

MARK

FAITH NOT FEAR

STUDY GUIDE

SAMPLE



LECTIO™

UNVEILING SCRIPTURE AND TRADITION

TIM GRAY

Nihil Obstat: Currently under review.
Imprimatur:

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Formed.org

Printed in the United States of America

ISBN ISBN 978-1-7321146-4-7

SESSION 1

SAINT MARK THE EVANGELIST



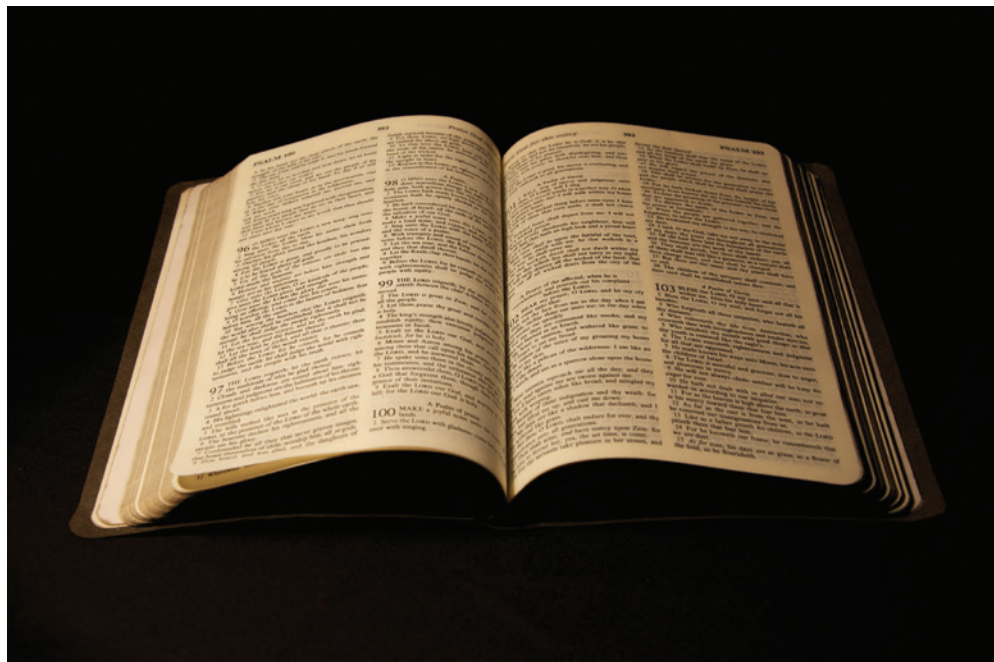
OPENING PRAYER

O God, who raised up Saint Mark, your Evangelist, and endowed him with the grace to preach the Gospel, grant, we pray, that we may so profit from his teaching as to follow faithfully in the footsteps of Christ, who lives and reigns with you in the unity of the Holy Spirit, one God, for ever and ever.
Amen.

—Collect, Feast of Saint Mark

INTRODUCTION

In this session, Dr. Gray will introduce the Gospel of Mark. In Saint Mark's writing, we will find a Gospel focused to inspire Christian living. And in Saint Mark himself, we will find a well-prepared servant of the Word with a special connection to Saint Peter, the first pope.



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CONNECT

It's all too easy to judge a book by its cover—to mistakenly set a person aside as uneducated or unrefined, only to later discover hidden depths. Has this ever happened to you? Can you think of examples from movies, history, literature, or Scripture where this takes place?

Are there people you have met who have an amazing ability to just get things done? What were they able to accomplish?

When have you learned about the same topic from several different sources? How did those additional sources change, or deepen, your initial understanding?



VIDEO

Watch the video segment. Use the outline below to follow along and take notes.

