

An Illustrated and Illuminated Manuscript of

# THE GOSPEL OF THOMAS

Carol W. Nichols  
Marvin Meyer

An Illustrated and Illuminated Manuscript of

THE GOSPEL  
OF  
THOMAS

Carol W. Nichols

Artist, Calligrapher and Book Designer

Marvin W. Meyer

Translator and Text Consultant

{Part of Introduction by Artist, Calligrapher, Book Designer,  
Carol W. Nichols}

# INTRODUCTION

As you pick up this book, do so with the following story in your minds and hearts, for the story of how this book came to be in your hands is as improbable to believe as its message is challenging to embrace.

About 1600 years ago, there was a monastery near Nag Hammadi in the upper Nile region of Egypt. The monks, belonging to the Order of St. Pachomius, seem to have had within their compound a scriptorium, devoted to the task of copying sacred texts. They kept their sacred library intact until the year 367 CE, when an order came from Alexandria, directing all libraries to read only the Gospels of Matthew, Mark, Luke and John. From that day forward, the order stated, only these four gospels would be sanctioned by the Christian church. The monks, however, apparently loving their "heretical" works of devotion, may well have chosen instead to bury some of their documents, thus saving their library from destruction.

The story continues around the year 1945. A resident of the area was out with his brothers digging in the hillside for *sabakk*, a natural fertilizer for the soil. The farmer, who was called Mohammed Ali, suddenly struck something near a large boulder, sending fragments of papyrus dust high into the air. He had broken into a jar containing thirteen ancient books. At first, he thought he had released a genie. But, he soon discovered a treasure trove containing some fifty-five texts, one of which was the *Gospel of Thomas*. Over the next thirty years, the books were sold, eventually resurfacing in the public domain, where study and refined translation were to intensify from the 1970's on.


Then, in 1988, during a very casual afternoon of shopping, I wandered into a bookstore in southern Indiana, which happened to carry some Near Eastern books. After some browsing, I was drawn to a curious orange-clad paperback edited by Raghavan Iyer. This exotic little copy of the *Gospel of Thomas* sat in hands as yet unskilled in the arts of calligraphy, watercolor, or book design. It had missed centuries of devoted copying, illustrating and artistic rendition, biblical study, religious inquiry, and yes, devotion.

# FOREWORD

Of all the gospels and other sacred texts discovered in the sands of Egypt over the past decades, the *Gospel of Thomas* has proved to be the most significant for our understanding of the historical figure of Jesus of Nazareth and the development of the gospel traditions in the early Christian period. The *Gospel of Thomas* presents a series of sayings of Jesus, with little narrative structure, as an indication of the wisdom teachings of Jesus. In this gospel, unlike the New Testament gospels, Jesus does not perform any physical miracles, nor reveal fulfillment of prophecy, nor announce an apocalyptic kingdom about to disrupt the world order, nor die for anyone's sins, nor rise from the dead on the third day. Rather, the Jesus of Thomas lives and saves through his sayings. The introductory clauses prefaced to the sayings ("Jesus said," "He said") may be translated in the present tense ("Jesus says," "He says"), as an indication that Jesus continues in the present to speak through these sayings. And as it is said in the first saying, "Whoever discovers the interpretation of these sayings will not taste death."

In the *Gospel of Thomas* the reader is invited to interact with Jesus and his sayings, in order to embrace the interpretive possibilities of his words and the meaning of his words, since words – and the word – can give life. Many of the sayings of Jesus in this gospel are enigmatic, and have a riddle-like quality, and hence they not only invite but require interpretation. In this way the sayings of Jesus in *Thomas* may reflect something of the pedagogy of the historical Jesus, who seems to have taught through witty one-liners and stories, or parables, which commonly included a question or had an open-ended quality.

Probably no saying of Jesus in the *Gospel of Thomas* is more puzzling, or even disturbing, than the concluding saying, on Mary becoming male in order to attain life. The interpretation of the saying that is most convincing acknowledges the ancient symbolism of the Father God as the heavenly male (our Father who is in heaven) and the Mother Goddess as the earthly female (our Mother who is in nature, on the earth). As a result,



THE GOSPEL  
OF  
THOMAS

or the Hidden Sayings  
of Jesus

6 HIS DISCIPLES ASKED HIM AND SAID TO HIM, "DO YOU WANT US TO FAST? HOW SHOULD WE PRAY? SHOULD WE GIVE TO CHARITY? WHAT DIET SHOULD WE OBSERVE?"

JESUS SAID, "DO NOT LIE, AND DO NOT DO WHAT YOU HATE, BECAUSE ALL THINGS ARE DISCLOSED BEFORE HEAVEN. FOR THERE IS NOTHING HIDDEN THAT WILL NOT BE REVEALED, AND THERE IS NOTHING COVERED THAT WILL REMAIN UNDISCLOSED."

ΠΕΤΕΤ̄ΜΟΥΤΕ ΦΙΜΟΥ'  
DO NOT DO WHAT YOU HATE.  
ΜΠΡΑΔΥ

As for you then, be on  
ἰσχυρῶς καὶ ποιεὶς  
guard against the world.  
κατεστῆ ἰσχυρῶς

AS FOR YOU, THEN, BE ON GUARD  
AGAINST THE WORLD. ARM  
YOURSELVES WITH GREAT STRENGTH,  
OR THE ROBBERS MIGHT FIND A WAY  
TO GET TO YOU, FOR THE TROUBLE  
YOU EXPECT WILL COME. LET THERE  
BE AMONG YOU A PERSON WHO  
UNDERSTANDS. WHEN THE CROP  
RIPENED, THE PERSON CAME  
QUICKLY WITH SICKLE IN HAND AND  
HARVESTED IT. WHOEVER HAS EARS  
TO HEAR SHOULD HEAR!

