

St. Mark the Apostle

The founder of the Coptic Church

The theme for MIX this year is “**Going back to the roots**”. We will cover this theme with our lessons that highlight different perspectives of what that means. There is no better start for such a theme than going back to the founder of our beloved Church – St. Mark.

- ❖ The Coptic Church is well known for its apostolicity and founder St. Mark, who is one of the four evangelists and one of Christ’s apostles. Not only is he regarded as the **first patriarch** but also the **first of a stream of Egyptian Martyrs**.
- ❖ The apostolicity of the church is not kept only by its founder but by the persistence of the church and congregation to observe the faith received by St. Mark, his successors and the Holy fathers. St Athanasius expressed this when he said:

“Orthodoxy is what Christ taught, the Apostles preached, and the Fathers kept.”

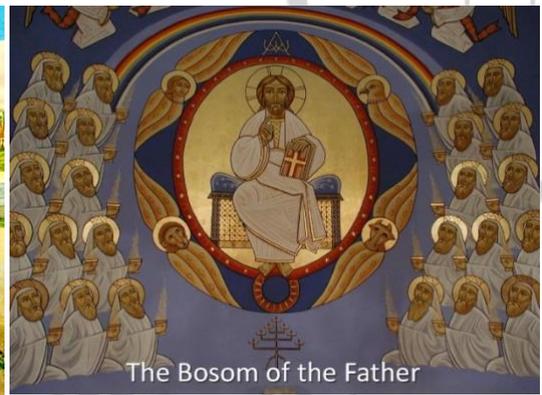
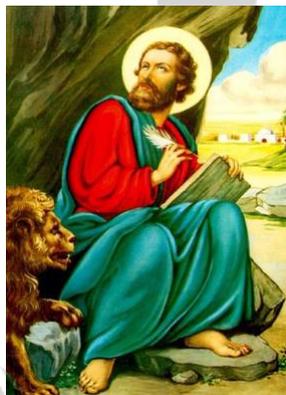
- ❖ St. Mark’s preaching in Egypt fulfills the prophecies from the Old Testament such as the one from Isiah that the Lord will become known to Egypt:

"In that day shall there be an altar to the Lord in the midst of the land of Egypt, and a pillar at the border thereof to the Lord. (Isaiah 19:19)

"Whom the Lord of hosts shall bless, saying, Blessed be Egypt my people"(Isaiah 19:25)

- ❖ Although St. Mark only stayed in Egypt for a **few years** (61-68 A.D), he was a broad-minded apostle, and his ministry was quite productive. With great enthusiasm, he was able to convert many people to Christianity.

Imagine that our strong standing Church that presents daily martyrs was the result of an honest man’s work for few years!



Who is St. Mark

- St. Mark (John Mark) was an African native of Jewish parents from the tribe of Levites.
- His family lived in Cyrenaica but moved to Jerusalem after being attacked by barbarians and lost their property.
- He was well-taught and spoke fluent Greek, Latin and Hebrew.
- He was related to St. Peter through his father (father's cousin) as well as St. Barnabas (his cousin).
- Mary, his mother, played a massive role in the early church. Her house became the first church in the world where the last supper was held. The Lord also appeared to his disciples in that very room after his resurrection.

- His Jewish name, "John", means the **kindness of God**
- His father's name was Aristopolus
- His mother's name was Mary

St. Mark's Call to Christ

- St. Mark was not one of the 12 disciples. However, Christ chose him to be one of the 70 apostles.
- He was also the man mentioned in the Gospels when the disciples went to prepare a place for the Passover preparation.

"And He sent out two of His disciples and said to them, "Go into the city, and a man will meet you carrying a pitcher of water; follow him. ¹⁴ Wherever he goes in, say to the master of the house, 'The Teacher says, "Where is the guest room in which I may eat the Passover with My disciples?"' (Mark 14: 13-14)

- The Coptic Church insists on calling St. Mark "**Theorimos**" meaning Beholder of God, to combat allegations that state he never accompanied Christ.

St. Mark's Symbols

- St. Mark is often associated with the symbol of a **Lion**.
- In **Revelations 4:7**. The lion is one of the four living creatures described in the book as a place around the throne of the Almighty and they are chosen as symbols of the four evangelists.
- St Mark is symbolized as a Lion for a couple of reasons:
 - The lion, that is well-known as symbol of power, pride, magnificence, nobility and courage was associated to Mark because his gospel emphasized the Resurrection power, the majesty and the regality of Christ.
 - His Gospel began describing John the Baptist as a Lion roaring in the desert.
 - The famous story of him and his father almost being killed by a lion, related by **Severus Ebn-El-Mokafa** where the lions fell down dead and St. Mark's father became Christian

St. Mark's early ministry

Before coming to Egypt, St. Mark was involved in multiple trips with the apostles

St. Mark accompanied St. Peter in his journey to Jerusalem and Judea

He then accompanied St. Paul and St. Barnabas on their first mission trip to Antioch, Cyprus and Asia Minor

St. Mark and St. Barnabas separated from St. Paul on their second mission trip and went to Cyprus. There, St. Barnabas departed and was buried by St. Mark

St. Mark then preached with St. Paul in Colosse and Rome.

He then went to Africa, where his missionary work is mainly evident.