- I. Three-year liturgical cycle of Scripture readings
 - A. Year A (Matthew), Year B (Mark/John), Year C (Luke)
 - B. Distinctive mark/emphasis of the different Gospels
 - C. Mark's special focus
- II. Tradition regarding authorship and location of Gospel
 - A. John Mark with Peter in Rome
 - 1. Papias of Hierapolis, Apostolic Father who describes Mark as the interpreter of Peter
 - 2. "Mark, my son" (1 Peter 5:13)
 - 3. House of "Mary, mother of John, whose other name was Mark" (Acts 12:12)
 - 4. Cousin of Barnabas, a Levite (Colossians 4:10; Acts 4:36)

B. Wealthy, priestly family = good education
and skills to be a translator

1. "Very useful" (2 Timothy 4:11)
2. Well connected (Acts 12:25)
3. Helps Paul on first missionary journey
(Acts 13:4–13)

C. Mark is Peter's translator in Rome; his
Gospel has the apostolic authority of Peter

III. Gospel of Peter

A. Tradition

B. Textual evidence

1. Roman/Latin terms (e.g., Roman watches)
2. Eyewitness flavor, details (e.g., names
of Simon of Cyrene's sons)
3. Emphasis on the Passion

DISCUSS

1. What was something that stood out or was new for you in the teaching?

2. What are advantages of having multiple Gospels? What does Mark's Gospel offer in particular?

3. What does Mark's focus on the Passion suggest about Mark's audience?

4. Have you ever shared Saint Augustine's opinion of Mark's Gospel as an abbreviated version of Matthew's Gospel? Have you been inclined to set aside the Gospel of Mark as too simplistic? What is your goal in studying this Gospel now?

Why a three-year cycle of readings?

In *Sacrosanctum Concilium*, the *Constitution on the Sacred Liturgy*, the Second Vatican Council called for an increase in the number of Scripture readings used at Mass:

"The treasures of the Bible are to be opened up more lavishly, so that richer fare may be provided for the faithful at the table of God's word. In this way a more representative portion of the Holy Scriptures will be read to the people in the course of a prescribed number of years."

—*Sacrosanctum Concilium*, 51

MEMORY VERSE

"But you shall receive power when the Holy Spirit has come upon you; and you shall be my witnesses in Jerusalem and in all Judea and Samaria and to the end of the earth."

—Acts 1:8



CLOSING PRAYER

Heavenly Father,
through the intercession of your evangelist, Saint Mark,
may we be brought to a deep love for your Son, Jesus,
and an ardent desire to serve him.
May the Holy Spirit inspire in us the same confidence
and humility that allowed Saint Mark to boldly proclaim the Gospel.
May we conform our lives to Christ's life,
embracing the Cross as he did,
and so come with joy to new life in your presence.
We ask this through Jesus Christ, Our Lord.
Amen.



Saint Mark by Reni.

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FOR FURTHER READING

Richard B. Hays, *Reading Backwards: Figural Christology and the Fourfold Gospel Witness* (Baylor University Press: 2016)

Richard B. Hays, *Echoes of Scripture in the Gospels* (Baylor University Press: 2017)

Francis J. Moloney, *The Gospel of Mark: A Commentary* (Baker Academic: 2012)

COMMIT—DAY 1

MARK THE EVANGELIST



An author is a little like a camera, giving us a snapshot of the world. But, as anyone who has tried to take a photo knows, there is more involved than simply pointing and shooting the camera. Many amateur photographers have been frustrated when a beautiful vista ends up dull and lifeless in their photos. Focus, lighting, angle, aperture, shutter speed, lens type—all these things are needed to make the beauty beheld by the human eye appear beautifully on film. It's also true that the same subject may look very different, depending on who takes the photo, even if multiple photos are worthy images.

As we set out to study the Gospel of Mark, it is important to ask, “Who is Saint Mark?” What sort of camera is he, and what are the settings he has chosen to use? Answering such questions will help us to understand his writing better and help us to perceive the beauty that he is presenting in his Gospel.

Mark or John Mark?

Acts 12:12 and 12:25 both refer to “John whose other name was Mark.” This special mention helps to distinguish him from the Apostle John, thereby avoiding confusion.

