Acts and Martyrdom of St. Matthew the Apostle

New Testament apocrypha (2nd–7th century)

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Acts and Martyrdom of St. Matthew the Apostle. About that time Matthew, the holy apostle and evangelist of Christ, was abiding in the mountain resting, and praying in his tunic and apostolic robes without sandals; and, behold, Jesus came to Matthew in the likeness of the infants who sing in paradise, and said to him: Peace to thee, Matthew! And Matthew having gazed upon Him, and not known who He was, said: Grace to thee, and peace, O child highly favoured! And why hast thou come hither to me, having left those who sing in paradise, and the delights there? Because here the place is desert; and what sort of a table I shall lay for thee, O child, I know not, because I have no bread nor oil in a jar. Moreover, even the winds are at rest, so as not to cast down from the trees to the ground anything for food; because, for the accomplishing of my fast of forty days, I, partaking only of the fruits falling by the movement of the winds, am glorifying my Jesus. Now, therefore, what shall I bring thee, beautiful boy? There is not even water near, that I may wash thy feet.

And the child said: Why sayest thou, O Matthew? Understand and know that good discourse is better than a calf, and words of meekness better than every herb of the field, and a sweet saying as the perfume of love, and cheerfulness of countenance better than feeding, and a pleasant look is as the appearance of sweetness. Understand, Matthew, and know that I am paradise, that I am the comforter, I am the power of the powers above, I the strength of those that restrain themselves, I the crown of the virgins, I the self-control of the once married, I the boast of the widowed, I the defence of the infants, I the foundation of the Church, I the kingdom of the bishops, I the glory of the presbyters, I the praise of the deacons. Be a man, and be strong, Matthew, in, these words.

And Matthew said: The sight of thee hast altogether delighted me, O child; moreover also, thy words are full of life. For assuredly thy face shines more than the lightning, and thy words are altogether most sweet. And that indeed I saw thee in paradise when thou didst sing with the other infants who were killed in Bethlehem, I know right well; but how thou hast suddenly come hither, this altogether astonishes me. But I shall ask thee one thing, O child: that impious Herod, where is he? The child says to him: Since thou hast asked, hear his dwelling-place. He dwells, indeed, in Hades; and there has been prepared for him fire

unquenchable, Gehenna without end, bubbling mire, worm that sleeps not, because he cut off three thousand infants, wishing to slay the child Jesus, the ancient of the ages; but of all these ages I am father. Now therefore, O Matthew, take this rod of mine, and go down from the mountain, and go into Myrna, the city of the man-eaters, and plant it by the gate of the church which thou and Andrew founded; and as soon as thou hast planted it, it shall be a tree, great and lofty and with many branches, and its branches shall extend to thirty cubits, and of each single branch the fruit shall be different both to the sight and the eating, and from the top of the tree shall flow down much honey;

and from its root there shall come forth a great fountain, giving drink to this country round about, and in it creatures that swim and creep; and in it the man-eaters shall wash themselves, and eat of the fruit of the trees of the vine and of the honey; and their bodies shall be changed, and their forms shall be altered so as to be like those of other men; and they shall be ashamed of the nakedness of their body, and they shall put on clothing of the rams of the sheep, and they shall no longer eat unclean things; and there shall be to them fire in superabundance, preparing the sacrifices for offerings, and they shall bake their bread with fire; and they shall see each other in the likeness of the rest of men, and they shall acknowledge me, and glorify my Father who is in the heavens. Now therefore make haste, Matthew, and go down hence, because the departure from thy body through fire is at hand, and the crown of thy endurance.

And the child having said this, and given him the rod, was taken up into the heavens. And Matthew went down from the mountain, hastening to the city. And as he was about to enter into the city, there met him Fulvana the wife of the king, and his son Fulvanus and his wife Erva, who were possessed by an unclean spirit, and cried out shouting: Who has brought thee here again, Matthew? or who has given thee the rod for our destruction? for we see also the child Jesus, the Son of God, who is with thee. Do not go then, O Matthew, to plant the rod for the food, and for the transformation of the man-eaters: for I have found what I shall do to thee. For since thou didst drive me out of this city, and prevent me from fulfilling my wishes among the man-eaters, behold, I will raise up against thee the king of this city, and he will burn thee alive. And Matthew, having laid his hands on each one of the demoniacs, put the demons to flight, and made the people whole; and they followed him.

