

# Next year's Lectionary – Gospel of Mark

The new lectionary year begins on the First Sunday of Advent. For the next year our readings will principally come from the Gospel of Mark. This article is to give you some background information and some of the major themes of this gospel.

Mark's gospel is the shortest and the oldest of the four gospels. Church tradition is that it was written by John Mark, who was a companion of Paul and Barnabas on their first missionary journey. He was also closely



associated with Peter and the traditional view is that Mark wrote his gospel using Peter's eyewitness account as his source. It was written somewhere between 65 and 75 AD in Rome. This was during the time of the first persecution of Christians by Nero and the escalating violence between Rome and Israel which led to the destruction of the temple in Jerusalem. It was probably written for a gentile audience of believers as it often explains Jewish customs and translates

Aramaic words.

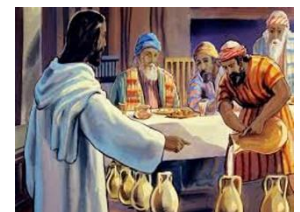
Mark's gospel is not like a modern biography but is similar to ancient biographies which tended not to dwell on a person's early years but start from the point where the person arrives on the public scene. In Mark's case there is no story of the nativity but his account starts from Jesus's baptism by John the Baptist. Another similarity to ancient biographies is that they concentrate on a person's death as a way of illustrating their life. Some people have often described this gospel as "a passion narrative with an extended introduction". Certainly Mark tells the story of Jesus's life and death through the lens of the events of Easter.



The gospel has long been associated with a lion. This is because Mark begins his gospel with a reference to Isaiah, which made the Jewish people think of a lion roaring in the desert. The pace of writing in Mark's gospel can also be described as being like a bounding lion. This is seen in the way he frequently uses the Greek word "euthus" typically translated as "immediately". He also doesn't focus on

dialogue or Jesus' teaching nearly as much as he focuses on Christ's actions."

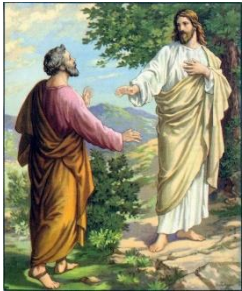
It is Jesus who is important and other people come into the gospel to illustrate something about him. Mark also focuses on the terms "power" and "authority" to show that, as he states in the very first verse, Jesus was the Son of God. Throughout his gospel, Mark focuses on Christ's power over demons, illness, nature, and even death. More than half the gospel is devoted to giving an account of the remarkable deeds that Jesus performed and describes more miracles than any of the other gospels.



Mark follows an established literary form which can be describe as a sandwich when he wants to develop a theme. He breaks up a story and inserts a second, seemingly unrelated, story into the middle of it or bookends two stories on the same theme. The middle part nearly always provides the key to the theological purpose of the sandwich.

# The Gospel of Mark - continued

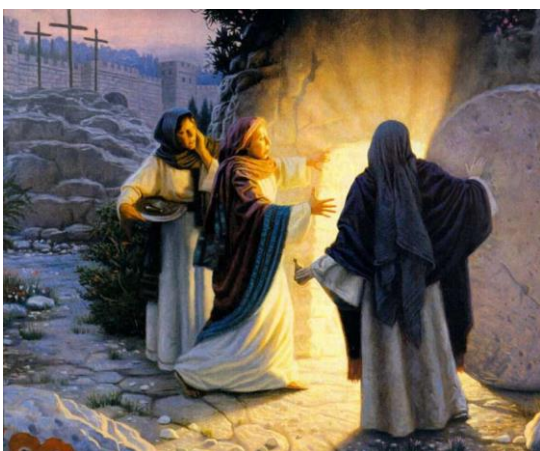
There are many instances in the Mark's gospel where only demons, women and other socially marginal characters, not the disciples, seem to understand who Jesus really is, and Jesus warns them to remain silent. This is referred to as the messianic secret. There is deliberate irony when the figure who recognises his true identity is a Roman soldier at the crucifixion. One explanation is that Mark wants to tell his readers that it is Jesus' desire that we might come to know him personally. Other people can tell us about Christ but no one can open our hearts to him for us. It gives the message that belief in Christ should be a personal decision.



The structure of Mark's Gospel provides the key to author's purpose. The first half of the gospel concerns the identity of Jesus as the Messiah and Son of God. The second half concerns the mission of Jesus where everything points to the need for Christ to suffer, die and be resurrected in order to accomplish this. Peter's confession, chapter 8:27–30, that Jesus is the Messiah thus forms a pivotal point.

Outline of Mark's gospel:

- Prologue: Events preceding the ministry of Jesus, 1:1-13
- Proclamation of the kingdom in Galilee 1:14-7:23
- The ministry outside Galilee, 7:24-8:26
- Peter's Confession 8:27-30
- The journey to Jerusalem, 8:31-10:52
- The ministry in Jerusalem, 11:1-13:37
- The death of Christ, 14:1-15:47
- The resurrection, 16:1-8
- Epilogue: the disputed ending as it is not found in the earliest manuscripts, 16:9-20



In Mark's original ending there are no appearances of Jesus following the visit of the women on Easter morning to the empty tomb. There are no resurrection stories but it can be assumed that the readers knew this as Jesus predicts his suffering and resurrection three times on the way to Jerusalem. There has always be speculation as to why Mark leaves the women in bewilderment, fear and silence. Maybe this ending made later Christians feel uncomfortable and so they felt the need to add the epilogue. But maybe this was how Mark wanted to end it as to him his gospel story was not the end, but the beginning as he states in his opening sentence. Maybe he wants

to put us in the same place as the women, wondering what do, whether to tell or just to run?

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