In his Letter to the Colossians, Saint Paul notes that Saint Mark is a cousin of Saint Barnabas (see Colossians 4:10). And in the Acts of the Apostles we learn that Barnabas is a Levite; that is, he is a descendent from the tribe of Levi (see Acts 4:36). As a result, we can deduce that Mark is also a Levite.

Look up the following Scriptures. Who are the Levites? Where and how do the Levites serve?

Numbers 1:48–53 _____

1 Chronicles 16:1–7 _____

Nehemiah 8:1–8 _____

The Levites are the priestly tribe. They had a special role to assist with the Tabernacle and, when the Temple was built, at the Temple. The Levites are also teachers of the people, explaining clearly God's Law so that all can understand. In order to prepare for their mission to serve at the Temple and to teach the people, the Levites would receive a good education. Given that God's people are people of the Book—the written Word of God in the Torah—reading and writing would be central to the education of the Levites.

When Saint Peter is miraculously freed from prison (see Acts 12), he heads to the house of Mark's mother. It's a place where many people are gathered in prayer for Peter's deliverance from imprisonment. A servant attends to Peter's knock at the door. The details of this story tell us several important things about Mark's family. The family is wealthy: they possess a house large enough to host the members of the Church, and they have a servant to answer the door. They are also committed members of the Church. In a time of persecution (Herod Agrippa has just had Saint James killed and Peter imprisoned, with the intention to kill him soon), their home is made available.

Growing up in this devout, wealthy, Levitical home, Mark would have received a good education, likely one with training in several languages. While such training is initially meant for Mark's service in the Old Covenant Temple, Mark's talents and gifts instead serve the New Covenant Gospel of Jesus Christ, first by assisting Paul, and later by assisting and then writing for Peter.

The events of Peter's arrest take place about the time that Paul and Barnabas come to Jerusalem to bring money for famine relief (see Acts 11:27–12:3). And once the persecution dies down, they return to Antioch, taking Mark with them. Look up Acts 11:20–26; 12:25; and 2 Timothy 4:11. What are Paul and Barnabas taking Mark to do? What does the inclusion of Mark say about him?

After assisting Barnabas and Paul on their first missionary journey, Mark and Barnabas return to Cyprus to minister to the Christian community there (see Acts 15:39). We don't know exactly when, but at some point, Mark joins Peter on his travels and ends up in the capital city of the empire assisting the first pope. Writing from Rome, Peter refers to his companion, saying, "my son Mark" (see 1 Peter 5:13). What significance do you find in Peter calling Mark "My son"? How do you imagine Mark must have treated Peter, for Peter to refer to Mark as his son?



Look up John 5:17–20. What does this passage add to the notion of being a son?

The Church honors Mark as a saint. His feast day is April 25. Based on what you have been studying, what saintly virtues and acts do you see in Mark? Are there areas in your own life in which you feel the need of a friend who has these virtues? Write these down, and ask Saint Mark to assist you with them. Saint Mark, pray for us!

Saint Mark the Evangelist © Zvonimir Atletic/shutterstock.com

COMMIT—DAY 2

CASTING OUT AN UNCLEAN SPIRIT



Have you ever wondered why there are four Gospels? Taking a photograph provides a good analogy to answer this question. The same object, event, or landscape can be portrayed in different aspects. Both photos shown here give a view of Yosemite Valley; both are beautiful, yet both are noticeably different. The Gospels are like four beautiful photographs of the Good News of Jesus Christ.



Yosemite National Park Valley from Tunnel View © f11photo/shutterstock.com



Yosemite National Park Tunnel View, sunset © Dan Sedran/shutterstock.com

Similarly, imagine that you have just been selected for a major award. And now four of your friends or family members are asked to give a short biographical introduction ahead of your reception of the award. What would they say? How would the biographies differ from one another? Where would they begin? What elements of your life might they emphasize, and what things would they leave out? How would the audience affect their descriptions or what they choose to include? While each of the four Gospel writers was inspired by the Holy Spirit to tell the story of Jesus Christ and the key events of his life and ministry, each left their distinctive mark on the narrative they told.

