

Very early in Christian writing the four Gospel writers came to be associated with the four beasts described in Ezekiel's great vision:

Ezekiel 1.⁴ As I looked, a stormy wind came out of the north: a great cloud with brightness around it and fire flashing forth continually, and in the middle of the fire, something like gleaming amber. ⁵ In the middle of it was something like four living creatures. This was their appearance: they were of human form. ⁶ Each had four faces, and each of them had four wings.... ¹⁰As for the appearance of their faces: the four had the face of a human being, the face of a lion on the right side, the face of an ox on the left side, and the face of an eagle; ¹¹such were their faces.

Which was connected to John's vision in Revelation:

Revelation 4.^{6b} Around the throne, and on each side of the throne, are four living creatures, full of eyes in front and behind: ⁷ the first living creature like a lion, the second living creature like an ox, the third living creature with a face like a human face, and the fourth living creature like a flying eagle. ⁸ And the four living creatures, each of them with six wings, are full of eyes all around and inside. Day and night without ceasing they sing, "Holy, holy, holy, the Lord God the Almighty, who was and is and is to come."

Why is the lion associated with Mark? One suggestion is that the lion, as the king of beasts, represents Christ as King, - the "lion of Judah" as emphasised in the Gospel. Another is that Mark commences with John the Baptist "like a lion roaring in the wilderness".

The four Evangelist symbols were extremely popular in European art, often surrounding the figure of Christ in triumph. Some of the most appealing examples are from the wonderful manuscripts produced during the Carolingian period (800-888). Although Charlemagne (Carolus in Latin), the then ruler of much of Europe, was himself illiterate he was a strong supporter of learning and book production.



The page here comes from a set of Gospels written and painted at Aachen, called the "Treasury Gospels" produced for Charlemagne's chapel at Aachen (now Aachen Cathedral). This vigorous depiction shows the Evangelists feverishly writing, with dawn breaking in the sky above.

The image of the *Markan* lion is commonly associated with Venice and the great Cathedral, San Marco, was founded in the 9th century when, according to legend, Venetian merchants obtained the body of St Mark in Egypt and smuggled it back to their city.



The lion topped pillar in the square in front of the church is actually a bronze, probably from Tarsus, Paul's city, of about 300 BC, and was placed in Venice in the 13th century. Most of the representations of the Venetian St Mark show the lion with its paw resting on a book inscribed "Peace to you, My evangelist Mark", as in the painting by the venetian artist Vittore Carpaccio. (1516)

