

Parish Magazine Items for The Diocesan Year of Matthew's Gospel

From The Rectory – for December 2025

As a diocese we're going to be focusing on each of the four Gospels over the coming years, exploring the unique portrait of the Lord Jesus that each provides.

Matthew's gospel begins with "a record of the genealogy of Jesus Christ, the son of David, the son of Abraham." That word "genealogy" is actually the word "genesis", or beginning. Matthew is telling us of a new beginning which will draw on Genesis and Exodus and all the other books of the Bible. Jesus is not a mythical or legendary figure but a real human being with a history, part of the human family and of God's dealings with Israel.

"Christ" is not a surname but a job description. It means the "anointed one". In the Old Testament, prophets, priest and kings were anointed with oil to show that they were called and marked out for a special ministry. Matthew presents Jesus as the long-promised Christ or Messiah, the rescuer-king who fulfils all the hopes of the people of God. He is to be great King David's greater son, born in Bethlehem, the city of David. Jesus will bring victory and peace. The ancient promises God made to Abraham, of people, land and blessing, which are partially fulfilled in the Old Testament, find their climax in the multitude from all nations whom Jesus will bring to the promised land of heaven and the New Creation.

Although John's famous prologue ("In the beginning was the Word...") looms large in Christmas services, only two of the gospels contain accounts of the birth of Jesus. If Luke tells the Christmas story more from Mary's perspective, Joseph is more prominent in Matthew's account. We can imagine Joseph's shock when he hears that his betrothed is going to have a baby since he knows he's not the father. He plans to break off the betrothal quietly, but like his name's sake in the Old Testament, this Joseph turns out to be a dreamer. An angel appears to him in a dream to tell him that what is conceived in Mary is from the Holy Spirit. She will give birth to a son who is to be called Jesus (meaning "the LORD saves"), because he will save his people from their sins. Jesus will be Immanuel – God with us.



Matthew frequently shows us how Jesus fulfils the Jewish Scriptures. But he also emphasises that Jesus has come for all the nations. It's to Matthew that we owe the account of the wise men from the east who come searching for the one born to be King of the Jews. King Herod is outraged because he thinks the job of King of the Jews is already taken and he doesn't fancy relinquishing the position for a newcomer. Herod becomes like Pharaoh of old, killing the baby boys. And Jesus and his family flee to Egypt and then return. As Jesus comes out of Egypt back to Israel, it's as if the story of the people of God is repeating itself. Jesus

is going to be the head of a New Israel, bringing freedom and salvation.

Later in his gospel, Matthew tells us that Jesus said: "every teacher of the law who has become a disciple in the kingdom of heaven is like the owner of a house who brings out of his storeroom new treasures as well as old." I pray that you'll find something new in the Christmas story this year. Or perhaps that something old will strike you in a new way. Whether it's something old or something new, there are great treasures to explore in the gospel accounts of Jesus. Indeed, Matthew suggests that the good news about Jesus is like treasure hidden in a field or like a pearl of great price which it is worth selling everything to be able to possess.

A very happy Christmas to you.

The Revd Marc Lloyd

From The Rectory – for January 2026

As I said last month, as a diocese we are going to have a focus on each of the four New Testament gospels in turn in the coming years. This year it's Matthew's gospel.

Plans don't always survive contact with reality, but here are some of the ways we might engage with Matthew's gospel in the year ahead. If you have other suggestions or ideas, I'm all ears.



- Read or listen to the gospel on your own. You can access the Bible free online for example via biblegateway.com. Lots of good translations and versions are available. For something reasonably accurate and understandable, I'd suggest starting with The New International Version (NIV). I have some free printed copies of Matthew's gospel available. Ask me if you'd like one. In my Bible,

Matthew is about 35 pages long, so it need not take long to read. But it's worth pondering rather than just rushing through. After it was written, the gospel was divided up into 28 chapters. You might choose to read a chapter – or even a shorter section – each day and reflect on its meaning. Perhaps before and after reading you might pray that God would show you who Jesus is and the difference which he might make to you.

