



## St Barnabas

Barnabas was one of the very earliest followers of Jesus and a leader of the early church. His story is told in the Acts of the Apostles and he is also mentioned in some of Paul's letters. Originally called Joseph, he was given his new name of Barnabas by those who knew him well, it means 'son of encouragement'. His new name certainly fits what we know of his character and actions.

We first hear of Barnabas in the New Testament due to his simple act of stewardship and sharing. He sold land he owned and donated the proceeds to the church to be used to support the poor.

When Paul came to Jerusalem after his conversion, most of the Christians there wanted nothing to do with him for they had known him as a persecutor of Christians.

But Barnabas, guided by God was willing to take a calculated risk on Paul. He sought Paul out, spoke with him, and having weighed him up, vouched for him.

We owe much of our New Testament to the work of Paul and in his preaching and evangelism he was used by God in the creation of many of the early Christian communities. Imagine if Barnabas had not been willing to obey God's call?

Later, Paul and Barnabas travelled far and wide, sharing the good news of God's love in Jesus. On one journey they took a young man called Mark with them.

This travelling ministry was tough and dangerous; they literally were risking their lives.

Part way, Mark turned back. When Paul and Barnabas were about to set out again, Barnabas suggested taking Mark along again. Paul was against it, saying that Mark was not dependable. But Barnabas wanted to give Mark a second chance, and so he and Mark went off on one journey, while Paul took Silas and went on another.

Apparently Mark responded well to the trust given him by Barnabas, the "son of encouragement," since we find that Paul recognises the change in Mark and later speaks of him as a valuable assistant.

Barnabas, who became one of the leaders of the Church was asked to help in the growth of a new congregation in Antioch. He didn't arrive thinking he'd whip them into shape, instead we read, 'he came and saw the grace of God, he rejoiced and he exhorted them all to remain faithful to the Lord with steadfast devotion.' Barnabas called Paul over to help in this work at Antioch and both he and Paul grew in their faith and ministry. And the Church grew too: a great many people became Christians – indeed it was here at Antioch that the followers of Jesus were first called 'Christians'. Born in Cyprus, Barnabas also died there in AD 61 when he was martyred for his faith. He stayed faithful and willing to give everything right to the end. We celebrate his life and example particularly on his feast day which is 11<sup>th</sup> June.