And thus the affair being made manifest, Plato the bishop, having heard of the presence of the holy Apostle Matthew, met him with all the clergy; and having fallen to the ground, they kissed his feet. And Matthew raised them, and went with them into the church, and the child Jesus was also with him. And Matthew, having come to the gate of the church, stood upon a certain lofty and immoveable stone; and when the whole city ran together, especially the brethren who had believed, began to say: Men and women who appear in our sight, heretofore believing in the universe, but now knowing Him who has upheld and made the universe; until now worshipping the Satyr, and mocked by ten thousand false gods, but now through Jesus Christ acknowledging the one and only God, Lord, Judge; who have laid aside the immeasurable greatness of evil, and put on love, which is of like nature with

affectionateness, towards men; once strangers to Christ, but now confessing Him Lord and God; formerly without form, but now transformed through Christ;—behold, the staff which you see in my hand, which Jesus, in whom you have believed and will believe, gave me; perceive now what comes to pass through me, and acknowledge the riches of the greatness which He will this day make for you.

For, behold, I shall plant this rod in this place, and it shall be a sign to your generations, and it shall become a tree, great and lofty and flourishing, and its fruit beautiful to the view and good to the sight; and the fragrance of perfumes shall come forth from it, and there shall be a vine twining round it, full of clusters; and from the top of it honey coming down, and every flying creature shall find covert in its branches; and a fountain of water shall come forth from the root of it, having swimming and creeping things, giving drink to all the country round about.

And having said this, and called upon the name of the Lord Jesus, he fixed his rod in the ground, and straightway it sprung up to one cubit; and the sight was strange and wonderful. For the rod having straightway shot up, increased in size, and grew into a great tree, as Matthew had said. And the apostle said: Go into the fountain and wash your bodies in it, and then thus partake both of the fruits of the tree, and of the vine and the honey, and drink of the fountain, and you shall be transformed in your likeness to that of men; and after that, having gone into the church, you will clearly recognise that you have believed in the living and true God. And having done all these things, they saw themselves changed into the likeness of Matthew; then, having thus gone into the church, they worshipped and glorified God. And when they had been changed, they knew that they were naked; and they ran in haste each to his own house to cover their nakedness, because they were ashamed.

And Matthew and Plato remained in the church spending the night, and glorifying God. And there remained also the king's wife, and his son and his wife, and they prayed the apostle to give them the seal in Christ. And Matthew gave orders to Plato; and he, having gone forth, baptized them in the water of the fountain of the tree, in the name of the Father, and the Son, and the Holy Ghost. And so thereafter, having gone into the church, they communicated in the holy mysteries of Christ; and they exulted and passed the night, they also along with the apostle, many others having also come with them; and all in the church sang the whole night, glorifying God. And when the dawn had fully come, the blessed Matthew, having gone along with the bishop Plato, stood in the place in which the rod had been planted, and he sees the rod grown into a great tree, and near it a vine twined round it, and honey coming down from above even to its root; and that tree was at once beautiful and flourishing, like the plants in paradise, and a river proceeded from its root watering all the land of the city of Myrna. And all ran together, and ate of the fruit of the tree and the vine, just as any one wished.

And when what had come to pass was reported in the palace, the king Fulvanus, having learned what had been done by Matthew about his wife, and his son, and his daughter-in-law, rejoiced for a time at their purification; but seeing that they were inseparable from

Matthew, he was seized with rage and anger, and endeavoured to put him to death by fire. And on that night in which the king intended to lay hands on Matthew, Matthew saw Jesus saying to him: I am with thee always to save thee, Matthew; be strong, and be a man. And the blessed Matthew, having awoke, and sealed himself over all the body, rose up at dawn, and proceeded into the church; and having bent his knees, prayed earnestly. Then the bishop having come, and the clergy, they stood in common in prayer, glorifying God. And after they had ended the prayer, the bishop Plato said: Peace to thee, Matthew, apostle of Christ! And the blessed Matthew said to him: Peace to you! And when they had sat down, the apostle said to the bishop Plato, and to all the clergy: I wish you, children, to know, Jesus having declared it to me, that the king of this city is going to send soldiers against me, the devil having entered into him, and manifestly armed him against us. But let us give ourselves up to Jesus, and He will deliver us from every trial, and all who have believed in Him.