- Engage with Matthew's gospel with others. I'd be happy to have a cuppa and to chat about the gospel with you. It may be that I, or someone else, or a small group might like to get together to talk about it. Let me know if you're interested in any of these. (We also have a couple of other Bible Study groups you might be interested in. Details are in the Warbleton Church notice sheet. Or just ask us).
- We'll be holding a Lent Course at the Rectory and via Zoom which will look at Matthew's gospel. You'd be very welcome. We won't assume any prior knowledge. You can just come and listen or ask anything you like. This will be on Wednesday evenings at 7:30pm for five weeks from 25th February to 25th March. Refreshments will be provided.
- I am thinking of trying to at least mention something from Matthew's gospel in each of my parish magazine items.
- The Church of England has a lectionary of set readings for services. Each year this focuses on a particular gospel. This year, it's Matthew. Readings from the Old Testament, the Psalms and the rest of the New Testament are always also provided. But I might aim to pay particular attention to Matthew's gospel this year.

Why not join us in taking a fresh look at Matthew's gospel this year?

A very happy new year to you!

The Revd Marc Lloyd

From The Rectory – for February 2026

I said last time that, in line with the Diocesan focus for the year, I would try at least to mention Matthew's gospel here each month.

The Church of England has set Lectionary Bible Readings for each Sunday of the Year. The modern *Common Worship* liturgy (from 2000 onwards) uses the *Revised Common Lectionary*. Something like this is used by the Roman Catholic church and many other churches around the world. It has a three-year cycle (this is Year A) with a gospel given prominence each year (this year it is Matthew). So as I write I've already preached a couple of times from Matthew's gospel this year. As usual, you can find those sermons on the Warbleton church website or indeed the whole service is on the church's YouTube channel (@warbletonparishchurch849 or simply search for Warbleton Parish Church). Remember you can easily look up or listen to Matthew's gospel online. I refer to parts of chapters two and three a bit further below.

I know I mentioned the wise men here a couple of months ago. And I must have preached on them countless times in Christmas and Epiphany sermons. But I do find they've somehow captured my imagination. I can't quite shake them off. Maybe it's the mystery around them. That journey. The danger. The T. S. Eliot poem. I'm not sure. Their example urges us to seek Christ in the Scriptures, whatever the cost, and to appreciate something of Jesus' true significance. How much they really knew we cannot tell. Yet they gave Jesus gifts fit for a king. And perhaps, if the carol can be believed, they saw that a deity was nigh, but also the bitter perfume spoke of gathering gloom and of an impending death of great import. A Bible study on gold, frankincense and myrrh is instructive. The only passage where all three are actually named together is in Old Testament love poem The Song of Songs (that is, the best song ever), sometimes known as The Song of Solomon. The gifts are associated with the arrival of this great bridegroom king famed for his wisdom, the object of the bride's love and longing.

The gospels tell us next to nothing about Jesus' childhood and adolescence. Matthew goes straight from the wise men and the associated sojourn of the Holy Family in Egypt to the baptism of Christ. Scholars imagine Jesus was about 30 years old at this point which marked the beginning of his public ministry. Now John the Baptist fades from the scene and Jesus takes over. In three years' time he will be crucified.

John's baptism is a baptism of repentance for the forgiveness of sins. And in Christian theology Jesus is the perfect God-Man. He has no sins of which he needs to repent. So why is he being baptised? The Baptist recognises something of this oddity. He at least says to Jesus it ought to be the other way round: "Jesus, you should be the one giving me a wash, not me you." Baptism in the Bible can be a picture of death, of flood waters which overwhelm. Here is the shadow of the cross again. Jesus is standing in the place of sinners. He is the innocent one on whom our guilt will crash. The judgement of God will expend itself on him that grace and mercy, blessing and love might flow to us.

The baptism is also rich with Biblical associations. Water, God speaking and the Spirit hovering recall the creation narrative. Jesus is the New Adam who will bring in a New Creation. Like Noah, who is associated with a dove, Jesus will be the Saviour. The church is a kind of ark. There will be a fresh start for planet earth. Jesus is called God's Son whom he loves, with whom the Father is well pleased. Later in the gospel these words are repeated with the instruction "listen to him".

Seek Jesus. Listen to Jesus. These are great new year's resolutions as relevant in February as in January. And if we haven't managed this brilliantly well so far this year, Jesus is always ready to receive us back, to welcome us, embrace us and go with us on the Way.

The Revd Marc Lloyd

From The Rectory – for March 2026

My eldest son has been attempting to navigate the university application process this year. Thankfully some of the places he might like to go seem interested in having him. Although they do want what seems like absurdly high grades to me. If you see the lad out and about, please do feel free to quiz him on the history of American Independence or set him some particularly tricky calculus problem. If he seems like he might be having fun, do point his back to his books.

