

The Easter story of Mary Magdalene

By Nick Butterworth

This is the Easter story of Mary Magdalene. Mary came from Magdala in Galilee and is not to be confused with Mary, the mother of Jesus.

Mary Magdalene's father was a farmer with vineyards, olive groves and a hundred sheep. She used to love watching the shepherd boys calling the sheep out of their pen in the morning. The sheep would come flocking out, jostling round the shepherds, recognizing their voices and ready for the day's journey to find grass.

One day she felt ill at ease with herself. People said she had evil spirits in her. In his Gospel, Luke tells the story how Jesus cured her of them. That day she walked miles and miles to be alone and to calm herself. Eventually she came to the shores of a lake where she saw a man talking to a crowd. This man was Jesus, although at the time she didn't know him. She joined the crowd and Jesus smiled at her and asked her to come and sit at his feet to listen to what he was saying. At first she held back as she felt it wasn't right for a woman to sit with him, like a real disciple, but he was insistent so she sat and listened with her whole being.

He was talking about being the good shepherd and calling his sheep and them knowing his voice and following him. When he talked about knowing the sheep and calling their names, Mary thought this was just like the shepherd boys calling her father's sheep.

Mary was spellbound as she joined a number of other women sitting with Jesus who were equally captivated.

Fast forward to Good Friday, Mary and the other women were present. They were clinging to each other as they watched in absolute horror as Jesus was crucified. They were still there when he died and was taken down from the cross to be hurriedly buried in a cave for a tomb.

The next day was the Sabbath. The women stood around in a state of complete shock at what they had witnessed the day before, barely able to do anything or even talk to each other.

As the Sabbath drew to a close, Mary realised they had to do something. Between them the women agreed to return to the grave to anoint his body but, as this was really a man's job, Mary went in search of the disciples. When she entered the room she saw there was little hope. The terror amongst the disciples was clear to see and Peter sat in the corner, rocking and weeping. Mary realised it was up to her and the other women to do the anointing.

In a city none of them knew, they spread out in search of spices, begging, borrowing and buying what they could. In the early morning they met up and compared their haul and decided they had just about enough. Armed with what they had and some jars of water, to bathe his battered body, they returned to the tomb and as they neared it, the sun had just risen casting eerie shadows. They peered through the morning light and were astonished to see that the stone across the entrance had been rolled away. They crept into the cave and there they saw a young man in a gleaming white robe.

Seeing their horrified faces, he said, **“Don't be alarmed. He's been raised. Go and tell the disciples - especially Peter - tell them he's going ahead of them to Galilee”**

The women turned and fled back to where they knew the disciples were, dropping the water and spices as they ran.

They broke into the room with the disastrous news that Jesus's body had been taken away.

The shock was enough to jolt Peter from his misery and they all ran back to the empty tomb. Running faster, the disciples arrived first and saw the linen wrapping lying on the floor and that Jesus's body had gone.

The women arrived and stood around outside sobbing, blinded by tears and not knowing what to do.

After a while Mary felt an over-whelming need to look into the tomb one more time.

The young man had been joined by someone else and the two were sitting at either end of the ledge. **"Why are you crying?"**, they asked. But before Mary could answer another voice asked the same question, **"Why are you crying?"**

Mary was in such a state she could barely answer. She spoke in a babble of tears about not knowing where the body had gone and didn't know what to do.

The man waited until she had pulled herself together and then said one word, **"Mary"**.

Mary was astounded because she immediately recognised Jesus's voice and realised straight away that the good shepherd was calling her by name, just as the shepherds called their sheep out in the field.

Mary's own words described her feelings when she realised that she was actually talking to Jesus and he was alive.

'The living, resurrected Jesus was there in the garden, and said my name. I was overwhelmed. I crumpled to the ground, my face literally in the mud at his feet, laughing and crying at the same time. I was clutching his robe and he was gently trying to disentangle himself. His voice was full of affection and love. "Don't hold on to me!", he said, "You need to go and tell the others that I'm back.

At that moment I would have done anything for him so I let him go.'

Mary then left Jesus to share the news.

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