

**St. Mark the Evangelist:
Apostle, Martyr, and Beholder of the Divine
The First Pope & Patriarch of Alexandria
And the See of St. Mark
(Martyrdom: Alexandria, Egypt May 8, 68 AD)**



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June 23, 2003

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St. Mark has the highest esteem in the Coptic Orthodox Church, he is the father of our Church. In the Doxology we sing: “You Mark the Evangelist, the Apostle and Martyr. Who witnessed to the suffering of our Lord Christ. You came to our land and taught us the Father, and the Son, and the Holy Spirit. You fed us the food of life which came from heaven. All the nations of the earth, were blessed by you. Your sayings reached all the countries of the world. .. Hail to you O Martyr, Hail to the Apostle. Hail to the Evangelist, Mark the Beholder of the Divine. Intercede in our behalf, O Mark the Evangelist, and the Apostle, so the Lord may forgive us our sins.” (St. Mark Doxology)

St. Mark’s parents (Aristo-Paul and Mary) were North African Jews, wealthy landlords who lost everything to the barbarians’ attacks. They immigrated to Palestine from Cirene (“Quayrawan”) in Pentapolis (five western cities) which is part of the region which is now Tunisia and Libya. His mother is one of the women who served our Lord Jesus. His father was a cousin of the wife of St. Peter. Mark’s name was John surnamed Mark. St. Mark was a young man when Jesus preached, he was born 15 years after the birth of the Lord, and it is known that Christ held the last supper in his parents house and also the descent of the holy spirit, the Pentecost, was in the upper room of their house. Mark followed Jesus as a youth and that is where the name beholder of the divine comes from, he beheld the Lord, saw him and communed with him in the flesh. He was chosen by Christ as one of the 70 Apostles. His birth is placed around 20 AD. That makes him 28 years of age when he came to Egypt in 48 AD, and 48 years of age when he received the crown of martyrdom in 68 AD. So, it is not correct to depict him as an old man.

The conversion of his father was when they traveled in the desert region south of the dead sea, they encountered a lion and a lioness. The wild animals started to attack, but were rendered harmless (tradition says, they dropped dead) through the prayers of St. Mark directed to the Lord Jesus Christ asking him audibly to protect them. According to tradition his father said to him: “You are my son in the flesh, but from now on I am your son in faith.” His father departed shortly thereafter.

The proper icon depicting St. Mark is of a bearded young man, not old, writing (the gospel) and a lion is to his side. Also, the icon should contain a symbol depicting the Church of Egypt, the Coptic Church. St. Mark traveled with Paul the Apostle on Paul’s first journey, but departed for Rome where he met St. Peter, and from Rome he traveled to North Africa, the place of his birth (Pentapolis, the five major cities in Libya and Tunisia) and then to Alexandria. Historians place his first visit to Alexandria around 48 AD.

He wrote the Gospel According to Mark, considered the first to be written of the four gospels, sometime between 48 and 63 AD. The early dating is according to Sts.

Origen, Clement, and John Chrysostom. The later dating is according to St. Irenaeus who proposed that it was even written after the martyrdom of St. Paul, after 63 AD. It is safe to assume that it was written between 48 and 53 AD, and that he consulted with the Disciples and Apostles including Peter and Paul. It was addressed to the Romans. His symbol is the lion, he is speaking to the Romans, powerful people, he speaks with power. He does come immediately to explaining the message (salvation), the forerunner (John the Baptist), and the messenger (The Lord Jesus Christ): “The beginning of the gospel of Jesus Christ, the Son of God; As it is written in the prophets, Behold, I send my messenger before thy face, which shall prepare thy way before thee. The voice of one crying in the wilderness, Prepare ye the way of the Lord, make his paths straight. John did baptize in the wilderness, and preach the baptism of repentance for the remission of sins... “ (Mark 1:1-4). The lion is the symbol, because he immediately writes about the lion from the tribe of Juda, the Lord Jesus Christ.

He was not on the second journey of St. Paul but Paul asks for him on his third Journey. This is all detailed in the book of Acts. Few historians believe that St. Peter wrote the gospel of Mark, but the majority believe that the gospel according to St. Mark is written by St. Mark. No doubt, St. Peter was consulted about the message of the Gospel and the Messenger, our Lord God and Savior Jesus Christ. We also know that all the holy books are written by holy men inspired by the Holy Spirit. St. Mark is one.

He opens by the statement: “The gospel of Jesus Christ, the Son of God”. Many great writings start by stating the objective before giving the explanation, because the writer is so respected that we trust that what he says is truth indeed. He goes on giving us the proof by explaining baptism, temptations, miracles, suffering, crucifixion, death, resurrection, and ascension. He concludes with the words of Christ to preach the Gospel to all the world baptizing in the Name of the Father, the Son, and the Holy Spirit.