The Old Testament gives numerous descriptions of the Messiah. Sometimes these even appear contradictory. For example, in Isaiah's last prophecy about the Suffering Servant, the servant is described as both "exalted and lifted up" (Isaiah 52:13) and "despised and rejected" (Isaiah 53:3). The gospel writers were aware of the challenges in communicating truths such as this that, while seeming contradictory at first, are both fulfilled in Jesus Christ.

Look up John 21:25–26. Does Saint John think it would be an easy thing to chronicle everything Jesus did?

Those who chronicle the life of Christ have much to say. The problem is not coming up with material, but with presenting it effectively. The purpose is not simply to unload information, but to proclaim Jesus Christ as Messiah and Savior, and in a way that also nurtures and builds up his disciples.

"The intellectual effort of the early church was at the service of a much loftier goal than giving conceptual form to Christian belief. Its mission was to win the hearts and minds of men and women and to change their lives."

—Robert Wilken, *The Spirit of Early Christian Thought*

Saint Luke comments on his own work, right at the beginning of his Gospel. Read Luke 1:1–4. If Luke is aware of other writings, why is he writing a Gospel?

Saint Luke writes to share the eyewitness testimony that has been delivered to him (i.e., from Saint Paul). Similarly, Saint Mark will write the eyewitness testimony that has been delivered to him from Saint Peter. Whereas Luke intends to write an “orderly account” (Luke 1:3), which he does—beginning at the beginning, with the conception and birth of both John the Baptist and Jesus—we find a different style in Mark’s Gospel.

There are no infancy narratives in Mark’s Gospel. Instead we begin in the desert where Saint John the Baptist appears, crying out in the wilderness. Mark’s very first verses show the fulfillment of the Old Testament prophecies. Mark wastes no time in proclaiming Jesus the “Son of God” (Mark 1:1) and promptly begins showing that Jesus is the one who is to fulfill God’s prophecies of old (cf. Mark 1:2–4).

That Mark’s Gospel is one of action is emphasized by his oft-repeated word: immediately. It appears thirty-five times in the sixteen chapters of Mark’s Gospel. Look up the following verses in the first chapter of Mark’s Gospel. How many times does “immediately” appear in each of these sections? What is happening immediately in each?

Mark 1:10–12 _____

Mark 1:17–21 _____

Mark 1:23–28 _____

Mark 1:29–31 _____

However, once Jesus enters Jerusalem for the Passover ahead his Passion and Death, there’s a shift: Mark only uses “immediately” two times in the last five and half chapters of his Gospel. Look up the following verses. What is happening immediately in each?

Mark 14:43 _____

Mark 14:72 _____

The last days of Jesus’s life will not happen “immediately.” Jesus’s words and deeds in these last days—his institution of the Eucharist, his suffering, his words from the Cross, and his Death—will be done with a clear, purposeful intentionality, and Saint Mark will give us a detailed eyewitness account of all that happens.

For us, Saint Mark provides a valuable meditation on the intensity of Jesus’s last days, of his Passion and Death. Our meditation on these events is to flow over into our own lives so that the centrality of the Cross permeates us. Mark’s “action Gospel” gives us encouragement to rely on the Lord, who lived so energetically and so sacrificially.

COMMIT-DAY 3

LECTIO: A SHARE IN CHRIST'S SUFFERING



Yesterday we looked at how Saint Mark's Gospel provides a glimpse of the "action" side of Christ, but we only just touched on the central action of Christ's life. That is, his Passion, Death, and Resurrection. Today's *lectio* from Saint Peter's first epistle affords us an opportunity to meditate more on the Christian's call to share in our Lord's suffering. Peter, the first pope, pens an apostolic exhortation, providing advice and encouragement for the sheep of his flock who are "exiles" (1 Peter 1:1), likely those who have been scattered by persecutions.

