

# The 'Apostle to the Apostles' - Mary Magdalene – 22 July 2023

## Acknowledgement

Wherever you are reading this, take a moment to be still and contemplate the place where you are. Connect your feet to the ground or floor and *feel* Country beneath you. We acknowledge and pay respect to the First Peoples as the original and ongoing owners and custodians of this land. We thank them with a deep gratitude for their ongoing care of the lands, seas, skies, and waterways that we call home. We commit ourselves to actively work alongside First Nations people for reconciliation and justice.

## Context

Mary Magdalene is mentioned fourteen times in the New Testament. Technically, she is Mary of Magdala; Magdala being her hometown, a village on the shore of the Sea of Galilee. She was a key figure in those who were influenced by and followers of Jesus. She stayed beside Jesus throughout his crucifixion and she was one of the women who attended his tomb, only to find it empty. Perhaps the climax in the story of Mary Magdalene was when Jesus appeared to her at the tomb. She was the first person to see Jesus after his resurrection and the first to share the news of his resurrection. Because of this, she was given the title of *Apostolorum Apostola*, or 'Apostle to the Apostles.'



Figure 1 Image: *St. Mary Magdalene Approaching the Sepulchre*. Fine Art. Britannica ImageQuest, Encyclopædia Britannica, 25 May 2016.

Jewish culture in the first century was decidedly patriarchal. The daily prayers of Jewish men included this prayer of thanksgiving: "Praised be God that he has not created me a woman." A woman's place was thought to be in the home. Women were responsible for bearing the children, rearing them and maintaining a hospitable home. Men were not to greet women in public. Some Jewish writers of Jesus' time, such as Philo, taught that women should never leave the home except to go to the synagogue.

In a time when women were regarded as second-class citizens, Jesus gave Mary- a woman- a highly significant honour by appearing to her first and charging her with spreading the news of his resurrection. This choice is another example of the radical love Jesus came to model to human beings. He recognised the intrinsic equality of men and women, and continually showed the worth and dignity of women as persons. Jesus valued their fellowship, prayers, service, financial support, testimony and witness. He honoured women, taught women, and ministered to women in thoughtful ways.

In 2016, Pope Francis raised the July 22nd memorial of St. Mary Magdalene to a feast on the church's liturgical calendar demonstrating the "relevance of this woman who showed great love for Christ and was much loved by Christ." She was and is the ideal representative for all of us frail and imperfect followers of Christ.

## Scripture (John 20: 11 – 18)

But Mary stood weeping outside the tomb. As she wept, she bent over to look into the tomb; and she saw two angels in white, sitting where the body of Jesus had been lying, one at the head and the other at the feet. They said to her, "Woman, why are you weeping?" She said to them, "They have taken away my Lord, and I do not know where they have laid him." When she had said this, she turned around and saw Jesus standing there, but she did not know that it was Jesus. Jesus said to her, "Woman, why are you weeping? Whom are you looking for?" Supposing him to be the gardener, she said to him, "Sir, if you have carried him away, tell me where you have laid him, and I will take him away."



Figure 2 Easter - Christ appears to Mary by Jesus Mafa Accessed at:

<https://diglib.library.vanderbilt.edu/act->

Jesus said to her, "Mary!" She turned and said to him in Hebrew, "Rabbouni!" (which means Teacher). Jesus said to her, "Do not hold on to me, because I have not yet ascended to the Father. But go to my brothers and say to them, 'I am ascending to my Father and your Father, to my God and your God.'" Mary Magdalene went and announced to the disciples, "I have seen the Lord"; and she told them that he had said these things to her.

## Reflection by Nadine Grant, Consultant Formation Identity and Outreach

At the heart of the story is love. Mary became an evangelizer because her heart was brimming over with love for the Lord. Though overwhelmed by his death, Mary hangs in with him out of love. Her love meets God's love in her meeting with Jesus alive. Love conquers death. The story reminds us how central love is in our faith and to our lives. Her life shows all of us- not just women- that what matters most is how well we love. It is a good time to pray for all the people we hold in our love and who love us.

## Prayer

Loving God, thank you for the love that brought Mary to the tomb in tears and took her away in joy.

Thank you for your love that took Jesus through death for us to life with us.

Thank you for the love that joins me to so many people.

Be with all who suffer in the absence of love in our world.

May I continue to show your love to all through my words and actions each day.

Amen

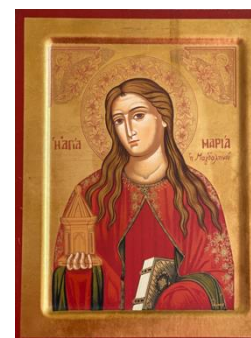


Figure 3 Personal Photo of Mary of Magdala icon

## Call to Action

- Contact a significant woman in your life and thank her for her influence and care.
- Listen to *Australian Women Preach* an initiative of WATAC (Women and the Australian Church) and the Grail in Australia, the Australian Women Preach Podcast showcases preaching by Christian women from across all denominations, relevant to contemporary Australian life.

