

Christ is Risen! Indeed He is Risen!



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April 25, Bright Friday this year, is the feast day of the Holy Apostle and Evangelist Mark.

Mark's Gospel is generally considered to be the first one written. It is also thought to be the closest and most accurate record of the "oral Gospel"—the preaching of the apostles. The second-century writer Papias called Mark "the interpreter of Peter."

Mark offers many details that reflect a familiarity with the eyewitness experiences of Peter and the other apostles. For example, in the account of Jesus' stilling of the storm, only Mark notes that he was asleep "on the cushions" in the stern of the boat (4:38).

Similarly, in his first chapter Mark tells about a morning when Jesus went out alone to pray. Simon and the others "pursue" Him, and when they find Him they say, "Everyone is searching for you" (1:37). The excited, urgent tone seems to reflect the experience of someone who was there. Luke's account of the same event (4: 42-44) is less lively, and reads like a story passed on through many hearers, rather than a person's account of an event he took part in or witnessed.

Mark, Matthew and Luke all relate the story of Christ bringing a child into the group of disciples and telling them that "whoever does not receive the Kingdom of God like a child shall not enter it" as both Mark (10: 15) and Luke (18: 17) have it. But only Mark notes that Jesus, after putting the child in the midst of them, also takes the child in His arms. It's the kind of gesture that would have stayed in the memory of someone who had seen it, and it fits with Mark's unique use of the word "indignant" to describe Jesus' telling the disciples to let the children come to Him, and not to hinder them (10:14).

Mark's Gospel is a fast-moving narrative in which events follow each other quickly. In 1: 10 he writes of Jesus' baptism that "when He came up out of the water, immediately He saw the heavens opened and the Spirit descending upon Him like a dove." The word "immediately" occurs five times in the next thirteen verses.

Action is Mark's byword. He writes that when Jesus' mother and brothers came to see Him, "they sent to Him and called Him" (3: 31b). In Luke's version the family members are more passive; somebody simply tells Jesus, "Your mother and brothers are standing outside, desiring to see you" (8:20). Though all three Gospels describe the healing of a blind man (or, in Matthew, two blind men), Mark alone provides the man's name, Bartimaeus. Only Mark describes his energetic response to the Lord's call: "...throwing off his mantle, he sprang up and came to Jesus" (10: 50).

Troparion - Tone 4

From your childhood the light of truth enlightened you, O Mark,
and you loved the labor of Christ the Savior.
Therefore, you followed Peter with zeal
and served Paul well as a fellow laborer,
and you enlighten the world with your holy Gospel.

The last verse of Mark's Gospel, like the rest of it, is about action. He writes that the apostles "went forth and preached everywhere" (16: 20a). It's a good reminder that we, too, can go forth and preach about the Resurrection we have just celebrated. And we should probably start immediately.