

# The Feast Day of Mark the Evangelist

April 25, 2010  
Revision B

Many people have confused the Evangelist Mark with another member of the Seventy, John surnamed Mark (Acts 12:12). But they are two different individuals who came from different locales and who had much different roles in the Early Church. The Evangelist Mark was originally an idolater<sup>1</sup> from Cyrene of Pentapolis, which is near Libya. He came to the Faith of Christ through the Apostle Peter. John Mark, on the other hand, was born at Jerusalem<sup>2</sup>, and the house of his mother Mary (Acts 12:12) adjoined the Garden of Gethsemane. After Pentecost, the Evangelist Mark accompanied the Apostle Peter (1 Peter 5:13), much as the Evangelist Luke accompanied the Apostle Paul. John Mark, on the other hand, accompanied the Apostles Paul and Barnabas on their First Missionary Journey (Acts 13:5, 13), and later worked with Barnabas on Cyprus (Acts 15:39) and with the Apostle Paul (Colossians 4:10, 2 Timothy 4:11) toward the end of Paul's missionary work.

## Table of Contents

The Evangelist Mark Versus John Mark .....	1
The Drafting of Mark's Gospel .....	4
<b>Reasons for Drafting the Gospel</b> .....	4
<b>Content of Mark's Gospel</b> .....	6
Mark's Early Missionary Work .....	8
Mark Founds the Church in Alexandria .....	10
<b>Mark's Apostolic Predecessors in Egypt</b> .....	11
<b>The Beginning of the Work of the Evangelist Mark in Egypt</b> .....	12
<b>Personal Details of the Work of Mark in Egypt</b> .....	13
The Evangelist Mark's Impact on the Middle East .....	14
Monasteries of the Alexandrian Church .....	16
Mark Travels to Jerusalem for the Funeral of the Virgin Mary .....	22
The Liturgy of St. Mark for the Church in Alexandria .....	24
The Martyrdom of the Evangelist Mark .....	28

## The Evangelist Mark Versus John Mark

That the two men couldn't be the same person is illustrated by the writings of the Jewish philosopher Philo, a native of Alexandria. Sometime before his death in 50 AD, Philo wrote<sup>3</sup> a short work praising the work of the Evangelist Mark in Alexandria and the lives of the monks in the monasteries Mark started. At the same time that Philo was visiting the Evangelist Mark's monasteries in Egypt, John Mark was leaving Antioch to accompany Paul and Barnabas on their First Missionary Journey. Jerome stated<sup>4</sup> that Philo saw in the monasteries of Egypt something of credit to his nation, since there was still a distinct Jewish flavor to their life together.

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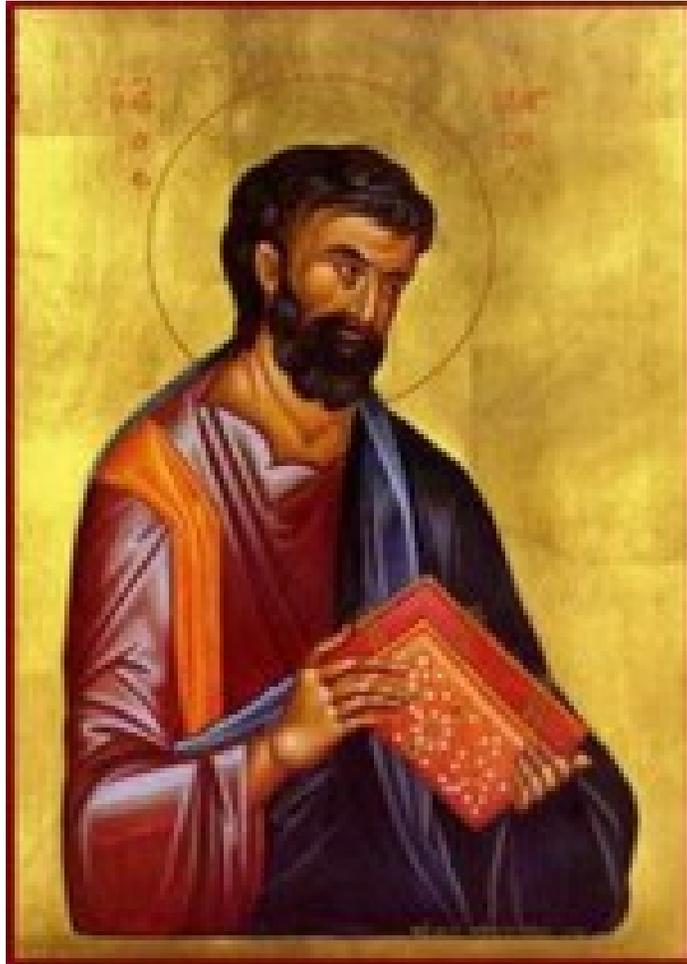
<sup>1</sup> For details, see [www.goarch.org](http://www.goarch.org), the Greek Orthodox Archdiocese website for April 25<sup>th</sup>.

<sup>2</sup> For details, see [www.oca.org](http://www.oca.org), the Orthodox Church in America website for April 25<sup>th</sup>.

<sup>3</sup> C. D. Yonge, tr., "On the Contemplative Life", *The Works of Philo*, Updated Edition Database, Hendrickson Publishers, 1995, II:10 to IV:39.

<sup>4</sup> Jerome, "Lives of Illustrious Men", Chapter 8, *Jerome and Gennadius*, Nicene and Post-Nicene Fathers, Volume 3.

“Philo, most learned of the Jews, seeing the first church at Alexandria still Jewish in a degree, wrote a book on their manner of life as something creditable to his nation telling how, as Luke says, the believers had all things in common at Jerusalem, so he recorded what he saw was done at Alexandria, under the learned Mark”.



### **The Evangelist Mark<sup>5</sup>**

As further proof that the two Marks are two different individuals, the Evangelist Mark was martyred<sup>6</sup> in Alexandria in the 8<sup>th</sup> year of Nero, or 61 AD. Yet Paul wrote to Timothy in 67 AD, just before his own martyrdom, to get John Mark and bring him to Rome (2 Timothy 4:11). Other testimony that they were two different individuals includes Hippolytus<sup>7</sup>, Nickolai Velimirovic<sup>8</sup>, and Demetrius of Rostov<sup>9</sup>. There are the names of two Apostles named Mark

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<sup>5</sup> See [www.goarch.org](http://www.goarch.org), the Greek Orthodox Archdiocese website for April 25<sup>th</sup>

<sup>6</sup> Eusebius, Church History, II, 24.

Jerome, “Lives of Illustrious Men”, Chapter 8, Jerome and Gennadius, Nicene and Post-Nicene Fathers, Volume 3.

<sup>7</sup> Hippolytus, “On the Seventy Apostles”, Ante-Nicene Fathers, v. 5, portrays both Mark’s as members of the Seventy.

<sup>8</sup> Nickolai Velimirovic, Prologue From Ochrid, Lazarica Press, Birmingham, 1986 gives the Feast Day of April 25 for the Evangelist Mark, and September 27 and October 30 for John Mark.

listed in the Byzantine, Greek and Russian Menaion for January 4<sup>th</sup>, the Feast Day for the Seventy, and they are referred to by the St. Sabbas Typicon (6<sup>th</sup> century). Both are also included in the Painter's Manual of Dionysius of Fournā<sup>10</sup> as different individuals.

Perhaps much of this confusion between the two Mark's comes from the New Testament apocryphal work<sup>11</sup> "The Acts of Barnabas", written by John Mark, which describes Barnabas' work on Cyprus, and which ends with the martyrdom of Barnabas on Cyprus<sup>12</sup> in c. 61 AD. At the end of the account, the author states that he left for Alexandria, but gives no connection to any work with the Apostle Peter. Thus both the Evangelist Mark and John Mark may have been in Alexandria for a short time, but doing different things.

Papias, the Early Apostolic Church Father (60-130 AD), stated<sup>13</sup> that the Evangelist Mark "neither heard the Lord nor accompanied Him. He accompanied the Apostle Peter, who taught based on the needs of his hearers, and Mark drafted his Gospel based on the Apostle Peter's teachings, but not as a chronological narrative of the Lord's life".

Hippolytus, another Early Church Father (170-236 AD), stated<sup>14</sup> that the Evangelist Mark had a maimed finger. However, this maimed finger does not show up clearly in any of the extant icons of the Evangelist Mark, such as illustrated in Figure 1. According to tradition<sup>15</sup>, Mark was referred to as "stump-fingered", but no information is available as to what caused this.

Hippolytus also listed<sup>16</sup> both the Evangelist Mark and John Mark as among the original Seventy Apostles (Luke 10:1-20) that the Lord sent out ahead of Him in the last year of His public ministry.

Hippolytus also stated<sup>17</sup> that both the Evangelists Mark and Luke were among those who were offended by Jesus when He stated,

"Most assuredly, I say to you, unless you eat the flesh of the Son of Man and drink His blood, you have no life in you. Whoever eats My flesh and drinks My blood has eternal life, and I will raise him up at the last day. For My flesh is food indeed, and My blood is drink indeed. He who eats My flesh and drinks My blood abides in Me, and I in him. As the living Father sent Me, and I live because of the Father, so he who feeds on Me will live because of Me. This is the bread which came down from heaven—not as your fathers ate the manna, and are dead. He who eats this bread will live forever" (John 6:53-58).

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<sup>9</sup> Demetrius of Rostov, "The Great Collection of the Lives of the Saints", January 4, tr. By Fr. Thomas Marretta, Chrysostom Press, House Springs, MO, 2002. Two Apostles named Mark are commemorated on the Feast Day for the Seventy, January 4<sup>th</sup>.

<sup>10</sup> Paul Hetherington, tr, The 'Painter's Manual' of Dionysius of Fournā, Oakwood Publications, Torrance, CA 90505, 1981, pp. 52-53.

<sup>11</sup> "The Acts of Barnabas", Apocrypha of the New Testament, Ante-Nicene Fathers, Volume 8.

<sup>12</sup> Cross and Livingstone, Oxford Dictionary of the Christian Church, 2<sup>nd</sup> Ed., Oxford University Press, 1978, p. 134.

<sup>13</sup> Fragments of Papias, 5, in Roberts and Donaldson, "The Apostolic Fathers", The Ante-Nicene Fathers, Volume 1.

<sup>14</sup> Hippolytus, Refutation of All Heresies, VII, 18.

<sup>15</sup> Cross and Livingstone, Oxford Dictionary of the Christian Church, Oxford University Press, 1978, p. 874, quoting Hippolytus and others.

<sup>16</sup> Hippolytus, On the Seventy Apostles, 14, in Roberts and Donaldson, The Ante-Nicene Fathers, v. 5.

<sup>17</sup> Hippolytus, On the Seventy Apostles, 14, in Roberts and Donaldson, The Ante-Nicene Fathers, v. 5.

Mark and Luke were scattered by the offense of the word which Christ spoke (John 6:66). But the one was induced to return to the Lord by Peter's instrumentality, and the other by Paul's. They were honored to preach that Gospel on account of which they also suffered martyrdom; the Evangelist Mark was burned, while John Mark was crucified on an olive tree.

According to Church Tradition, on the night that Christ was betrayed, the Evangelist Mark followed Him to the Garden of Gethsemane, wrapped only in a linen cloth<sup>18</sup>. When Mark was seized by soldiers, he fled away naked, leaving the cloth behind (Mark 14:51-52).

## **The Drafting of Mark's Gospel**

### **Reasons for Drafting the Gospel**

Clement of Alexandria stated<sup>19</sup> that Mark drafted his Gospel at the persistent request of the people in Rome that heard Peter preach. They wanted a written account of what Peter had said. Peter heard about this, approved Mark's Gospel, and authorized the Reading of the Gospel of Mark in the Churches. Clement stated:

“Such a ray of godliness shone forth on the minds of Peter's hearers, that they were not satisfied with the once hearing or with the unwritten teaching of the divine proclamation, but with all manner of entreaties asked Mark, to whom the Gospel is ascribed, he being the companion of Peter, that he would leave in writing a record of the teaching which had been delivered to them verbally. They did not let the man alone till they prevailed upon him; and so to them we owe the Scripture called the ‘Gospel by Mark’. On learning what had been done, through the revelation of the Spirit, it is said that the Apostle was delighted with the enthusiasm of the men, and sanctioned the composition for reading in the Churches. Clement gives the narrative in the Sixth Book<sup>20</sup> of the Hypotyposes”.

Eusebius interpreted<sup>21</sup> the Apostle Peter's remarks about “Babylon” (1 Peter 5:13) as a reference to the drafting of Mark's Gospel in the city of Rome.

“Peter makes mention of Mark in his first Epistle which they say that he wrote in Rome itself, as is indicated by him, when he calls the city, by a figure, Babylon, as he does in the following words. ‘The Church that is at Babylon, elected together with you, salutes you; and so does Mark my son’”.

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<sup>18</sup> According to tradition, the young man was the Evangelist Mark himself, who lived nearby, and who was roused out of bed by the commotion. See April 25<sup>th</sup> for the Lives of the Saints at the web site [www.oca.org](http://www.oca.org). According to the web site [www.celticchristianity.org](http://www.celticchristianity.org), Mark's simple wrap indicates that he probably went out of the house that was in the garden when he heard the multitude arrive in the middle of the night. Ancient tradition states that this part of the Garden of Gethsemane belonged to the family of St. Mark.

<sup>19</sup> Clement of Alexandria, “From the Catena on Luke Edited by Corderius”, in Fragments of Clemens Alexandrinus, Ed. Roberts and Donaldson, The Ante-Nicene Fathers, Volume 2. Quoted by Eusebius, Ecclesiastical History, II, 15.

Jerome, Lives of Illustrious Men, II, 8, in Jerome and Gennadius, The Nicene and Post-Nicene Fathers, Second Series, Volume 3.

Clement of Alexandria, “Fragments” 1, From the Latin Translation of Cassiodorus, Comments on 1 Peter, 1, in Roberts and Donaldson, The Ante-Nicene Fathers, v. 2.

<sup>20</sup> The Hypotyposes of Clement of Alexandria have been lost. All that is extant are fragments that were quoted by other writers.

<sup>21</sup> Eusebius, Church History, II, 15.

Papias (60-130 AD) referred<sup>22</sup> to the Evangelist Mark as “the interpreter of the Apostle Peter”. By “interpreter”, he does not mean that Peter could not communicate with people who didn’t speak Hebrew. The Apostle Peter, like the Evangelist Mark, had the gift of speaking in tongues that they received at Pentecost. The way this gift worked was described by Rufinus of Aquilea<sup>23</sup>.

