

“Peter is at the door!”

Mark traveled with his cousin Barnabas to accompany Paul. He first went with them to Antioch in Syria, but at the end of the major mission in Cyprus, Mark decided to return home. His decision disappointed Paul, who would not allow Barnabas to invite Mark for their second journey. Because of this, the two agreed to divide their work, so that Barnabas went on a separate mission from Paul, and took Mark as his assistant to Cyprus, visiting the previously established communities there.

About ten years later, Mark was in Rome assisting Peter as “interpreter.” The relationship was close; Peter called Mark his “son” (1 Peter 5:13). Mark also became Paul’s aide in Rome; to the Colossians Paul writes that Mark is his consolation. In his second letter to Timothy, Paul asks him to come bring Mark, because he is useful in spreading the Gospel.

Mark returned to Africa where he became the first local bishop and founder of the Church in Egypt, specifically the Coptic Church. (*Coptic* comes from the Greek word for *Egyptian*.) This happened in Alexandria. Christianity spread throughout Egypt within fifty years of Mark’s arrival there. He was martyred at or near Alexandria.

In the year 825, his relics were given to Venetian merchants for safekeeping, who smuggled them past the Muslims by putting Mark’s bones in a box underneath salted pork. Construction of the Basilica of St. Mark in Venice was begun in 1063, modeled after the Basilica of the Twelve Apostles in Constantinople. To arrive there, pilgrims must travel by boat. In 1075, the Duke of Venice passed a law that required ships returning to the city to bring something back of value or beauty to add to the basilica. Precious alabaster, jasper, and other items were brought, and are there to this very day. There are Byzantine elements in the structure and design, mixed with Venetian and Roman style. Each of its five gold domes have beautiful mosaics, covering 8000 sq. meters, bigger than a football field.

#### Socials with the Saints

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Sources incl.: New International Version of the Bible, The African History, The Jewish Virtual Library, History Walks Venice, and *Navarre Bible: St. Mark*



## *Saint Mark the Evangelist*

**Born:** Between 5 and 12 A.D. in Cyrene, modern-day Libya

**Died:** Circa 68 A.D. on April 25

**Feast Day:** April 25

According to tradition, Saint Mark was born in Cyrene, in the Pentapolis region of modern-day Libya, to Jewish parents named Paul and Mary, who were financially well-off. Many Jews lived in this area. In fact, the author of the Second Book of Maccabees says that the book was a shortened version of a five-volume work by a

Jew named Jason of Cyrene who lived around 100 B.C.

Mark was also called John Mark (Acts 12:12 and 15:37) or even just John (Acts 13:5-13). Using two names was common practice for a Jew at the time; John would have been his Jewish name (*Yohannan*) while Mark (*Marcus*) was his Latin name, appropriate under the Roman empire.

Mark was a cousin of Saint Barnabas, who was Saint Paul’s companion on his missionary journeys. Mark’s family situation afforded him a good education; he studied Hebrew, Greek, and Latin.

How did Mark end up in ancient Palestine? It was not uncommon for Jews from Cyrene to travel there, as the two Jewish communities maintained close connections. Many Cyrenians in fact moved to Palestine. In the story of Christ’s Passion, Simon of Cyrene is made to carry Jesus’ cross on the road to Calvary. Simon is identified by Mark as “the father of Alexander and Rufus,” so we can guess Mark personally knew Simon or else the family was known to the local Jewish population.

According to the Church Father Hippolytus, Mark was one of the 70 or 72 disciples whom Jesus sent out, as we read in Luke chapter 10:

The Lord appointed seventy-two [*some manuscripts say seventy*] others and sent them two by two ahead of him to every town and place where he was about to go. He told them, “The harvest is plentiful, but the workers are few. Ask the Lord of the harvest, therefore, to send out workers into his harvest field. Go! I am

sending you out like lambs among wolves. Do not take a purse or bag or sandals; and do not greet anyone on the road.

