

It is more profitable to know Jesus than to know about Him.

Weekly Edition – March 18, 2016

The Risen Christ: Twelve Appearances – Mary Magdalene

¹¹ Now Mary stood outside the tomb crying. As she wept, she bent over to look into the tomb ¹² and saw two angels in white, seated where Jesus' body had been, one at the head and the other at the foot.

¹³ They asked her, "Woman, why are you crying?"

"They have taken my Lord away," she said, "and I don't know where they have put him." ¹⁴ At this, she turned around and saw Jesus standing there, but she did not realize that it was Jesus.

¹⁵ He asked her, "Woman, why are you crying? Who is it you are looking for?"

Thinking he was the gardener, she said, "Sir, if you have carried him away, tell me where you have put him, and I will get him."

¹⁶ Jesus said to her, "Mary."

She turned toward him and cried out in Aramaic, "Rabboni!" (which means "Teacher").

¹⁷ Jesus said, "Do not hold on to me, for I have not yet ascended to the Father. Go instead to my brothers and tell them, 'I am ascending to my Father and your Father, to my God and your God.'"

¹⁸ Mary Magdalene went to the disciples with the news: "I have seen the Lord!" And she told them that he had said these things to her.

(John 20:11:18)

The Twelve Appearances of the Resurrected Christ

1. Mary Magdalene at tomb (John 20:16)
2. To Peter (Luke 24:34 & 1 Corinthians 15:5)
3. On the road to Emmaus (Luke 24:31)
4. To the Eleven Apostles (Luke 24:36)
5. To Thomas (John 20:27)
6. To Two Women (Matthew 28:9)
7. By the Sea of Galilee (John 21:7)
8. To the 500 (1 Corinthians 15:6)
9. To James His brother (1 Corinthians 15:7)
10. On mountain in Galilee (Matthew 28:17)
11. Near Bethany (Luke 24:50-53)
12. To His Mother (*not recorded*)

About Mary Magdalene

- 1) Mary Magdalene was not a woman of rank, yet her name appears thirteen times in the New Testament, more than many of the Apostles, and to this add another dozen occasions if she is the same woman as Mary of Bethany and the anonymous penitent woman. For example, Bartholomew is mentioned only four times – and those four occurrences are the lists of the twelve apostles as given by each of the four Gospel writers.
- 2) Mary Magdalene, a follower of our Lord (John 20:11-18); the anonymous penitent woman who washed our Lord's feet with her hair and expensive perfume (Luke 7:36-50); and Mary of Bethany, the sister of Martha and Lazarus (Luke 10:38-42) are thought to be one in the same person: (*See sidebar next page*)
- 3) She is mentioned among the women who accompanied Jesus and ministered to Him. (Luke 8:2-3)
 - a) Jesus had cast seven devils out her. (Mark 16:9)
 - b) She stood at the foot of the cross during His crucifixion. (Mark 15:40; Matthew 27:56; John 19:25; Luke 23:49).
 - c) She watched as Jesus was laid in the tomb (Matthew 27:61) and she was the first recorded witness of the Resurrection.
- 4) As a sinner who knew God's forgiveness in her life, she loved the Lord deeply, as the Gospels make plain. She is an example for all of us – God forgives sinners and the response to forgiveness is deep love of God.

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Seven Reflections on the First Appearance of Jesus

First Consideration: Proximity

- 1) The first recorded appearance of our Resurrected Lord is to Mary Magdalene. Why Mary? Not to over simplify, but one answer is simply because she was there.
- 2) Peter and John came to the tomb, but then departed. Mary lingered there, weeping for her Friend Jesus.
- 3) There is something to be said about the role of "proximity" in the growth of our life in Jesus Christ.
- 4) While God is omnipresent – everywhere – yet He is also a God of intimacy – He is near; He is with us, and in us.
- 5) God is always present to us, but we are not always present to God. If we want to get close to Him, to feel His presence in new and intimate ways, there is something to be said about "hanging around the net."
- 6) That is what Mary did. She simply waited at the tomb, and as a result she got the initial "rebound" – hence, the first recorded appearance is a private intimate meeting between two friends.
- 7) **Application:** Am I in near enough proximity to God to meet Jesus in new and surprising ways?

