



St. Mary Magdalene



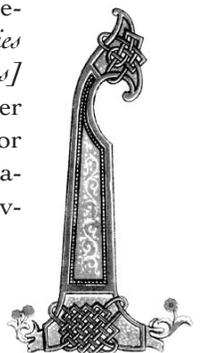
Mary Magdalene, by Timothy Schmalz

FIRST CENTURY
FRIEND OF JESUS
FEAST DAY: JULY 22

GRATITUDE is at the very heart of the reason to love God, who sustains all of creation and lovingly cares for his creatures. Everything is a free gift from God, and he wants only love freely returned. St. Mary Magdalene is the exemplar of one set free by Jesus, whom she loved fiercely in gratitude and followed for the remainder of her life.

Mary was probably from Magdala, a town not far from the western shore of the Sea of Galilee. Nothing is known of her history. The Gospels say that Jesus drove seven demons from her, and it is probable, although not certain, that she was the “*woman of the city*” (likely

Capernaum, where Jesus lived during much of his public ministry in the home of the Apostles Peter and Andrew), “*who was a sinner*” (Lk 7:37) who crashed a dinner party given by a Pharisee, washed Jesus’ feet with her tears, wiped them with her hair and kissed them, and anointed them with ointment. To the scandalized host, Jesus said, “[*H*er sins, which are many, are forgiven, for she loved much” (Lk 7:47). She heads the list of several women who traveled with Jesus, “*who had been healed of evil spirits and infirmities [and] who provided for them [Jesus and his apostles] out of their means*” (Lk 8:2-3). Most of the other women on the list are identified as mothers or wives, suggesting, perhaps, that Mary Magdalene was neither. Tradition identifies her as having been a prostitute.





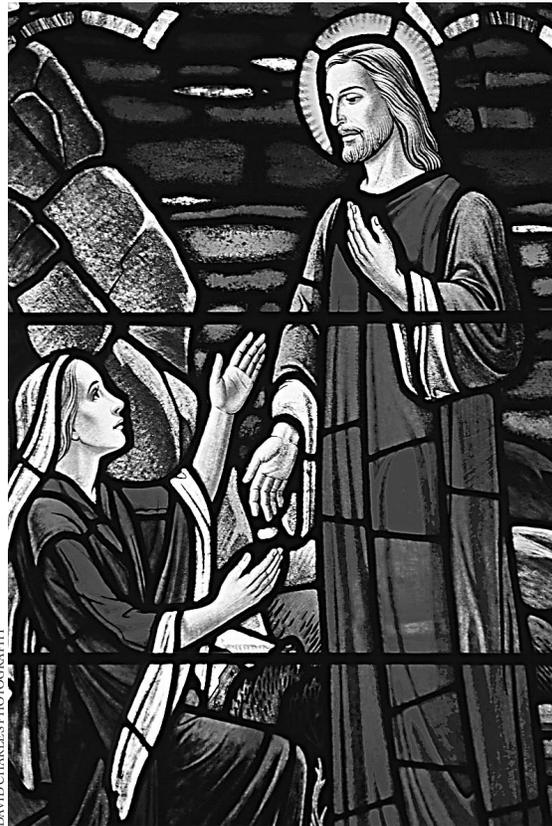
“Jesus instructed her to tell his disciples that she had seen him, making Mary Magdalene the ‘herald of the Resurrection.’”

Some also believe that Mary Magdalene is Mary of Bethany, the sister of Lazarus, whom Jesus raised from the dead. While not impossible, it is unlikely, since Mary Magdalene traveled with Jesus’ band, while Mary of Bethany is shown in the Gospels only at home. “Mary” seems to have been a very common name at the time.

In addition to Jesus’ mother, the Gospels name three women present at his crucifixion: Mary Magdalene, Mary the wife of Clopas and the mother of James and Joses (two of the “brothers” of Jesus), and Salome the wife of Zebedee and the mother of James and John. (Other women were present as well.) Following Jesus’ death and burial, Mary Magdalene and Mary the mother of James and Joses were the ones who remained behind after everyone else had departed, close to Jesus’ tomb, noting its location. With what little remained of daylight, they prepared spices and ointments for the re-interment that they would do on Sunday, following the sabbath rest.

Before it was fully light on Sunday, Mary Magdalene, Mary the mother of James and Joses, Salome, and other women went to the tomb with the spices. They were concerned about who would roll back the huge stone covering the door of the tomb — and discovered that it had been rolled back and that the tomb was empty. A dazzling angel told them that Jesus had risen from the dead, and instructed them to go tell his disciples. Running *“with fear and great joy”* (Mt 28:8), Mary Magdalene found them, told them what she had heard and seen, and was met with complete disbelief. Nevertheless, Peter and John ran back to the tomb, found it empty, and only then believed what she had told them.

At this point, however, Mary Magdalene herself still did not believe what she and the other women had heard from the angel. She remained near the tomb after Peter and John had left, weeping in desolation at the thought that Jesus’ body had been stolen. A nearby man, whom she took to be the gardener of the cemetery, asked why she was weeping, and she begged him to tell her where Jesus’ body was. He then called her by name, and she recognized that the “gar-



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denner” was Jesus. She fell at his feet, and he instructed her to tell his disciples that she had seen him, making Mary Magdalene the “herald of the Resurrection.”

This beautiful story of Jesus’ response to the love of the women who had cared for him and his little band of apostles, especially to the love of Mary Magdalene, shows how God abundantly repays love, faithful service, and courageous witness. These women had taken it upon themselves to materially support Jesus’ public ministry, stood by Jesus even to his death by crucifixion when his apostles had fled in fear, and sought to care lovingly for his body. They were privileged with the first news of the Resurrection and the first appearances of their Risen Lord. Jesus singled out Mary Magdalene for an especially tender encounter. He had freed her from a life of torment (and probably great sin), she had responded by freely giving him a heart full of love, and her reward was to be the first to see his glory.