LECTIO: The practice of praying with Scripture, *lectio divina* begins with an active and close reading of the Scripture passage. Read the verse below and then answer the questions to take a closer look at some of the details of the passage.

Beloved, do not be surprised at the fiery ordeal which comes upon you to prove you, as though something strange were happening to you. But rejoice in so far as you share Christ's sufferings, that you may also rejoice and be glad when his glory is revealed. If you are reproached for the name of Christ, you are blessed, because the spirit of glory and of God rests upon you. But let none of you suffer as a murderer, or a thief, or a wrongdoer, or a mischief-maker; yet if one suffers as a Christian, let him not be ashamed, but under that name let him glorify God. For the time has come for judgment to begin with the household of God; and if it begins with us, what will be the end of those who do not obey the gospel of God? And "If the righteous man is scarcely saved, where will the impious and sinner appear?" Therefore, let those who suffer according to God's will do right and entrust their souls to a faithful Creator.

—1 Peter 4:12–19

How does Saint Peter refer to those he is addressing?

What is happening to his readers?

How does he want them to respond? (Hint: look at the verbs.)

The theme of suffering is evident. But it is also important to note the theme of joy in the midst of that suffering. Read the passage again slowly and note the words and phrases that relate to trials/suffering, and those that relate to joy/glory. Use the table below.

Trials/Suffering	Joy/Glory

MEDITATIO: *Lectio*, a close reading and rereading of Scripture, is followed by *meditatio*, a time to reflect on the Scripture passage and to ponder the reason for particular events, descriptions, details, phrases, and even echoes from other Scripture passages that were noticed during *lectio*. Take some time now to mediate on the above verse.

It is very hard not to think of a kind of mystical Christ just beside us or in front of us, suffering with inline patience and joy, being obedient, humble, persevering, fulfilling His Father's will. It isn't really difficult to realize that if He is formed in our life we are not beside Him but in Him; and what He asks of us is to realize that it is actually in what we do that He wants to act and to suffer. . . . It really needs to be practiced to be understood. We need to say to ourselves a thousand times a day "Christ wants to do this; Christ wants to suffer this."

—Caryll Houselander, *The Reed of God*

Do you realize that you are God's "beloved"? Explain.

How does Saint Peter's exhortation to "not be surprised" by trials help us when we encounter suffering?

What would you need to do to be aware of the “spirit of glory and of God” resting on you the next time you are suffering?

ORATIO, CONTEMPLATIO, RESOLUTIO: Having read and meditated on today’s Scripture passage, take some time to pray—bringing your thoughts to God (*oratio*)—and to be receptive to God’s grace in silence (*contemplatio*). Then end your prayer by making a simple concrete resolution (*resolutio*) to respond to God’s prompting of your heart in today’s prayer.



Jesus Christ-crucifixion on Calvary © Thoom/shutterstock.com

COMMIT-DAY 4

WRITTEN FROM ROME



Vintage manuscript with pen © Dimitr1ch/shutterstock.com

Since the clear light of the word of God rose on the city of Rome, the story of truth and light, which was preached by Peter, instructed the minds of all by its pleasing sound. Thus, every day those who heard it never heard enough. It was not enough just to hear it, but they begged the disciple Mark to put into writing what Peter preached orally, to have a perpetual record of it, which they could always meditate both at home and outside. They did not give up pressing him, until they got what they asked for. This was what led to the writing of the Gospel according to Mark. Peter, who by the Holy Spirit found himself subjected to a religious theft, was delighted, considering their faith and devotion. He ratified what was done, and bequeathed this to the churches as Scripture to be read forever.

—Eusebius, *Ecclesial History*,
quoted by Saint Thomas Aquinas in *Catena Aurea*

In his *Church History*, Eusebius describes the abundance of God's grace poured out on the city of Rome with Peter's preaching. Peter himself indicates his presence in Rome in his first epistle, but he does so using coded language in his phrase "she who is in Babylon" (1 Peter 5:13). In the Old Testament, it was the Babylonian king and empire that destroyed the first Temple and either killed or took captive God's people. In the writings of the prophet Isaiah, Babylon is described as a wicked oppressor who "struck the peoples in wrath with unceasing blows, that ruled the nations in anger with unrelenting persecution" (see Isaiah 14:6). Babylon became the symbol city of foreign dominant power persecuting God's people. For the early Christians, Rome was the "Babylon" of the time.

