

logo©2004 by R Fulwiler

# Seasoning the Seasons™

The Institute for Christian Formation, Inc.

Text©2013 by Sandra A. Chakeres. All rights reserved.

Saint Paul, The Apostle

## Saint Paul, The Apostle

On January 25th we celebrate the Feast of the Conversion of Saint Paul, the Apostle. We actually have a number of facts about Paul's life from the Scriptures, both the Acts of the Apostles and the Pauline Epistles, or Letters. Sometime during the decade after Jesus' birth, Saul (Paul) was born in Tarsus in Cilicia, which is now in eastern Turkey. His parentage was Hebrew and he was of the tribe of Benjamin, and he inherited Roman citizenship. Saul was his Jewish name, and Paul was his Roman name. Saul was a Pharisee. He was well educated and studied the Law under Gamaliel in Jerusalem.



Conversion of Saint Paul  
14th Century  
Location: Decani Monastery, Serbia

Saul was present at the martyrdom of Saint Stephen, the First Martyr. Scripture tells us that a fierce persecution of the Church broke out on the day of Stephen's martyrdom. Saul, himself, was sent to Damascus to continue this persecution. But the Lord had other plans for Saul. It was on the road to Damascus that Saul experienced a profound conversion to the Lord Jesus. The Acts of the Apostles gives us three accounts of Saul's conversion (Acts 9:1-19; Acts 22:3-16; and, Acts 26:2-18). While there are a few variances in these accounts, many details remain the same.

Paul had no encounters with the "earthly" Jesus during Jesus' public ministry, passion, and death. His sole encounter was with the Risen Lord. Once he experienced conversion, Paul became a missionary preaching the Gospel to the Gentiles. He supported his missionary endeavors through his trade as a leather worker and tent maker.

His mission to preach the Gospel to the Gentiles took Paul on four missionary journeys. You can read about these in the Acts of the Apostles: Acts 13:1-14:28; Acts 15:30-18:22; Acts 18:23-21:17; and, Acts 27:1-28:16.

Paul's journeys took him to the populated areas – the urban centers, where his preaching and witness led to the establishment of church communities, such as in Philippi, Thessalonica, Corinth, and Ephesus. As Paul traveled, and was even imprisoned at times, he kept in contact with the church communities he established by writing letters, or epistles, to these church communities. Of the twenty-one letters found in our Christian Scriptures, thirteen of these are attributed to Paul and his disciples. (Modern scholars agree that not all thirteen were directly written by Paul, but



that those that were not were likely written by his followers.)

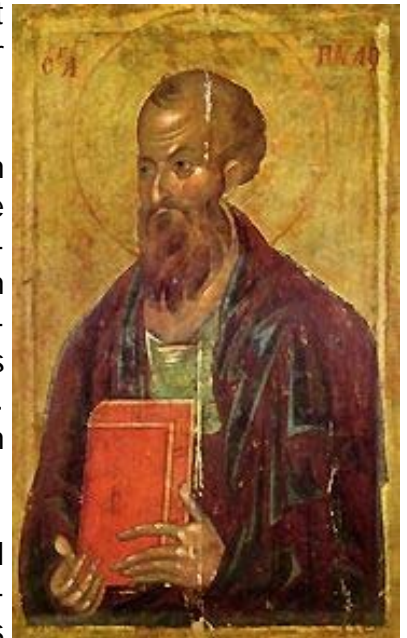
Saint Paul's letters were written sometime between the years 50 and 65. His Letter to the Thessalonians is the earliest writing we have in our Christian Scriptures (even earlier than the Gospels), and the earliest Christian theology we have available to us. Paul had a great sense of the dignity of all Christians and of equality within the Christian community. His coworkers in ministry were the laity – both women and men, married and single. He also had a strong sense of Christian charity and justice, and the communities he established took up collections for the needy in Jerusalem. The churches he established, however, had their share of problems and divisions, which were the topic of some of his letters to them.

We often talk about the Church being the Body of Christ. It is Saint Paul who gave us this theology of the community as Christ's body (see 1 Corinthians 12:12-31).

During his ministry, Paul did have encounters with two of the original twelve Apostles, Peter and James. In addition to the January 25 Feast of the Conversion of Saint Paul, the Apostle, we also celebrate the June 29 Solemnity of Saints Peter and Paul, Apostles.

Tradition tells us that Saint Paul was martyred by beheading in Rome around the year 65-67. He was buried a short distance from where he was martyred. His burial place became the site for Christians to worship Christ and to venerate Paul, the Apostle to the Gentiles. In the fourth century, when the Emperor Constantine ended the persecution of Christians and legalized freedom to worship, a basilica was built over Paul's tomb. Today you can visit the Papal Basilica of St. Paul Outside-the-Walls. Pope Benedict XVI declared June 2008 – June 2009 a Year of St. Paul in celebration of the 2000th anniversary of Paul's birth.

An apostle is one who is sent. And while not one of the original twelve apostles, Saint Paul certainly deserves the title. Following his conversion he went on many missionary journeys preaching the Good News and establishing churches. Thirteen of the twenty-one epistles or letters in our Christian Scriptures are attributed to Saint Paul or his disciples. May Saint Paul the Apostle intercede for us that we, like him, may trust in new beginnings and heed our baptismal call to receive the Word and proclaim faith to the Glory of God.



**St. Paul**  
15th Century Icon  
Russian  
School: Novgorod