Second Consideration: Healing Grace

- 1) In the creation story in Genesis, Satan in the form of a serpent outwits the woman Eve, and through her, original sin stains the human race:
 - a) ⁴ *"You will not certainly die," the serpent said to the woman.*
 - ⁵ *"For God knows that when you eat from it your eyes will be opened, and you will be like God, knowing good and evil."*
 - ⁶ *When the woman saw that the fruit of the tree was good for food and pleasing to the eye, and also desirable for gaining wisdom, she took some and ate it. She also gave some to her husband, who was with her, and he ate it.*
(Genesis 3:4-6)
- 2) As the fall from grace was by the woman Eve, so now the restoration in grace first appears to a woman – Mary Magdalene – who through repentance had been cleansed of seven demons.
- 3) In appearing to Mary first, Jesus lifts the station of all women to a place of grace and dignity, redeeming what was done in that Garden long ago by what is done in this garden on Easter morning.
- 4) **Application:** Consider the perfection and wonder of God's majestic plan of salvation for mankind. Marvel at the precision and fine detail – nothing left unfinished in His plan of redemption! Even in this small detail God's majesty is proclaimed! Allow the perfection of God's craftsmanship to inspire praise and thanksgiving!

Identity of Mary Magdalene

Mary Magdalene, Mary of Bethany (Martha's sister) and the sinful woman of Luke's Gospel are, in fact, one in the same person. Here is how we know:

Mary Magdalene is specifically identified as one of the women who accompanied Jesus and the Apostles. (Luke 8:1-3) Mark confirms that our Lord had expelled seven demons from Mary Magdalene. (Mark 16:9) She stood at the foot of the cross during the crucifixion. (Mark 15:40, Matthew 27:56 & John 19:25). She also witnessed Christ's burial, and on Easter was the first to discover the empty tomb and then the first to see the risen Lord. (John 20:1-18)

Is she also the penitent woman found in Luke's Gospel who anointed Jesus' feet with her tears and perfume? (Luke 7:36-50) Luke writes that she entered the home of Simon the Pharisee, who said to himself, "If this man were a prophet, He would know who and what sort of woman this is that touches Him that she is a sinner," an obvious reference to her being "untouchable" because of such a serious sin as adultery, fornication, or promiscuity. While not named by Luke in Chapter 7, Magdalene is derived from the expression "curling women's hair," which means "adulteress" in the Talmud - a connection easy to follow. The name "Magdalene" is also derived from Magdala, a town located along the Sea of Galilee (aka "Tiberias").

In Luke's Gospel our Lord travelled to "a village" to the home of Martha, who "had a sister named Mary." (Luke 10:38-42) There Martha prepared a meal for our Lord. Luke does not name the village but John's Gospel identifies it as Bethany (John 12:1-11) where Jesus had raised Lazarus from the dead. John further identifies this Mary as the one who had wiped Jesus's feet with her hair, (John 11:1-2) making Martha's sister the same woman who anointed Jesus in the house of Simon in Luke's Gospel and also the Mary of Bethany.

In Mary we find a perfect example of the inexpressible love for Jesus that comes from knowing her sin is forgiven!

Ah, that we should know this too – not in our heads but within our hearts!

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Third Consideration: Out from the Depths

- 1) As Mary made her way to the borrowed tomb early that morning, she was running low on faith and hope.
- 2) What she had recently witnessed had simply shattered both of these, and neither the disciples nor the angels could begin to fill the aching void in her sorrowing heart. No, not even angels!
- 3) Luke tells us that when the women encountered two angels *'in dazzling apparel,'* they were *"filled with fear, and bowed down their faces to the earth."* But not Mary! She had no more interest in two resplendent angels than she did in two leading apostles.
- 4) She had lost her greatest treasure – the One she spoke of consistently as 'Lord.' With Him she had everything; without Him she had nothing. Hence her unrestrained 'weeping' – which is mentioned three times!
- 5) As Mary made clear to the apostles, the angels, and the supposed 'gardener,' the most she hoped for was to find her Lord's dead body 'laid' somewhere. The very last thing she expected was to encounter the Living Lord standing before her.
- 6) **Application:** What about me? In the depths of darkness and despair do I feel as though I am alone and on my own – or do I expect to encounter the Living God in the depths of my circumstances?

Fourth Consideration: He Calls By Name

- 1) Mary didn't recognize Jesus from His physical appearance that morning – any more than the two disciples on the road to Emmaus, or the disciples casting nets on the Sea of Galilee.
- 2) Nor did she recognize Jesus from His kind inquiry: "Why are you weeping? Who are you seeking?"
- 3) She recognized Him instantly when He spoke her name.
- 4) *"I am the good shepherd; I know My sheep and My sheep know Me— they listen to My Voice."* (see John 10)
- 5) **Application:** Have I ever heard God call my name? How does He call me by name?
 - a) How do I recognize God's voice in my life?