Eusebius not only describes Saints Mark and Peter together in Rome, but also Mark's writing of his Gospel from Peter's testimony. What evidence can we find in the Gospel itself for these claims? Let's look for some clues.

Imagine a modern retelling of *Cinderella*. What kinds of things would let the reader know where and when it was set? Cinderella might have a Ferrari instead of a coach. Rather than a prince, she might fall in love with the president's son. And maybe she would drop her cell phone instead of her shoe. The audience would realize that this version of the story was set in modern times in a democratic country. Time and location can be indicated indirectly through a story's details.

Particular language, special terms, and historical figures provide indications of time and location in the Gospel. Look at the following verses. What Roman terms are used?

Mark 5:9, 15 _____

Mark 13:35 _____

Mark 14:5 _____

Mark 15:39, 44, 45 _____

Mark's use of Roman terms gives us clues that he was writing from Rome or, at least, writing for a Roman audience. Additionally, we find small but vivid details in Mark's Gospel that are characteristic of testimony that could only be given by one who was present at the events described. This is detected in the special mention of the time of day (see Mark 1:35; 11:20), the color of the grass (see Mark 6:39), and even the mention of Jesus's use of a cushion when sleeping in Peter's boat (see Mark 4:38). But one detail is remarkable for its placement. Who is mentioned in Mark 15:21 besides Simon of Cyrene?

The inclusion of the names of Simon's sons in this verse seems at first glance like superfluous information, but it is more than that. The Passion of our Lord is the primary story of Mark's Gospel. Its details have extra significance. This little family tree inserted along the way of the Cross is there because it provides an additional connection to the story.

Look up Romans 16:13, where Saint Paul closes his Letter to the Romans by sending his greetings to numerous Christians living in Rome. How does Paul describe Rufus? And Rufus's mother?

Paul's inclusion of this greeting to Rufus indicates that Rufus lives in Rome and is an important member of the Church there. Mark's inclusion of Rufus by name in his Gospel gives us another clue of Mark's primary audience—the Christian community in Rome, who would know Rufus as one of their prominent members. The inclusion of Rufus in Mark's gospel account provides a personal connection for the Roman Christian community.

The first Roman persecution of Christians took place around 64 AD. To shift blame from himself, the Emperor Nero accused the Christian community of starting the Great Fire, which destroyed much of the city. Christians were rounded up, arrested, tortured, and martyred in hideous ways—clothed in the hides of beasts, nailed to crosses, fixed to posts, and set ablaze as human pyres to serve as evening lights. Saints Peter and Paul were among those martyred during Nero's persecution. Given what the Christians in Rome were suffering, it is no surprise that Mark's Gospel has an emphasis in Jesus Christ's Passion and Death, and the Lord's call for his disciples to take up their cross and follow him.

How would Mark's emphasis on Jesus's Passion and Death have been a help to the Christians in Rome facing persecution? How is it a help to us today in our own lives?

COMMIT-DAY 5

TRUTH AND BEAUTY



Mark, the Winged Lion

Symbols of the four evangelists on church door in Walluf, Germany.



Winged Man – Matthew



Winged Lion – Mark



Winged Ox – Luke



Winged Eagle – John

The lion, the eagle, the bull, and the human—symbol for evangelist Marcus/Johannes/Lucas/Mattheus. © Daan Kloeg/shutterstock.com

It is not uncommon to see images of winged creatures in Christian art and architecture. Often these creatures appear next to the four authors—referred to as the four evangelists—of the Gospels contained in the New Testament Scriptures. These images appear in arches over the doorways of churches, on the doors themselves, and in frescoes and mosaics that decorate ceiling vaults and triumphal arches over church sanctuaries. They decorate illuminated manuscripts of the Gospels and the Scriptures, and they appear in paintings of the evangelists themselves. Where do these images come from? And why the particular choice for each of the gospel writers and their Gospels?