“After Pentecost, they were enabled to speak a variety of different languages such that they found no nation strange to them and no foreign speech beyond their comprehension”

As “interpreter” of Peter, the Evangelist Mark wrote down accurately whatever he remembered from Peter’s preaching. He did not write down the sayings or deeds of Christ in the exact order that they happened. Eusebius stated<sup>24</sup> that Mark composed his Gospel per Peter’s instructions, which implies that there was some editing that occurred after Mark’s first draft. Irenaeus stated<sup>25</sup> that “Mark handed down to us in writing what had been preached by Peter, but that this occurred after Peter’s departure”.

Some manuscripts of Mark’s Gospel add the following paragraph at the end of Chapter 16, verse 20: This indicates that

“And they promptly reported all these instructions to Peter and his companions. And after that, Jesus Himself sent out through them from East to West the sacred and imperishable proclamation of eternal salvation”.

Clement of Alexandria also stated<sup>26</sup> that the order of the drafting of the four Gospels is the same as their order appears in modern Bibles; that is, Matthew first and John last.

“The Gospel according to Mark had this occasion. As Peter had preached the Word publicly at Rome, and declared the Gospel by the Spirit, many who were present requested that Mark, who had followed him for a long time and remembered his sayings, should write them out. And having composed the Gospel he gave it to those who had requested it”.

From the above, we can obtain an approximate date for the drafting of the Gospel of Mark. He wrote his Gospel when the Apostle Peter was still in Rome, which was in the mid-40’s AD. We can get a rough check on this by looking carefully at when Luke wrote his Gospel. Luke ended his account of the travels of Paul with Paul still under house-arrest in Rome, which ended in c. 62 AD. Luke wrote his Gospel a few years before he wrote Acts, or about 58-60 AD. Thus we can see that this lines up with Clement’s understanding. Matthew wrote his Gospel before leaving on his missionary journeys in the early 30’s. Mark drafted his Gospel in the mid

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<sup>22</sup> Fragments of Papias, 5, in Roberts and Donaldson, “The Apostolic Fathers”, The Ante-Nicene Fathers, Volume 1. Eusebius, Church History, III, 39.

Jerome, Lives of Illustrious Men, II, 1, in Jerome and Gennadius, The Nicene and Post-Nicene Fathers, Second Series, Volume 3.

<sup>23</sup> Rufinus of Aquilea, “Commentary on the Apostles’ Creed”, Schaff and Wace, Nicene and Post-Nicene Fathers, Second Series v.3.

<sup>24</sup> Eusebius, Church History, VI, 25.

<sup>25</sup> Irenaeus, Against Heresies, III, I, 1. Eusebius, Church History, V, 8.

<sup>26</sup> Clement of Alexandria, “From the Catena on Luke Edited by Corderius”, in Fragments of Clemens Alexandrinus, Ed. Roberts and Donaldson, The Ante-Nicene Fathers, Volume 2.

Quoted by Eusebius, Church History, VI, 14.

40's, and John wrote his Gospel toward the end of the 1<sup>st</sup> Century. The order of the Gospels reflects the order of their writing.

### **Content of Mark's Gospel**

The Evangelist Mark began and ended his Gospel with a reference to what the Prophets had said about Christ. He began with a reference to Isaiah and Malachi, and ended with a reference to David. Irenaeus noted<sup>27</sup> this as follows:

“Mark, the interpreter and follower of Peter, began his Gospel narrative: ‘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 Your face, Who will prepare Your way before You. The voice of one crying in the wilderness: Prepare the way of the Lord; Make His paths straight before our God’ (Mark 1:2-3, Isaiah 40:3 LXX, Malachi 3:1). Plainly the commencement of the Gospel quotes the words of the holy prophets, and points out Him at once, whom they confessed as God and Lord. The Father of our Lord Jesus Christ had promised Him that He would send His messenger before His face, who was John, crying in the wilderness, in ‘the spirit and power of Elijah’ (Luke 1:17, Matthew 11:14), ‘Prepare the way of me Lord, make straight paths before our God’ (Isaiah 40:3 LXX). For the prophets announced one and the same God, under various aspects, and many titles. For varied and rich in attribute is the Father”.

“Towards the conclusion of his Gospel, Mark says: ‘So then, after the Lord Jesus had spoken to them, He was received up into heaven, and sat down at the right hand of God’ (Mark 16:19). This confirmed what had been spoken by the prophet: ‘The Lord said to my Lord, "Sit at My right hand, Till I make Your enemies Your footstool"' (Psalm 110:1). Thus God and the Father are truly one and the same; He who was announced by the prophets, and handed down by the true Gospel; whom we Christians worship and love with the whole heart, as the Maker of heaven and earth, and of all things therein”.

Irenaeus compared<sup>28</sup> the four Gospels to the four living creatures in the books of Ezekiel and Revelation. Other writers such as Augustin and Victorinus have expressed different links to these creatures<sup>29</sup>. Irenaeus said that Matthew's Gospel corresponded to the man; Mark's, to the flying eagle; Luke's, to the calf that was slain, and John's, to the lion.

“It is not possible that the Gospels can be either more or fewer in number than they are. Since the Church is scattered throughout all the world, and the ‘pillar and ground’ of the Church is the Gospel and the spirit of life; it is fitting that she should have four pillars, breathing out immortality on every side. The Word, the Creator of all, He that sits upon the cherubim, and contains all things, He who was revealed to men, has given us the Gospel under four aspects, but bound together by one Spirit. As David says, when entreating His manifestation,

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<sup>27</sup> Irenaeus, *Against Heresies*, III, x, 5.

<sup>28</sup> Irenaeus, *Against Heresies*, III, xi, 8.

<sup>29</sup> Augustin, *Harmony of the Gospels*, I, vi, 9 identified Matthew with the lion due to his emphasis on Jesus' descent from kings and John with the eagle due to his soaring theological understanding. That left him with Mark depicting the man since Mark's accounts did not emphasize the royal or priestly aspects of Jesus' life. Victorinus, *Commentary on the Apocalypse of the Blessed John*, Chapter 4, 7-10 on the other hand, agreed with Irenaeus on Matthew and Luke, but likened Mark to the lion due to his reference to “crying in the wilderness” (Mark 1:3) where lions lived. Irenaeus seems to express more depth in understanding the Gospel of Mark than do Augustin and Victorinus.

‘You that sit between the cherubim, shine forth’ (Psalm 80:1). For the cherubim, too, were four-faced, and their faces were images of the dispensation of the Son of God. As the Scripture says (Ezekiel 1:8-10, 10:14, Revelation 4:7), ‘The first living creature was like a lion’, symbolizing His effectual working, His leadership, and royal power. The second living creature was like a calf, signifying His sacrificial and sacerdotal order. But ‘the third had, as it were, the face as of a man’ — an evident description of His advent as a human being. ‘The fourth was like a flying eagle’, pointing out the gift of the Spirit hovering with His wings over the Church”.

“The Gospels are in accord with these things, among which Christ Jesus is seated. For the Gospel according to John relates His original, effectual, and glorious generation from the Father, thus declaring, ‘In the beginning was the Word, and the Word was with God, and the Word was God’ (John 1:1). Also, ‘all things were made by Him, and without Him was nothing made’ (John 1:3). For this reason, too, is John’s Gospel full of confidence, like the royal presence of a lion, for such is His person”.

“But that according to Luke, taking up His priestly character, like a calf about to be slain, commenced with Zachariah the priest offering sacrifice to God. For now was made ready the fatted calf, about to be immolated for the finding again of the younger son” (Luke 15:32).

“Matthew relates His generation as a man, saying, ‘The book of the generation of Jesus Christ, the son of David, the son of Abraham’ (Matthew 1:1); and also, ‘The birth of Jesus Christ was as follows’ (Matthew 1:18). This, then, is the Gospel of His humanity; for which reason it is that the character of a humble and meek man is kept up through the whole Gospel”.

“Mark, on the other hand, commences with a reference to the prophetic spirit coming down from on high to men, saying, ‘The beginning of the Gospel of Jesus Christ, as it is written in Isaiah the prophet’ (Mark 1:1-2), pointing to the winged aspect of the Gospel, like a flying eagle. On this account he made a compendious and cursory narrative, for such is the prophetic character”.

“The Word of God Himself used to converse with the ante-Mosaic Patriarchs, in accordance with His divinity and glory; but for those under the Law he instituted a sacerdotal and liturgical service. Afterwards, being made man for us, He sent the gift of the celestial Spirit over all the earth, protecting us with His wings. As was the course followed by the Son of God, so was also the form of the living creatures. And such as was the form of the living creatures, so was also the character of the Gospel. For the living creatures are quadriform, and the Gospel is quadriform, as is also the course followed by the Lord. For this reason were four principal covenants given to the human race:

1. Prior to the Deluge, under Adam
2. After the Deluge, under Noah
3. The giving of the Law, under Moses
4. That which renovates man, and sums up all things in itself by means of the Gospel, raising and bearing men upon its wings into the heavenly kingdom”.

In Mark’s Gospel, there is internal evidence of Peter’s editing, where Peter, in his humility, had Mark delete accounts that glorified himself, but yet let him include accounts of his weakness.

For example, Matthew recorded an incident in his Gospel where Jesus paid the Temple Tax<sup>30</sup>. Jesus had Peter cast a hook into the Sea of Galilee, and the first fish that he caught would have a piece of money in its mouth. Jesus instructed Peter to use that money to pay the Temple Tax for both of them (Matthew 17:24-27). This was an incredible miracle that showed Jesus' complete mastery over the sea, everything in it and the order of events. This was quite an honor for Peter also that Jesus would do this for him.

While Matthew recorded this event, Mark did not, even though Mark was the constant companion of Peter. John Chrysostom noted<sup>31</sup> that it was rather significant for Mark to omit this event, since Mark did not omit details of Peter's denial (Mark 14:66-72)! Chrysostom concluded that Peter, out of humility, asked Mark to omit the things that made him look good, but let him include the things that showed his weakness. Chrysostom stated:

“Regarding the incident of the Temple Tax, Mark, the follower of this Apostle, did not set it down, because it indicated the great honor paid to Peter. But regarding Peter's denial, he did write about it. The things that made him illustrious, Mark passed over in silence, his master perhaps entreating him not to mention the great things about himself. And Jesus used the phrase, ‘for me and you’. Now as you are amazed at Christ's power, so I ask you to admire also the disciple's faith, that to a thing beyond possibility he listened to. For it was very far beyond possibility by nature to find money in a fish's mouth. In answering for his faith, He joined him to Himself in the payment of the tribute”.

Chrysostom also pointed out<sup>32</sup> that the Evangelist Mark, a disciple of Peter and one of the Seventy, declares his master's weakness in more detail than the rest, since he learned this from Peter himself.

“But Mark said, that when he had once denied, then first the cock crew, but when he denied Him for the third time, then the cock crew for the second time. For he declares more particularly the weakness of the disciple, and that he was utterly dead with fear; having learned these things of his master himself, for he was a follower of Peter. In which respect one would most marvel at him, that so far from hiding his teacher's faults, he declared it more distinctly than the rest on this very account, that he was his disciple”.

## Mark's Early Missionary Work

The Evangelist Mark developed a close relationship with the Apostle Peter in the days following Pentecost, and he followed Peter similar to the way the Evangelist Luke followed the Apostle Paul, and the Apostle Prochorus (of the Seventy) followed the Apostle John. There are numerous references documenting the Evangelist Mark as being a disciple<sup>33</sup> and “spokesman”

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<sup>30</sup> This “Temple Tax” was required from foreigners - payable in shekels of the sanctuary - before they could bring any offering forward. And the moneychangers could charge anything they saw proper to perform this “service”.

<sup>31</sup> John Chrysostom, Homilies on Matthew, LVIII, 2.

<sup>32</sup> John Chrysostom, Homilies on Matthew, LXXXV, 1.

<sup>33</sup> Irenaeus, Against Heresies, III, I, 1.

Clement of Alexandria, “Comments on the First Epistle of Peter”, Fragments of Clemens Alexandrinus, Ante-Nicene Fathers, Volume 2.

Tertullian, Five Books Against Marcion, II, ii, 4, 5.

for the Apostle Peter. Just as with Luke and Prochorus, everywhere Peter went, the Evangelist Mark went also. This formed a foundation for the drafting of Mark's Gospel, since he used Peter's words in his preaching as the basis for his text.

In the Days of Unleavened Bread or at the time of Passover, 44 AD<sup>34</sup>, James the son of Zebedee was beheaded by Herod Agrippa I and Peter was imprisoned, expecting the same fate after Passover. Peter was released from prison by an angel (Acts 12:1-17), and headed North to Antioch, taking the Evangelist Mark with him. Eventually they made their way to Rome.

At Pentecost, 30 AD, when the Holy Spirit was given to the Church, there had been visitors in Jerusalem from Rome, both Jews and Gentile converts (Acts 2:10). Many of these visitors stayed and made up part of the 3000 that were added to the Church as a result of Peter's preaching (Acts 2:41). One year later, at the stoning of Stephen, the Church was scattered due to the bloodbath in Jerusalem (Acts 8:4). While the Scripture records just the stoning of Stephen one year after Pentecost, in actuality, two hundred others were also stoned<sup>35</sup> that same day, including deacon Nicanor (Acts 6:5). Thus, people were leaving town to avoid a major bloodbath organized by the Jewish leaders. Those who had come to Jerusalem from Rome, and stayed after Pentecost, may have returned to Rome at this time.

Things were so stressful that Nicodemus, who had defended Jesus before fellow members of the Sanhedrin (John 7:50-52), died as he was mourning the death of Stephen, and he was buried in Gamaliel's tomb. Nicodemus was an old man at the time, and he had also helped Joseph of Arimathea with the burial rite of Jesus (John 19:38-42).

Meanwhile, Mary Magdalene, who was quite wealthy, had traveled on her own to Rome to appear before Tiberias Caesar and tell him the whole story of Pilate's unjust trial of Jesus, his release of a murderer-insurrectionist and his cowering to the Jewish leaders. As a result of this, Pilate was summoned to Rome, was unable to defend his actions and was banished to Gaul where he later committed suicide. Mary Magdalene stayed in Rome for a long time working as an evangelist before moving to Ephesus in the 60's AD to work with the Apostle John. Mary was a pioneer for the Church in Rome. In doing this, she would have had to liquidate all her wealth along with the others after Pentecost (Acts 4:34-37).

After Peter arrived in Rome, Mary stayed to continue helping the Church, and Paul addressed her by name in his Epistle (Romans 16:5). In that Epistle, dated about 55 AD, Paul also addressed 18 members of the original Seventy Apostles (Romans 16:3-23), who had been sent to Rome by Peter and Paul to aid in the work Mary started. Mary Magdalene came to be called "Equal to the Apostles" for her role in the young church, primarily in Rome and later in Ephesus with the Apostle John.

Thus when Peter and the Evangelist Mark arrived in Rome, there were a number of believers already there and organized by Mary Magdalene. There was a core group who were familiar with the Apostles, and who had received the Holy Spirit at Pentecost, and who had lived in the Church in Jerusalem for a while, where everyone had all things in common

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<sup>34</sup> Unger gives the date of Herod's death as 44 AD. See Merrill Unger, Unger's Bible Dictionary, Moody Press, Chicago, 1967, p. 486.

