

The Gospel according to St. Mark

The Gospels of Matthew, Mark and Luke, are always known as the synoptic gospels. *Synoptic* comes from two Greek words which mean *to see together*. In other words, they can be set down in parallel columns and their common matter looked at together.

The Gospel of Mark is the earliest of all and therefore the first life of Jesus that has come down to us. Mark is also the shortest gospel and more to the point.

Who then was this Mark who wrote the gospel?

Actually the New Testament tells us a good deal about him. He was the son of a well-to-do lady of Jerusalem whose name was Mary, and whose house was a meeting place of the early church (Acts 12:12). Mark was also the nephew of Barnabas, and when Paul and Barnabas set out on their first missionary journey, they took young Mark with them (Acts 12:25). When they were in Perga and Paul decided to move inland, for some reason, Mark left the expedition and went home (Acts 13:13).

On Paul's second missionary journey, Barnabas wants Mark to accompany them but Paul would hear none of it. So serious was the difference between them that Paul and Barnabas split company, and, so far as we know, never worked together again (Acts 15: 37-40).

Tradition has it that Mark later went down to Egypt where he founded the Church of Alexandria. And, to our surprise, we discover that when Paul writes the letter to the Colossians from prison in Rome, Mark is with him. Also, when Paul writes to Timothy he says, "Take Mark and bring him with you; for he is a most useful servant to me" (2 Timothy 4:11). The man Paul had dismissed as a quitter, we see that he was the one Paul wanted at the end near him.

Mark spent a lot of time with Peter and his gospel is based in all that he had heard of Peter. One could say that it is the closest we can get to an eyewitness account of the life of Jesus. Peter called him "Mark, my son" (1 Peter 5:13).

The original gospel of Mark stops at Mark 16:8. By then, Mark could have suffered martyrdom or else. We will never know for sure. But the style of the Greek in the last verses (9-20) is so different that they could not have been written by the same person who wrote the rest of the gospel.