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~ **The Mystery of Mary Magdalene** ~

You can learn much more about this story by doing these three things:

1. Read John 20:1-17.
2. Discover key cultural and historical insights.
3. Answer the reflective questions.

**1. Read the text of the story.**

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<b>John 20:1-17 NASB</b>	<b>John 20:1-17 NLT</b>
<p><sup>1</sup> Now on the first <i>day</i> of the week Mary Magdalene *came early to the tomb, while it *was still dark, and *saw the stone <i>already</i> taken away from the tomb. <sup>2</sup> So she *ran and *came to Simon Peter and to the other disciple whom Jesus loved, and *said to them, “They have taken away the Lord out of the tomb, and we do not know where they have laid Him.” <sup>3</sup> So Peter and the other disciple went forth, and they were going to the tomb. <sup>4</sup> The two were running together; and the other disciple ran ahead faster than Peter and came to the tomb first; <sup>5</sup> and stooping and looking in, he *saw the linen wrappings lying <i>there</i>; but he did not go in. <sup>6</sup> And so Simon Peter also *came, following him, and entered the tomb; and he *saw the linen wrappings lying <i>there</i>, <sup>7</sup> and the face-cloth which had been on His head, not lying with the linen wrappings, but rolled up in a place by itself. <sup>8</sup> So the other disciple who had first come to the tomb then also entered, and he saw and believed. <sup>9</sup> For as yet they did not understand the Scripture, that He must rise again from the dead. <sup>10</sup> So the disciples went away again to their own homes.</p> <p><sup>11</sup> But Mary was standing outside the tomb weeping; and so, as she wept, she stooped and looked into the tomb; <sup>12</sup> and she *saw two angels in white sitting, one at the head and one at the feet, where the body of Jesus had been lying. <sup>13</sup> And they *said to her, “Woman, why are you weeping?” She *said to them, “Because they have taken away my Lord, and I do not know where they have laid Him.” <sup>14</sup> When she had said this, she turned around and *saw Jesus standing <i>there</i>, and did not know that it was Jesus. <sup>15</sup> Jesus *said to her, “Woman, why are you weeping? Whom are you seeking?” Supposing Him to be the gardener, she *said to Him, “Sir, if you have carried Him away, tell me where you have laid Him,</p>	<p><sup>1</sup> Early on Sunday morning, while it was still dark, Mary Magdalene came to the tomb and found that the stone had been rolled away from the entrance. <sup>2</sup> She ran and found Simon Peter and the other disciple, the one whom Jesus loved. She said, “They have taken the Lord’s body out of the tomb, and we don’t know where they have put him!”</p> <p><sup>3</sup> Peter and the other disciple started out for the tomb. <sup>4</sup> They were both running, but the other disciple outran Peter and reached the tomb first. <sup>5</sup> He stooped and looked in and saw the linen wrappings lying there, but he didn’t go in. <sup>6</sup> Then Simon Peter arrived and went inside. He also noticed the linen wrappings lying there, <sup>7</sup> while the cloth that had covered Jesus’ head was folded up and lying apart from the other wrappings. <sup>8</sup> Then the disciple who had reached the tomb first also went in, and he saw and believed— <sup>9</sup> for until then they still hadn’t understood the Scriptures that said Jesus must rise from the dead. <sup>10</sup> Then they went home.</p> <p><sup>11</sup> Mary was standing outside the tomb crying, and as she wept, she stooped and looked in. <sup>12</sup> She saw two white-robed angels, one sitting at the head and the other at the foot of the place where the body of Jesus had been lying. <sup>13</sup> “Dear woman, why are you crying?” the angels asked her.</p> <p>“Because they have taken away my Lord,” she replied, “and I don’t know where they have put him.”</p> <p><sup>14</sup> She turned to leave and saw someone standing there. It was Jesus, but she didn’t recognize him. <sup>15</sup> “Dear woman, why are you crying?” Jesus asked her. “Who are you looking for?” She thought he was the gardener. “Sir,” she said, “if you have</p>

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and I will take Him away.”<sup>16</sup> Jesus \*said to her, “Mary!” She turned and \*said to Him in Hebrew, “Rabboni!” (which means, Teacher).<sup>17</sup> Jesus \*said to her, “Stop clinging to Me, for I have not yet ascended to the Father; but go to My brethren and say to them, ‘I ascend to My Father and your Father, and My God and your God.’”

taken him away, tell me where you have put him, and I will go and get him.”

