

# *People of the Bible*

## Mary Magdalene

Mary Magdalene traveled with Jesus as one of his followers. She was present at Jesus' two most important moments: the crucifixion and the resurrection. Within the four Gospels she is named at least 12 times, more than most of the apostles. The Gospel references describe her as courageous, brave enough to stand by Jesus in his hours of suffering, death and beyond.

The Gospel of Luke says seven demons had gone out of her, (Luke 8:2) and the longer ending of Mark says Jesus had cast seven demons out from her. (Mark 16:9) The "seven demons" may refer to a complex illness, not to any form of sinfulness. (Some Bible commentators would *erroneously* have us believe that she was prostitute.)

"Magdalene" identifies her with her place of birth, just as Jesus was called "The Nazarene" because of His association with Nazareth. Magdala means "tower" or "castle," and in the time of Christ was a thriving, populous town on the coast of Galilee about three miles from Capernaum. Dye works and primitive textile factories added to the wealth of the community. It may be that "The Magdalene" was connected with the industry of the town for it would seem as if she was not without means, enabling her to serve the Lord with her substance.

We have no record of Mary's parentage, her marital status or her age. That she was free to follow Jesus in His journeys would suggest that she had no home obligations. Some examples of her being with Jesus follow below:

- After this, Jesus traveled about from one town and village to another. The Twelve were with him, and also some women who had been cured of evil spirits and diseases: Mary (called Magdalene) from whom seven demons had come out—and many others. These women were helping to support them out of their own means. (Luke 8:1-3)
- It is at the time of the crucifixion and resurrection that Mary Magdalene comes to the fore in the gospels. Uniquely among the followers of Jesus, she is specified by name (though not consistently by any one gospel) as a witness to three key events: Jesus' crucifixion, his burial, and the discovery that his tomb was empty. Mark 15:40, Matthew 27:56 and John 19:25 mention Mary Magdalene as a witness to crucifixion, along with various other women. Luke does not name any witnesses, but mentions "women who had followed him from Galilee" standing at a distance. (Luke 23:49)
- In listing witnesses who saw where Jesus was buried by Joseph of Aramathea, Mark 15:47 and Matthew 27:61 both name only two people: Mary Magdalene and "the other Mary", who in Mark is "the mother of James". Luke 23:55 describes the witnesses as "the women who had come with Jesus from Galilee". John 19:39-42 mentions no other witness to Joseph's burial of Jesus except for Nicodemus. Mark 16:1 says "...Mary Magdalene, Mary the mother of James, and Salome bought spices so that they might go to anoint Jesus' body".
- In Mark, Matthew, and John, Mary Magdalene is first witness to the resurrection. John 20:1 names Mary Magdalene in describing who discovered the tomb was empty. Mark 16:9 says she was accompanied by Salome and Mary the mother of James, while Matthew 28:1 omits Salome. Luke 24:10 says the group who reported to the disciples

the finding of the empty tomb consisted of "Mary Magdalene, Joanna, Mary the mother of James, and the others with them". In Luke 24 the resurrection is announced to the women at the tomb by "two men in clothes that gleamed like lightning" who suddenly appeared next to them.

- The final chapter of Mark's Gospel contains two narratives relating to Mary Magdalene: firstly that along with Mary the mother of James and Salome, she was advised by "a young man dressed in a white robe" that Jesus had risen, and given instructions to tell Jesus' disciples — and Peter — that he was going before them into Galilee, but through fear they told no one; and secondly, in the longer ending, that Jesus appeared "first" to Mary Magdalene (alone), who then related his appearance to "those who had been with him", but they did not believe her.