

Dear all

Today is my day... well, the feast of St Mark. Richard Coles has written a piece from his usual rather unusual perspective:



It is the Feast of St Mark the Evangelist. scholars have argued for centuries about which Mark, or if it was even a Mark, who wrote the Gospel which bears his name, but most (nowadays) agree it was the first and dates to around 75CE. He is believed to have been martyred in Alexandria, his home community, by being dragged through the streets by a halter. In 828, during the Abbasid Caliphate, his relics were stolen from there by two Venetian merchants (see marvellous illustration by Tintoretto), wrapped in pork and cabbage leaves, to deter Muslim customs inspectors, and smuggled to the Christian city and state of La Serenissima where they were kept by the doge until the building of the Basilica San Marco when St Mark displaced St Theodore Stratelates as patron. Unfortunately they lost the relics before transfer, but his arm appeared mysteriously out of a pillar and pointed to the exact spot where the rest of him lay.

In comments, Richard pointed out that the word for transferring a saint's remains is 'translation', to which one witty commentator suggested "Lost in translation"!

There is a tradition that Mark was the young man who fled naked at the arrest of Jesus (Mk 14: 51-52), and that perhaps the Last Supper was held at his parents' house.

It is often held that Mark was the John Mark who accompanied Paul (Acts 12:25 – 13:13). Acts 13:13 just says that they parted company; however it appears that the parting was not on good terms, as Paul refuses to have him back later (Acts 15:36-39), feeling he deserted the cause. Paul's erstwhile and faithful companion Barnabas (whose name means 'son of encouragement' or 'son of consolation') instead picks him up, and they go on a mission to Cyprus. Barnabas and Mark are described as cousins (Col 4:10).

Mark's Gospel is considered by most scholars as the first written, and as one of the source documents for the other two synoptic ('same eye' i.e. from the same viewpoint) gospels, Matthew and Luke.

The symbol of the Evangelist Mark has traditionally been the lion, and it has been pointed out that the gospel is very lion-like. Jesus 'leaps in' immediately at the beginning, with no preamble (there are no birth stories); and the stories leap breathlessly from one to another ("then... next... and then...").

It is unique among the gospels in, apparently, having no proper ending. Our bibles give us 2 alternative endings, but both are later additions – seemingly added to round them off properly. The original ends at 16:8, seemingly half-way through a sentence: *So they went out and fled from the tomb, for terror and amazement had seized them; and they said nothing to anyone, for they were afraid.* In Greek, this is in effect *and they said nothing to anyone, for they were afraid of...* It is a fascinating place to stop. What were

they afraid of? They had been told Jesus has been raised, but have not yet met with Him. We are left with a massive “so what now...?”

Simon Peter is traditionally believed to be the apostolic source of the gospel.

As the shortest gospel, it is easy to read in one go – a great way to get an overview of the life of Jesus. Something helpful, perhaps, for lockdown. Or you may like to listen (again?) to David Suchet reading the whole gospel (over 2 hours long). Here is the link again:

<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=JjOgcMQXvSc>

JS Bach never wrote a St Mark's Passion (unlike St Matthew or St John), however one has been put together from various other pieces he wrote.

Here is a version by Ton Koopman:

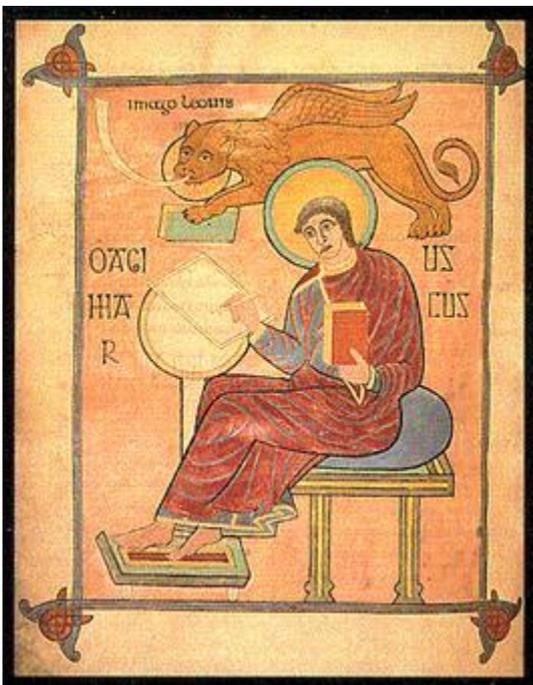
<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=mUeLlzD6ezw>

and here one reconstructed by Dr Simon Heighes:

<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=P-tEGcN6QYo>

If you want a late-Romantic English take, here is St Mark's Passion by Charles Wood.

<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=uHE4qS-LDmA>



A Sonnet for St Mark by Malcolm Guite

A wingèd lion, swift, immediate
Mark is the gospel of the sudden shift
From first to last, from grand to intimate,
From strength to weakness, and from debt to gift,
From a wide desert's haunted emptiness
To a close city's fervid atmosphere,
From a voice crying in the wilderness
To angels in an empty sepulchre.
And Christ makes the most sudden shift of all;
From swift action as a strong Messiah
Casting the very demons back to hell
To slow pain, and death as a pariah.
We see our Saviour's life and death unmade
And flee his tomb dumbfounded and afraid.

Stay safe

Blessings and love

Mark