

## Section 104

# Jesus' Early Life

# Mary of Magdala

## Introduction

One of the greatest controversies of the early 21st century revolves around the personality of Mary Magdalene. There are several Marys appearing in the New Testament, Mary of Magdala, Mary of Bethany, Mary the mother of James and John, Mary the wife of Cleopas, Mary the mother of John Mark and of course Mary the mother of Jesus. There are also several women who appear very close to Jesus and perform duties that only a wife might perform in Jewish society.

Jesus is brought up in Galilee and in the normal course of events could expect to be married in his late teens or early twenties, long before his ministry begins. He is frequently referred to as a rabbi and was evidently well versed in the scriptures. In contemporary Jewish society he could not have been a rabbi unless married.

On the other hand he is often associated with the Essene community at Qumran. This community is generally regarded as celibate but it had a very strict hierarchy with well defined criteria to advance from novice to full member. To reach the higher ranks they would have to have been at least thirty years of age. However there were associate members who were married although women were not allowed into the heart of the community.

## Magdala

Magdala is a small village on the shores of the Sea of Galilee between Tiberius and Capernaum. As Jesus was brought up in Nazareth and spent considerable time around the sea it is quite conceivable that he met Mary and married her in the normal course of events. Luke introduces her as a woman whom Jesus had cured of infirmities.

### *LUKE 8.1 to 8.3*

And it came to pass afterwards that he went through [the country] city by city, and village by village, preaching and announcing the glad tidings of the kingdom of God; and the twelve [were] with him, and certain women who had been healed of wicked spirits and infirmities, Mary who was called Magdalene, from whom seven demons had gone out, and Joanna, wife of Chuza, Herod's steward, and Susanna, and many others, who ministered to him of their substance.

## The Wedding at Cana

While he was in Galilee Jesus attended a wedding. It was obviously of someone very close because his mother seemed to be in charge. One might speculate that it was Jesus' own wedding and that several of his childhood friends who later became disciples were also there.

### *John 2.1 to 2.12*

ON the third day there was a wedding at Cana-in-Galilee. The mother of Jesus was there, and Jesus and his disciples were guests also. The wine gave out, so Jesus's mother said to him, 'They have no wine left.' He answered, 'Your concern, mother, is not mine. My hour has not yet come.' His mother said to the servants, 'Do whatever he tells you.' There were six stone water-jars standing near, of the kind used for Jewish rites of purification; each held from twenty to thirty gallons. Jesus said to the servants, 'Fill the jars with water', and they filled them to the brim. 'Now

draw some off', he ordered, 'and take it to the steward of the feast'; and they did so. The steward tasted the water now turned into wine, not knowing its source; though the servants who had drawn the water knew. He hailed the bridegroom and said, 'Everyone serves the best wine first, and waits until the guests have drunk freely before serving the poorer sort; but you have kept the best wine till now.'

This deed at Cana-in-Galilee is the first of the Signs by which Jesus revealed his glory and led his disciples to believe in him,

## Attending to Jesus

Throughout the Gospels there are references to women who perform acts which it would be normal for a wife to perform. Luke tells of Mary ignoring the chores to be with Jesus

*LUKE 10.38 to 10.42*

And it came to pass as they went that \*he\* entered into a certain village; and a certain woman, Martha by name, received him into her house. And she had a sister called Mary, who also, having sat down at the feet of Jesus was listening to his word. Now Martha was distracted with much serving, and coming up she said, Lord, dost thou not care that my sister has left me to serve alone? Speak to her therefore that she may help me. But Jesus answering said to her, Martha, Martha, thou art careful and troubled about many things; but there is need of one, and Mary has chosen the good part, the which shall not be taken from her.

There are other stories of women anointing Jesus with oil. Luke starts with a dinner given by one of the Pharisees.

*LUKE 7.36 to 7.50*

But one of the Pharisees begged him that he would eat with him. And entering into the house of the Pharisee he took his place at table; and behold, a woman in the city, who was a sinner, and knew that he was sitting at meat in the house of the Pharisee, having taken an alabaster box of myrrh, and standing at his feet behind [him] weeping, began to wash his feet with tears; and she wiped them with the hairs of her head, and kissed his feet, and anointed [them] with the myrrh.