In Egypt, St. Mark preached the gospel of Jesus Christ to one, Anianos a cobbler (Shoe repairman). Anianos had the awl penetrate the palm of his hand, he screamed in pain: “The One and Only God” St. Mark healed his hand by praying then spitting on the ground and making a dab of clay and putting the clay on his wound. Through the wisdom of the Holy Spirit, he used Anianos words to preach to him the true God. Anianos accepted the faith. He and his family were baptized and that marked the beginning of Christianity in Patlomic Egypt which mixed the worship of Greek idols with ancient Egyptian idol worship before St. Mark taught our ancestors the gospel (good news) of Jesus Christ. After teaching them the true faith, St. Mark ordained Anianos bishop and ordained 3 priests and 7 deacons to assist him in spreading the gospel, the Word of God in Egypt and beyond.

St. Mark traveled back to Rome, he then joined St. Paul on the third journey, and returned to Egypt in 58 AD. He found a growing Church, so he appointed more priests and deacons, and instituted the first liturgy, according to St. Mark, also known as the liturgy of St. Cyril the Great (24th Pope). Mark went back to Rome and was close to St. Paul in the two years he spent in Rome, before Paul’s Martyrdom. Mark returned back

to Egypt in 63 AD. The Church was growing in spirit and number which naturally brings the envy of Satan and his powers, and tribulations were on the horizon.

In St. Mark we notice extraordinary ability to teach, preach, write. His virtues include: courage, long suffering, wonders & miracles, agape (love) for the Lord manifested in service and love for all humans, even those who persecuted him. One is not surprised to note the verse concerning those who serve God, according to St. Mark: “And Jesus answered and said, Verily I say unto you, There is no man that hath left house, or brethren, or sisters, or father, or mother, or wife, or children, or lands, for my sake, and the gospel's, But he shall receive an hundredfold now in this time, houses, and brethren, and sisters, and mothers, and children, and lands, with persecutions; and in the world to come eternal life. But many that are first shall be last; and the last first. And they were in the way going up to Jerusalem; and Jesus went before them: and they were amazed; and as they followed, they were afraid. And he took again the twelve, and began to tell them what things should happen unto him, “ (Mark 10:29-32). Please note the word with persecution. Also note that what followed was Jesus telling the disciples about his own passion (suffering).

St. Mark did suffer persecution when in 68 AD, the Roman rulers accused him of steering trouble in the capital. They arrested him and tied him to the tail of a horse and dragged him in the streets of Alexandria and at sunset they dragged him to prison. The next day they repeated the same tortures until his holy head was severed from his holy body. The murderers tried also to burn his corpse, but strong wind and heavy rain extinguished the fire. The disciples (followers) came and took his body and his head and buried him with great honor in the region of Alexandria called Bokalia (Cattle Hill). In this place is the old St. Mark Cathedral to this day.

Venicean merchants stole the body and carried it to Venice Italy in the 16th century. The head always remained in Egypt, it was once moved to the monastery of St. Makarios, but was returned to Alexandria. St. Mark Cathedral in Venice, Italy is where the body was kept for 400 years. In 1968 an agreement was reached between the Roman Catholic Church and our Coptic Orthodox Church. According to this positive agreement of friendship between the two Apostolic Churches most of the remains were returned to Egypt in a great celebration commemorating 19 Centuries following St. Mark's martyrdom in Alexandria. This was during the patriarchate of the late Popes Kyrillos VI (Coptic Church) and Paul VI (Roman Catholic). The writer was only 21 years of age and was fortunate to come extremely close to the proceedings of this magnificent celebration being a member of the committee to keep order during the celebration. I stood only a few feet away from His Holiness, the departed, Pope Kyrillos VI, and the departed Emperor Heila-slassy (Last of the Ethiopian Emperors) during the whole liturgical celebration on May 8, 1968. You can feel the reverence of the moments when the departed Pope Kyrillos VI carried the box containing the remains on his shoulder, with no assistance, from the sanctuary to the lower level where a permanent burial place was ready to receive the holy remains of St. Mark after being out of Egypt for 400 years!.

All the nations of the earth are certainly blessed by St. Mark through his gospel, wonders & miracles, and the founding of the Coptic Church. But the Copts are especially blessed because he became the father of our Church and the first pope and patriarch of Alexandria and the See of St. Mark.

Intercede in our behalf, O'Our father St. Mark the Apostle, Evangelist, and Great Martyr. Bring your blessings on Egypt the land of our ancestors, and all of us who call you father and first patriarch. Glory be to God forever. Amen.

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Books On St. Mark, available in Arabic, include : one by HHPS, Arch-deacon Habib Girgis, Saverus Ibn Al-moqafaa (10th century), and appropriate chapters in the Synexarion, Church History (khareeda al Nafessa), and the Story of the Copts by Iris Habib. A concise biography of St. Mark is on COPT NET:

<http://pharos.bu.edu/cn/synexarion/Mark.txt>

We added a link to the DIDACHE (Teachings of the Apostles).

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