

## New Matth

I was sitting in my study reading St. Matthew's Gospel, when the phone rang.

"This is Melvin," the voice said. I was flabbergasted. My friend Melvin is a world acclaimed archeologist and I hadn't heard from him in months since his ancient scroll discovery in Ouagadougou. Apparently the scroll was written before the censors took out a lot of important stuff like the fact that neither Adam nor Eve had belly buttons and Noah left some animals off the ark.

"Hey, Melvin," I said joyfully. "I haven't heard from you in ages. How's it going?"

I had to turn off the TV to hear him. He whispered, "Are you alone?"

"Sure," I said in a normal voice.

"Shhhhhh," he shushed. "There might be people listening. Meet me at the Castle," and hung up. We often met there when he was in town, our favorite bar in Manhattan Beach.

I got there in no time, and picked a table in back. I ordered two Negra Modelos and waited for awhile, when suddenly someone touched my right shoulder and hissed "Psssst." I jumped three feet off my chair. Nobody says "Psssst" except in comic books. Melvin had snuck in the back way. He sat down, looked around suspiciously, then reached over to give me a hug.

"I found a new scroll outside of Jericho," he whispered, cupping his hands next to my ear so as not to be heard by anyone but me. I looked around. Everybody was drinking, talking or playing pool. "Maybe you're being too cautious," I said in a normal voice. "Nobody is paying any attention to us at all."

The beer began to relax him. "You won't believe this one," he said at last. "I found the original Gospel of Matthew. I mean the one actually written by him, not the censored one you read today. There are things that the later versions completely left out."

"Come on," I said. "Everyone knows the gospels were written long after Jesus died. Anyway, the scholars all say Mark's gospel was first. As a matter of fact, I was reading Matthew when you called."

“Mark didn’t even know Jesus. He and the others just wrote about things they had heard about. Matthew was a tax collector so he could read and write. He took notes for years, and since he was one of the apostles he saw everything first hand. All the other gospels stole from him and didn’t even give attribution. He could have sued them for copyright infringement.”

I decided not to comment on two thousand year old copyright laws. Melvin continued, “The basic story is the same, but the censors took out a lot of material. Take the Three Wise Men, for example. The gospel we read called them Gaspar, Balthasar and Melchior, but the censors substituted exotic sounding names to impress people....their real names, according to Matthew, were Gus, Baldy and....hold on to your hat....Melvin. Is that great, or what? My name in the New Testament.

“As for the gifts, well if they had brought frankincense or myrrh as gifts for a baby, they would have been called the Three Stooges...but they actually were wise men and practical. Gus brought a little bird contraption that moved in the breeze and attached to the manger with a clamp. Matthew says Jesus giggled all night and Mary loved it. Baldy brought a kind of donkey seat with safety belt so Jesus wouldn’t fall off on the way to Egypt, and Melvin did bring some gold so the family could pay for the toll roads.”

Wow! I remembered my friend Ed Tasca writing about being skeptical about the gifts. This proved his intuition was right on. I couldn’t wait to tell him. “What else?” I asked.

“When Jesus was a teenager, he went to the temple and talked with the scholars there, just like it says in our version of the gospel. But they talked football. It turns out that a game similar to soccer was played all over Israel and Nazareth United was the best team that year. Jesus was a huge fan and so, it seems, were the scholars. They were very impressed at all the stats Jesus knew about the players.”

By now I was really awed about all this new information. It had the ring of truth. All teenagers love sports.

“And that’s not all,” Melvin said. “There are a lot of stories Mary apparently told Matthew about Jesus’ teenage years that were left out. One of them is amusing. Apparently Jesus left the front door open one time, and his mom yelled, ‘Close the door, Jesus! You’d think you were born in a barn!’”

I laughed. All teenagers were guilty of things like that. “Anything really unusual?” I asked.

“Hold on to your hat,” Melvin hissed, looking around to make sure nobody was nearby. “This is way different than the version we read. It turns out that the wine that Jesus made at the wedding feast at Cana wasn’t very good.”

“No!” I said loud enough that the guys playing pool looked around at us. I lowered my voice. “That was his first miracle, and it was a big one. As I remember, the waiter said the wine was great.”

“Even the versions we read now say that when Mary told him there was no wine for the guests, he said, ‘My time has not yet come.’ It implied she shouldn’t ask him to perform a miracle yet. But he was an obedient son, so he finally gave in...and sure enough, after the transformation, a waiter, a cousin of the groom, came over to taste the wine and said it was great...but he didn’t know squat about wine. Matthew tasted it too and said it was too watery and lacked body. It turns out the cousin was, like Jesus, a descendent of the House of David. His first name was Mogan and he kept the formula in the family to this very day, which explains a lot.”

Holy cow,” I said. “Do you think that when Jesus said his time hadn’t come yet it was because maybe he was still learning about miracles?”

“Exactly,” Melvin told me. “Remember later on when he did the miracle of the loaves and fishes for the multitudes? Matthew wrote that the bread was a ‘slightly crusty rye’ and the fish was ‘sea bass with a delicate citrus marinade.’ He really knew his food. And the wine part is completely missing from the gospel you read. Matthew, referring back to the modest beverage at Cana, claims this was the best wine he had ever tasted, roughly translated as a ‘Persian Grand Cru.’”

“That makes sense,” I said sensibly. “After all it was a mature miracle this time. Jesus wouldn’t have made some common bread and fish either...and I guess he learned a lot at Cana. I wonder why the censors took all this great material out?”

“I don’t know,” Melvin said, stroking his chin pensively. “Censors often don’t have common sense. Remember the old scroll I told you about I found last year? I forgot to tell you they left out the part about Adam and Eve walking on all fours.”

“Oh, come on,” I laughed, beer snorting out my nose, the mental image mind boggling. “I don’t believe that for a second.”

“Think about it,” Melvin admonished. “You’d think they would learn from their mistakes, but It happened right after the disastrous apple debacle. Once again their arrogance got them in trouble. They stood up and started to walk upright....so of course they and their descendents, all of us, have foot and back problems up the wazoo. You never see animals with back problems, do you?”

As usual, Melvin made all kinds of sense, but it was getting late and we were the last ones leaving the Castle. As we passed his hotel, Melvin gave me a farewell hug. I knew I wouldn’t see him for awhile. He said there were rumors about some missing epistles of St. Paul near the ruins of Carthage.

As I walked home I ruminated over Melvin’s findings. I was mentally composing a letter: “Dear Mr. President. About your favorite wine and the way you walk....”