A student in Israel watched as three shepherds converged with their separate flocks of sheep. The three men hailed each other and then stopped to talk. While they were conversing, their sheep intermingled, melting into one big flock. Wondering how the three shepherds would ever be able to identify their own sheep, she waited until the men were ready to say their goodbyes. She watched, fascinated, as each of the shepherds called out to his sheep. At the sound of their shepherd's voice, the sheep separated again into three flocks.

Fifth Consideration: Our Lord's Disguises

- 1) Our Lord often shows up in our lives in various disguises.
- 2) As noted before, Mary didn't recognize Jesus from His physical appearance that morning – nor did the two disciples on the road to Emmaus, or the disciples casting nets on the Sea of Galilee.
- 3) ³⁷ *"Then the righteous will answer Him, 'Lord, when did we see You hungry and feed You, or thirsty and give You something to drink?'³⁸ When did we see You a stranger and invite You in, or needing clothes and clothe You?³⁹ When did we see You sick or in prison and go to visit You?"*
- ⁴⁰ *"The King will reply, 'Truly I tell you, whatever you did for one of the least of these brothers and sisters of Mine, you did for Me.'* (Matthew 25:40)
- 4) Jesus shows up in the disguise of that irritating person who is interrupting your meeting. He shows up in the disguise of the pan-handler outside the Union League. He shows up in many different ways.

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- 5) **Application:** How open am I to receive Jesus when He shows up disguised in one form or another in my life?
- Do I only expect to see Him in certain ways?
 - Do I really make an effort to see Jesus in this person or that person throughout my day, or would I prefer to simply be rid of those bothersome people so I can get on with my faith life?

Sixth Consideration: Going Out in the Darkness

- In the Song of Songs the Shulammitte went out in the darkness of night saying: "*I will search for the One my heart loves.*" (Song of Songs 3:1-2)
- Diligently she searched until at last, "*when I found the One my heart loves, I held Him and would not let Him go.*" (Song of Songs 3:4)
- Likewise, here we see Mary going out, as the Shulammitte had a thousand years before, in search of her Beloved.
- In the darkness of early morning, Mary goes with spices to anoint her Lord, only to be heartbroken as she is unable to find Him. Yet her darkness is soon changed to resplendent joy and adoration as she finds the One her heart pines for and falls at His feet; she will not let Him go.
- She calls Him by the familiar title "Rabboni" – teacher. And while it is true that He is, indeed, Teacher – Jesus now reveals Himself as something so much more. Jesus is so much greater than "Teacher" that His new identity is like a kind of darkness to Mary – dark in the sense that it surpasses her understanding.
- "Do not hold onto Me!" Jesus tells her. In His divinity, the Lord our God is so much bigger than what we can grasp. Jesus is not ours to hold, but rather we are held by His grasp – in His love, in His tender care. Jesus holds us fast in His grip, not the other way around.
- Application:** Has God ever revealed Himself in some new and surprising way to me, in a way that was as a kind of darkness to me – surpassing my previous understanding – challenging my faith to new dimensions of intimacy with Him?
 - Am I prepared to "go out in the darkness" of my own understanding to search for my Maker and my Friend beyond the limits of my present faith understanding? God is always challenging us to step a little further than the present boundary of my faith.

Seventh Consideration: Foul Odor of Corruption

- Mary had been at the tomb of her brother, Lazarus, when Jesus raised him from the dead. Her sister Martha warned Jesus saying "*But, Lord, by this time there is a bad odor, for he has been there four days.*" (John 11:39)
- Yet when Mary stooped to look into *this* tomb, there was no fear of such stench, as Paul expressed, "*He whom God raised up saw no corruption.*" (Acts 13:35)
- The corruption of sin leaves a foul odor in our soul, and most of us would prefer to leave that place buried within us with a large stone rolled across the entrance to prevent us from having to deal with it. It takes courage to visit this place. It takes courage to confront the boiling cauldron of hurts and pains and scars and rejections and shame that hide openly in our inner self. Jesus came to set us free that we would live fully!
- The Resurrected Lord offers new life to everyone who comes to Him with open heart. He alone can heal those wounds and scars that lie buried in our inner-man. But we must allow Him access to those places.
- Application:** What lies buried in me oozing foul odors that I want Jesus to unwrap and heal?