

# EP INTRODUCTION TO THE GOSPEL

## 19 ACCORDING TO ST. MARK

**S**t. Mark is referred to in the Bible as John Mark. His mother was a Christian woman in Jerusalem named Mary, who knew the Holy Apostle Peter (Acts 12:12). He was the cousin of St. Barnabas (Colossians 4:10), and traveled with Ss. Barnabas and Paul on St. Paul's first missionary journey [although he left them in Turkey to return to Jerusalem] (Acts 13:13). The Bible tells us that St. Mark knew St. Peter during St. Peter's later years in Rome (1 Peter 5:13). According to such early Church Fathers as Ss. Papias of Hierapolis and Irenaeus of Lyons (among others), St. Mark wrote down St. Peter's memories of the life and ministry of Jesus while in Rome. St. Mark traveled throughout Asia Minor, and later went to Egypt, where he was the bishop of Alexandria and established the first Christian school. He also evangelized Libya and other areas of north Africa. He was martyred by being dragged through the streets of Alexandria.

We are not certain when St. Mark wrote his account of the Gospel. We do know that it was written before the fall of Jerusalem in 70 AD. Most scholars believe this Gospel was written somewhere between 55-70 AD, with the majority of scholars believing it was written between 64-68 AD.

St. Mark had a number of reasons for writing his Gospel. First, St. Mark wrote to spread the good news of Jesus Christ to the Gentiles. While the Church started in Jerusalem with the Jewish Apostles, it was growing in the Gentile Roman Empire — people who did not understand the Jewish basis for the story of Jesus Christ. He therefore spends a lot of time explaining Jewish words and customs that the Gentiles

would not understand, making it possible for non-Jews to see how Jesus is the Messiah prophesied in what is now the Old Testament.

St. Mark also wrote to encourage Christians to be faithful disciples, particularly under persecution. The Church had experienced terrible persecution under the emperor Nero in 64 AD, even losing Ss. Peter and Paul. St. Mark prepares Christians to endure further persecution by telling of Christ's suffering and how he had predicted His followers would endure similar suffering.

Another reason for St. Mark's Gospel is to defend the Christian faith against false charges. There were many rumors during the first two centuries of the Church that Christians were dangerous rebels whose strange religious beliefs and practices were a threat to the Empire. St. Mark's Gospel both defends Jesus against charges of being a political revolutionary, and shows Christians to be good citizens.

Christians today often need to defend the faith: in this country we often need to correct the wrong understanding that other Christians have of Orthodox Christianity, and in some countries Christians still face persecution from governments and religions that do not understand Christianity.

The most important reason St. Mark wrote was to demonstrate that Jesus Christ is God. In his Gospel St. Mark shows the Father proclaiming Jesus as His Son at Christ's baptism and Transfiguration. He also shows Jesus divinity by having the centurion announce his belief that Jesus is the Son of God, and through the Resurrection and angel's announcement that the Son of God has conquered death.

### A QUICK TIP FOR YOUR LIFE

## TAKE A TRIP

**St. Mark went with Ss. Barnabas and Paul on a missionary trip when he was relatively young. While it's unlikely that you will be called to go on a long-term mission, there are still trips you can make that will deepen your faith.**

**You could travel with your parish's youth group to a diocesan or national youth meeting. You could also attend the Orthodox summer camp for your area. Or you could look into a making a short-term mission trip, where you and other Orthodox Christians can help those who are suffering in the world.**

**So, where might God be calling you to go?**