<sup>16</sup> “Mary!” Jesus said. She turned to him and cried out, “Rabboni!” (which is Hebrew for “Teacher”).

<sup>17</sup> “Don’t cling to me,” Jesus said, “for I haven’t yet ascended to the Father. But go find my brothers and tell them, ‘I am ascending to my Father and your Father, to my God and your God.’”

## 2. Discover key cultural and historical insights

The following insights are from *A Social Science Commentary on the Synoptic Gospels* and *A Social Science Commentary on John* by Malina and Rohrbaugh. These insights pertain to the resurrection story in John 20:1-17.

- A first century ordinance, found near Nazareth, promoted by the Roman emperor made grave robbing a capital offense.

“Ordinance of Caesar: It is my pleasure that graves and tombs – whoever has made them as a pious service for ancestors or children or members of their house – that these remain unmolested in perpetuity. But if any person lay information that another either has destroyed them, or has in any other way cast out the bodies which have been buried there, or with malicious deception has transferred them to other places, to the dishonor of those buried there or has removed the headstones or other stones, in such a case I command that a trial be instituted, protecting the pious services of mortals, just as if they were concerned with the gods. For beyond all else it shall be obligatory to honor those who have been buried. If anyone does so however, it is my will that he shall suffer capital punishment on the charge of tomb robbery. (SEG 8:13 Nazareth (?) first-century C.E. trans. B.M. Metzger 1980: 77)

- Executed criminals were usually dishonored even in death. Romans often denied burial to criminals. 218
- Burial was in two phases – the body was placed in a tomb and then after a year, when the flesh decomposed, the bones were collected and placed in an ossuary to await the resurrection. It was believed that sin resided in the flesh and the bones were pure before God. God would use the bones to form the new person who had been purified in the year-long process as the flesh decomposes. This was to atone for his sins and to purify the person. In the case of a criminal, the Sanhedrin would keep the body, and after a year return the bones to the family. One can imagine the shock if a body disappears or is thought to be stolen. It cannot be prepared for resurrection. The resurrection of Jesus shows that he was pure – his flesh did not decompose and it vindicates him.
- In the first century Mediterranean world, people believed all earthquakes were caused by heavenly beings.

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- Taking spices to a tomb was a family responsibility.

The following insights are from *The NIV Cultural Backgrounds Study Bible* and pertain to John 20:1-17.

- Because the Sabbath ended at sundown on Saturday, Mary Magdalene and the others were free to bring their spices to the tomb.
- Tomb entrances were often covered by disk-shaped rocks, a yard in diameter, and laying in a groove. It could not be moved from the inside and would require several people to remove it from the outside.
- Women’s testimony had limited value in Jewish and Roman law. Thus, for Jesus to give Mary a message to pass on to others is remarkable.

The following insights are from *Breaking the DaVinci Code* by Darrell L. Bock

- Mary Magdalene is one of seven “Mary’s” listed in the New Testament. Women were often identified by the significant male in their lives. If there was no significant male, they could be identified by their home town.
- Mary was identified by her home village, Magdala, which was on the west coast of the Sea of Galilee. Magdala has been discovered and excavations are underway. See [www.magdala.com](http://www.magdala.com).
- It is often thought that Mary Magdalene was a prostitute or immoral woman. She is often popularly identified with the woman in Luke 7:37-50 or the woman in John 8. But there is no warrant for associating her with either of these women. Aside from the resurrection account, the most that Scripture says about her is found in Luke 8:1-3 which says that she was possessed by seven evil spirits and delivered by Jesus.

### **3. Answer these reflective questions.**

**Luke 8:1-3 tells us that Mary, along with other women, traveled with Jesus and supported him from their wealth. Why do you think Mary did this? Was it because of what Jesus had done for her? What has Jesus done for you? How does his grace in your life motivate you to serve him?**

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**The Gospel records show that Mary was at the crucifixion and watched Jesus suffer, die, and be buried. How do you think she felt in seeing these things? How would you feel having to watch Jesus suffer and die as he did?**

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**Mary went to the tomb to anoint the dead body of Jesus. What does this say about her devotion to Jesus? What do you think she would have felt having seen him raised from the dead and talked with him? How would she have felt when he gave her the mission to tell the others that he was alive?**

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**Why do you think there are so many false ideas about Mary Magdalene?**

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**When we learn all there is to know about Mary Magdalene, we discover that the stories are given to us so that we might focus on Jesus! Is your life focused on Jesus and spreading the good news of his resurrection to others?**

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