Look up the following verses. How are the “four living creatures” described?

Ezekiel 1:1–14 _____

Revelation 4:1–11 _____

The prophet Ezekiel and, later, Saint John the beloved disciple, are each granted a vision of God's throne in Heaven. In each vision, around the throne appear four living creatures. Several of the early Church Fathers associate the four living creatures with the four gospel writers and their texts. For example, Saint Jerome writes in the introduction to his *Commentary on Matthew*:

That these four gospels then were predicted a long time beforehand by Ezekiel....The first, the face of a man, signifies Matthew, who begins to write as if concerning a man: The book of the generation of Jesus Christ, son of David, son of Abraham; the second [signifies] Mark, in whom the voice of a roaring lion is heard in the wilderness: A voice crying out in the desert: Prepare the way of the Lord; make his paths straight; the third [face], which fixes beforehand that Luke the evangelist would assume a beginning from Zachariah the priest, is of a calf; the fourth [signifies] John the evangelist, who disputes concerning the word of God by assuming the wings of an eagle and hurrying on to the heights. . . . Whence also the apocalypse of John. . . . saying: The first animal was like a lion, and the second like a calf, and the third like a man, and the fourth like a flying eagle.

Jerome's correlation between the images of the living creatures and the Gospels is summarized in the following chart:

Gospel Writer	Living Creature	Opening Text
Matthew	Man	Matthew begins his Gospel with Jesus's human genealogy (1:1–17) and with Jesus's Incarnation and Birth, in which he takes on our human nature (1:18–25)
Mark	Lion	Mark begins his Gospel with the roar (like that of a lion) of John the Baptist preaching in the wilderness (1:1–8)
Luke	Ox	Luke begins with Zechariah the priest serving at the Temple, where the ox was a common sacrificial animal (1:1–23)
John	Eagle	Like an eagle, John begins his Gospel soaring to the heights of Heaven, where Jesus is with God: "In the beginning was the Word" (1:1–14)

When the scriptural canon was collected, the unity between the number of living creatures in these visions and the four Gospels was seen as a confirmation of the inspiration of these four gospel texts. Thus, Saint Jerome would continue: "By all of these things it is plainly shown that only four gospels ought to be accepted."

Just as the four living creatures continually give glory, thanks, and praise to God in the heavenly throne room, so too here on earth the four Gospels glorify God wherever they are read and preached. Just as a single river flowed out of and watered the Garden of Eden, then dividing into four rivers to water the earth (see Genesis 2:10–14), so too the four Gospels inspired by the Spirit of the one, true God, and proclaiming the one Gospel of Jesus Christ, bring life-giving water to the ends of the earth. The patristic writers saw a unity and harmony that the God who created the world with wisdom and order—with four seasons, four elements, four directions, four cardinal virtues—would also in his plan of salvation give us four Gospels.

With this background, it's not surprising that the symbols of the four evangelists took a prominent place in church decoration and art. The symbols of the evangelists on or over the doorway of a church is a herald that inside these doors one will hear proclaimed the Good News of him who is the Way, the Truth, and the Life. The symbols of the evangelists on the book of the Gospels, on an archway ahead of the sanctuary, or on the dome of the apse over the altar, was a reminder that in the sacred mysteries, proclaimed in the Scriptures and made present on the altar during the liturgy, we too would be lifted up to join the four living creatures and the evangelists around the throne of God singing, "Holy, Holy, Holy."

Take a moment to journal your ideas, questions, or insights about this lesson. Write down thoughts you had that may not have been mentioned in the text or the discussion questions. List any personal applications you gained from the lessons. What challenged you the most in the teachings? How might you turn what you've learned into specific action?

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