<sup>35</sup> Nickolai Velimirovic, Prologue From Ochrid, Lazarica Press, Birmingham, 1986, July 28.

One of the first places that the Apostle Peter sent the Evangelist Mark after their arrival in Rome was to the city of Aquilea (near Venice). Mark's excursion to Aquilea became significant hundreds of years later, after the Islamic Conquest of Egypt, when his relics were moved away from Alexandria to prevent desecration; they were moved to Aquilea.

After spending a short time in Aquilea, the Apostle Peter ordained the Evangelist Mark as Bishop, and sent him go to Alexandria in Egypt. According to tradition, he stopped at his hometown of Pentapolis and cities nearby first. From the Prologue<sup>36</sup> of Ochrid:

“Mark was chosen by the Apostle Peter to be a bishop and was sent to Egypt to preach. Egypt was oppressed by the thick darkness of paganism, idolatry, divination and malice. With the help of God, the Evangelist Mark succeeded in sowing the seed of the knowledge of God in Libya, Ammonicia and Pentapolis. From Pentapolis, he went to Alexandria where the Spirit of God led him”.

At some time in the late 40's AD, Emperor Claudius had expelled all the Jews from Rome. Because of this, the Apostle Paul ran into the Apostle Aquila (of the Seventy) and his wife Priscilla in Corinth (Acts 18:1-3), where Paul, Aquila and Priscilla worked together for a number of years after this. This edict by the Emperor, expelling the Jews, may have been the occasion for Peter sending the Evangelist Mark to Egypt.

### **Mark Finds the Church in Alexandria**

There are numerous references, a few included here<sup>37</sup>, documenting the sending of the Evangelist Mark to Alexandria by the Apostle Peter to raise up the Church there, since he was a disciple<sup>38</sup> and “spokesman” for Peter.

It is difficult to date the exact year that the Apostle Peter sent Mark to Egypt to preach the Gospel. One account quotes<sup>39</sup> Eutychius, patriarch of Alexandria, as saying this occurred in the 9<sup>th</sup> year of the Emperor Claudius, or 49 AD. However, this may have occurred earlier than 49 AD. The Jewish philosopher Philo visited some of the monasteries that the Evangelist Mark established, and wrote<sup>40</sup> a short article expressing his admiration for these communities. [More about this will be covered later.] If Philo died in 50 AD, after reporting a great number of monasteries in the neighborhood of Alexandria, it may have taken Mark more than a year to get these monasteries started. However, a number of the monks had been in Jerusalem after Pentecost (Acts 2:10) only to return to Egypt during the persecution. Having a history of living

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<sup>36</sup> Nikolai Velimirovic, Prologue From Ochrid, Lazarica Press, Birmingham, 1986, April 25.

<sup>37</sup> Gregory the Great, Book of Pastoral Rule, V, 1.

Gregory the Great, Epistles, Book VI, 60.

<sup>38</sup> Irenaeus, Against Heresies, III, I, 1.

Clement of Alexandria, “Comments on the First Epistle of Peter”, Fragments of Clemens Alexandrinus, Ante-Nicene Fathers, Volume 2.

Tertullian, Five Books Against Marcion, II, ii, 4, 5.

<sup>39</sup> Isaac Lambertsen, The Lives of the Holy Apostles, Holy Apostles Convent Press, Buena Vista, CO, 1990, p. 247.

This is a translation from the following:

The Lives of the Saints in the Russian Language, According to the Menology of St. Dimitri of Rostov, Synodal Press, Moscow, 1906, v. 8, (April) pp. 403-416.

<sup>40</sup> C. D. Yonge, tr., “On the Contemplative Life”, The Works of Philo, Updated Edition Database, Hendrickson Publishers, 1995, II:10 to IV:39.

together under the Apostles, they may have been able to develop monastic communities quicker than we might realize.

On the other hand, they could have gotten started earlier. Jerome stated<sup>41</sup> that Peter left for Rome in the 2<sup>nd</sup> year of Claudius, or 42 AD. Others state that Peter left Jerusalem in the year of Herod Agrippa's death, which was the year 44 AD. Sometime during this interval 42 AD to 49 AD, the Evangelist Mark went to Rome at the direction of the Apostle Peter, where the people of Rome encouraged him to write his Gospel, before he was sent to Egypt.

### **Mark's Apostolic Predecessors in Egypt**

The Evangelist Mark was not the first of the Apostles to go to Egypt. After Pentecost, the Twelve made preparations for their various missionary journeys, and cast lots to divide up the world into regions<sup>42</sup> where each of the Twelve had one lot. The lot for James the son of Alphaeus included Egypt, but may have included other areas of the world as well. Also during this first year, Matthew had finished writing his Gospel in Hebrew<sup>43</sup>, and the Twelve had finished drafting<sup>44</sup> what was later called "The Apostles' Creed". The Creed was a common statement of the Faith that they and their successors could use as a metric, since they realized that they may never see each other again.

A brief summary<sup>45</sup> of the work of James the son of Alphaeus in Egypt notes that there was a great deal of conflict with pagans such that James was crucified in Egypt.

"Aflame with the fire of divine zeal, he burned up the thorns of ungodliness, smashed idols to pieces, destroyed their temples, healed diverse illnesses, drove evil spirits out of people, and brought a great multitude of people to Christ. For this he acquired for himself a new name, the 'Divine Seed'. Because he sowed the seed of the Word of God in men's hearts, planted faith and grew piety, he was called the 'Divine Seed'. Going about many lands, he sowed the seed of heaven, and ended his earthly course in the steps of Christ. Being an emulator of the sufferings of Christ, he surrendered his spirit into the hands of God while nailed to a cross in Egypt."

Another traditional account<sup>46</sup> of James' missionary work reads as follows.

"After the descent of the Holy Spirit at Pentecost, it fell to the lot of the Apostle James to preach Christ's Gospel in Eleutheropolis (i.e. Greece) and the surrounding area, and then in Egypt, where he suffered for his Savior. With great power, both in word and in act, James spread abroad the saving news of the incarnate Word of God, rooting out idol worship, driving demons out of men, healing all manner of sickness and disease in the Name of the Lord Jesus Christ.

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<sup>41</sup> Jerome, "Lives of Illustrious Men", Chapter 1, Jerome and Gennadius, Nicene and Post-Nicene Fathers, Volume 3.

<sup>42</sup> Nickolai Velimirovic, Prologue From Ochrid, Lazarica Press, Birmingham, 1986, October 6, October 9, November 30.

<sup>43</sup> For details of Matthew's draft of his Gospel in Hebrew, see the separate study on the life of Matthew.

<sup>44</sup> Rufinus, A Commentary on the Apostles' Creed, Post-Nicene Fathers, Series 2, v. 3.

<sup>45</sup> Isaac Lambertsen, The Lives of the Holy Apostles, Holy Apostles Convent Press, Buena Vista, CO, 1990, pp. 218-220. This is a translation from the following:

The Lives of the Saints in the Russian Language, According to the Menology of St. Dimitri of Rostov, Moscow, Synodal Press, 1904, v. 2, (October) pp. 166-167.

<sup>46</sup> Nickolai Velimirovic, Prologue From Ochrid, Lazarica Press, Birmingham, 1986, October 9.

His labors and his zeal were crowned with great success. Many pagans came to believe in Christ the Lord, Churches were founded and set in order, and priests and Bishops were made. He suffered in Egypt in the town of Ostracina<sup>47</sup>, being crucified by the pagans”.

The Apostle Nathanael (or Bartholomew) also spent a short time in Egypt. Nathanael’s early missionary journeys have not been well documented, and we know considerably more about his later missionary journeys, both when he traveled with the Apostle Philip (of the Twelve) and by himself. The Roman Martyrology states<sup>48</sup> that during his early missionary journeys, he preached in Egypt for a time, as did some of the other Apostles. From a fragment of the writings of an unknown author<sup>49</sup> of the late 2<sup>nd</sup> Century, Pantaenus of Alexandria “became a zealous missionary to the Oriental Ethiopia, and found there the traces of Matthias’ labors, and those also of Nathanael. Pantaenus returned from this mission about 192 AD”.

### **The Beginning of the Work of the Evangelist Mark in Egypt**

One characteristic difference between the missionary work of the Twelve versus that of the Seventy is that the Twelve continued traveling their whole lives, while the Seventy were more fixed to one locale as Bishop. Most of the Seventy follow this pattern, but there are a few exceptions, such as the Evangelist Luke. The work of James the son of Alphaeus and Nathanael in Egypt, where they continued traveling widely, followed by the Evangelist Mark, who was more closely associated with Alexandria and vicinity, seems to fit this pattern.

Concerning the difficulty that Mark faced with Egyptian idolatry when he arrived in Alexandria, Jerome remarked<sup>50</sup> that, “No nation was so given to idolatry and worshipped such a countless number of monsters as the Egyptians”.

To get a perspective of the significance of the Church in Alexandria that resulted from his efforts, we must remember what Alexandria was like in the 1<sup>st</sup> Century. It was a seat of great learning, and it had a very large Jewish population. Its rulers were receptive to Christianity, and Pharaoh Ptolemy was the one who had commissioned the translation of the Hebrew Scriptures into Greek in the 3<sup>rd</sup> Century BC. His purpose was to make the Hebrew Scriptures available to the large Jewish population in Egypt, who didn’t speak Hebrew. He assembled seventy scholars to do this, and therefore the translation is called the Septuagint or the LXX. It was this version of the Old Testament that was used exclusively by the Early Church throughout the world.

One account<sup>51</sup> of Mark’s work at the time of his arrival in Alexandria reads as follows:

“In Alexandria, he succeeded in establishing the Church of God, in giving her bishops, priests and deacons and in rooting everything firmly in faithfulness and devotion. Mark confirmed his preaching with many great miracles. When the pagans brought accusations against Mark, as a destroyer of their idolatrous

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<sup>47</sup> Ostracina is at the Eastern side of the Nile Delta, right on the Mediterranean Coast, where Alexandria is on the Western side of the Nile Delta. See [www.christusrex.org/www1/ofm/mad/legends/legends131.html](http://www.christusrex.org/www1/ofm/mad/legends/legends131.html) for a detailed location.

<sup>48</sup> Thurston and Attwater, Butler’s Lives of the Saints, Christian Classics, Westminster, MD, 1990, August 24.

<sup>49</sup> Roberts and Donaldson, ed., “Pantaenus, the Alexandrian Philosopher, Introduction”, Remains of the Second and Third Centuries, Ante Nicene Fathers, v. 8.

<sup>50</sup> Jerome, The Life of Paulus, the First Hermit, 8.

Jerome, Against Jovinianus, II, 7.

<sup>51</sup> Nickolai Velimirovic, Prologue From Ochrid, Lazarica Press, Birmingham, 1986, April 25.

faith, and when the governor of the city began to search for Mark, he fled to Pentapolis, where he continued his earlier work. After two years, Mark again returned to Alexandria to the great joy of all his faithful, whose number had already increased greatly”.

### **Personal Details of the Work of Mark in Egypt**

Another account<sup>52</sup> of Mark’s arrival in Alexandria gives some personal interaction of Mark with a local cobbler. As Mark arrived in the Alexandria neighborhood, at a place called Medion, his sandal split in two. He took this to be a favorable omen, and went to a nearby cobbler shop to get his sandal repaired. While working on Mark’s sandal, the cobbler accidentally ran his awl through his hand; crying out in pain, the cobbler called on the Name of God. Hearing this exclamation, Mark rejoiced in spirit, seeing that the Lord was laying out before him a good path.

The wound in the cobbler’s hand was very painful, and he was losing a lot of blood. Mark, remembering what Jesus had done (John 9:6), spit on the ground to make clay, and anointed the cobbler’s hand. As he did this, he said, “In the Name of Jesus Christ, Who lives forever, be whole!” Immediately, the cobbler’s wound closed up and his hand was healed.

The cobbler was stunned at such power in the man standing before him and in the effects of his words. Mark’s presence, and the purity and sanctity of his life, had already been apparent. The cobbler begged that Mark come to his house for the evening meal, and stay the night, in appreciation for the mercy that he had shown to his servant, the cobbler. Mark joyfully consented and said, “May the Lord bestow on you the Bread of Life, the Bread of Heaven!”

The cobbler joyfully led Mark to his home. Entering into the house, Mark said, “May the blessing of the Lord be upon this place! Brethren, let us pray to God”. Mark was following Jesus’ instruction for both the Twelve and the Seventy in doing this. When they entered a house to stay at, Jesus had said to “let your peace come upon that household” (Matthew 10:13, Luke 10:5). If the household was worthy, or if a son of peace was there, their peace would rest upon that household. If not, their peace would return to them and it would be more tolerable on Judgment Day for Sodom than for that house or that city. This “peace” was incorporated<sup>53</sup> into the Liturgy in the 1<sup>st</sup> Century, where the presiding presbyter or bishop would say, “Peace be to all”, and the people would respond, “And to your spirit!” This is an Apostolic blessing and, in similar fashion, it will be more tolerable on Judgment Day for Sodom than for that Church that rejects the Apostolic blessing.

After praying, when everyone reclined at table, the cobbler initiated the conversation by saying, “Father, who are you? And where did you get the power that is in your speech?” Mark replied, “I am the servant of the Lord Jesus Christ, the Son of God”. The cobbler said, “I would like to see this Son of God”. Mark replied that he would show Him to them. Then beginning with the Gospel and the Prophets, Mark explained how they all foretold concerning Christ. The cobbler replied that he had never heard of the Hebrew Scriptures, only the Iliad, the Odyssey,

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<sup>52</sup> Isaac Lambertsen, *The Lives of the Holy Apostles*, Holy Apostles Convent Press, Buena Vista, CO, 1990, p. 247.

This is a translation from the following:

*The Lives of the Saints in the Russian Language, According to the Menology of St. Dimitri of Rostov*, Synodal Press, Moscow, 1906, v. 8, (April) pp. 403-416.

<sup>53</sup> John Chrysostom, *Homilies on Matthew*, XXXII, 9.

and what Egyptian youths are taught. Mark continued to show him clearly that all the wisdom of the world is foolish in the sight of God.

The cobbler, whose name was Ananias, believed all that Mark told him, and beholding the miracles that Mark performed, accepted baptism. His whole household was also baptized, along with a great multitude of people in that area. Day by day, the number of the faithful increased.

Eventually, the rulers of the city of Medion became aware that Mark's work was hindering the sacrifices customarily offered to their gods, and that he was "blaspheming" their idols. They sought to murder this "foreigner" and gathered together to take counsel on how to arrest him.