“When you enter a house, first say, ‘Peace to this house.’ If someone who promotes peace is there, your peace will rest on them; if not, it will return to you. Stay there, eating and drinking whatever they give you, for the worker deserves his wages. Do not move around from house to house.

“When you enter a town and are welcomed, eat what is offered to you. Heal the sick who are there and tell them, ‘The kingdom of God has come near to you.’ But when you enter a town and are not welcomed, go into its streets and say, ‘Even the dust of your town we wipe from our feet as a warning to you. Yet be sure of this: The kingdom of God has come near.’ I tell you, it will be more bearable on that day for Sodom than for that town. [...]

“Whoever listens to you listens to me; whoever rejects you rejects me; but whoever rejects me rejects him who sent me.”

The seventy-two returned with joy and said, “Lord, even the demons submit to us in your name.”

He replied, “I saw Satan fall like lightning from heaven. I have given you authority to trample on snakes and scorpions and to overcome all the power of the enemy; nothing will harm you. However, do not rejoice that the spirits submit to you, but rejoice that your names are written in heaven.”

Many Church writers identify Mark as the young man who flees from the Garden of Gethsemane so fast upon the arrest of Jesus that he even leaves behind his clothes; Mark is the only Gospel writer who includes this detail, perhaps as a personal signature. “A young man, wearing nothing but a linen garment, was following Jesus. When they seized him, he fled naked, leaving his garment behind.” (Mark 14:51) It is thought that Mark’s family may have owned the Garden of Gethsemane.

According to various early written testimonies, Mark was a disciple of Saint Peter. Mark’s gospel account was based on Peter’s teachings and testimonies. Even though it is the second Gospel listed in the Bible, Mark’s was the first Gospel written. Because of this—and its similarities

to the Gospel according to Matthew and Luke, Mark is thought to be a sort of template for Matthew & Luke. Together, these three gospel accounts are called the synoptic Gospels because they focus on narrative (synopsis) more than John’s—which is more mystical in its focus.

Mark’s is the shortest Gospel, and is known for using the word “immediately” very often in its 16 chapters. You can find the word “immediately” listed more than 40 times. It begins with the story of John the Baptist; “a voice crying in the wilderness” (Mark 1:3), like the roaring of a lion. Thus, the symbol for Mark and his Gospel is a lion with wings, which is symbolic of Christ’s royalty and resurrection. The winged lion is inspired by the books of Ezekiel and Revelation.

All four of the Gospel writers and their accounts have a symbol, in fact: Matthew as an angel or a man due in part to the genealogy of Jesus which begins his Gospel, Luke symbolized with an ox representing temple sacrifice, and John represented by an eagle which symbolizes its mystical nature—soaring high in a bird’s eye view close to the heavens.

Mark wrote his Gospel in Rome at Saint Peter’s request. He was sort of an “interpreter” of Peter, and Mark made his Gospel very vivid and to the point. This is why it is known also as the “breathless Gospel”; Mark goes from one story or miracle to the next without much stopping or transition. Hence the number of times he uses “immediately”. From this we can see that Mark wished to express the urgency of conversion. He makes clear that the disciples needed to leave their former way of life “quickly” and follow Jesus with conviction. Mark especially emphasizes timeliness in the ministry of Jesus and His earthly mission.

Mark’s Gospel ensured that Peter’s preaching was not lost.

The site of the Last Supper is believed by many to be Mark’s family home in Jerusalem, where Jesus instituted the Eucharist, and where the disciples gathered after the Resurrection. In the Acts of the Apostles chapter 12, following Peter’s miraculous release from prison, we read:

(Peter) went to the house of Mary the mother of John, also called Mark, where many people had gathered and were praying. Peter knocked at the outer entrance, and a servant named Rhoda came to answer the door. When she recognized Peter’s voice, she was so overjoyed she ran back without opening it and exclaimed,