And the king, plotting against the blessed Matthew how he should lay hands on him, and seeing also that the believers were very many, was very much at fault, and was in great difficulty. Therefore the wicked and unclean devil who had come forth from the king's wife, and his son, and his daughter-in-law, put to flight by Matthew, having transformed himself into the likeness of a soldier, stood before the king, and said to him: O king, why art thou thus put to the worse by this stranger and sorcerer? Knowest thou not that he was a publican, but now he has been called an apostle by Jesus, who was crucified by the Jews? For, behold, thy wife, and thy son, and thy daughter-in-law, instructed by him, have believed in him, and along with him sing in the church. And now, behold, Matthew is going forth, and Plato with him, and they are going to the gate called Heavy; but make haste, and thou wilt find them, and thou shalt do to him all that may be pleasing in thine eyes.

The king having heard this, and being the more exasperated by the pretended soldier, sent against the blessed Matthew four soldiers, having threatened them, and said: Unless you bring Matthew to me, I shall burn you alive with fire; and the punishment which he is to undergo, you shall endure. And the soldiers, having been thus threatened by the king, go in arms to where the Apostle Matthew and the bishop Plato are. And when they came near them, they heard their speaking indeed, but saw no one. And having come, they said to the king: We pray thee, O king, we went and found no one, but only heard the voices of persons talking. And the king, being enraged, and having blazed up like fire, gave orders to send other ten soldiers—man-eaters—saying to them: Go stealthily to the place, and tear them in pieces alive, and eat up Matthew, and Plato, who is with him. And when they were about to come near the blessed Matthew, the Lord Jesus Christ, having come in the likeness of a most beautiful boy, holding a torch of fire, ran to meet them, burning out their eyes. And they, having cried out and thrown their arms from them, fled, and came to the king, being speechless.

And the demon who had before appeared to the king in the form of a soldier, being again transformed into the form of a soldier, stood before the king, and said to him: Thou seest, O

king, this stranger has bewitched them all. Learn, then, how thou shalt take him. The king says to him: Tell me first wherein his strength is, that I may know, and then I will draw up against him with a great force. And the demon, compelled by an angel, says to the king: Since thou wishest to hear accurately about him, O king, I will tell thee all the truth. Really, unless he shall be willing to be taken by thee of his own accord, thou labourest in vain, and thou wilt not be able to hurt him; but if thou wishest to lay hands on him, thou wilt be struck by him with blindness, and thou wilt be paralyzed. And if thou send a multitude of soldiers against him, they also will be struck with blindness, and will be paralyzed. And we shall go, even seven unclean demons, and immediately make away with thee and thy whole camp, and destroy all the city with lightning, except those naming that awful and holy name of Christ; for wherever a footstep of theirs has come, thence, pursued, we flee. And even if thou shalt apply fire to him, to him the fire will be dew; and if thou shalt shut him up in a furnace, to him the furnace will be a church;

and if thou shalt put him in chains in prison, and seal up the floors, the doors will open to him of their own accord, and all who believe in that name will go in, even they, and say, This prison is a church of the living God, and a holy habitation of those that live alone. Behold, O king, I have told thee all the truth. The king therefore says to the pretended soldier: Since I do not know Matthew, come with me, and point him out to me from a distance, and take from me gold, as much as thou mayst wish, or go thyself, and with thy sword kill him, and Plato his associate. The demon says to him: I cannot kill him. I dare not even look into his face, seeing that he has destroyed all our generation through the name of Christ, proclaimed through him.

The king says to him: And who art thou? And he says: I am the demon who dwelt in thy wife, and in thy son, and in thy daughter-in-law; and my name is Asmodæus; and this Matthew drove me out of them. And now, behold, thy wife, and thy son, and thy daughter-in-law sing along with him in the church. And I know, O king, that thou also after this wilt believe in him. The king says to him: Whoever thou art, spirit of many shapes, I adjure thee by the God whom he whom thou callest Matthew proclaims, depart hence without doing hurt to any one. And straightway the demon, no longer like a soldier, but like smoke, became invisible; and as he fled he cried out: O secret name, armed against us, I pray thee, Matthew, servant of the holy God, pardon me, and I will no longer remain in this city. Keep thou thine own; but I go away into the fire everlasting.