Mark learned of their decision, and hurriedly ordained Ananias as Bishop for the faithful, and three priests (Malchus, Sabinus and Cedronus), along with seven deacons and eleven lesser clergymen for the ministry of the Church. Then he left town and went back to Pentapolis. Mark spent two years in Pentapolis, confirming the brethren in the Faith, ordaining Bishops, priests and clergymen for the surrounding regions and cities before returning to Alexandria.

On his return, he found that the brethren had increased in number and excelled in grace and faith in the Lord. Ananias had also built a Church building near the sea in a place called Bukulus. On seeing the Church, Mark rejoiced greatly, and kneeling down, gave glory to God. Mark stayed in Alexandria for a considerable time, and the Christians of that Church increased in number to a multitude. They grew strong in the Faith, and openly criticized the Greeks for their idolatry. The pagan city officials, knowing that Mark was in the city performing many miracles, were enraged at him in their hatred and malice, and began to seek to kill him. Their efforts were long in vain, and they assembled in their pagan temples and gnashed their teeth wrathfully, saying, "O what trouble this wizard and sorcerer is causing us!"

### **The Evangelist Mark's Impact on the Middle East**

According to tradition, the Evangelist Mark traveled throughout Egypt, finding a receptive people as he went. In some places the people had been prepared by Christ Himself, when He was a child during the Flight to Egypt (Matthew 2:13-15). The end of the journey of Joseph, Mary, Jesus and James was Upper Egypt near the Qousqam Mountains about 100 miles from Thebes, where they lived in a cave for the better part of a year. Today this cave is the site of the Dair al-Muharraq Monastery. The first church was built on that location by about 60 AD, following the Evangelist Mark's travels throughout Egypt. The Monastery there was built in the 4th Century as were a number of other monasteries and churches that commemorated the various places Joseph, Mary, Jesus and James stayed. Many of these still exist today and the historic sites are visited by many people every year<sup>54</sup>.

The Apostle Peter visited the Evangelist Mark in Egypt during this time, after visiting Spain and Carthage. Together they went all the way up the Nile to Thebes in Upper Egypt to the place where Jesus, Joseph, Mary and James stayed when Jesus was a toddler during the Flight to Egypt (Matthew 2:13-15). While there, Peter ordained Rufus, of the Seventy, as bishop of

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<sup>54</sup> Holy Apostles Convent, The Life of the Virgin Mary, pp. 284-285

Thebes. Rufus was the son of Simon of Cyrene, the man who carried Jesus' cross to Golgotha. Of the four evangelists, only Mark mentioned Rufus' relation to Simon of Cyrene (Mark 15:21). Rufus also was in Rome as Paul wrote Romans (Romans 16:13) and must have joined Peter in Egypt or traveled with him. This dates Peter's visit to Egypt to probably the late 50's AD.

Roberts and Donaldson speak<sup>55</sup> of the Alexandrian Church as the leader of the Churches throughout the world. Prior to the 5<sup>th</sup> Century, the only Patriarchate that could claim "papal authority" as Rome later claimed, was Alexandria, not Rome. The spirituality and the wisdom of Alexandria can be traced to the efforts of the Evangelist Mark and the Apostle Apollos of the Seventy and their successors.

"In this volume (Ante-Nicene Fathers, Volume 6), the moral grandeur and predominance of the See of Alexandria are conspicuously illustrated. The mastery, which its great school continued to exercise over Christian thought, will all present themselves forcibly to every reflecting reader of this book. One half of this volume presents the Alexandrian school itself in its glorious succession of doctors and pupils<sup>56</sup>, and the other half in the reflected light of its universal influence".

"Because it was the capital of the empire, therefore Rome was reckoned the *first*, but not the chief, of Sees, as the Council of Nicaea declared; and because Byzantium had become 'New Rome', therefore it is made *second* on the list, but equal in dignity. The endowment of Alexandria was unasserted because unquestioned, and unchallenged because as yet unholy ambition had not infected the Apostolic churches".

"It is time to disabuse the West of its narrow ideas concerning ecclesiastical history. Dean Stanley rebuked<sup>57</sup> this spirit and called on us to enlarge our petty Occidental horizon. He added words of reproach which invite us to reform the entire scheme of our ecclesiastical history by presenting the Eastern Apostolic churches as the main stem of Christendom, of which the church of Rome itself was, for three hundred years, a mere colony".

"The early Roman church was but a colony of Greek Christians or Grecized Jews. The earliest Fathers of the Western Church wrote in Greek. The early popes were not Italians, but Greeks. The name of pope is not Latin, but Greek; she is the mother, and Rome the daughter. It is her privilege to claim a direct continuity of speech with the earliest times. She read the whole code of Scripture, Old as well as New, in the language in which it was read and spoken by the Apostles" (i.e. Greek).

"The See of Alexandria was then the most important in the world. The Alexandrian Church was the only great seat of Christian learning. Its episcopate was the Evangelical See, as founded by the chair of St. Mark. Its occupant was the only potentate of the time who bore the name of pope. After the Council of Nicaea he became the judge of the world, from his decisions respecting the celebration of Easter; and from the obedience paid to his judgment in all matters

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<sup>55</sup> Roberts and Donaldson, "Introductory Notice to Volume 6", Ante-Nicene Fathers, 1975.

<sup>56</sup> Some of these standouts of the Church in Alexandria were the Evangelist Mark and the Apostle Apollos in the 1<sup>st</sup> Century, Pantaenus and Clement in the 2<sup>nd</sup> Century, Dionysios and Gregory Thaumaturgos in the 3<sup>rd</sup> Century, and Athanasius and Cyril in the 4<sup>th</sup> Century.

<sup>57</sup> Dean Stanley, Lectures on the Eastern Church,

of learning, secular and sacred'. 'The head of the Alexandrian church,' says<sup>58</sup> Gregory Nazianzen, 'is the head of the world'".

Because of the efforts of especially Apollos and the Evangelist Mark, Alexandria became the earliest seat of Christian learning<sup>59</sup>. Catechetical schools in Alexandria enrolled some of the brightest students from across the Empire, and with the resources of the Alexandrian library at hand, something like a Christian university came into being. And this occurred at a time when Christianity was still being persecuted.

In the 3<sup>rd</sup> Century BC, at this Alexandrian library, the Hebrew Scriptures were first translated into Greek due to the extensive influence of the Hellenistic Jewish community in Alexandria on Pharaoh Ptolemy Philadelphus. This Greek translation, called the "Septuagint", from the seventy scholars involved, was used as the Old Testament text of the Early Church, and almost all of the Old Testament quotes in the New Testament come from the Septuagint

By the beginning of the 4<sup>th</sup> Century, Alexandria was the mother of Churches and the intellectual and the ecclesiastical primacy of Christendom<sup>60</sup>, virtually "the light of the world". Egypt was again the pharos of the world as it was in the days of Moses. The "men of Galilee" had taken possession of the great Alexandrian Library for their ultimate use. The Evangelist Mark and the eloquent Apollos had founded the schools of Christendom and shaped the theology of their day.

### **Monasteries of the Alexandrian Church**

Monasticism in and around Alexandria began in the late 40's AD, and the characteristics of the monastic life there was modeled after Church life in Jerusalem following Pentecost about 15 years earlier. We can see this from the testimony of the Jewish Philosopher Philo.

The Jewish philosopher Philo (20 BC to 50 AD) had great admiration<sup>61</sup> for the monastic communities in Egypt, whom he called "*The Therapeutae*" or healers<sup>62</sup>. Eusebius devoted<sup>63</sup> a chapter of his Church History to quoting Philo's account of 1<sup>st</sup> Century monasticism<sup>64</sup>, saying,

"The multitude of believers, both men and women, that were collected at these monasteries at the very outset, and lived lives of the most philosophical and excessive asceticism, was so great, that Philo thought it worthwhile to describe their pursuits, their meetings, their entertainment, and their whole manner of life".

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<sup>58</sup> Gregory Nazianzen, Oration XXI, 7.

<sup>59</sup> Roberts and Donaldson, "Introductory Note to Clement of Alexandria", The Ante-Nicene Fathers, v. 2.

<sup>60</sup> Roberts and Donaldson, "Introductory Note to Peter of Alexandria", The Ante-Nicene Fathers, v. 6.

<sup>61</sup> C. D. Yonge, tr., "On the Contemplative Life", The Works of Philo, Updated Edition Database, Hendrickson Publishers, 1995, I:2, II:10 to IV:39.

<sup>62</sup> Philo applied this name to refer to the healing of the soul and the worship of God in purity and sincerity.

<sup>63</sup> Eusebius, Church History, II, 17.

Sozomen, Ecclesiastical History, I, 12.

<sup>64</sup> The Protestant Reformers had a strong reaction to monasticism in general, and were unwilling to believe that a well-developed monasticism could have existed at all until much later, never mind before the death of Philo in 50 AD. They concluded that these communities were either not Christian, or that the accounts were a later addition to the works of Philo. See Philip Schaff, ed., Eusebius, Church History, II, 17, Footnote 2, Nicene and Post Nicene Fathers, Second Series, Volume 1.

Jerome stated<sup>65</sup> that Philo, a native of Alexandria of the priestly class, saw in the monasteries of Egypt something of credit to his nation, since there was still a distinct Jewish flavor to their life together.

Some characteristics of these monastic communities, as described by Philo in the above referenced work “On the Contemplative Life” are:

1. They consisted of men and women living in separate quarters.
2. They leave their possessions to relatives or friends when they join the community.
3. The communities are located primarily in desert areas with no city walls.
4. These communities are located in Greece and other barbarian lands, but the largest concentration is in Egypt, especially near Alexandria.
5. Their houses are very plain, just adequate to shield them from the sun and the cold.
6. They don't live close to one another as men do in cities (i.e. wall-to-wall), but yet close enough for fellowship.
7. Every house has a sacred shrine, which is called the holy place.
8. They study the Laws of God, the Prophets, hymns and Psalms, and “the writings of the ancients”, which is probably the writings of the Apostles, which Philo wouldn't recognize as such. At this early date, all they could have had were the Gospels of Matthew and Mark. None of the rest of the New Testament had yet been written.
9. They pray twice every day, at sunrise and sunset.
10. During the six days of the week, each retires into solitude by himself, to work, study and compose hymns and psalms. Thus they practice the Prophets' mode of life.
11. On the 7<sup>th</sup> day, they all come together, sitting down on the floor according to age, to listen to their eldest (i.e. bishop) speak with great powers of reasoning and prudence.
12. The men and women both listen, but from separate areas of the house.
13. They only eat after sunset, leaving the daytime for work and study, and part of the night for the necessities of the body. Deacons help serve tables.
14. Some men go 3-6 days between meals, which consist of bread with a little salt<sup>66</sup> and perhaps hyssop. They eat no meat and don't drink wine, only water from a spring.
15. Their clothes are very plain: a cloak of some shaggy hide for winter, and a thin mantle or linen shawl for summer.
16. They sleep on the ground on a bed of straw.
17. They practice complete simplicity, looking upon falsehood as the foundation of pride, but truth as the origin of simplicity.
18. Their common assemblies are very cheerful in their praise to God.

A monastic community in Alexandria as early as the late 40's may be surprising to us in the 21<sup>st</sup> century, but it should not be if we understand those parts of the Scriptures that we tend to pass over too quickly. The Lord told the Twelve Apostles, “Everyone who has left houses or brothers or sisters or father or mother or wife or children or lands, for My name's sake, shall receive a hundredfold, and inherit eternal life” (Matthew 19:29). We tend to read past “wife and children” too quickly without understanding what the Lord was referring to.

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<sup>65</sup> Jerome, “Lives of Illustrious Men”, Chapter 8, Jerome and Gennadius, Nicene and Post-Nicene Fathers, Volume 3.

<sup>66</sup> It is interesting that their diet was the same as that of the Apostle Thomas a continent away in India. See Roberts and Donaldson, ed., “Acts of the Holy Apostle Thomas, When He Came Into India”, Apocrypha of the New Testament, Ante Nicene Fathers, v. 8

All of the Twelve and the Seventy<sup>67</sup>, after their call by the Lord, left behind both the things of this world and the pleasures of this world. Thus they gave up their land and property, and also sexual relations with their wives. Those Apostles that had wives often had their wives and even their children travel with them. The Apostle Paul, who didn't have a wife traveling with him, referred to others who did. "Do we have no right to take along a sister, a wife, as do also the other Apostles, the brothers of the Lord, and Cephas?" (1 Corinthians 9:5) For example, the Apostle Philip traveled with his wife and three daughters for at least part of his missionary journeys<sup>68</sup>.

If the Apostles were living a celibate life, it was natural for many others to do so also, especially during the days following Pentecost. Philo's description of daily life in the monasteries of Alexandria reads so much like the life of the Church following Pentecost that we need to reassess exactly what was going on after Pentecost. What is apparent is that everyone in the Church was doing what the Apostles were doing: they were leaving behind the things of this world, and presumably also the pleasures of this world. That everyone was leaving behind the things of this world is apparent. "All who believed were together, and had all things in common, and sold their possessions and goods, and divided them among all, as anyone had need" (Acts 2:44-45). And again, "Nor was there anyone among them who lacked; for all who were possessors of lands or houses sold them, and brought the proceeds of the things that were sold, and laid *them* at the apostles' feet; and they distributed to each as anyone had need" (Acts 4:34-35).

Paul hints that many people had tried to abandon the pleasures of this world about 25 years after Pentecost. He starts out, "It is good for a man not to touch a woman" (1 Corinthians 7:1), implying a general favor toward celibacy. But then he adds, "Nevertheless, because of sexual immorality, let each man have his own wife, and let each woman have her own husband" (1 Corinthians 7:2). For those who could not live the celibate life, Paul has comforting words, "Even if you do marry, you have not sinned; and if a virgin marries, she has not sinned. Nevertheless such will have trouble in the flesh, but I would spare you" (1 Corinthians 7:28).

John Cassian stated<sup>69</sup> that the Lenten Fast was ordained for the benefit the weak brethren who were imitating Ananias and Sapphira in retaining their worldly possessions and who were almost ignorant of abstinence and contrition. This had to have occurred in the 1<sup>st</sup> century<sup>70</sup> because of changes to the early life in the Church of Jerusalem.

"As the primitive church retained its perfection unbroken, the observance of Lent did not exist. They were not bound by the requirements of this order, or

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<sup>67</sup> That is, those who remained faithful to the Lord. Four of the Seventy apostatized to follow the Arch Heretic Simon Magus and therefore don't fit this model. For details of this, see Mark Kern, Simon Magus the Heresiarch, St. Athanasius Press, 2004.

<sup>68</sup> For details, see Mark Kern, The Apostle Philip, St. Athanasius Press, 2002.

<sup>69</sup> John Cassian, First Conference of Abbot Theonas, III, xxi, 30.