And the Pharisee who had invited him, seeing it, spoke with himself saying, This [person] if he were a prophet would have known who and what the woman is who touches him, for she is a sinner.

And Jesus answering said to him, Simon, I have somewhat to say to thee. And he says, Teacher, say [it].

There were two debtors of a certain creditor: one owed five hundred denarii and the other fifty; but as they had nothing to pay, he forgave both of them [their debt]: [say,] which of them therefore will love him most? And Simon answering said, I suppose he to whom he forgave the most. And he said to him, Thou hast rightly judged. And turning to the woman he said to Simon, Seest thou this woman? I entered into thy house; thou gavest me not water on my feet, but she has washed my feet with tears, and wiped them with her hair. Thou gavest me not a kiss, but she from the time I came in has not ceased kissing my feet. My head with oil thou didst not anoint, but she has anointed my feet with myrrh.

For which cause I say to thee, Her many sins are forgiven; for she loved much; but he to whom little is forgiven loves little. And he said to her, Thy sins are forgiven. And they that were with [them] at table began to say within themselves, Who is this who forgives also sins? And he said to the woman, Thy faith has saved thee; go in peace.

Mark tells a slightly different version. He places it in Bethany and also refers to Simon, but as a leper not a Pharisee.

*MARK 14.3 to 14.9*

And when he was in Bethany, in the house of Simon the leper, as he lay at table, there came a woman having an alabaster flask of ointment of pure nard, very costly; and having broken the alabaster flask, she poured it out upon his head. And there were some indignant in themselves,

and saying, Why has this waste been made of the ointment? for this ointment could have been sold for more than three hundred denarii and given to the poor. And they spoke very angrily at her. But Jesus said, Let her alone; why do ye trouble her? she has wrought a good work as to me; for ye have the poor always with you, and whenever ye would ye can do them good; but me ye have not always. What she could she has done. She has beforehand anointed my body for the burial. And verily I say unto you, Wheresoever these glad tidings may be preached in the whole world, what this [woman] has done shall be also spoken of for a memorial of her.

John goes further and identifies the woman as Mary and Simon as the father of Judas Iscariot

*JOHN 12.1 to 12.8*

Jesus therefore, six days before the passover, came to Bethany, where was the dead [man] Lazarus, whom Jesus raised from among [the] dead. There therefore they made him a supper, and Martha served, but Lazarus was one of those at table with him. Mary therefore, having taken a pound of ointment of pure nard of great price, anointed the feet of Jesus, and wiped his feet with her hair, and the house was filled with the odour of the ointment. One of his disciples therefore, Judas [son] of Simon, Iscariot, who was about to deliver him up, says, Why was this ointment not sold for three hundred denarii and given to the poor? But he said this, not that he cared for the poor, but because he was a thief and had the bag, and carried what was put into [it]. Jesus therefore said, Suffer her to have kept this for the day of my preparation for burial; for ye have the poor always with you, but me ye have not always.

## Bethany

There are many other references to Jesus visiting Bethany whilst in Judea. It would seem that this was his home. This is covered in section 303

## John Mark

The final part of the jigsaw is found in Acts. Herod is persecuting Christians and had already beheaded James the brother of John. Peter had been arrested but makes a miraculous escape from prison and goes immediately to the house of Mary, mother of John Mark.

*ACTS 12.11 to 12.17*

Then Peter came to himself. 'Now I know it is true,' he said; 'the Lord has sent his angel and rescued me from Herod's clutches and from all that the Jewish people were expecting.' When he realized how things stood, he made for the house of Mary, the mother of John Mark, where a large company was at prayer. He knocked at the outer door and a maid called Rhoda came to answer it. She recognized Peter's voice and was so overjoyed that instead of opening the door she ran in and announced that Peter was standing outside. 'You are crazy', they told her; but she insisted that it was so. Then they said, 'It must be his guardian angel.'

Meanwhile Peter went on knocking, and when they opened the door and saw him, they were astounded. With a movement of the hand he signed to them to keep quiet, and told them how the Lord had brought him out of prison. 'Report this to James and the members of the church', he said. Then he left the house and went off elsewhere.

Who was John Mark? - His story and an alternative interpretation of the story of the Magi can be found in section 707.