Then the king, affected with great fear at the answer of the demon, remained quiet that day. And the night having come, and he not being able to sleep because he was hungry, leaped up at dawn, and went into the church, with only two soldiers without arms, to take Matthew by craft, that he might kill him. And having summoned two friends of Matthew, he said to them: Show to Matthew, says he, that I wish to be his disciple. And Matthew hearing, and knowing the craft of the tyrant, and having been warned also by the vision of the Lord to him, went forth out of the church, led by the hand by Plato, and stood in the gate of the church.

And they say to the king: Behold Matthew in the gate! And he says: Who he is, or where he is, I see not. And they said to him: Behold, he is in sight of thee. And he says: All the while I see nobody. For he had been blinded by the power of God. And he began to cry out: Woe to me, miserable! what evil has come upon me, for my eyes have been blinded, and all my limbs paralyzed? O Asmodæus Beelzebul Satan! all that thou hast said to me has come upon me. But I pray thee, Matthew, servant of God, forgive me as the herald of the good God; for assuredly the Jesus proclaimed by thee three days ago through the night appeared to me altogether resplendent as with lightning, like a beautiful young man, and said to me, Since thou art entertaining evil counsels in the wickedness of thine heart in regard to my servant Matthew, know I have disclosed to him that through thee will be the release of his body. And straightway I saw him going up into heaven. If therefore he is thy God, and if he wishes thy body to be buried in our city for a testimony of the salvation of the generations after this, and for the banishing of the demons, I shall know the truth for myself by this, by thee laying on hands upon me, and I shall receive my sight. And the apostle having laid his hands upon his eyes, and saying Ephphatha, Jesus, he made him receive his sight instantly.

And straightway the king, laying hold of the apostle, and leading him by the right hand, brought him by craft into the palace; and Plato was on Matthew's left hand, going along with him, and keeping hold of him. Then Matthew says: O crafty tyrant, how long dost thou not fulfil the works of thy father the devil? And he was enraged at what had been said; for he perceived that he would inflict upon him a more bitter death. For he resolved to put him to death by fire. And he commanded several executioners to come, and to lead him away to the place by the seashore, where the execution of malefactors was wont to take place, saying to the executioners: I hear, says he, that the God whom he proclaims delivers from fire those who believe in him. Having laid him, therefore, on the ground on his back, and stretched him out, pierce his hands and feet with iron nails, and cover him over with paper, having smeared it with dolphins' oil, and cover him up with brimstone and asphalt and pitch, and put tow and brushwood above. Thus apply the fire to him; and if any of the same tribe with him rise up against you, he shall get the same punishment.

And the apostle exhorted the brethren to remain undismayed, and that they should rejoice, and accompany him with great meekness, singing and praising God, because they were deemed worthy to have the relics of the apostle. Having therefore come to the place, the executioners, like most evil wild beasts, pinned down to the ground Matthew's hands and feet with long nails; and having done everything as they had been bid, applied the fire. And they indeed laboured closely, kindling it all round; but all the fire was changed into dew, so that the brethren, rejoicing, cried out: The only God is the Christians', who assists Matthew, in whom also we have believed: the only God is the Christians', who preserves His own apostle in the fire. And by the voice the city was shaken. And some of the executioners, having gone forth, said to the king: We indeed, O king, by every contrivance of vengeance, have kindled the fire; but the sorcerer by a certain name puts it out, calling upon Christ, and invoking his cross; and the Christians surrounding him play with the fire, and walking in it with naked feet, laugh at us, and we have fled ashamed.

Then he ordered a multitude to carry coals of fire from the furnace of the bath in the palace, and the twelve gods of gold and silver; and place them, says he, in a circle round the sorcerer, lest he may even somehow bewitch the fire from the furnace of the palace. And there being many executioners and soldiers, some carried the coals; and others, bearing the gods, brought them. And the king accompanied them, watching lest any of the Christians should steal one of his gods, or bewitch the fire. And when they came near the place where the apostle was nailed down, his face was looking towards heaven, and all his body was covered over with the paper, and much brushwood over his body to the height of ten cubits. And having ordered the soldiers to set the gods in a circle round Matthew, five cubits off, securely fastened that they might not fall, again he ordered the coal to be thrown on, and to kindle the fire at all points.