Anyway, this was all in the mind as I preached on Jesus' calling of his first disciples from Matthew's gospel chapter 4 the other day. You can listen to the sermon on the Warbleton Church website here: https://www.warbletonchurch.org.uk/sermons-talks/?sermon_id=688 Or a video of the whole service is here on the Warbleton Parish Church YouTube Channel: <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=pARwiQkVrmw> The gospel reading begins about 11 and a half minutes in and is followed by the sermon. (We also share these on the Warbleton Parish Church Facebook page).



Normally students who wished to become disciples (= learners) of a rabbi (= teacher) would apply to the rabbi. But as so often, Jesus does things in a different surprising way. He calls these men to come and follow him. Literally disciples would walk around behind their master. He would lead them and they would follow. They would be with him. It was a kind of apprenticeship. Whether they knew it or not, these men were signing up for a three-year BA(hons) in Kingdom of God studies.

Jesus says, "Come, follow me". And immediately they leave their nets, their boat, their father and their former way of

life to follow Jesus. Perhaps there are things that we might have to leave behind (or at least relegate to second place) if we are to follow Jesus?

Likely, in fact, some of the disciples had met Jesus before. And perhaps been associates of John the Baptist. But nevertheless, the way Matthew tells the story starkly emphasises the authority of Jesus. Counterculturally, they do not choose him; he chooses them. And still he calls women and men to come and follow him, to learn from him and be like him, to share in his mission, joining his team.

Of course Jesus could have done his thing all on his own. But he calls a community around him. The twelve disciples echo the twelve sons of Israel (= Jacob) who were the heads of the twelve tribes of Israel. Jesus is going to create a new people of God. He is forming a church, using people to do so.

And these ordinary men, these fishermen, are to be its leaders. Jesus still calls ordinary people today. He is still building his church, seeking followers, calling others to join him and his work.

We can't follow Jesus around ancient Israel, but we can do so in heart and mind as we read the Gospels. We can be with Jesus in the Scriptures and learn from him. We can pray that he would teach us and lead us.

They were fishermen, and Jesus makes them fishers of men. He transforms them. But in a way he makes them even more themselves, all they were meant to be. Who knows what skills and

interests we might already have which might be taken up into Jesus' kingdom? We will have to change to be his disciples, but we may also find our true identity as the people God intends us to be.

In the Old Testament, the story is very much based around the land of Israel and the leaders were characteristically shepherds (think of Abraham, Moses, David and others). Jesus is the good shepherd who comes for the lost sheep of Israel. But a number of Jesus' disciples were fishermen. Jesus is often in a boat. And the Apostle Paul goes sailing around the Mediterranean on his mission to the Gentiles. Jesus launches a new phase of God's dealings with the world as the good news goes to all the fishy gentile nations across the seas – even as far as this obscure northern corner of the world, the British Isles.

Maybe we too will hear and respond to Jesus' call and join his new fishing business.

The Revd Canon Marc Lloyd

From The Rectory – for April 2026

I think I may come from a long line of accomplished worriers. Some of my family have made worry into an art form. My great Aunt Ann – Auntie Nan, we called her – seemed to have a “worry drawer” in her little flat. She filled it with news clippings of things to worry about. There was the woman who was knocked over by a bus when buying fish in Swansea. Did she have her hood up and therefore didn't see the bus as she stepped out into the road? It became a cautionary tale for our family. None of us ever got our fish in Swansea. Another relative of mine once told us she was worried about the fact that she didn't seem to have anything to worry about.

On average we must be one of the most comfortable and secure generations ever to have lived, but perhaps we are also one of the most anxious. The 24-hour news on our smart phones probably doesn't help.



Jesus famously addressed this question of worry or anxiety in his Sermon on the Mount. He is speaking to his disciples, with the crowd listening in, about the blessed life of the Kingdom of God – life as it is meant to be lived, according to the Maker's instructions. He urges his disciples to actually think and live like Christians, not like the Gentile nations nor like religious hypocrites. What Jesus has to say about worry (Matthew 6:25-end) comes shortly after his teaching about prayer (6:5-15), and unsurprisingly the two subjects are related. The Christian life and faith are a package. The Christian believer has a loving heavenly Father who sees and

knows our needs. He is willing and able to give good gifts to his children. And our awareness of him should make all the difference. Jesus gives us a vision for the Kingdom of God which raises our eyes from the concerns of this present age to eternity, and beyond ourselves to God and his purposes for the church and for all creation. His people are to lay up for themselves treasures in heaven where moth and rust do not destroy and where thieves do not break in and steal (6:19-21). This life will always be somewhat uncertain. But Jesus' disciples can build their lives on the solid rock of Jesus by putting his words into practice. Terrible storms may still come, but the life built on Jesus will stand (7:24-27).

