

JOHN MARK

There is a young teenager in the drama tonight whose name is John Mark. He is the son of the widow who had a house with a large upper room, where Jesus ate his last passover. This was a familiar house to the disciples, because when Peter was released from prison, the Book of Acts (12:12) says that he went for refuge to the house of John Mark's mother.

John Mark's name was a combination of the Jewish *Yohanan*, or John, with the Roman *Marcus*, or Mark. And this shows that he was likely from an upper-class family that had grown wealthy under Roman rule. We know that the family had at least one slave, the man who was seen carrying a water jar to the Upper Room.

Also, Mark was related to another man of wealth. His cousin Barnabas, who came from Cyprus, had property that he was able to sell and add to the church treasury. Paul mentioned "*Mark, the cousin of Barnabas*" in Colossians 4:10, and the sale of property was described in Acts 4:36-37.

If Mark was in or near the Upper Room, then he was an eyewitness of Jesus. This meant he had a place of status in the early church. Because Paul had not seen Jesus, he was first excluded as a true apostle, but he argued that he had also seen the Lord, if only in a vision on the road to Damascus.

When Jesus left the Upper Room to go out to the Mount of Olives, he was followed by a young man wrapped in a bed sheet. When the Roman soldiers grabbed at the youth, they pulled away his sheet and he ran off naked. Only Mark's Gospel gave this detail (14:51-52), so it is likely that he was writing about himself. Also, this Gospel shows familiarity with the scene of the Last Supper that would make it the testimony of an eyewitness.

Mark ran away again on another occasion, when he deserted Paul and his cousin Barnabas on their first missionary journey. Why did he leave? Many reasons have been given, but it just may be that he was a rich kid not used to any hardships or difficulties in life.

We know that Paul disliked Mark very much after he dropped out of the mission trip. But somehow these two were reconciled, because Paul listed Mark as one of his "fellow workers" in the Letter to Philemon (v. 24).

Although Matthew's Gospel comes before that of Mark, most Bible scholars now believe that Mark was really the first to put down the story of Jesus into words. There is an ancient listing of New Testament books called the Muratorian Canon that implies that Peter may have helped Mark write his Gospel by filling in details about events at which "he was present." The early church historian, Eusebius, said that Mark was "the

companion of Peter.” And Peter went so far as to call Mark “*my son*” in 1 Peter 5:13. Eusebius also wrote that Mark was sent to Egypt and that he established churches in the city of Alexandria.

Jerome tells us that Mark was buried in Alexandria. In the year 828, sea-faring merchants from Venice stole the body of Mark from Alexandria and carried it back to Italy. There, Venice entombed the body of Mark in a magnificent new cathedral built especially for her new patron saint. And this is the famous San Marco Basilica that is the heart of the city and which is seen by all visitors to that city today. In the religious calendar of the Roman Catholic Church, every April 25th is set aside as “Saint Mark’s Day.”

So, in the life of John Mark, we start with a timid youth who first saw Jesus from a distance, but who went on to become a true champion of the Faith.