



December 27

Festival: John, Apostle and Evangelist

John the Apostle was the son of Zebedee, and the brother of St. James the Greater. The Eastern Orthodox 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 apostles of Jesus.

John held a prominent position in the Apostolic body. He is frequently mentioned with his brother, James. Jesus referred to the pair collectively as "Boanerges" translated "sons of thunder." John survived James by more than half a century after James became the first apostle to die a martyr's death. Peter, James and John were the only witnesses of the raising of Jairus' daughter, of the Transfiguration and of the Agony in Gethsemane. John and his brother wanted to call down fire on a Samaritan town, but were rebuked by Jesus. Only he and Peter were sent into the city to make the preparation for the final Passover meal (the Last Supper). At the meal itself, his place may have been next to Jesus on whose chest he leaned if he is indeed the "disciple whom Jesus loved." However, this cannot be concluded with certainty. 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 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.

After Jesus' Ascension and the descent of the Holy Spirit on Pentecost, John, together with Peter, took 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. With Peter he is also thrown into prison. He is also with Peter visiting the newly converted in Samaria.

There is no positive information in the Bible 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 labor, until the persecution of Herod Agrippa I led to the scattering of the Apostles through the various provinces of the Roman Empire. It does not appear improbable that John then went for the first time into Asia Minor. In any case a messianic community was already in existence at Ephesus before Paul's first labors there in addition to Priscilla and Aquila. 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 AD 51). Paul, in opposing his enemies in Galatia, recalls that John explicitly along with Peter and James the Just were referred to as "pillars of the church" and refers to the recognition that his Apostolic preaching of a gospel free from Jewish Law received from these three, the most prominent men of the messianic community at Jerusalem.

Of the other New Testament writings, it is only from the three Letters of John and the Book of Revelation that anything further might be learned about John, if we assume that he was the author of these books. From the Letters and Revelation we may suppose that John belonged to the multitude of personal eyewitnesses of the life and work of Jesus 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, the Book of 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 honored with the vision contained in Revelation.

Though most scholars agree in placing the Gospel of John somewhere between AD 65 and 85, John A.T. Robinson proposes an initial edition by 50–55 and then a final edition by 65 due to narrative similarities with Paul.

Other critical scholars are of the opinion that John was composed in stages (probably two or three).

Until the 19th century, the authorship of the Gospel of John had universally been attributed to the Apostle John. However, critical scholars since then have had their doubts. The Gospel does not make that attribution. Instead, authorship is internally credited to the *disciple whom Jesus loved* in John 20:2. The term *the Beloved Disciple* is used five times in the Gospel of John to indicate authorship. John 21:24 claims that the Gospel of John is based on the written testimony of the "Beloved Disciple".

Russian Orthodox icon of the Apostle and Evangelist John the Theologian, 18th century (Iconostasis of Transfiguration Church, Kizhi Monastery, Karelia, Russia) Date: first quarter of 18th century.