Questions to Answer:

1) Who wrote the Gospels? Why believe that Matthew, Mark, Luke, and John are the authors when they never explicitly claim to be? Is believing that Matthew wrote Matthew as naïve as believing that Titus wrote Titus? Or is it more like believing that Jude wrote Jude?

2) How were the Gospels written? Does inspiration mean that Luke went into a Spirit-induced trance and woke up with his completed Gospel in front of him? Or is God’s inspiration process compatible with Luke doing meticulous research with eyewitnesses and previously written sources?

3) What do we know about the four authors as men?

I. Who wrote the Gospels (or why we believe that Matthew, Mark, Luke, and John were the authors)

Summary of my answer:

We believe that the Four Gospels were written by Matthew, Mark, Luke and John, because this is the unanimous testimony of the early church, and there seems to be no good reason to doubt their testimony.

- Matthew, Mark, Luke, and John do not explicitly name themselves as the authors within the body of the narrative as Paul does in his epistles. In this sense, the four Gospels are technically anonymous.

- And yet, that doesn’t mean that we’re totally clueless about who wrote the Gospels. After all, the Declaration of Independence was also technically anonymous, but that doesn’t mean that we can’t come to a well-informed, reasoned conclusion that Thomas Jefferson wrote it.

- Essentially all scholars agree that the four Gospels were written between 50 and 100 A.D., and that as far back as we have any record, they were universally attributed to Matthew, Mark, Luke, and John. No other authors were ever suggested as options.

“...by about 140, and perhaps earlier, the traditional attributions were widely known, without significant variation”

-D.A. Carson and Douglas Moo, An Introduction to the New Testament (p. 140)

- Though the authors’ names are not given within the books themselves, the earliest manuscripts always carried the titles “The Gospel according to Matthew,” etc. Given that there is no evidence that they ever actually circulated without these titles, some scholars have argued that the only way to account for such unanimous early agreement about the titles is that the titles were original.

How likely is it (a) that gospels could have been in circulation for anything up to sixty years without a title, and (b) that titles could have then been attached uniformly to
previously anonymous documents and so universally accepted that there is no trace of any rival [author] being even considered?

Such scholars suggest that the “anonymous” nature of the Gospels is not really that significant in the end.

It is conventionally stated that the four...gospels are anonymous. What is meant by this is that the author doesn’t identify himself by name in the course of the document, as for instance Paul does in Romans 1:1 or 2 Cor. 10:1...This is a perfectly true observation...but how significant is it?

This sort of ‘anonymity’ is, after all, shared by the vast majority of literary works. Except in the case of autobiographies or other works concerned with events in which the author was himself involved, it is not to the body of the work that we look for information on its authorship, but to the title page. The same is true of books in the ancient world...Manuscripts written around the New Testament period...frequently carry a heading,...identifying the...author. The same is true of the Gospels.

In the earliest texts available in Greek or in translation, each of the gospels regularly carries a heading 'The Gospel according to Matthew/Mark' etc. There is no evidence for any of the Gospels ever existing without such a heading. Nor is there any variation in the names of those to whom they are attributed.
-R.T. France, *Matthew: Evangelist and Teacher*

For more on the argument for the titles “according to Matthew” being original, see pages D.A. Carson and Douglas Moo’s *An Introduction to the New Testament*, pages 140-142.

• Matthew and John were part of the original 12 apostles, so we perhaps could imagine the church wanting to attribute authorship to them. But when it comes to Mark and Luke, men who were not particularly famous or apostolic, it is harder to see why the 1st century church would have claimed them as the authors unless they actually were.

II. A Look at the Four Authors
1. Matthew
   a. His name appears in all four lists of the 12 apostles (Mark 3:16-19; Matthew 10:2-4; Luke 6:14-16; Acts 1:13)
   b. The story of his calling to follow Jesus is recorded in all three Synoptic Gospels (Mark 2:14-22; Matthew 9:9-17; Luke 5:27-38)
   c. He would have been an eyewitness to much of what is recorded in his Gospel, and he would have access to eyewitnesses (i.e. Jesus and the other disciples, Mary the mother of Jesus, see Acts 1:14; Matt. 12:46-50) for much of the rest.

2. Mark
a. Essentially everyone agrees that this “Mark” is the “John Mark” mentioned in Acts as Paul and Barnabas’s fellow traveler (Acts 12:12, 25; 13:5, 13; 15:37-39) as well the Mark mentioned in Paul’s epistles (Col 4:14; 2 Tim. 4:9-12).

b. It is debated whether Mark was an eyewitness to the events of Jesus’s life.

c. Early tradition consistently affirms that Mark was Peter’s disciple, and got his information mainly from Peter. The New Testament confirms Mark’s close relationship with Peter (1 Pet. 5:13)

   This also the elder [John] said: Mark, having become the interpreter of Peter, wrote down accurately, though not indeed in order, whatsoever he remembered of the things done or said by Christ. For he neither heard the Lord nor followed him, but afterward, as I said, he followed Peter, who adapted his teaching to the needs of his hearers, but with no intention of giving a connected account of the Lord’s discourses, so that Mark committed no error while he thus wrote some things as he remembered them. For he was careful of one thing, not to omit any of the things which he had heard, and not to state any of them falsely.
   -Papias (c. 140 A.D.)

3. Luke

   c. Though Luke is not named in Acts, the book of Acts implies that its author was a companion of Paul in his travels.
   d. Paul names Luke as a close companion, co-worker, and beloved physician (Philemon 23; Col 4:14; 2 Tim. 4:11). All three of these passages list Luke in close proximity with Mark, implying that they would have known each other, and consequently, been able to share their information and research about the life of Jesus.

4. John

   a. John comes closer than any of the other authors to identifying himself in the text. In the final chapter (John 21:24), the author identifies himself as “the disciple whom Jesus loved,” a cryptic person he has been referring to since chapter 13.
      i. 13:23-25 (in the upper room with the 12 and Peter)
      ii. 19:26-27, 34-35 (at the cross with Mary)
      iii. 20:2-10 (at the empty tomb with Peter)
      iv. 21:7, 20-24 (at the seaside with Peter and the others)
      v. Most scholars also identify the “other disciple” with Peter in 18:15-16 as this same “beloved disciple.”

   b. Knowing that the beloved disciple was among the 7 disciples listed in John 21:1-2, we can narrow the options to John the son of Zebedee with virtual certainty. Of the seven listed, we know the author wasn’t Peter, since he is clearly distinguished from the beloved disciple. We’ve no reason to think it was Thomas or Nathaniel, since the author is clearly willing to give their actual names. This leaves four options for the beloved disciple: he is either one of the two unnamed disciples, or he is one of the
“sons of Zebedee.” James the son of Zebedee died too early to be the author. And though we can’t prove that the author wasn’t one of the two unnamed disciples, surely it would be odd to choose that option when the other option, namely John the son of Zebedee, happens to be universally attested as the author by the early church.