<sup>70</sup> This had to be the case for several reasons. First, we don't see Paul's Churches having everything in common as the Church in Jerusalem did in 30 AD. Instead, the Gentile Churches took up a collection for the Churches in Judea (1 Corinthians 16:1-3). This would have been difficult if they had sold all their property. Second there had been a persecution in Jerusalem beginning in 31 AD with the death of Archdeacon Stephen and the scattering of the Church (Acts 7:59-8:1). Part of this persecution was a confiscation of all personal belongings, leaving the Church in Jerusalem impoverished, and in dire need of help from the Gentile Churches. Third, those that wished to continue living with all things in common were forced to move to monasteries, such as the ones started by the Evangelist Mark near Alexandria in the mid 40's AD.

confined in the very narrow limits of the fast, since the fast was embraced by everyone all year long. Gradually the multitude of believers began day by day to decline from that apostolic fervor. They began to look after their own wealth, and not to portion it out for the good of all the faithful in accordance with the arrangement of the Apostles, but had an eye to their own private expenses. They tried not only to keep it but actually to increase it, not content with following the example of Ananias and Sapphira. Then it seemed good to all the priests that men who were hampered by worldly cares, and almost ignorant of abstinence and contrition, should be recalled to the pious duty by a fast canonically enjoined. This way they might be constrained by the necessity of paying the legal tithes; this certainly was good for the weak brethren and did not do any harm to the perfect who were living under the grace of the Gospel and by their voluntary devotion going beyond the Law. The strong brethren succeeded in attaining the blessedness that Paul speaks of: 'For sin shall not have dominion over you; for you are not under the Law but under grace' (Romans 6:14-15). For sin cannot exercise dominion over one who lives faithfully under the liberty of grace."

One of the characteristics of the Alexandrian Church instituted by the Evangelist Mark was a strong monastic community. John Cassian, at one time a monk in Egypt, described<sup>71</sup> some details of life among the monks in Egypt during the early days of monasticism in Egypt. They were considering how many Psalms to include at Vespers, where some wanted to include over fifty Psalms<sup>72</sup>. One evening at Vespers, an angel joined them, unrecognized, and chanted twelve Psalms; then he disappeared. From that time on, they fixed the number of Psalms at Vespers at twelve. The interesting aspect of this event is that the angel didn't stand out as being unusual! Cassian described the demeanor and holiness of the monks in Egypt as being similar to the early Church in Jerusalem after Pentecost:

"In the early days of the faith only a few, and those the best of men, were known by the name of monks, as they received that mode of life from the Evangelist Mark of blessed memory, the first to preside over the Church of Alexandria as Bishop. They preserved those grand characteristics, which we read in the Acts of the Apostles, that the Church and multitude of believers in primitive times was famous for. That is, 'The multitude of believers had one heart and one soul. Nor did any of them say that any of the things which he possessed was his own: but they had all things common' (Acts 4:32, 2:44-45). The Egyptian monks added to these characteristics others still more sublime. Withdrawing into more secluded spots outside the cities they led a life marked by such rigorous abstinence that, even to those of another creed, the exalted character of their life was a standing marvel. For they gave themselves up to the reading of Holy Scripture and to prayers and to manual labor night and day with such fervor that they had no desire or thoughts of food — unless on the second or third day bodily hunger reminded them. They took their meat and drink not so much because they wished for it as because it was necessary for life; and even then they took it not before sunset, in order that they might connect the hours of daylight with the practice of spiritual meditations, and the care of the body with the night".

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<sup>71</sup> John Cassian, *Institutes of the Coenobia*, II, 5.

<sup>72</sup> This has to be describing very early times, since the Liturgy was well established by 60 AD.

Another example of angels attending the Liturgy in Alexandria is given from the account of the life of Peter, Bishop of Alexandria from 300 to 311 AD. During the Hierarchical Liturgies<sup>73</sup>, Peter often sat on the footstool in front of the Bishop's Throne and not on the chair itself. Out of love and respect for their Bishop, all the people and the clergy asked him to sit on the chair, but he often didn't. Finally, one day when they were particularly insistent, he explained<sup>74</sup> his secret to the clergy after the Liturgy.

“Very often when I wish to draw near to that seat, I see an angel sitting on it, exceedingly radiant with the brightness of its light. Then, being in suspense between joy and fear, I acknowledge that I am altogether unworthy to sit on such a seat. I would not even venture to sit on the stool itself, but I do so to avoid offending the people. Thus it is, my beloved sons, that I seem to you, in this, to transgress the pontifical rule. Nevertheless, many times when I see it vacant, as you yourselves are witnesses, I refuse not to sit upon the chair after the accustomed manner”.

John Cassian recounted<sup>75</sup> the history of the Coenobitic<sup>76</sup> monastics in Egypt, who were the descendants of the monks that were first organized by the Evangelist Mark. They took their direction from the Early Church described in Acts, which Cassian says was a monastic-like community. Since the leaders of the Early Church were celibate, including the Twelve and the Seventy, many people naturally imitated them, including the Apostle Paul after his conversion (1 Corinthians 7:7-8). Cassian lamented the lack of monastic zeal in later centuries, as Church leaders began to keep their own property and possessions.

“The system of the Coenobites took its rise in the days of the preaching of the Apostles. For such was all that multitude of believers in Jerusalem, which is thus described in the Acts of the Apostles. ‘But the multitude of believers was of one heart and one soul, neither did anyone say that any of the things he possessed was his own, but they had all things in common. They sold their possessions and goods, and divided them among all, as anyone had need’ (Acts 4:32, 2:45). And again, ‘Nor was there anyone among them who lacked; for all who were possessors of lands or houses sold them, and brought the proceeds of the things that were sold, and laid *them* at the apostles' feet; and they distributed to each as anyone had need’ (Acts 4:34-35). The whole Church was then such as now exists among those few who can be found with difficulty in Coenobia. At the death of the Apostles the multitude of believers began to grow cold. Especially so was that multitude which had come to the Faith from diverse foreign nations, from whom the Apostles out of consideration for the infancy of their faith and their ingrained heathen habits, required nothing more than that they should ‘abstain from things sacrificed to idols and from fornication, and from things strangled, and from blood’ (Acts 15:29). That liberty which was conceded to the Gentiles because of the weakness of their newly-born faith, had by degrees begun to mar the perfection of that Church which existed at Jerusalem. The fervor of that early faith cooled down owing to the daily increasing number both of natives and

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<sup>73</sup> A “Hierarchical Liturgy” is one where the Bishop is present and presides, rather than a priest.

<sup>74</sup> Roberts and Donaldson, Ed., “The Genuine Acts of Peter”, Nicene and Post-Nicene Fathers, Volume 6.

<sup>75</sup> John Cassian, Conference of Abbot Piamun, XVIII, 5.

<sup>76</sup> The term “Coenobite” comes from the Greek words *koinos* and *bios*, meaning “common” and “life” respectively. They lived in communities, as opposed to those who lived as hermits, and they had all things in “common”, just like the Early Church following Pentecost.

foreigners. Not only those who had accepted the Faith, but even those who were the leaders of the Church relaxed somewhat in their strictness. For some, fancying that what they saw permitted to the Gentiles because of their weakness, was also allowable for themselves. They thought that they would suffer no loss if they followed the faith and confession of Christ, keeping their property and possessions. But those who still maintained the fervor of the Apostles, mindful of that former perfection, left their cities and those who thought that carelessness and a laxer life was permissible to themselves and the Church of God. They began to live in rural and more sequestered spots, and there, in private and on their own account, to practice those things which they had learned to have been ordered by the Apostles throughout the whole body of the Church in general. That whole system, of which we have spoken, grew up from those disciples who had separated themselves from the evil that was spreading. And these, by degrees, were separated from the great mass of believers. Because they abstained from marriage and cut themselves off from their kinsmen and the life of this world, were termed monks or solitaries from the strictness of their lonely and solitary life. It followed that from their common life they were called Coenobites and their cells and lodgings Coenobia. These were the earliest kind of monks, which were first not only in time but also in grace, and which continued unbroken for a very long period up to the time of Abbot Paul and Antony<sup>77</sup>; and even to this day we see its traces remaining in strict coenobia”

Cassian continued<sup>78</sup> to say that Lent was not observed by the Early Church, but was ordained by the Apostles in the late 1<sup>st</sup> century as the people fell away from the spirit of the Church after Pentecost. As people quit leaving behind the things of this world, it became necessary to constrain a canonical fast to bring people back to the Faith.

“As long as the primitive church retained its perfection unbroken, the observance of Lent did not exist. They were not bound by the requirements of this order, or by any legal requirements, nor confined in the very narrow limits of the fast, since the fast was embraced year round. Later the multitude of believers began day by day to decline from that apostolic fervor, and to look after their own wealth, and not to portion it out for the good of all the faithful in accordance with the arrangement of the Apostles. Having an eye to their own private expenses, they tried not only to keep it but actually to increase it, not content with following the example of Ananias and Sapphira. Men were hampered by worldly cares, and almost ignorant of abstinence and contrition. Then it seemed good to all the priests that men should be recalled to pious duty by a canonically directed fast and be constrained by the necessity of paying the legal tithes. This certainly would be good for the weak brethren and could not do any harm to the perfect, who were living under the grace of the Gospel. By their voluntary devotion going beyond the Law, they succeeded in attaining the blessedness which the Apostle speaks of. ‘Sin shall not have dominion over you; for you are not under the Law but under grace’ (Romans 6:14). Sin cannot exercise dominion over one who lives faithfully under the liberty of grace.”

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<sup>77</sup> Paul and Antony were early Anchorite monks of the late 3<sup>rd</sup> Century, who lived as hermits in the desert. They are distinguished from Coenobite monks from their solitary mode of life.

<sup>78</sup> John Cassian, 1<sup>st</sup> Conference of Abbot Theonas, III, xxi, 30.

According to tradition<sup>79</sup>, the early Irish monks modeled themselves after the monks at the hermitages of Scetis in Egypt. Early Irish monks used tones similar to that set by the Evangelist Mark in Egypt.

“As Mark went to the other cities of Egypt, he also went to interior lands in Africa, Libya, Cyrenaica and Pentapolis. Pagan temples collapsed, idols toppled and were shattered, and the people saw miracles of healing the sick, and cleansing of lepers. Many other miracles came to the truth and the people were enlightened. Even the pagans and Jews praised the virtue of the Egyptian Christians, and Egypt became a center of asceticism known throughout the Christian world. The Irish monks later modeled themselves after the monks at the hermitages of Scetis in Egypt, and it is said the ‘Scotus’ or northern Celts sang according to the tones set by the Evangelist Mark, so they must have been taught directly by some monks of Egypt. Those who seek historically accurate music for the early Celtic Rite may do research into the tones set by the early Church in Egypt or Ethiopia, because these are likely the tones sung by the Irish before other influences came into Ireland and Scotland. Other influences also came into the Middle East because of the invasion of peoples from the Far East, but some of the fragments of music of the ancient Irish Church match some portions of church music of the Egyptians and Ethiopians, who have mainly preserved their music from the ancient Church”.

### **Mark Travels to Jerusalem for the Funeral of the Virgin Mary**

During the time that the Evangelist Mark was at work in the Churches in Egypt, the Virgin Mary was growing old in Bethlehem in c. 55 AD. As Mary reached her mid 70’s, she was feeling the effects of old age. And it was then that the Archangel Gabriel appeared to her to tell her that her departure was imminent<sup>80</sup>, and would occur in three days.

Shortly after Gabriel left, the Apostle John was translated from wherever he was at the time. This was similar to the way the Deacon Philip was translated from the desert road between Jerusalem and Gaza to Azotus (Acts 8:26, 39-40), and as Habakkuk the prophet carried food to Daniel, who was in the lions’ den, and quickly returned to Judea<sup>81</sup>. There is some disagreement among the Church Fathers as to whether John was in Ephesus or in some region of Judea. They contend that John did not leave the Virgin Mary alone during her lifetime, unless it was just briefly in the care of her stepson, James, the Lord’s brother.

After John arrived<sup>82</sup>, “the rest of the Twelve arrived also from whatever part of the world where they were then preaching the Gospel. Peter came from Rome<sup>83</sup>, Paul from Tiberia, Thomas from Western India, James from Jerusalem. Andrew, Peter’s brother, and Philip, Luke, and Simon the Zealot, and Jude, who had fallen asleep, were raised by the Holy Spirit out of

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<sup>79</sup> See the web site [www.celticchristianity.org](http://www.celticchristianity.org).

<sup>80</sup> Roberts and Donaldson, “The Book of John Concerning the Falling Asleep of Mary”, *Ante-Nicene Fathers*, v.8.  
Roberts and Donaldson, “The Passing of Mary”, *Ante-Nicene Fathers*, v.8.

<sup>81</sup> Lancelot C. L. Brenton, “Bel and the Dragon 1:33-39”, *The Septuagint with Apocrypha*, Hendrickson, Peabody MA, 1990

<sup>82</sup> Roberts and Donaldson, ed., “The Passing of Mary, First Latin Form”, *Apocrypha of the New Testament*, Ante Nicene Fathers, v. 8.

<sup>83</sup> Roberts and Donaldson, “The Book of John Concerning the Falling Asleep of Mary”, *Ante-Nicene Fathers*, v.8.

their tombs. To them the Holy Spirit said, ‘Do not think that it is now the resurrection; but on this account you have risen out of your tombs, that you may go to give greeting to the honor and wonder-working of the mother of our Lord and Savior Jesus Christ, because the day of her departure is at hand, of her going up into the heavens’.

Nathaniel (i.e. Bartholomew) said<sup>84</sup>, “I was in the Thebais (possibly Thebes, in Upper Egypt) proclaiming the Word, and behold the Holy Spirit said to me, ‘The mother of your Lord is taking her departure; go, then, to greet her in Bethlehem’. And, behold, a cloud of light snatched me up, and brought me to you”. And Matthew also answered<sup>85</sup> and said, “I have glorified and do glorify God, because when I was in a boat and overtaken by a storm, the sea raging with its waves, all of a sudden a cloud of light overshadowing the storm, changed it to a calm, and having snatched me up, set me down beside you”. And the Evangelist Mark likewise coming around, coming from Alexandria, stated<sup>86</sup>, “And when I was finishing the canon of the third day in the city of Alexandria, just as I was praying, the Holy Spirit snatched me up, and brought me to you”.

All of the Twelve arrived except Thomas. They stood and went in, and greeted the queen mother with the following words: ‘Hail, Mary, full of grace! The Lord be with you’ (Luke 1:28). And she eagerly rose quickly, and bowed herself, and kissed them, and gave thanks to God. And Peter answered and said to the Apostles, ‘Let us each, according to what the Holy Spirit announced and commanded us, give full information to the mother of our Lord’. And those who had come likewise agreed to give an account of how they had come. So each of the Twelve gave Mary an account of where they were when they were summoned”.

