

Saint John

John the Apostle was the son of Zebedee, and the brother of James. One tradition gives his mother's name as Salome. They originally were fishermen and fished with their father in the Lake of Genesareth. He was first a disciple of John the Baptist and later one of the twelve disciples of Jesus. He is revered as a saint by most of Christianity. The Roman Catholic Church commemorates him on December 27. He is also remembered in the liturgy on January 3. The Eastern Orthodox Church commemorates him on September 26, and also remembers him on May 8, on which date Christians used to draw forth from his grave fine ashes which were believed to be effective for healing the sick. John had a prominent position in the Apostolic body. Peter, James and John were the only witnesses of the raising of Jairus' daughter (Mark 5:37), of the Transfiguration (Matthew 17:1) and of the Agony in Gethsemane (Matthew 26:37). Only he and Peter were sent into the city to make the preparation for the final Passover meal (the Last Supper) (Luke 22:8). At the meal itself, his place was next to Jesus on whose chest he leaned (John 13:23, 25). According to the general interpretation, John was also that "other disciple" who with Peter followed Jesus after the arrest into the palace of the high-priest (John 18:15). John alone remained near Jesus at the foot of the cross on Calvary with Jesus' mother, Mary, and the pious women and took Mary into his care as the last legacy of Jesus (John 19:25-27). After the Resurrection, John with Peter was the first of the disciples to run towards the grave and he was the first to believe that Jesus had truly risen (John 20:2-10). John was accustomed to indicate himself in writing without giving his name as: "the disciple whom Jesus loved". After Jesus' Ascension and the descent of the Holy Spirit, John took, together with Peter, a prominent part in the founding and guidance of the church. He is with Peter at the healing of the lame man in the Temple (Acts 3:1 seq.). With Peter he is also thrown into prison (Acts 4:3). He is also with Peter visiting the newly converted in Samaria (Acts 8:14). There is no positive information concerning the duration of this activity in Judea. Apparently, John in common with the other Apostles remained some 12 years in this first field of labour, until the persecution of Herod Agrippa I led to the scattering of the Apostles through the various provinces of the Roman Empire (cf. Acts 12:1-17). It does not appear improbable that John then went for the first time to Asia Minor and exercised his Apostolic office in various provinces there. In any case a messianic community was already in existence at Ephesus before Paul's first labours there (cf. "the brethren", Acts 18:27, in addition to Priscilla and Aquila) and it is easy to connect a sojourn of John in these provinces with the fact that the Holy Spirit did not permit Paul on his second missionary journey to proclaim the Gospel in Asia, Mysia and Bithynia (Acts 16:6 sq.). Such a sojourn by John in Asia in this first period was neither long nor uninterrupted. He returned with the other disciples to Jerusalem for the Apostolic Council (about A.D. 51). Paul in opposing his enemies in Galatia names John explicitly along with Peter and James the Just as a "pillar of the Church" and refers to the recognition that his Apostolic preaching of a gospel free from the law received from these three, the most prominent men of the messianic community at Jerusalem (Galatians 2:9). Of the other New Testament writings, it is only from the three Letters of John and the book of Revelation that anything further is learned about John. Both the Letters and Revelation presuppose that John belonged to the multitude of personal eyewitnesses of the life and work of Jesus (cf. especially 1 John 1:1-5; 4:14), that he had lived for a long time in Asia Minor, was thoroughly acquainted with the conditions existing in the various messianic communities there, and that he had a position of authority recognized by all messianic communities as leader of this part of the church. Moreover, Revelation says that its author was on the island of Patmos "for the word of God and for the testimony of Jesus", when he was honoured with the heavenly vision contained in Revelation (Revelation 1:9). John is traditionally held to be the author of five books of the New Testament, including the Gospel of John. However, almost all higher critical scholars place the writing of the final edition of John at some time in the late first or early second century. Catholic/Orthodox tradition says that he and the Virgin Mary moved to Ephesus, where both eventually died. Many Evangelical and other scholars question this, especially due to the advanced age which Mary would have reached by this time. Some believe, however, that there is support for the idea that John did go to Ephesus and from there wrote the three epistles tradition attributed to him. John was allegedly banished by the Roman authorities to the Greek island of Patmos, where some believe that he wrote the Book of Revelation. According to Tertullian (in *The Prescription of Heretics*) John was banished (presumably to Patmos) after being plunged into boiling oil in Rome and suffering nothing from it. Some believe his tomb is located at Selcuk, a small town in the vicinity of Ephesus. When John was old he trained Polycarp, later Bishop of Smyrna. This was important because Polycarp was able to carry John's message to another age. In art, John as the presumed author of the Gospel is often depicted with an eagle, which symbolizes the height he rose to in the first chapter of his gospel.

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