

## 140// HERE BEGINNETH THE LIFE OF ST. MATTHEW

### ST. MATTHEW CONFRONTS THE ENCHANTERS OF ETHIOPIA

**M**atthew the apostle, preaching in Ethiopia, in the city that is said Nadaber, found there two enchanters named Zaroës and Arphaxat, which enchanted the men by their art, so that whom that they would, should seem that thy were prived of the health and office of their members. Which were so elevated in pride that they made them to be honoured as gods.

#### The Arrival of St. Matthew

Then Matthew the apostle entered into that city and was lodged with the eunuch of Candace, the queen, whom Philip baptized. Then he discovered the faits [doings] and deeds of the enchanters in this manner, that all that they did to men into hurt, that turned Matthew into health.

Then this eunuch demanded of St. Matthew how he spake and understood so many tongues. And then Matthew told him how the Holy Ghost descended and had given to the apostles all science of tongues. That like as they had emprised by their pride to make the tower unto heaven which ceased by confusion of tongues that were changed, all in like wise the apostles made a tower of sciences of tongues, and nothing of stones but of virtues, by the which all that believe shall mount up into heaven.

#### He Routs the Enchanters' Dragons

Then came before them a man that said that the enchanters were come with two dragons, which cast fire and sulphur by their mouths and nostrils, and slew all the men. Then the apostle garnished him with the sign of the cross and went out surely to them, and anon as these dragons saw him, anon they came and slept at his feet. Then said Matthew to the enchanters: Where is your craft? Awake ye them if ye may; and if I would pray our Lord, that which ye would have committed in me, I should soon execute on you. And when the people were assembled, he commanded the dragons that they should depart without hurting of any, and they went anon.

### ST. MATTHEW'S SERMON

**A**nd the apostle there made a great sermon of the glory of paradise terrestrial, saying that it appeared above all the mountains and was nigh unto heaven, and that there were neither thorns ne rocks, and that the lilies and roses flourished always and waxed never old; but the people were there always young, and the sound of angels sounded there always, and the birds came anon as they were called. And said that out of this paradise was a man cast, but he was called to the paradise of heaven by the nativity of our Lord.

## HE RAISES THE KING OF ETHIOPIA'S SON AND CONVERTS THE NATION

And as he said these words to the people, anon a great noise arose, and a great weeping was made for the son of the king which was dead, and when these enchanter might not raise him, they made the king believe that he was ravished into the company of the gods, and that he should make to him a temple and an image. And then the foresaid eunuch, keeper of the queen Candace, made the enchanter to be kept, and sent for the apostle. And when the apostle was come he made his prayer and raised the king's son anon.

And then the king, which was named Egippus, sent for all the men in his provinces saying to them: Come and see ye God in the likeness of a man. And then the people came with crowns of gold and divers manner of sacrifices, and would have sacrificed to him, and then St. Matthew beheld them and said: What do ye men? I am not God, but I am servant of our Lord. And by the commandment of him they made a great church of the gold and silver that they had brought, which in thirty days space was edified [built] and achieved. In which church the apostle sat three and thirty years, and converted all Ethiopia to the faith of Christ. And then the king Egippus, with his wife and his daughter, and all the people, were baptized. And then the apostle hallowed to God Ephigenia the king's daughter, and made her mistress and governess of more than two hundred virgins.

## KING HIRTACUS HAS ST. MATTHEW SLAIN

And after this, Hirtacus succeeded to the king, and coveted the said virgin Ephigenia, and promised to the apostle half his realm if he would make her consent to be his wife; and the apostle said to him that after the custom of his predecessor he should come on the Sunday to the church, and Ephigenia being present with the other virgins, he should hear what he should say of the goodness of lawful marriage. And then he departed with great joy, and supposed that he would have stirred Ephigenia to his marriage.

And when the virgins and all the people were assembled, he spake long of good and lawful matrimony, and was much allowed of the king, which supposed that he had said for to have joined the virgin to him for to consent the marriage. Then when silence was made, he made rehearsal of his sermon saying that marriage is good if it be truly held by good alliance. "But ye that be here, know ye well that if any servant would take the wife of a king wedded he should not only run to the offence of the king, but above that he should deserve death, and not for to wed her, but for that he in so taking the spouse of his lord should corrupt the marriage joined. And thou the king that knew that Ephigenia is made the spouse of the king perdurable, and is sacred with the holy veil, how mayst thou take the wife of a more puissant [powerful] king and couple her to thee by marriage?"