“Then the blessed Mary said to her brethren: ‘What is this, that you have all come to Jerusalem?’ Peter, answering, said to her: ‘We need to ask this of you. Certainly, as I think, none of us knows why we have come here today with such speed. All declared plainly the place where they had been that day. And they all wondered that they were there when they heard these things. The blessed Mary said to them: ‘I asked my Son, before He endured the passion, that He and you should be at my death; and He granted me this gift. Therefore you may know that my departure will be tomorrow’”.

“After Mary’s death the next day, the Apostles with great honor laid the body in a tomb on the Mount of Olives, then Thomas was suddenly brought to the Mount of Olives, like the others had been brought earlier. He saw Mary’s body going up to heaven, and began to cry out to her. Then the belt with which the Apostles had encircled her body was thrown down from heaven to the blessed Thomas. And taking it, and giving thanks to God, he came again into the Valley of Jehoshaphat, finding all the Apostles and a great crowd there. Then Thomas said, ‘Where have you laid her body?’ And they pointed out the sepulcher with their finger. And he said, ‘The body is not there’. But they didn’t believe Thomas. Then they went to the sepulcher, which was a new one hollowed out in the rock, and took away the stone; but they did not find the body, and did not know what to say. Then Thomas told them how he was singing mass in India — he still had on his sacerdotal robes. He, not knowing the word of God, had been brought to the Mount of Olives, and saw the body of the blessed Mary going up into heaven, and prayed her

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<sup>84</sup> Roberts and Donaldson, “The Book of John Concerning the Falling Asleep of Mary”, Ante-Nicene Fathers, v.8.

<sup>85</sup> Roberts and Donaldson, “The Book of John Concerning the Falling Asleep of Mary”, Ante-Nicene Fathers, v.8.

<sup>86</sup> Roberts and Donaldson, “The Book of John Concerning the Falling Asleep of Mary”, Ante-Nicene Fathers, v.8.

to give him a blessing. She heard his prayer, and threw him her belt, which she had about her. And the Apostles seeing the belt which they had put about her, glorified God, on account of the benediction which the blessed Mary had given him, and because he had seen her body going up into heaven. Then Thomas gave them his benediction, and said, ‘Behold how good and how pleasant it is for brethren to dwell together in unity!’”

In another account<sup>87</sup>, it states, “And Thomas said, ‘While traversing the country of India, when the preaching was prevailing by the grace of Christ, the king’s sister’s son, Labdanus by name, was about to be sealed by me in the palace. All of a sudden the Holy Spirit said to me, ‘Thomas, go to Bethlehem to greet the mother of your Lord, because she is taking her departure to the heavens’. And a cloud of light having snatched me up, set me down beside you”.

“And the same cloud<sup>88</sup> by which they had been brought carried them back each to his own place. And so also the Apostles quickly returned to where they had at first been, to preach to the people of God”.

### **The Liturgy of St. Mark for the Church in Alexandria**

A number of ancient liturgies existed in the Early Church. The perceptions of these liturgies by modern scholars depends greatly on the background of the scholar. Some, who are hostile to early liturgies and liturgy in general, claim that these liturgies were not written before the 3<sup>rd</sup> Century. Others, who are comfortable with liturgies, claim that these Early Liturgies are very representative of 1<sup>st</sup> Century practice. The early liturgies that are extant are as follows, where the first three are better known:

1. The Liturgy of St. James<sup>89</sup>: for Jerusalem and vicinity
2. The Liturgy of St. Mark<sup>90</sup>: for Egypt and North Africa
3. The Liturgy of the Holy Apostles<sup>91</sup>: for Persia and the Far East
4. The Clementine or Roman Liturgy: for Rome and vicinity
5. The Gallican Liturgy<sup>92</sup>: for Gaul and the Western outposts

Some difficulties in studying these ancient liturgies are that the oldest manuscripts date from no earlier than the 10<sup>th</sup> Century AD. None of these Liturgies appear to have been written down<sup>93</sup> before the 4<sup>th</sup> Century, and for obvious reasons – Christianity was illegal and the Liturgy

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<sup>87</sup> Roberts and Donaldson, “The Book of John Concerning the Falling Asleep of Mary”, Apocrypha of the New Testament, Ante-Nicene Fathers, v.8.

<sup>88</sup> Roberts and Donaldson, ed., “The Passing of Mary, First Latin Form”, Apocrypha of the New Testament, Ante Nicene Fathers, v. 8.

<sup>89</sup> “The Liturgy of James, the Holy Apostle and Brother of the Lord”, in Fathers of the Third and Fourth Centuries, Ante-Nicene Fathers, v. 7, Publisher, p. 537.

<sup>90</sup> “The Divine Liturgy of the Holy Apostle and Evangelist Mark, the Disciple of the Holy Peter”, in Fathers of the Third and Fourth Centuries, Ante-Nicene Fathers, v. 7, Publisher, p. 551.

<sup>91</sup> The Liturgy of the Holy Apostles is attributed to Thaddaeus, one of the Seventy, who was sent to Edessa in Persia by the Apostle Thomas. This is similar to the Malabar Liturgy used by the Apostle Thomas in India. See “The Liturgy of the Blessed Apostles”, in Fathers of the Third and Fourth Centuries, Ante-Nicene Fathers, v. 7, Publisher, p. 561.

<sup>92</sup> The Gallican Liturgy may be of later origin, but Irenaeus refers to its common practice in his days (c. 130-200 AD). See A. Cleveland Coxe, “Introductory Notice to Early Liturgies”, in Fathers of the Third and Fourth Centuries, The Ante-Nicene Fathers, Volume 7.

<sup>93</sup> Although they were not written down until later, many early writers refer to their existence in a precise format and order. Some examples from the late 1<sup>st</sup> and early 2<sup>nd</sup> Century are:

was referred to as the “mysteries” of the Faith (1 Corinthians 4:1). The Liturgy of St. James is admittedly the oldest of these liturgies, and there are three schools of thought regarding its content. One group claims that it is entirely destitute of any claim to an apostolic origin, and that it belongs to a much later age. Another group claims that the main structure of this liturgy is the work of St. James, while they admit that it contains some evident interpolations. A third group claims that the whole is the genuine production of the Apostle. Most scholars regard the Liturgy of St. Mark as of about the same age as the Liturgy of St. James.

Those in the second group point to the texts that we have of these Liturgies, such as the words “consubstantial” and “mother of God”, that were catch-words during the controversies of the 4<sup>th</sup> Century, and say that this is evidence of later additions. But these are just a few words in a four-hour long liturgy, where the basic form and content is Apostolic. In the words<sup>94</sup> of one modern scholar, of the second group, the Rev. J. Mason Neale:

“These liturgies, though not composed verbatim by the Apostles whose names they bear, were the legitimate development of their unwritten tradition respecting the Christian Sacrifice. The words, probably, in the most important parts, the general tenor in all portions, descending unchanged from the Apostolic authors”.

A. Cleveland Coxe gave<sup>95</sup> a good overview of the transition from the Old Testament liturgy, that was set up by Samuel and David, to the New Testament liturgies that were set up by the Apostles. For further information regarding various aspects of the Old Testament Liturgy, see the study<sup>96</sup> on the life of the Apostle Peter.

“Hippolytus, in a few sentences<sup>97</sup>, has pointed out the epoch of David, as the dawning of Christianity itself. The pivot of Hebrew history turns on the whole system of the ‘goodly fellowship of prophets’ who heralded the Sun of Righteousness as successive constellations rise before the day. The learned Dean Payne-Smith, more minutely than Hippolytus, identifies Samuel, the master of David, as the great instrument of God in shaping the institutions of Moses to be a prelude to the Advent; in other words, transforming a local and tribal religion into that of Catholicity. The value of the Dean’s condensed and luminous elaboration can hardly be overstated”.

“But, to go behind even the Dean’s stand-point, we shall better comprehend the era of which, under God, Samuel was the author, by noting the immense importance of that specific Mosaic ordinance which not only made it possible. An all-wise *prolepsis* or anticipation governed the whole Law of Moses. We generally conceive of the Mosaic system as one of unlimited burnt offerings. On the contrary, it was a system restricting and limiting the unsystematic primeval institution of sacrifice, which had done its work by passing into the universal religions and rituals of the Gentiles. When the seminal idea of

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Ignatius, Epistle to the Ephesians, XX.

Justin Martyr, First Apology, 65-67.

Irenaeus, Against Heresies, V, ii, 2-3.

<sup>94</sup> A. Cleveland Coxe, “Introductory Notice to Early Liturgies”, in Fathers of the Third and Fourth Centuries, The Ante-Nicene Fathers, Volume 7.

<sup>95</sup> A. Cleveland Coxe, “Introductory Notice to Early Liturgies”, in Fathers of the Third and Fourth Centuries, The Ante-Nicene Fathers, Volume 7.

<sup>96</sup> Mark Kern, The Apostle Peter, Unpublished Work, St Athanasius Press, 2005, p. 258.

<sup>97</sup> Hippolytus, “On the Psalms”, Part I Exegetical Works, Extant Works and Fragments, The Ante-Nicene Fathers, Volume 5.

expiation, atonement, and the blood of innocence as a propitiation for guilt, was communicated to all the families of the earth, the Mosaic institutions limited sacrifices for the faithful, and localized them (i.e. to Jerusalem) with marvelous significance. Previously the faithful everywhere had imitated the sacrifices of their fathers, Noah and Abraham, who reared their altars everywhere, as Job also did, wherever they dwelt”.

“Note, further, that all this provision and *prevision* was part of the great Messianic system, which reached its crisis in the time of David, as prophetic of ‘the Son of David’. It was the office of Samuel to take the Mosaic ordinances, and to shape them for the advent of the Lamb of God, for His sacrifice upon Calvary, and for the setting-up of His universal kingdom. The Institutions of Samuel, therefore, were *in essence* institutions for the Gospel-day, and they were completed by the anointing of David as king, and by his prophetic mission to provide the Psalter. Then the Ark came out of curtains, and the Lord chose and appointed *the place* of which Moses had spoken, none other than the spot where Abraham had rehearsed in type the Sacrifice and Resurrection of Christ, according as it was written: “And Abraham called the name of the place *Jehovah-Jireh* (The-Lord-Will-Provide); as it is said *to* this day, ‘In the Mount of the Lord it shall be provided’” (Genesis 22:14). Thus, all sacrifice acceptable to God was shown to have reference to the Paschal Lamb, who on that mount of the Lord should be sacrificed, and rise again, as was accomplished in a figure earlier.

“The Temple itself was supplied with an expository liturgy. Moreover, a liturgical system, revolving about the central worship of the Temple, was brought to every man’s door by the establishment of the synagogue for the villages of Israel. The synagogue-worship became, therefore, the education and preparation of the faithful for the simple and spiritual worship of the new Law. This our Lord Himself expounded to the outcast Samaritans: ‘The hour is coming, when you will neither on this mountain, nor at Jerusalem, worship the Father. But the hour is coming, and now is, when the true worshippers will worship the Father in spirit and in truth’ (John 4:21-23). We have seen that the hour promised by Malachi was supposed by the Ante-Nicene Fathers to be here intended: ‘My name shall be great among the Gentiles; and in every place incense shall be offered to My Name, and a pure offering’” (Malachi 1:11).

“The primitive writers were universally impressed with these principles, and they are essential to the study of the liturgies”.

Specific developments in the Old Testament Liturgy, as outlined<sup>98</sup> by Coxe, included the following:

1. Samuel instituted “Schools of the Prophets,” out of which grew the synagogue system supplying the Rabbinical education to Israel, and furnished chiefs to the synagogues. See Acts 3:24; and compare 1 Samuel 10:5, 19:20, and 1 Chronicles 9:22.
2. Choral worship and the chanting of hymns — e.g., of Moses and Miriam, and Hannah (Samuel’s mother) — was in full operation under Samuel.

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<sup>98</sup> A. Cleveland Coxe, “Introductory Notice to Early Liturgies”, in Fathers of the Third and Fourth Centuries, The Ante-Nicene Fathers, Volume 7.

3. David, inspired as “the sweet singer of Israel,” supplied the Psalter, which in diverse arrangements has continued among Christians to be the marrow of public worship “in every place,” and throughout the world.
4. The reading of the law and the prophets was now set in order; and not only was the Temple supplied with teachers, but also the villages in every tribe.
5. Thus the Christian Church was provided with a system of worship from the hour of its institution, the synaxis succeeding the synagogue. The “ministration of the word” was enriched by Gospels and Epistles, by psalms and hymns and spiritual songs, and by “the prayers”, based upon the *Shemone esre*<sup>99</sup>, which now began to be composed and multiplied in the churches. Touching “spontaneous prayer” as exemplified in the first ages, Cyprian (3<sup>rd</sup> Century) encouraged<sup>100</sup> spontaneous prayer to pray for the lapsed.

All the Early Liturgies had a similar format, and were divided into two parts: the first part for everyone, including Gentiles, penitents, catechumens, and the faithful, and the second part for only the faithful. Coxe gave<sup>101</sup> a brief summary of this first part as follows:

“After the Psalms and Lessons with which the service commenced, a section from the Acts of the Apostles or the Epistles was read; after which the deacon or presbyter read the Gospel. Then followed an exhortation from one or more of the presbyters; and the bishop or president (similar to the synagogue ruler) delivered a Homily or Sermon, explanatory of the Scripture which had been read, and exhorting the people to imitate the virtues exemplified. When the preacher had concluded his discourse with a doxology in praise of the Holy Trinity, a deacon made proclamation for all non-communicants to withdraw. Then came the dismissal of the several classes of catechumens and penitents, after the prayers for each respectively, and the second part commenced”.

“The second part consisted of two halves, essentially distinct: viz., of prayers for the faithful, and for mankind in general, introductory to the Oblation; and the Anaphora or Oblation itself. The introductory part varied considerably in the formularies of different churches; but in the Anaphora all the existing liturgies so closely agree, in substance at least, if not in words, that they can always be the same<sup>102</sup>. The following essential points belong, without exception, to them all”:

1. The Kiss of Peace;
2. The form beginning, *Lift up your hearts*;
3. The Hymn, *Therefore with angels*, etc.;
4. Commemoration of the words of Institution;
5. The Oblation;
6. Prayer of Consecration;
7. Prayers for the Church on Earth;
8. Prayers for the dead;

<sup>99</sup> The *Shemone esre* was part of the Jewish liturgies, and the petitions of the Lord’s prayer were extracted almost verbatim from the Jewish liturgies. See Cyprian, *Treatises*, “Elucidations”, III, Ante-Nicene Fathers, Volume 5.

<sup>100</sup> Cyprian, Epistles, XXX, 6.

<sup>101</sup> A. Cleveland Coxe, “Introductory Notice to Early Liturgies”, in Fathers of the Third and Fourth Centuries, The Ante-Nicene Fathers, Volume 7.