Trip to Egypt and the start of the Coptic Church

- Mark travelled to Egypt, through the Oasis, the desert of Libya, Upper Egypt, and then entered **Alexandria** through the eastern gate in 61 A.D.
- While travelling, the strap of St. Mark's sandals broke so he went to a cobbler to fix it. The cobbler, named **Anianos**, pierced his finger with the needle and cried out, "O One God." St. Mark healed his hand and preached to him about Christ.
- Anianos became the first believer in Egypt and later the first bishop in Egypt
- Anianos took St. Mark to his home after their interaction. He and his family were then baptized by St. Mark and many others followed
- St. Mark was the first Pope of Alexandria

Early Christianity in Egypt

- Due to the rapid spread of Christianity in Egypt, the pagans became furious and sought out St. Mark throughout Alexandria.
- Knowing that his life was in danger, he ordained Anianos Bishop as well as three priests and seven deacons to look after the congregation
- He then left Egypt and travelled to different places to continue his mission.
 - These places included: Berce and Rome, and Pentapolis
 - Upon returning to Alexandria, St. Mark found that the Christians in Egypt had multiplied and was able to build a considerable church in the suburban district of **Baucalis, Alexandria.**

Martyrdom of St. Mark

- In the year 68 A.D., the feast of the Resurrection fell on the same day as Serapis' feast - a Greek-Egyptian Pagan God.
- This infuriated the pagan worshipers. To retaliate, they tied and dragged St. Mark through the streets of Alexandria, yelling, "The ox must be led to Baucalis"

What is Baucalis?

Baucalis is a very rocky area where the pagans go to feed their oxen that they will later sacrifice.



- After dragging St. Mark through this area, they returned him to the prison, where an angel and the Lord Jesus Christ appeared and comforted him saying "Now your hour has come O Mark, the good minister, to receive your recompense. Be encouraged, for your name has been written in the book of life"
- The next day he was taken and dragged through the streets of Alexandria for the procession of the pagan God
- The believers took his body secretly to bury it under an altar he built in Baucalis.
- We celebrate his martyrdom on **May 8th** according to the Gregorian calendar which falls on **30 Baramouda** in the Coptic calendar
- The body of St. Mark was then taken to Venice by Italian merchants.
- On June 24, 1968, the relics of St Mark was returned to **Pope Kyrillos the 6th** by Pope Paul VI and we celebrate this feast on the **17th of Paona**

The moment of handing over the holy relics, after 11 centuries, during which the body of St. Mark was kept in the city of Venice, in Italy, was a solemn joyful moment!

Pope Kyrillos placed the relics in the old St. Mark Cathedral in El-Azbakiah (on top of its

main altar named after St Mark) till the third day of its arrival, and then it was moved to the new St. Mark Cathedral.



Martyrdom of St. Mark in Baucalis

St. Mark's impact

- St. Mark started many initiatives, such as establishing the **Theological School of Alexandria** to stand against the pagans and combat their ideas. This theological school of Alexandria brought out many church fathers including:
 - Clement of Alexandria
 - Didymus
 - Origen the Great
- St. Mark designated **St. Justus** to manage the school, who later became the sixth Bishop of Alexandria
- This school became not only an essential institute of religious learning but also in other fields such as:
 - Christian philosophy
 - Greek & Roman literature
 - Science
 - Arts
 - Music
- Students who were blind were also able to attend the theological school of Alexandria and were taught different techniques to read and write, **15 centuries before braille was invented.**
- St. Mark also wrote the liturgy of the holy Eucharist, which was later modified by St. Cyril and known by all Coptic Christians today as the **Divine Liturgy of St. Cyril.**

- He wrote it in Greek and then it was translated into Coptic

Martyrdom of Coptic Christians

- Due to the success of the Coptic Church in Alexandria, the Roman emperors focused their prosecution efforts there.
- They were surprised by the apparent zeal of the Coptic people, who were eager to receive the crown of martyrdom.
- The Copts created their own calendar in the **year 284 A.D.** when Emperor Diocletian began his reign.

They called the calendar “Anno Martyri” (Year of the Martyrs).

- During the reign of Diocletian, an estimated 1 million Copts were martyred.
- Diocletian also went to the extent of burning churches and any copy of the bible that could be found.

The Present Coptic Church:

There is hardly any prayer in the church that does not mention St. Mark’s name, glorifying him or asking for his intercession and blessing. Some examples can be found below:

❖ **The prayer for blessing**

- His name is mentioned after the Matin Raising of Incense, at the end of the Eucharist, after partaking, and at the end of every prayer or gathering.
- We begin, by asking our Lady the Mother of God The pure Mary, then we ask for the blessing of St. Mark, saying " The beholder of God, the Evangelist, St. Mark, the Saint and Apostle"

❖ **The Ministers’ Absolution**

- "From The Holy Trinity, the church, the twelve Apostles and from the Beholder of God St. Mark the Apostle, the Saint and Martyr.

❖ **Other prayers in the liturgy**

- **Praxis:** “Peace be with you O martyr, peace for the Evangelist, peace for the apostle and peace for the Beholder of God.”
- **The Commemoration of Saints** " The beholder of God, the Evangelist, Mark the apostle, the saint and the martyr

❖ **In the Doxology**

In the praise for midnight: "Ask God O the beholder of God the evangelist Mark for forgiveness of our sins."