*Matthew was named by twain [two] names, that was Matthew and Levy. Matthew is expounded a hasty gift, or a giver of counsel, or it is said Matthew of magnus, and theos, that is God, as it were a great God. Or of manus, that is a hand, and theos, that is God, as it were the hand of God. He was a gift of hastiness by hasty conversion, a giver of counsel by wholesome predication, great to God by perfection of life, and the hand of God by writing of the gospel of God. Levy is interpreted assumpt [assumed], or applied, or put to, or set. He was assumpt and taken away from gathering of tolls, he was applied to the number of the apostles, he was put to the company of the evangelists, and set to the catalogue of martyrs.*

And when the king heard this he began to enrage and departed all wood [mad] and frantic. And the apostle without dread confirmed all the others to patience. And Ephigenia, lying tofore him for dread, he blessed, and all the other virgins also.

And after the solemnities of the mass, the king sent a tormentor which slew Matthew with a sword behind him, which was standing by the altar holding up his hands into heaven, and so was consecrate a martyr.

And then all the people would have gone into the palace for to have slain the king, and with great pain were they holden of the priests and deacons, and hallowed with great joy the martyrdom of the apostle. And the king then sent to Ephigenia matrons and enchantresses, but for all them, when he saw that he might not turn her courage [heart] ne draw her to him in no manner, he environed and beset the house of her with a right great fire, for to burn her and all the other virgins.

And then the holy apostle appeared at the fire and put out the fire about the house, and it took the palace of the king, so that it burnt and consumed all that was therein, that none escaped save the king and his son only. And the son was ravished of the devil and began to cry and confess his father's sins, and went to the sepulchre of the apostle. And the father was made a fowl mesel [leper], and when he saw that he might not be cured, he slew himself with his own hand with a sword.

### **A CHRISTIAN REGIME IS ESTABLISHED**

**A**nd the people then established for to be king, the brother of Ephigenia whom the apostle had baptized, and reigned seventy years, and established his son for to be king after him, and increased much the honour of Christian men, and replenished all Ethiopia with noble churches of our Lord.

And then Zaroës and Arphaxat fled into Persia from the day that the apostle raised the son of the king, but St. Simon and St. Jude vanquished them there.

### **QUALITIES OF ST. MATTHEW**

#### **Obedience**

**A**nd know ye that four things be principally considered in the blessed St. Matthew. The first is the hastiness of obedience, for as soon as our Lord called him, he left all and doubted nothing of the Lord, and left the reckonings of his receipts imperfect, and joined him perfectly to our Lord Jesu Christ. And for this hasty obedience some took occasion of error in themselves, like as St. Jerome recordeth in the original upon the foresaid place, saying in that place:

Porphyry and Julian Augustus reproveth in the same place the folly of the story lying, saying that as the story saith, like as they followed suddenly the Saviour, that they would as hastily follow another man that had called them. For there were showed so many virtues and so many tokens tofore, that the apostles of our Lord

believed verily without doubt. And certainly this replenisher of the privy majesty shone in his blessed face at the first to them that saw him, and he might by that sight and will draw them to him. If such virtue, as men say, is in a precious stone which is named magnet, which draweth to him festues [pins] and straws, how much more the creator of all things may draw to him whom he will.

This said Jerome.

### Generosity

The second is his largess or his liberality. For anon he made to him a great feast in his house, the which was not great by apparel of meats, but it was much great only by reason of great desire, for he received with right great will and right great desire.

And also it was great by reason of service, for this feast was demonstrance of great mystery, which mystery the *Gloss* expoundeth upon St. Luke saying: “He that receiveth our Lord Jesu Christ in his house was fed withinforth plenteously of greater things than the other, that is to wit of delectations, of good manners, and of good delights.”

And after he was great by reason of his enseignments, for he showed great teachings and doctrines. And this was of great mercy by desire, and not by sacrifice, as he said: *Misericordiam volo et non sacrificium, etcetera* [I will have mercy and not sacrifice, Matthew 9:13]. And also “they that be whole need no leech” [Matthew 9:12], and so it was great, for there was Jesu Christ and his disciples.”