<sup>102</sup> A major change to this part of the liturgy occurred in the West in the 14<sup>th</sup> Century. Instead of the Eucharist being “Holy things for the Holy”, i.e. holy things for holy people, it became an elevation of the host to God, where the people just watched instead of partaking.

9. The Lord's Prayer;
10. Breaking of the Bread;
11. Communion.

### **The Martyrdom of the Evangelist Mark**

According to Eusebius<sup>103</sup> and Jerome<sup>104</sup>, the Evangelist Mark was martyred in the 8<sup>th</sup> year of Nero, or 62 AD, and was succeeded as Bishop of Alexandria by Annianus. According to tradition<sup>105</sup>, this occurred at Bucolia, which is near Alexandria.

In Alexandria, he succeeded in establishing the Church of God, in giving her bishops, priests and deacons and in rooting everything firmly in faithfulness and devotion. Mark confirmed his preaching with many great miracles. When the pagans brought accusations against Mark, as a destroyer of their idolatrous faith, and when the governor of the city began to search for Mark, he fled again to Pentapolis, where he continued his earlier work. After two years, Mark again returned to Alexandria to the great joy of all his faithful, whose number had already increased greatly. The pagans took the opportunity to seize Mark, and they bound him tightly and began to drag him over the cobblestone pavement crying: "We're taking the ox to the stall."

Wounded and bloodied throughout, they cast Mark into prison where, at first, a heavenly angel appeared to him encouraging and strengthening him. After that, the Lord Jesus Himself appeared to him and said: "Peace be to you Mark, my Evangelist!" To that Mark replied: "Peace be to you also my Lord Jesus Christ!" The next day the vicious men brought Mark out of prison and again dragged him throughout the streets with the same cry: "Let us drag the ox to the pen." Completely exhausted and worn out, Mark uttered: "Into Your hands O Lord, I give up my spirit." Mark expired and his soul was translated into a better world. His holy relics were honorably buried by Christians and, through the centuries, his relics give healing to people from all of their afflictions, pains and diseases.

Additional details surrounding the martyrdom of the Evangelist Mark were recorded<sup>106</sup> by Symeon Metaphrastes, a Church Historian of the 9<sup>th</sup> Century. In the year of Mark's martyrdom, the Feast of Pascha (Easter in the West) coincided with the festival of the idol Serapis, or April 24<sup>th</sup>. As the Evangelist Mark was celebrating the Divine Liturgy that day, the pagans assembled a great mob for their own festival. They suddenly attacked the Church and arrested Mark. Tying him up with thongs, they dragged him through the streets and lanes saying, "Let us lead this bullock to the trough". Mark, however, bore these torments calmly, and gave thanks to the Lord saying, "I thank You, O Lord Jesus Christ, that You have counted me worthy to endure these sufferings for Your Name".

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<sup>103</sup> Eusebius, Church History, II, 24.

<sup>104</sup> Jerome, "Lives of Illustrious Men", Chapter 1, Jerome and Gennadius, Nicene and Post-Nicene Fathers, Volume 3.

<sup>105</sup> Roberts and Donaldson, Ed., "The Genuine Acts of Peter of Alexandria", Nicene and Post-Nicene Fathers, Volume 6.

<sup>106</sup> Symeon Metaphrastes, as quoted in Holy Apostles Convent, The Lives of the Holy Apostles, Buean Vista CO, 1990, pp. 255-256.

As they dragged him along the ground littered with sharp stones, his body was torn by the rocks and covered with wounds, such that blood stained the path that they took. Finally they brought the severely lacerated Mark to prison and cast him in at the onset of evening, as they gathered to take counsel as to what sort of death they would subject him to. At midnight, an angel appeared to Mark and strengthened him for the struggle ahead. Also the Lord Jesus Christ was revealed to him, comforting him with His appearance.

The following morning, the savage mob of pagans dragged the Apostle from his dungeon cell and again dragged him through the streets of the city. Mark could not sustain any more wounds, and soon expired, giving thanks to God and saying, "Into Your hands, O Lord, do I surrender my spirit".

The wickedness of the pagans was not satisfied with the death of the Apostle, so they decided to consume his body with fire. After they built a large fire, suddenly darkness descended, along with a dreadful clap of thunder. The earth quaked, and rain and hail fell, scattering the crowd and extinguishing the fire. The pious Christians took the body of Mark with reverence, and laid it in a tomb of stone in the place where they held their prayer services.

In the year 310 AD, a Church was erected over the tomb of the Evangelist Mark, and his relics remained in Alexandria until the 9<sup>th</sup> Century. In 828 AD, when the dominion of Islam and the heresy of Monophysitism had greatly weakened the Orthodox Church in Egypt, the relics of the Evangelist Mark were transferred to Venice, near where he had preached the Gospel in Aquilea. Today there is a magnificent Church dedicated to him, where there is preserved an ancient manuscript of his Gospel on Egyptian papyrus that was written, according to tradition, by his own hand.

According to tradition<sup>107</sup>, the Evangelist Mark had already ordained Annianus as Bishop before his departure, but perhaps not as Patriarch of Alexandria. The successor to Annianus as Patriarch was Avilius, who was ordained by the Evangelist Luke after the death of the Apostle Paul.

According to tradition, as described<sup>108</sup> in "The Teaching of the Apostles" from Persia, the Bishops in the Church were first called "Rulers" and "Guides". This short work describes the area directed by some of the Twelve and the Seventy. It doesn't cover where all of the Apostles went, but it does mention the area covered by the Evangelist Mark as including not just Egypt, but also the Sinai Peninsula and points East to Persia.

"And after the death of the Apostles there were Guides and Rulers in the Churches; and, whatever the Apostles had committed to them, they continued to teach to the multitude through their entire lives. At their deaths they committed to their disciples whatever they had received from the Apostles; that is, what James had written from Jerusalem, and Simon from the city of Rome, and John from Ephesus, and Mark from Alexandria the Great, and Andrew from Phrygia, and Luke from Macedonia, and Thomas from India. The epistles of an Apostle were received and read in the Churches that were in every place, just as the achievements of their Acts, which Luke wrote, are read. In this way, the Apostles

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<sup>107</sup> Roberts and Donaldson, Apostolic Constitutions VII, iv, 46, Ante-Nicene Fathers, v. 7.

<sup>108</sup> Roberts and Donaldson, ed., "The Teaching of the Apostles", Memoirs of Edessa and Other Ancient Syriac Documents, Ante-Nicene Fathers, Volume 8.

were known, and the prophets, and the Old Testament and the New. One truth was proclaimed in them all: that one Spirit spoke in them all, from one God whom they had all worshipped and had all preached. And the diverse countries received their teaching. Everything, therefore, which had been spoken by our Lord by means of the Apostles, and which the Apostles had delivered to their disciples, was believed and received in every country, by the operation of our Lord, who said to them: 'I am with you, even until the world shall end'. The Guides disputed with the Jews from the books of the prophets, and contending also against the deluded pagans with the terrible mighty-works, which they did in the Name of Christ. All the peoples, even those that dwell in other countries, quietly and silently received the Gospel of Christ. Those who became confessors cried out under their persecution: 'This our persecution today shall plead on our behalf, lest we be punished, for having been formerly persecutors ourselves'. For there were some of them against whom death by the sword was ordered. There were others of them from whom they took away whatsoever they possessed, and let them go. And the more affliction arose against them, the richer and larger did their congregations become; and with gladness in their hearts did they receive death of every kind. And by ordination to the priesthood, which the Apostles themselves had received from our Lord, did their Gospel wing its way rapidly into the four quarters of the world.

1. Jerusalem received the ordination to the priesthood, as did all the country of Palestine, and the parts occupied by the Samaritans, and the parts occupied by the Philistines, and the country of the Arabians, and of Phoenicia, and the people of Caesarea, from James, who was ruler and guide in the church of the Apostles, which was built in Zion.
2. Alexandria the Great, and Thebais, and the whole of Inner Egypt, and all the country of Pelusium (i.e. the Sinai Peninsula), and extending as far as the borders of the Indians, received the Apostles' ordination to the priesthood from Mark the Evangelist, who was ruler and guide there in the church which he had built, in which he also ministered.
3. India, and all the countries belonging to it and round about it, even to the farthest sea, received the Apostles' ordination to the priesthood from Thomas, who was guide and ruler in the church which he had built there, in which he also ministered there.
4. Antioch, and Syria, and Cilicia, and Galatia, even to Pontus, received the Apostles' ordination to the priesthood from Simon Cephas, who himself laid the foundation of the church there, and was priest and ministered there up to the time when he went up from thence to Rome on account of Simon the sorcerer, who was deluding the people of Rome with his sorceries.
5. The city of Rome, and all Italy, and Spain, and Britain, and Gaul, together with all the rest of the countries round about them, received the Apostles' ordination to the priesthood from Simon Cephas, who went up from Antioch; and he was ruler and guide there, in the church which he had built there, and in the places round about it.
6. Ephesus, and Thessalonica, and all Asia, and all the country of the Corinthians, and of all Achaia and the parts round about it, received the Apostles' ordination to the priesthood from John the evangelist, who had leaned upon

the bosom of our Lord; who himself built a church there, and ministered in his office of Guide which he held there.

7. Nicaea, and Nicomedia, and all the country of Bithynia, and of Inner Galatia, and of the regions round about it, received the Apostles' ordination to the priesthood from Andrew, the brother of Simon Cephas, who was himself Guide and Ruler in the church which he had built there, and was priest and ministered there.
8. Byzantium, and all the country of Thrace, and of the parts about it as far as the great river, the boundary which separates from the barbarians, received the Apostles' ordination to the priesthood from Luke the Apostle, who himself built a church there, and ministered there in his office of Ruler and Guide which he held there.
9. Edessa, and all the countries round about it which were on all sides of it, and Zoba, and Arabia, and all the north, and the regions round about it, and the south, and all the regions on the borders of Mesopotamia, received the Apostles' ordination to the priesthood from Addaeus the Apostle, one of the seventy-two Apostles, who himself made disciples there, and built a church there, and was priest and ministered there in his office of Guide which he held there.
10. The whole of Persia, of the Assyrians, and of the Armenians, and of the Medians, and of the countries round about Babylon, the Huzites and the Gelae, as far as the borders of the Indians, and as far as the land of Gog and Magog, and moreover all the countries on all sides, received the Apostles' ordination to the priesthood from Aggaeus, a maker of silks, the disciple of Addaeus the Apostle.

The other remaining companions of the Apostles, moreover went to the distant countries of the barbarians; and they made disciples from place to place and passed on. There they ministered by their preaching; and there occurred their departure out of this world, their disciples after them going on with the work down to the present day, nor was any change or addition made by them in their preaching.

Luke, moreover, the evangelist had such diligence that he wrote the exploits of the Acts of the Apostles, and the ordinances and laws of the ministry of their priesthood, and whither each one of them went. By his diligence did Luke write these things, and more than these; and he placed them in the hand of Priscus and Aquilus, his disciples. They accompanied him up to the day of his death, just as Timothy and Erastus of Lystra, and Menaüs, the first disciples of the Apostles, accompanied Paul until he was taken up to the city of Rome because he had withstood Tertullus the orator (Acts 24:1-9).

There was also a very strong monastic community that developed in that part of the Evangelist Mark's territory in the Sinai Peninsula that consisted of over 60 monasteries, some of which are still active. One of these, St. Catherine's Monastery<sup>109</sup>, which grew from a chapel erected by Helena (the Mother of Emperor Constantine) in the fourth century, is located at the foot of Mt. Sinai at the spot traditionally associated with the burning bush. At the peak of Mt. Sinai overlooking the cliff is a small chapel that was rebuilt from a sixth century church built by

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<sup>109</sup> Biblical Archaeology Review, July/August 1985, pp 27-41.

Justinian. Nearby the chapel is a cave that may be the “cleft of the rock” where God placed Moses. Other caves exist on Mt. Sinai, also. Many of these monasteries were destroyed during the Moslem conquest of the 6th and 7th centuries, but some survived intact; others have been rebuilt and others are currently being excavated. The 20<sup>th</sup> Century witnessed a veritable revolution in the study of these Judean desert monasteries, and an entire issue of an archaeology journal<sup>110</sup> was devoted to this remarkable concentration of monasteries, some built right into the side of a rock cliff. Current excavations indicate that these desert monasteries started in the 3<sup>rd</sup> Century, but much more work needs to be done in the excavations.

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<sup>110</sup> Biblical Archaeology Review, September/October 1995.

**SUNDAY OF THE PARALYTIC**  
***Tabitha and the Samaritans***

**April 25, 2010**  
**4<sup>th</sup> Sunday of Pascha**  
**Revision E**

**GOSPEL: John 5:1-15**

**EPISTLE: Acts 9:32-42**

Today's Gospel lesson used to be used in some Western churches a couple generations ago for the 14<sup>th</sup> Sunday after Trinity (early August). But it is disappearing from use today. Today's Epistle is not used in the West at all.

**GOSPEL LESSON - John 5:1-15**

The pool of Bethesda mentioned in the Gospel lesson was 100 yards from the Temple area near the Sheep Gate and was used for washing the sacrificial lambs before they were slain. This means that quite a few sheep got washed in this pool. One thousand sheep passed through this pool per year just from the morning and evening offering, the Sabbath offering and the first of the month offering (Numbers 28:1-11). At the dedication of the Temple, Solomon offered 120,000 sheep over the course of one week (1 Kings 8:63), and they all were probably washed in this pool of Bethesda. Figuring at least 10,000 sheep per year as an average, the pool of Bethesda may not have been as clean and crystal clear as a Southern California backyard swimming pool. This may explain why the lame and paralyzed were sitting around the pool and not in the pool.

With many sheep passing through the pool of Bethesda, there had to be an organized effort and various captive industries to support it. For example, the shepherds who were keeping watch over their flocks by night (Luke 2:8-21) when Jesus was born were part of this industry. Their flocks were in the queue for the sacrifices in Jerusalem.

The old city of Jerusalem had an extensive and intricate underground water system that is still being explored today. Extensive tunnels and underground springs existed. Some people have "explained" the stirring of the water of the pool as being caused by the hydraulic effects of intermittencies in the underground springs. The close connection of the pool to the Temple and the Presence of God (in the Holy of Holies) makes the angelic explanation in v.4 quite plausible also. One can expect to see a lot of angelic activity in the Presence of God. (Compare John 1:51, Psalm 91:11-12). Some have attributed the "stirring" of the Pool of Bethesda to the Archangel Raphael; for more details, see the Feast Day for Archangels.

Jesus' first remarks to the paralytic of our Gospel lesson are puzzling. The Lord asked him simply, "Do you want to be made whole (or healthy)? The man had been there for 38 years

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waiting for an opportunity to be the first one in the water after the angel stirred it. But every time the stirring occurred, someone else beat him into the water. Since he was laying on a bed as opposed to sitting up, he may have been a quadriplegic as opposed to a paraplegic (i.e. paralyzed neck down versus waist down). In other words, he may not have been able to move at all since he needed “a man to put me into the pool” (v.7).