44 **J**ESUS SAID, "WHOEVER  
BLXSPHEMES AGXINST THE  
FATHER WILL BE FORGIVEN, AND  
WHOEVER BLXSPHEMES AGXINST  
THE SON WILL BE FORGIVEN, BUT  
WHOEVER BLXSPHEMES AGXINST  
THE HOLY SPIRIT WILL NOT BE  
FORGIVEN, EITHER ON EXRTH OR  
IN HEAVEN."

**ΟΥΑΓΑΘΟΣ**

A GOOD

**ΠΡΩΜΕ**

PERSON

**ΥΑΧΕΙΝΕ**

BRINGS FORTH

**ΝΟΥΑΓΑΘΟΝ**

GOOD.

77 **J**ESUS SAID, "I AM THE LIGHT  
THAT IS OVER ALL THINGS.

ἄΝΟΚ ΤΤΕ ΤΤΟΥΘΕΙΝ

I AM ALL FROM ME  
ALL HAS COME FORTH,

ἄΝΟΚ ΤΤΕ ΤΤΗΡΥ

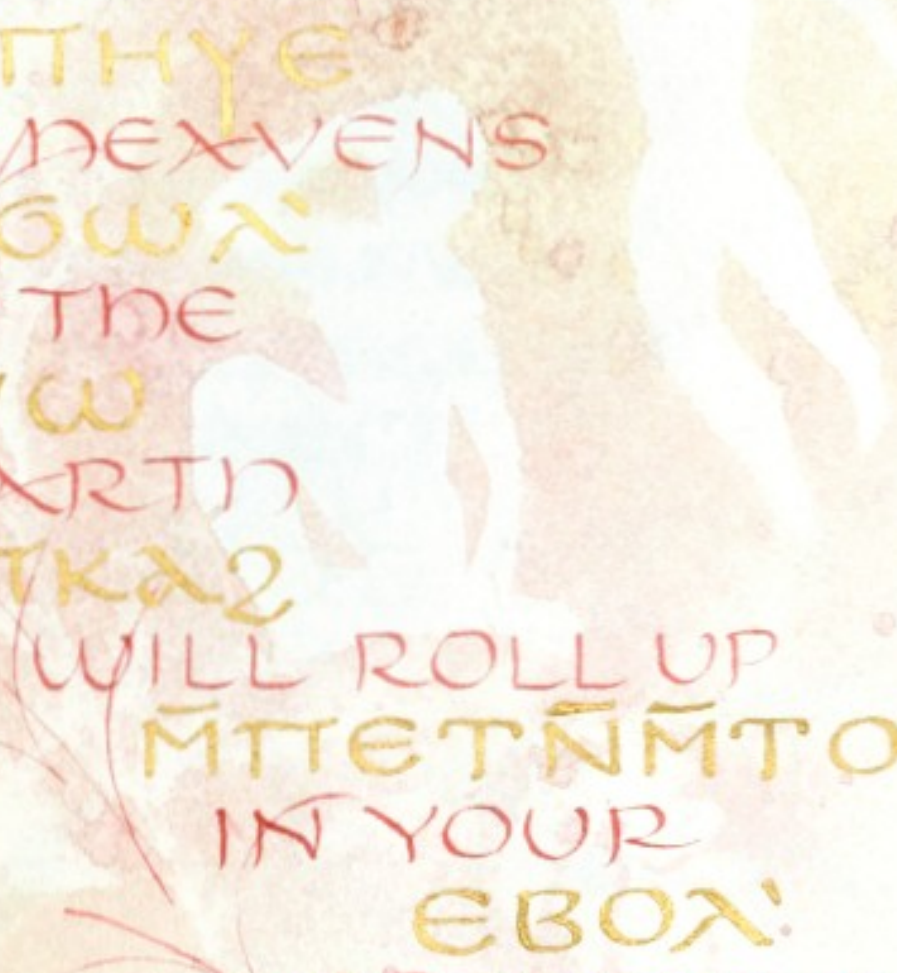
AND TO ME

ΤΤΩΣ ΝΝΟΥΣ

96 **J**esus said, "The father's kingdom is like a woman. She took a little yeast, hid it in dough, and made it into large loaves of bread. Whoever has ears should hear."

97 **J**esus said, "The father's kingdom is like a woman who was carrying a jar full of meal. While she was walking along a distant road, the handle of the jar broke and the meal spilled behind her along the road. She did not know it; she had not noticed a problem."

112 JESUS SAID, "SHAME ON THE  
FLESH THAT DEPENDS ON THE  
SOUL. SHAME ON THE SOUL  
THAT DEPENDS ON THE  
FLESH."



ΜΙΤΗΥΕ  
THE HEAVENS  
ΝΑΘΩΛ  
AND THE  
ΑΥΩ  
EARTH  
ΤΙΚΑ2  
WILL ROLL UP  
ΜΠΕΤΝΜΤΟ  
IN YOUR  
ΕΒΟΛ  
PRESENCE.

**H**IS DISCIPLES SAID  
TO HIM, "WHEN WILL  
THE KINGDOM COME?"  
"IT WILL NOT COME BY  
WATCHING FOR IT.  
IT WILL NOT BE SAID,  
'LOOK, HERE IT IS,'

ΑΛΛΑ ΤΜΗΝΤΕΡΟ  
ἢ ΠΕΙΩΤ'  
ΕΣΤΟΡΩ'  
ΕΒΟΛ