When it comes to worry specifically, Jesus would have us learn from the birds of the air and the lilies of the field. The birds do not sow or reap or store stuff away in barns, but God feeds them. The flowers do not labour or spin, but who is dressed more splendidly?

Jesus argues that worry is unnecessary. The Christian can trust God. Worry is also pointless. Jesus asks: who of you, by worrying, can add an inch to his height or a minute to his life (cf. 6:27)? In fact, anxiety is likely to be counterproductive. It may well shorten our lives.

No, instead we are to seek first the Kingdom of God and trust God to get us safely to heaven.

All this doesn't mean we should be irresponsible or fail to plan for the future or seek to provide for our families. Other passages of Scripture address these things. But Jesus concludes here perhaps rather grimly, maybe with a smile: "Do not worry about tomorrow for tomorrow will worry about itself. Each day has enough trouble of its own." Jesus wants us to trust God afresh each day for our daily bread – not to hope that God will give us a life time's supply of bread today that we can hoard for ever. Even if we had all the money in the world "safely" in the best bank, much about the future would be uncertain. Jesus tells his people they can expect their fair share of trouble. But also that their Creator, who made and rules all things, cares for them like the perfect all-knowing, all-wise, infinitely loving and powerful Father that he is.

I'm still not sure about shopping for fish in Swansea in the rain, but I hope what Jesus has to say here about the ever-relevant subject of anxiety might make us think about whether we dare to trust everything to him. His death and resurrection should give us good reasons to do so.

A very happy Easter to you all!

The Revd Canon Marc Lloyd

From The Rectory – for May 2026

This year we journeyed through Easter in our church services with Matthew's Gospel.

I've mentioned here before something about the similarities and differences between the four Gospels which we have in our New Testament, and some of the theories about their relationships.

In my opinion, all four gospels are harmonizable and complementary. The early Christians who first collected these four Gospels together obviously thought so. But even if some of the Gospel writers knew one another's works, they each provide a somewhat independent witness to Jesus. They don't read like police notebooks which have been carefully cooked up to tell an agreed story. Their harmony is sometimes that of different eyewitnesses who notice, mention or emphasise different things. They each write with a purpose and an agenda.

All four Gospel writers tell us of Jesus' so-called Triumphal Entry into Jerusalem on Palm Sunday (Matthew 21; Mark 11; Luke 19; John 12). All four Gospels tell us that Jesus rode on a donkey. Mark and Luke say the donkey was a "colt" "which no one had ever ridden". What's the point of this detail? Does it suggest Jesus' uniqueness: he alone rides on this donkey? I know nothing about horses and so on, but presumably riding a donkey that no one has ever ridden may not be easy. The colt needs to be broken in and trained. Jesus seems to have no problems. Does this point to Jesus' rule over creation? Jesus is the new and better Adam, to whom the creatures readily submit. Just as the wind and the waves obey Jesus, does the young donkey do better than many of the religious leaders and recognise his Maker? Jesus is the King even of unruly colts.

Matthew alone tells us in fact there were two donkeys: a she-ass with her colt. Some sceptical readers have cried, "Ah! A contradiction! Come on! Was there one donkey or were there two?" Of course, saying there were two donkeys includes saying there was one! Talking about one donkey doesn't exclude the fact that there were two. If the other Gospel writers knew of both donkeys, perhaps they didn't think it worth mentioning. They simplify the tale. Perhaps they also emphasise Jesus' power and control by only mentioning the previously unriden donkey. A couple of parishioners have pointed out to me that if you are going to ride on a previously unriden donkey it

makes sense to take its mother with it. Both animals are likely to be much happier with sticking together, apparently.

