

Community Church of Issaquah
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The Mary We Thought We Knew
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There are times when we read scriptures and assume that we know more than we often do. That is often the case concerning some of the individuals that appear in portions of stories that we have read many times. Here just a few weeks past the Easter celebration and the beautiful story of Jesus rising from the dead, one of the people who has always raised my curiosity is one of the women who we read about attending the crucifixion of Christ, witnessing the empty tomb, and encountering the resurrected Jesus. Her name is Mary Magdalene and I'd like to share some things about her that you might not know, and to dispel some of the rumors about her that are not truths.

Mary has been portrayed in such negative ways that she has not impressed us with her life. What are some of the incorrect things in her life that we have heard?

- ❖ Jesus healed her to the seven demons of her sins

- ❖ Mary was a prostitute

- ❖ Even some teach that Mary and Jesus were married

And there's much more, but let's make it clear that none of those assumptions are true. Instead, I'd like to share the positive life of an amazing woman.

Mary Magdalene stands as one of the most compelling and often misunderstood figures in the story of redemption. Her life is a testimony to the transforming power of grace, the depth of devotion, and the courage to remain faithful even

when hope seems lost. Today, we reflect on her journey—not just as history, but as a mirror for our own lives.

Mary Magdalene first enters the biblical narrative in a place of deep brokenness. Scripture tells us that Jesus cast seven demons out of her. We are not given all the details, but we are given enough to understand that her life before encountering Christ was marked by suffering, bondage, and spiritual darkness. Whether her struggles were visible to others or hidden within, she carried burdens that she could not remove on her own. And then she met Jesus.

In that moment, everything changed. Where there had been chaos, Christ brought peace. Where there had been torment, He brought restoration. Where there had been despair, He planted hope. This is the first powerful truth we learn from Mary Magdalene: no one is beyond the reach of God's grace. No past is too broken, no life too tangled, no soul too lost for Jesus to redeem. Mary did not simply receive this transformation and move on unchanged. Her response was one of deep, unwavering devotion. The Gospel accounts tell us that she became one of the women who followed Jesus, supporting His ministry and remaining close to Him throughout His journey. She did not return to her old life; she stepped into a new one defined by gratitude and purpose.

This invites us to ask a hard but necessary question: how do we respond to the grace we have received? It is one thing to experience God's forgiveness; it is another to live a life shaped by it. Mary shows us that true encounter with Christ leads to commitment. It leads to a reordering of

priorities, a willingness to follow, and a heart that longs to serve. As Jesus' ministry unfolded, many people came and went. Crowds gathered when miracles were performed and scattered when teachings became difficult. Even among His closest disciples, there were moments of doubt, fear, and failure. Yet Mary Magdalene remained.

She was present at the crucifixion. While others fled in fear, Mary stood near the cross. She witnessed the suffering of the One who had given her life back. She saw the nails, heard the cries, and felt the crushing weight of what seemed like the end. Imagine the emotional turmoil she must have experienced—grief, confusion, heartbreak. The One who had delivered her was now dying before her eyes. And yet, she did not turn away.

This is the second truth we learn from Mary: true devotion does not disappear in moments of pain. It deepens. It stays. It endures. Faith is not only about celebrating victories; it is also about standing firm in seasons of sorrow, when answers are unclear and hope feels distant. How often do we follow God when life is going well, but struggle to remain when things fall apart? Mary's example challenges us to a deeper faith—one that holds on even at the foot of the cross.

After Jesus was laid in the tomb, Mary Magdalene did something extraordinary in its simplicity: she showed up. Early on the first day of the week, while it was still dark, she went to the tomb. This was not a triumphant visit. She was not expecting resurrection. She came in grief, to mourn, to honor, to be near the place where her Lord had

been laid. But what she encountered changed everything. The stone had been rolled away.

In confusion and distress, she ran to tell the disciples. After they came and left, Mary remained at the tomb, weeping. This detail is important—she stayed. Even in her sorrow, even in her uncertainty, she did not walk away. And then, in that quiet moment of grief, she encountered the risen Christ. At first, she did not recognize Him. Through her tears, she saw what she thought was a gardener. But then Jesus spoke her name: “Mary.” In that single word, everything became clear. There is something deeply personal about this moment. Jesus did not reveal Himself with grandeur or spectacle. He called her by name. This is the third truth we learn: the risen Christ meets us personally. He knows us. He sees us. He calls us by name.

Mary’s response was immediate. She turned toward Him. Recognition led to relationship, and relationship led to mission. Jesus gave her a message: “Go to my brothers and tell them.” In that moment, Mary Magdalene became the first witness of the resurrection and the first to proclaim the risen Lord. The woman who had once been bound by darkness was now entrusted with the greatest news in history.

This is no small detail. In a time when women’s testimony was often undervalued, God chose Mary to be the first messenger of resurrection. This speaks volumes about the heart of God. He does not define us by our past, by societal labels, or by human expectations. He calls, equips, and sends those whose hearts are open to Him.

Mary's story is a story of reversal. From brokenness to restoration. From despair to hope. From follower to messenger. Her life reminds us that God specializes in transformation and that He delights in using those the world might overlook.

But there is also a challenge in her story. Mary did not cling to Jesus when she recognized Him. When she reached out, He told her not to hold on, but to go and tell others. This teaches us that our relationship with Christ is not meant to be kept to ourselves. It is meant to be shared. Faith is not a private possession; it is a living message. How often do we encounter God in meaningful ways, yet hesitate to share that experience with others? Perhaps we feel unqualified. Perhaps we fear rejection. Perhaps we think our story is not significant enough. Mary Magdalene reminds us that the power is not in our perfection, but in our testimony.

She did not have all the answers. She simply shared what she had seen and heard: "I have seen the Lord." That is enough. Today, we are invited to see ourselves in Mary's journey. Some of us may relate to her past—to the brokenness, the struggles, the need for healing. Others may relate to her devotion—seeking to follow Christ faithfully in daily life. Still others may find themselves at the cross or the tomb—in seasons of grief, confusion, or waiting. Wherever we are, her story speaks to us.

- ❖ If you are in a place of brokenness, know that Jesus still heals. He still restores. He still sets people free.

- ❖ If you are walking in faith, let Mary's devotion inspire you to remain steadfast, not only in moments of joy but also in times of difficulty.
- ❖ If you are in a season of sorrow or uncertainty, remember that the tomb is not the end of the story. Resurrection often comes when we least expect it.
- ❖ And if you have encountered the risen Christ, even in a quiet and personal way, consider how you might share that experience with others.

Mary Magdalene's life is not just about what Jesus did for her; it is about what He did through her. She became a witness, a messenger, a bearer of hope.

The same is true for us.