And Matthew, having looked up to heaven, cried out, Adonai eloi sabaoth marmari marmunth; that is, O God the Father, O Lord Jesus Christ, deliver me, and burn down their gods which they worship; and let the fire also pursue the king even to his palace, but not to his destruction: for perhaps he will repent and be converted. And when he saw the fire to be monstrous in height, the king, thinking that Matthew was burnt up, laughed aloud, and said: Has thy magic been of any avail to thee, Matthew? Can thy Jesus now give thee any help? And as he said this a dreadful wonder appeared; for all the fire along with the wood went away from Matthew, and was poured round about their gods, so that nothing of the gold or the silver was any more seen; and the king fled, and said: Woe's me, that my gods are destroyed by the rebuke of Matthew, of which the weight was a thousand talents of gold and a thousand talents of silver. Better are the gods of stone and of earthenware, in that they are neither melted nor stolen.

And when the fire had thus utterly destroyed their gods, and burnt up many soldiers, there came to pass again another stranger wonder. For the fire, in the likeness of a great and dreadful dragon, chased the tyrant as far as the palace, and ran hither and thither round the king, not letting him go into the palace. And the king, chased by the fire, and not allowed to go into his palace, turned back to where Matthew was, and cried out, saying: I beseech thee, whoever thou art, O man, whether magician or sorcerer or god, or angel of God, whom so great a pyre has not touched, remove from me this dreadful and fiery dragon; forget the evil I have done, as also when thou madest me receive my sight. And Matthew, having rebuked the fire, and the flames having been extinguished, and the dragon having become invisible, stretching his eyes to heaven, and praying in Hebrew, and commending his spirit to the Lord, said: Peace to you! And having glorified the Lord, he went to his rest about the sixth hour.

Then the king, having ordered more soldiers to come, and the bed to be brought from the palace, which had a great show of gold, he ordered the apostle to be laid on it, and carried to the palace. And the body of the apostle was lying as if in sleep, and his robe and his tunic unstained by the fire; and sometimes they saw him on the bed, and sometimes following, and sometimes going before the bed, and with his right hand put upon Plato's head, and

singing along with the multitude, so that both the king and the soldiers, with the crowd, were struck with astonishment. And many diseased persons and demoniacs, having only touched the bed, were made sound; and as many as were savage in appearance, in that same hour were changed into the likeness of other men. And as the bed was going into the palace, we all saw Matthew rising up, as it were, from the bed, and going into heaven, led by the hand by a beautiful boy; and twelve men in shining garments came to meet him, having never-fading and golden crowns on their head; and we saw how that child crowned Matthew, so as to be like them, and in a flash of lightning they went away to heaven.

And the king stood at the gate of the palace, and ordered that no one should come in but the soldiers carrying the bed. And having shut the doors, he ordered an iron coffin to be made, put the body of Matthew into it, and sealed it up with lead; through the eastern gate of the palace at midnight put it into a boat, no one knowing of it, and threw it into the deep part of the sea. And through the whole night the brethren remained before the gate of the palace, spending the night, and singing; and when the dawn rose there was a voice: O bishop Plato, carry the Gospel and the Psalter of David; go along with the multitude of the brethren to the east of the palace, and sing the Alleluia, and read the Gospel, and bring as an offering the holy bread; and having pressed three clusters from the vine into a cup, communicate with me, as the Lord Jesus showed us how to offer up when He rose from the dead on the third day.

And the bishop having run into the church, and taken the Gospel and the Psalter of David, and having assembled the presbyters and the multitude of the brethren, came to the east of the palace at the hour of sunrise; and having ordered the one who was singing to go upon a certain lofty stone, he began to praise in singing of a song to God: Precious in the sight of God is the death of His saints. And again: I laid me down and slept; I arose: because the Lord will sustain me. And they listened to the singing of a song of David: Shall he that is dead not rise again? Now I shall raise him up for myself, saith the Lord. And all shouted out the Alleluia. And the bishop read the Gospel, and all cried out: Glory to Thee, Thou who hast been glorified in heaven and on earth. And so then they offered the gift of the holy offering for Matthew; and having partaken for thanksgiving of the undefiled and life-giving mysteries of Christ, they all glorified God.