### Humility

The third is humility which appeared to him in two things, first he showed him a publican. The other evangelists, as saith the gloss, because of shame, and for the honour of the evangelist, they set not their common name, but as it is written: “The just is first accuser of himself.” And Matthew named himself publican, first because that he showed that none converted ought not mistrust of health, like as he was made of a publican, an apostle and evangelist. Secondly, because he was patient in his injuries. For when the pharisees murmured that Jesu Christ was descended to a man, sinner, Matthew might have answered: Ye be more wicked and more sinful than ween ye be just and refuse the leech, for I may no more be said sinner than am gone to the leech of health and hide not my sin ne wound.

### The Pre-eminence of His Gospel

The fourth is the great solemnity of him in the church of his gospels. His gospels be ofter and more used in the church than the other evangelists, like as the psalms of David and the epistles of Paul be rehearsed before other scriptures, which be more ofter recited in the church.

And this is the reason that James witnesseth that there be three manner of sins, that is to wit: the sin of pride, of lechery, and of avarice. In the sin of pride sinned Saul, for Saul by the sin of pride persecuted the church over proudly. David sinned in the sin of lechery, for he made

adultery, and for the adultery he slew Uriah, his true knight. And Matthew sinned in the sin of avarice, for for covetousness he meddled him of villainous gain. For he was in a port of the sea where he received the toll and custom of ships and merchandise.

And howbeit that they were sinners, yet always our Lord took their penance in gree [good will] and was pleased therewith, so that he pardoned them not only their sins, but multiplied in them his gifts of grace. For him that was a right cruel persecutor, he made a right true preacher, and him that had been adulterer and homicide, he made a prophet, and him that coveted so villainous gain, he made apostle and evangelist.

And therefore these foresaid three be oft recited that no man that would be converted should have despair of pardon when such that were in so great sin, he beholdeth to have been in so great grace.

### **ST. AMBROSE ON THE CONVERSION OF ST. MATTHEW**

**A**nd it is to be considered that, after St. Ambrose, some things ought to be noted in the conversion of St. Matthew, that is to wit somewhat of the party of the leech [physician], and some of the party of the sick to be healed.

#### **The Part of the Physician**

In the leech were three things, that is to wit, wisdom by which he knew the root of the malady, and the bounty by which he ministered the medicine, and the power by which he healed him so soon. Of these three saith St. Ambrose in the person of the said Matthew, “This master may take away the sorrow from my heart, and the dread of the soul which knoweth the things hid and privy.” And this is as touching to the first. And as to the second, “I have found a leech that dwelleth in heaven and sheddeth in earth his medicine.” And as to the third he said, “He may well heal my wounds that knoweth not his own.”

#### **The Part of the Sick Man**

In this blessed sick man that was healed, that is to say St. Matthew, three things be to be considered, after St. Ambrose. He took away first his malady, he was always agreeable to his leech, and he was always clean and whole after he had received his health. Then he said, “Matthew, follow now thy leech merrily and gladly,” and he joying said, “Now I am no publican, ne am not Levi, I have put away Levi sith I have received Christ and follow him,” and this is to the first. And as to the second, “I hate my lineage and flee my life and follow only the Lord.” And as to the third he said, “Who shall depart me from the charity of our Lord God which is in me? Tribulation or anguish or hunger?” As who saith: “Nothing.”

#### **The Manner of Healing**

And the manner of healing, as Ambrose saith, was treble. First, Jesu Christ bound him with bonds; secondly, he impressed in him charity; and thirdly, he cleansed him from all rottenness. And Ambrose saith in the person of Matthew: “I am bounden with the nails of faith, and good

life of charity.” Secondly, “I shall keep thy commandment as imprinted in me by charity.” And as to the third: “Good Lord, come soon and open my wounds lest any noieful humour corrupt ne rot the hid passions, and wash them that be foul and cleanse them.”

### **ST. BARNABAS FINDS THE GOSPEL WRITTEN IN ST. MATTHEW’S HAND**

**H**is gospel that he had written with his own hand, was found with the bones of St. Barnabas, the which gospel Barnabas bare with him, and laid them upon them that were sick, and anon they were healed by the merits of the martyr, and were founden in the year of our Lord five hundred.

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The [iconography of St. Matthew](#) is available at the [Christian iconography website](#).

For other saints, see the [index to this Golden Legend website](#).

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