# Introduction to the Gospels

The 4 gospels are “lives” – recounting the life of Jesus of Nazareth – somewhat in the style of contemporary accounts of other people, but they are written by believers in the divinity of Christ and are designed to convince potential converts and to confirm the truth of the divinity of Christ and of his sacrifice to believers. They were written probably 30 to 60 years after the crucifixion, and not by first hand observers. They are probably based on material which circulated orally over the intervening decade.

The synoptic gospels have very significant overlap of content, structure and text. It is commonly believed that Mark was written down first and that Matthew and Luke based their gospels on that, probably independently but possibly each with reference to a common, now lost, additional text (Q).

Mark starts with John the Baptist and Jesus’ baptism, covers his teaching in Galilee and then recounts at some length his Journey to Jerusalem and the passion. He presents Jesus as a secretive enigma, but one provoked opposition and crossed geographical but also social boundaries.

Matthew fleshes out many aspects of the account from Mark, and paints a more Jewish picture, comparing Jesus to Moses and suggesting less departure from the Jewish traditions than Mark. The text appears to address a largely Jewish audience. Matthew provides many memorable images and is seen as a teacher because of this.

Luke may be seen as the first of a two-volume account (Luke-Acts). It is a sophisticated literary work and introduces a number of unique stories. It seems to spring from a background with more gentile influence and emphasises the Holy Spirit.

John’s gospel paint a larger, more spiritual picture, placing Christ is vast context of creation and emphasising his divine claims.