The Lord did not necessarily ask a dumb question, “Do you want to be made whole?” Some people prefer to be infirm in some way so that others will take care of them, or so that they can avoid their responsibilities. It’s a little like staying home “sick” on the day of a big final exam or on the day of a big confrontation at work.

In verse 6, the Lord asked: “Do you want to be made whole?” In verse 14, He said: “See, you have been made whole. Sin no more lest a worse thing come upon you!” The only time Jesus was recorded as using a similar phrase was in His final words to the woman caught in the act of adultery by the Scribes and Pharisees: “Neither do I condemn you; go and sin no more” (John 8:10-11). We don’t usually think of a poor helpless cripple as being a sinner, but perhaps there was more to it than that. Everything depended on the condition of his heart which the Lord can see and we can’t.

The “worse thing” that Jesus referred to is illustrated in Luke 11:24-26. There, Jesus described what happens when someone is healed and cleaned out. Once cleaned out, if a man does not have the Holy Spirit guarding his dwelling (i.e., his heart and soul) someone stronger than he (i.e., the demons) will overcome him (Luke 11:21-22). When they do, they will bring with them other demons that are stronger and even more evil such that the last state of the man will be worse than the first.

This healing of the paralytic had some major repercussions since it was done on the Sabbath (John 5:1, 9). And not just a weekly Sabbath, but the Pentecost Sabbath (according to John Chrysostom, Homily xxxvi on John 5). For a more detailed discussion of the Sabbath Laws, see the Gospel lesson for the 10<sup>th</sup> Sunday of Luke. The Laws concerning the Sabbath were very strict and had teeth in them. For example:

- Complete rest was required Exodus 23:12; 31:15; 35:2
- One could not even kindle a fire (to cook a meal) Exodus 35:3
- No gathering of wood for the day after the Sabbath was allowed either Numbers 15:32-36
- This was one of the Ten Commandments Exodus 20:9-11,  
Deuteronomy 5:13-15
- The death penalty was prescribed for anyone breaking the Sabbath Exodus 31:15; 35:2

But also tied in to the Sabbath observation was a recalling of the time Israel was being “worked to death” in Egypt (Deuteronomy 5:15). Thus, the Sabbath was made for man, not man for the Sabbath (Mark 2:27). But it was also a holy day (Exodus 16:23; 20:11; 31:15), and a day of gladness (Numbers 10:10). On this day, the daily offering was doubled (four lambs versus two, see Numbers 28:3-15) and the shewbread was set out in the Holy Place (Leviticus 24:8) before the Lord. The Sabbaths were also to be a sign (or omen) between Israel and God “that they might know that I am the Lord who sanctifies them” (Ezekiel 20:12, 20).

In the true spirit of the Sabbath, Jesus did a number of healings on the Sabbath. For example:

- The paralytic (today's Gospel) John 5:9
- A man with a withered hand Matthew 12:10; Mark 3:2; Luke 6:7
- The man born blind (Gospel for 6<sup>th</sup> Sunday of Pascha) John 9:14
- A woman's hunchback (Gospel for 10<sup>th</sup> Sunday of Luke) Luke 13:14
- A man with dropsy Luke 14:3

When the Scribes and Pharisees criticized Jesus for these things -- saying that He was working on the Sabbath -- Jesus replied: that mercy, not sacrifice was to be the spirit of the Sabbath (Matthew 12:7, Hosea 6:6).

Following today's Gospel lesson, Jesus had some discussions with the Jewish leaders where He spoke to them about how He was just doing His Father's work (John 5:17; 19-47). Therefore, the Jewish leaders had two counts against Him: one for breaking the Sabbath and another for making Himself equal with God (John 5:18). Both were capital offenses under Mosaic Law (Leviticus 24:10-23).

There are two paradoxes in all this: First, the Jewish leaders had such heartache with Jesus doing good on the Sabbath, when that was what the Sabbath was for. Second, they accused Jesus of blasphemy for (1) claiming to be equal with God (John 5:18; 10:33; 19:7) and (2) forgiving sins which only God can do (Matthew 9:2-3; Luke 5:20-21). Yet they themselves were the real blasphemers when they claimed Jesus cast out demons by the ruler of the demons (Mark 3:20-30; Matthew 12:24-37).

John Chrysostom (4<sup>th</sup> Century) pointed out some details in this Gospel lesson that are worth considering: sin had been the cause of the Paralytic's condition, for Jesus said, "See, you have been made whole (or healthy). Sin no more, lest a worse thing come upon you" (v.14). Earlier, Jesus began by asking the Paralytic, "Do you want to be made whole (or healthy)?" Yet the Paralytic did not even know Who Jesus was (v.13), never mind believe that He could perform the miracle. On other occasions, Jesus had asked the recipients if they believed He could work the cure (Matthew 9:28). In this case, then, He healed the Paralytic before he exhibited any faith.

Once cured, however, Chrysostom pointed out that the former Paralytic showed evidence of a rekindled faith. For example: (1) He immediately got up and walked without mocking or questioning or doubting. (2) He obeyed Jesus in carrying his bed, even though in violation of the Sabbath Laws. (3) When challenged by the Jewish leaders about breaking the Sabbath Laws, he referred to an obviously higher authority Who told him to do so. (4) In spite of the harassment of the Jewish leaders, the former Paralytic went straight to the Temple, "which is an indication of his great piety. For he departed not into the market places, nor gave himself up to luxury and ease, but remained in the Temple although about to sustain a violent attack and to be harassed by all there."

Chrysostom also pointed out that Jesus concealed Himself after the healing (v.13). Why? "First, that while He was absent, the testimony of the man might be unsuspected, for he who now felt himself whole was a credible witness of the benefit. Second, that He might not cause the fury of the Jews to be yet more inflamed, for the sight of One whom they envy is wont to kindle

not a small spark in malicious persons. On this account He retired, and left the deed by itself to plead its cause among them.” Chrysostom went on to say that envy disables the eyes of the soul and endangers the salvation of him who is possessed by it (Homily xxxvi on John 5).

Delving more deeply into the sin that was the cause of the paralysis, Chrysostom stated that when the soul is diseased, we often feel no pain. “Therefore, God oftentimes punishes the body for the transgressions of the soul, so that by means of the scourging of the inferior part, the better part also may receive some healing.” But yet “this man had not sinned for as many years as he suffered (he was paralyzed for 38 years, v.5), for he had spent a whole lifetime in the length of his punishment. For sins are not judged by time but by the nature of the transgression... Besides this, we may see another thing, that though we have suffered severely for former sins; if we afterwards fall into the same, we shall suffer much more severely. And with good reason; for he who is not made better even by punishment, is afterwards led as insensible and as a despiser to still heavier chastisement. The fault should of itself be sufficient to check and to render more sober the man who once has slipped; but when not even the addition of punishment effects this, he naturally requires more bitter torments.”

”What then’, says one, ‘do all diseases proceed from sin?’ Not all, but most of them; and some proceed from different kinds of loose living since gluttony, intemperance and sloth produce such like sufferings. But the one rule we have to observe is to bear every stroke thankfully, for they are sent because of our sins.”

Chrysostom also pointed out that Jesus did not say, “Behold you have suffered a sufficient punishment for your sins”; but, “Behold you have been made whole. Sin no more...” (v.14). For He declared not to him that he was delivered after suffering the deserved amount of punishment, but that through lovingkindness he was made whole. Also, by saying “sin no more...,” He revealed His Divinity and showed that He knew all the transgressions that had been formerly committed by him (Homily xxxvii on John 5).

Many people today are in the same condition as the paralytic. We are all paralyzed by sin to varying degrees; but the lesson here is that we should never give up hope. The Lord is aware of our own unique situations. If even the hairs of our head are all numbered (Matthew 10:29-31) and not one of them falls without our Father’s knowledge (Luke 21:16-19), certainly He is aware of our infirmities and has allowed them in order to strengthen our faith. For it is by our patience that we possess our souls (Luke 21:19; 1 Corinthians 9:24; Hebrews 12:1).

## *Tabitha and the Samaritans*

April 25, 2010  
4<sup>th</sup> Sunday of Pascha

### **EPISTLE LESSON - Acts 9:32-42**

Today's Epistle lesson is the third in a seven part series describing the development of Christianity after the Resurrection.

In our Epistle lesson, we begin with some of Peter's early missionary journeys. He was not far from home here: Lydda, Joppa, Caesarea, and the Plains of Sharon (see map). But later on Peter traveled extensively: Asia Minor, Italy, Egypt, Africa, even Britain, never staying too long in one place.

The date of the Epistle lesson is sometime between 31 AD (the martyrdom of Stephen in Acts 7) and 44 AD (the famine in the days of Claudius and the martyrdom of James Zebedee in Acts 11:28; 12:2). During the period, the Apostle Paul was converted c. 34 AD (Acts 9:1-18), went to Arabia (Galatians 1:17), returned to Jerusalem three years later c. 37 AD (Galatians 1:18), and finally was sent to Tarsus (Acts 9:30). With Paul the Jewish zealot pacified, "the churches throughout Judea, Galilee and Samaria had peace and were edified" (Acts 9:31). Thus, the setting for the Epistle lesson must be the late 30's AD. For more discussion of these dates, see the Epistle lesson for the 20<sup>th</sup> Sunday after Pentecost (Galatians 1:11-19).

As Peter traveled around, he healed the paralytic Aeneas, telling him to take up his bed and walk, just like the Lord had told the paralytic by the pool of Bethesda in today's Gospel lesson. This happened in Lydda, which is at the Southern end of the 50 mile long Plain of Sharon. Thus the Twelve, the foundation of the Church and ultimately the New Jerusalem (Revelation 21:14), have begun acting in the place of the Lord at the direction of the Head of the Body. Aeneas may have been well known, because people from considerable distances came to see Peter and turned to the Lord (Acts 9:35). Since the Plain of Sharon is located in Samaria, many of these new converts may have been Gentiles, thus setting up the "Gentile Pentecost" of Acts 10 in Caesarea at the Northern end of the Plain of Sharon.

John Chrysostom noted that the circumstances of the healing of Aeneas were similar to that of the Paralytic in the Gospel lesson. Peter did not wait for an expression of faith on the part of Aeneas just as the Lord had done with the Paralytic. And the results were similar: the miracle served as an exhortation to many (v.35). "All who dwelt at Lydda and Sharon...turned to the Lord" (Homily xxi on Acts 9).

In our Epistle lesson, while Peter was in Lydda after healing Aeneas, Tabitha died in Joppa. The disciples in Joppa therefore sent two men to get Peter in nearby Lydda. When Peter arrived, he again imitated His Master in raising Tabitha as he had in healing Aeneas. Peter remembered how the Lord had raised Jairus' daughter: first He had everybody leave the room

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except Jairus, his wife and Peter, James and John. With the tumult, commotion and ridicule outside, Jesus taught Peter to seek the Lord in the quietness of prayer (Mark 5:37-42). In our Epistle lesson, Peter did the same thing (Acts 9:40-41) after putting all the weeping widows out of the room.

This was not the first time Peter had been to Samaria. He and John had been sent to Samaria earlier by James (and the apostles in Jerusalem) in response to the preaching of Deacon Philip in c. 32-33 AD (Acts 8:14). On their return to Jerusalem, Peter and John had preached in many Samaritan villages (Acts 8:25). However, Deacon Philip's preaching took place in the city of Samaria (or Sebaste), which is about 15 miles East of the Plain of Sharon. Peter and John had laid hands on Deacon Philip's converts then such that they received the Holy Spirit in what is sometimes called "The Samaritan Pentecost" (Acts 8:17); today we call this receiving of the Holy Spirit "chrismation." Most of these people were probably "half-Jews" as Samaritans were called.

Peter stayed quite a while in Joppa (Acts 9:43) as a result of the large number of converts from the healing of Aeneas and the raising of Tabitha (9:36-42).

Another prominent resident of Lydda around this time was Joseph of Arimathea. After he and Nicodemus, both members of the Sanhedrin, performed the burial service for Jesus, they became persona-non-grata in Jerusalem and had to leave town. Joseph settled in Lydda and helped start the church there before going to Gaul and Britain. Later bishops of Lydda were Amplias and Zenas who worked with the Apostle Paul (Romans 16:8; Titus 3:13) and who were two of the original members of the Seventy (Luke 10:1-17).

Next week we will pick this up again with Photina (or Photini), the Samaritan woman Jesus met at the well in Sychar, and with the men from Cyprus and Cyrene who started preaching to Gentiles in Antioch.

### **Prayers for the Dead**

Regarding Tabitha, besides comparing her to Jairus' daughter, Chrysostom notes the faith of the disciples in Joppa. Why did they wait until she was dead? Why wasn't Peter solicited earlier? So right-minded were they, they did not think it proper to trouble the disciples about such matters and to take them away from the preaching.

Chrysostom went off on a bit of a tangent in commenting on this. He began with how inappropriate the tears were in Joppa. "If the Emperor were to send and invite some one of us to the palace, would it be right, I ask, to weep and mourn? Angels are present, commissioned from heaven, sent from the King Himself to call their fellow servant (Tabitha); and say, do you weep? Do you not know what a mystery it is that is taking place, how awful, how dread, and worthy of hymns and praise?...Like the spectacle of the Emperor as he comes in state to take possession of the city is the soul having left the body and departing in company with angels. Think what the soul must then be! In what amazement, what wonder, what delight! Why do you mourn?"

On the other hand, given "a man who has lost all the labor of a whole life: not one day has he lived for himself, but only to luxury, to debauchery, to covetousness, to sin, to the devil. Shall we not bewail this man? Shall we not try to snatch him from his perils? For it is, yes, it is

possible, if we will, to mitigate his punishment, if we make continual prayers for him; if for him we give alms. Has he no alms-deeds of his own to exhibit? Let him have at least those of his kindred, which are done for him. The more sins he has to answer for, the greater need he has of alms; not only for this reason, but because the alms have not the same virtue now, but far less. For it is not all the same to have done it himself, and to have another do it for him. Even this pertains to the mercy of God: widows (like the widows in Joppa) standing around and weeping know how to rescue, not indeed from the present death, but from that which is to come. Many have profited even by the alms done by others on their behalf (Ibid).

Something we often overlook is Jesus reply to the Sadducees when they tested Him regarding the Resurrection. Quoting a very much used passage from the Old Testament, “I am the God of Abraham, the God of Isaac, and the God of Jacob”, He said, God is not the God of the dead, but of the living” (Matthew 22:32). When He said this, Abraham, Isaac and Jacob had been “dead” c. 1800 years. If they’re not really “dead”, but living somewhere, it behooves us to get in touch with the abode where they are and see things from their point of view.

# Map of the Plain of Sharon

The Plain of Sharon is located West of Samaria along the coast of the Mediterranean.

