

## **Who was St. Mark the Evangelist?**

The pioneer in Gospel writing was St. Mark (about 65 A.D.) His is the shortest and the oldest of the Gospels. Little is known of Mark except from the New Testament. Mark was not one of the twelve apostles, but rather a member of the first Christian community. It was probably Mark's mother who opened her house as a place of prayer for the apostles during Peter's imprisonment (Acts 12:12). Mark also had firsthand experience of the early church and apostolic life.

Mark was a traveling companion and assistant of Paul and Barnabas on the first missionary journey. Something happened to Mark on that journey – perhaps homesickness – so he returned to Jerusalem. The incident caused a quarrel between Paul and Barnabas. Barnabas, Mark's cousin, was sympathetic to Mark's problems, but Paul would not hear of Mark accompanying them again. Later Paul and Mark must have reconciled, because when Paul wrote to Timothy during his final imprisonment, he asked for Mark's assistance (2 Timothy 4:11).

## **Mark's Great Contribution to the Christian Community**

Mark's Gospel was his great contribution to the Christian community. It included oral and written tradition concerning the words and deeds of Jesus. He probably secured some of his material from St. Peter and then presented the account of God's saving plan through the life, death, and resurrection of Jesus. Mark shows Jesus as the suffering Son of God.

Mark knew that it was easy to be a disciple of the Risen Jesus, and anticipate the assured victory of eternal life. But Mark also knew that to accept the Risen Jesus meant to come to terms with the cross. Jesus was glorified because he willingly allowed Himself to suffer death for our salvation. He was taken by His enemies, mocked, misunderstood, humbled, and, through these sufferings, was glorified. Mark writes sincerely that anyone who wishes to come after Jesus must accept the cross.

## **Features of Mark's Gospel**

Mark wrote to proclaim the Good News to a community that had as its members both Jewish and Gentile Christians. His Gospel is direct and simple to read and is the shortest of the four Gospels. He speaks to Christians about a Jesus who understands their difficulties and sufferings and will one day bring them to share with Him eternal joy and glory. He shows Jesus to be the one who forgives sins and leads people to everlasting happiness.

When you experience the excitement of a big event, you naturally want to tell someone. Telling the story can bring back that original thrill as you relive the experience. Reading Mark's first words – *Here begins the Gospel of Jesus Christ, the Son of God. (Mark 1:1)* – you can sense his excitement. Mark has you picture yourself in the crowd as Jesus heals and teaches!

In his Gospel, Mark moves right into action! He completely bypasses the birth of Jesus, and quickly begins to prepare us for Christ's ministry. The Gospel of Mark is concise, straightforward, and chronological. He presents a rapid succession of vivid pictures of Jesus in action – his true identity revealed by what he does, not by what he says. Eighteen miracles are described by St. Mark, and only four parables. He tells us the story of Jesus on the move!

Many of the passages of St. Mark's Gospel are also found in Matthew and Luke. But Mark has some sections which are not repeated in other Gospels. One of these passages gives parables on the Kingdom of God. (*Mark 4: 1-32*) He also records many miracles of the Savior, showing Christ's power as the Son of God.

Perhaps the most key verse of his Gospel is: "For the Son of Man did not come to be served but to serve, and to give his life as a ransom for many. (*Mark 10:45*)

### **Additional Facts about St. Mark**

St. Mark is traditionally thought to have been a bishop of Alexandria, and while living there cured a shoemaker and suffered martyrdom.

Traditionally, each of the Gospel writers has been represented by a symbol. St. Mark is represented by a **winged lion**. This symbol is derived the descriptions from the Prophet Ezekiel (*1: 1-21*) and also from the Book of Revelation (*4: 6-8*). St. Irenaeus (140-202) explained these images from the Old and New Testaments for St. Mark with the following words:

"St. Mark, represented by the winged lion, references the Prophet Isaiah when he begins his gospel: 'Here begins the Gospel of Jesus Christ, the Son of God.' In Isaiah the Prophet it is written: "I send my messenger before you to prepare your way: a herald's voice in the desert, crying: 'Make ready the way of the Lord, clear Him a straight path.'" "The voice in the desert crying" reminds one of a lion's roar, and the prophetic spirit descending to earth reminds one of a "winged message." The lion also signified royalty, an appropriate symbol for the Son of God."

St. Mark is also sometimes referred to as "John Mark" in the New Testament.