Some sceptical scholars have said that Matthew was misreading Old Testament prophecy. Zechariah had spoken of the king coming to his people “gentle and riding on a donkey, on a colt, the foal of a donkey.” One can’t really ride two donkeys at once. Not without getting into a mess, anyway. And Hebrew poetry loves what’s called parallelism: saying the same thing – or similar, or contrasting things – twice or more. This parallelism is like our rhyming, a “rhyming” of ideas. Some people say Matthew has misread Zechariah. Zech is speaking of one donkey, a foal, poetically. Matt has missed the point and assumed there must be two donkeys, so that’s what he put in. Unfortunately this theory falls down, in my view, because it assumes Matthew is stupid and we are cleverer. I’m sure Matthew knew what he was doing.

A donkey is not a war horse. Jesus comes humble and gentle and riding on a donkey.

But Old Testament kings did ride on donkeys at times. But Jesus’ humility is especially emphasised by his riding on a colt. Jesus is a striking combination of kingly authority and of peace, humility, gentleness and service. Jesus shows, as the modern hymn has it, “meekness and majesty, manhood and deity.” He is the king, but the servant king who has come to die.

Perhaps it’s worth having more than one Gospel. And worth reading them closely, attending to their details and their differences, as well as to their powerful and profound agreement. Donkeys, even foals, speak to us still today.

The Revd Canon Marc Lloyd

From The Rectory – for June 2026

Sunday 31st May this year is Trinity Sunday. Each year this comes after Pentecost or Whitsun, when we remember Christ sending the gift of the Holy Spirit on the fledgling New Testament church. On the Feast of the Ascension we thought about the crucified and risen Christ returning to the glory of heaven and enthroned as the God-Man at the right hand of the Father. So the drama of Pentecost, like all of salvation, is Trinitarian in shape. The Father and the Son send the Spirit. The Son’s saving work is complete and the Spirit is sent to be God’s presence and power with the disciples to equip them for their great work of mission. The Spirit sends them out to proclaim Jesus that people might be brought back to the Father.

This year we’re focusing on Matthew’s Gospel. And one of the readings for Trinity Sunday is the very end of Matthew’s Gospel, from chapter 28, verse 16. The disciples worship the risen Christ and he says to them:

“All authority in heaven and on earth has been given to me. Therefore go and make disciples of all nations, baptizing them in the name of the Father and of the Son and of the Holy Spirit, and teaching them to obey everything I have commanded you. And surely I am with you always, to the very end of the age.”

Jesus won’t be with them physically any longer, but by his Holy Spirit.

And when people believe, they are to be baptised in the Triune name of God the Father, God the Son and God the Holy Spirit. Not three names but one name. As the church would later go on to say, the name of the one God who is three Persons.

When Matthew was writing, the technical definitions of the Trinity had still to be worked out. Even the word “Trinity” doesn’t come in the Bible. But the essential teaching is there. Jesus is worshiped

as God. The Spirit makes Jesus present. There is obviously a profound unity between Father, Son and Spirit. Not three gods.

Jesus' own baptism, right at the beginning of his public ministry, which Matthew records (3:13-end), powerfully portrays the Triune God in action. The voice of God the Father says from heaven about Jesus: "This is my Son, whom I love; with him I am well pleased." And God the Holy Spirit comes down on God the Son in the form of a dove. There's the Trinity!

It's easy for us to feel rather baffled by the Trinity. Thinking about it can make our brains hurt. But it's not surprising that God is incomprehensible to us. We can know God truly, but not fully. A God we could have all pinned down and sorted out wouldn't be much of a God. Yes, he's revealed himself, but he also remains a Mystery – perhaps rather in the way that Elsie the Dog, I trust, knows and loves me, but I like to think there are hidden depths to me that she has not yet plumbed!

Theologians have insisted that everything God does is Trinitarian because that is who God is. And the Trinitarian formula at baptism puts the Trinity right there at the beginning and centre of the Christian life. Of course the Trinity can rightly be the subject of many tomes of profound dogmatics. But Jesus intentionally includes it in the essential basics of Christian initiation. The church thought it really mattered that Jesus and the Spirit were really God so that we could really be saved by God alone, and know that God is really with us and for us.

If you're interested in thinking more about this, you might enjoy the 3, 2, 1 Course from Speak Life: 321.speaklife.org.uk/course/321. It's a free online video-based course that helps you explore life according to Jesus, with space for reflection. One of the sessions focuses on God's three-ness – his tri-unity. As ever, I'm always keen to hear from parishioners who'd like to talk further about this stuff. Happy Trinity Sunday and season to you!

The Revd Canon Marc Lloyd