And it was about the sixth hour, and Plato sees the sea opposite about seven furlongs off; and, behold, Matthew was standing on the sea, and two men, one on each side, in shining garments, and the beautiful boy in front of them. And all the brethren saw these things, and they heard them saying Amen, Alleluia. And one could see the sea fixed like a stone of crystal, and the beautiful boy in front of them, when out of the depth of the sea a cross came up, and at the end of the cross the coffin going up in which was the body of Matthew; and in the hour of the piercing on the cross, the boy placed the coffin on the ground, behind the palace towards the east, where the bishop had offered the offering for Matthew.

And the king having seen these things from the upper part of the house, and being terror-struck, went forth from the palace, and ran and worshipped towards the east at the coffin,

and fell down before the bishop, and the presbyters, and the deacons, in repentance and confession, saying: Truly I believe in the true God, Christ Jesus. I entreat, give me the seal in Christ, and I will give you my palace, in testimony of Matthew, and you shall put the coffin upon my golden bed, in the great dining-room; only, having baptized me in it, communicate to me the Eucharist of Christ. And the bishop having prayed, and ordered him to take off his clothes, and having examined him for a long time, and he having confessed and wept over what he had done, having sealed him, and anointed him with oil, put him down into the sea, in the name of Father, and Son, and Holy Ghost. And when he came up from the water he ordered him to put on himself splendid garments, and so then having given praise and thanks, communicating the holy bread and mixed cup, the bishop first gave them to the king, saying: Let this body of Christ, and this cup, His blood shed for us, be to thee for the remission of sins unto life. And a voice was heard from on high: Amen, amen, amen. And when he had thus communicated in fear and joy, the apostle appeared and said: King Fulvanus, thy name shall no longer be Fulvanus;

but thou shalt be called Matthew. And thou, the son of the king, shall no longer be called Fulvanus, but Matthew also; and thou Ziphagia, the wife of the king, shall be called Sophia; and Erva, the wife of your son, shall be called Synesis. And these names of yours shall be written in the heavens, and there shall not fail of your loins from generation to generation. And in that same hour Matthew appointed the king a presbyter, and he was thirty-seven years old; and the king's son he appointed deacon, being seventeen years old; and the king's wife he appointed a presbyteress; and his son's wife he appointed a deaconess, and she also was seventeen years old. And then he thus blessed them, saying: The blessing and the grace of our Lord Jesus Christ shall be with you to time everlasting.

Then the king, having awakened out of sleep, and rejoiced with all his house at the vision of the holy Apostle Matthew, praised God. And the king, having gone into his palace, broke all the idols to pieces, and gave a decree to those in his kingdom, writing thus: King Matthew, to all those under my kingdom, greeting. Christ having appeared upon earth, and having saved the human race, the so-called gods have been found to be deceivers, and soul-destroyers, and plotters against the human race. Whence, divine grace having shone abroad, and come even to us, and we having come to the knowledge of the deception of the idols, that it is vain and false, it has seemed good to our divinity that there should not be many gods, but one, and one only, the God in the heavens. And you, having received this our decree, keep to the purport of it, and break to pieces and destroy every idol; and if any one shall be detected from this time forth serving idols, or concealing them, let such an one be subjected to punishment by the sword. Farewell all, because we also are well.

And when this order was given out, all, rejoicing and exulting, broke their idols to pieces, crying out and saying: There is one only God, He who is in the heavens, who does good to men. And after all these things had come to pass, Matthew the apostle of Christ appeared to the bishop Plato, and said to him: Plato, servant of God, and our brother, be it known unto thee, that after three years shall be thy rest in the Lord, and exultation to ages of ages.

And the king himself, whom after my own name I have called Matthew, shall receive the throne of thy bishopric, and after him his son. And he, having said Peace to thee and all the saints, went to heaven. And after three years the bishop Plato rested in the Lord. And King Matthew succeeded him, having given up his kingdom willingly to another, whence there was given him grace against unclean demons, and he cured every affliction. And he advanced his son to be a presbyter, and made him second to himself.

And Saint Matthew finished his course in the country of the man-eaters, in the city of Myrna, on the sixteenth of the month of November, our Lord Jesus Christ reigning, to whom be glory and strength, now and ever, and to ages of ages. Amen.

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