

Additional Resources for Further Reflection

Introduction

All four Gospels (Matthew 28:1,9-10, Mark 16:9-11 Luke 24:1-11 and John) as well as an early Christian text, the Gospel of Peter, state explicitly that Mary Magdalene was at the tomb, sometimes accompanied by other women. It is important to note that the first to see the risen Christ is the one entrusted with the authority and leadership of the believing community. There are no scholarly grounds for questioning the authenticity of the tradition that the first Christophany was to Mary Magdalene.

Mary Magdalene

- ❖ Mary was from Magdala. Hebrew name, 'Migdal of the Fish Salters', suggests that preserving fish was a profitable local industry.
- ❖ Given that Mary is included among a group of women who provided for Jesus out of their own resources (Luke 8:2-3), it is not unreasonable to suspect that she or her family might have made their money from the fishing industry.

Resurrection Message

- ❖ Mary was the first witness to Jesus' resurrection: "I have seen the Lord" (John 20:18). The announcement of the presence of the risen Jesus is core of the Easter message.
- ❖ Missioned by Jesus "to go to my sisters and brothers and say to them, 'I am ascending to my Father and your Father, to my God and your God'" (John 20:17).
- ❖ Jesus' God is now also the God of the disciples.
- ❖ That which Jesus had previously lived and modelled is now entrusted to those who follow him.

Luke and the Petrine Tradition

- ❖ Matthew, Mark and John show Mary Magdalene and the other women arriving first at the empty tomb.
- ❖ Only in Luke does Peter arrives first (24:34): Luke would appear to have an agenda.
- ❖ Possibly this is to raise up the authority of Peter, at least in part, by diminishing the apostolic witness of Mary Magdalene and the other women.

- ❖ The person and leadership of Peter was intentionally brought to the fore in order to establish, without competition, one body of leadership within the early church.

Luke Omits

- ❖ Unflattering traditions about Peter.
- ❖ In Mark and Matthew Jesus tells Peter to “get behind me Satan” after Peter rebukes him (Mark: 8:33, Matt 16:23).
- ❖ Peter’s promise never to deny Jesus “even though they all fall away” (Matt 26:33; Mark14:29).

Elizabeth Johnson

- ❖ *Desiring to impress his readers in the Roman Empire, Luke consistently depicted men in public leadership roles and, in order to conform with the empire’s standards, kept women decorously under control in supportive positions. Having eyes mainly for elite men, he fudged women into an insignificant background ignoring the leadership roles they in fact held. . . . Consequently, Acts does not contain a representative picture of church leadership in the early decades. It tells only part of the story.*
(*Truly our Sister*, 300).

Non Canonical Texts

- ❖ In the Gospel of Peter there is mention of Mary Magdalene and her women friends (12:50).
- ❖ In the *Espiritual Apostolorum* Ethiopic 9 there is mention of Sarah, Martha, and Mary Magdalene.
- ❖ Coptic 9 mentions Mary, the daughter of Martha, and Mary Magdalene.
- ❖ The Gospel of Mary Magdalene.
- ❖ The name that is consistent in all of these accounts is that of Mary Magdalene.

Traditional Scholarship

- ❖ Priority has been given to the male-oriented tradition of Jesus’ resurrection appearances preserved in 1 Corinthians 15:1-7.
- ❖ Paul has nothing to say regarding the witness of women to the empty tomb and the resurrection.
- ❖ Why were these stories not preserved by Paul and Acts?

Sandra Schneiders

In at least one of the first Christian communities, a woman was regarded as the primary witness to the paschal mystery, the guarantee of the apostolic tradition. Her claim to apostleship is equal in every respect to both Peter's and Paul's, and we know more about her exercise of vocation than we do about most of the members of the twelve. Unlike Peter, she was not unfaithful to Jesus during the Passion, and unlike Paul, she never persecuted Christ in his members. But, like both, she saw the Risen Lord, received directly from him the commission to preach the Gospel, and carried out that commission faithfully and effectively. (Written that you may Believe, 113).

Pope Gregory the Great (540 – 604)

- ❖ Early Church tried to discount the authority of Mary Magdalene and the other women witnesses.
- ❖ Conflating several women, identified Mary Magdalene as the woman caught in adultery, the woman who anointed Jesus' feet, *and* the woman who had seven demons cast out of her.
- ❖ He said that the seven demons were the seven mortal sins and that after Jesus healed her, she became a model penitent.
- ❖ The image of Mary Magdalene as a prostitute became the dominant story despite it not being true. Why?

Gregory of Antioch (571 – 593).

- ❖ In one sermon he attributed these words to Jesus, "Proclaim to my disciples the mysteries which you [Mary Magdalene] have seen.
- ❖ Become the first teacher of the teachers... Peter who has denied me must learn that I can choose women as apostles".
- ❖ (Gregory of Antioch: Homilia in S.Theophania, CPG 7385–Gleanings of Text and Theme," JTS 60 vol. 2 (2009), pp. 531-7).

Mary Apostol to the Apostles

- ❖ From Rhabanus Maurus in the ninth century, Abelard and Bernard of Clairvaux in the twelfth century, and Thomas Aquinas in the thirteenth century,
- ❖ To Pope John Paul II in the twentieth century —Mary is apostle to the apostles.
- ❖ See John Paul II, *Mulieris Dignitatem, On the Dignity and Vocation of Women*, # 16 n. 38.
- ❖ Feast day 22nd July.

- ❖ Women's status in the Church is much more than ordination, it is about creating spaces for women, a language for women with equal ministerial roles.

Twentieth and twenty-first century

- ❖ The trend to link Mary Magdalene with an infamous sexual past.
- ❖ Jesus Christ Superstar: Mary Magdalene attempts to reconcile her sexual past with her current feelings for Jesus singing "I don't know how to love him".
- ❖ In the Last Temptation of Christ she appears as a prostitute to whom Jesus is physically attracted and the "last temptation" he must overcome.
- ❖ The Da Vinci Code popularised the idea that Mary Magdalene was Jesus' wife, along with a number of other legendary details that tend to resurface in different forms over the years.
- ❖ The 'fallen' woman image got superimposed over the image of Mary of Magdala.
- ❖ Despite this, feminist interpreters have been instrumental in reclaiming her role as a witness and apostle in early Christianity.

Questions further reflection and discussion

- ❖ Which resurrection story do you follow in your personal life?
- ❖ An examination of Christian texts show that Mary Magdalene's prominence had to be dealt with, her position as an apostle or an eye witness of the resurrection is often weakened, altered or eradicated. What have been and are the consequences of this both for us Mercy women, society and our Church?
- ❖ What does Mary Magdalene have to teach us about authenticity of women's leadership both at a personal and communal level?