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MARY MAGDALENE, MARY OF BETHANY AND THE SINFUL WOMAN OF LUKE 7: THE SAME PERSON?

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This article argues that Mary Magdalene, Mary of Bethany and the sinful woman in Luke 7 should be identified as one and the same, as long held by Christian tradition but recently challenged. Comparison of the four Gospel narratives of Christ's anointing reveals numerous details supporting this identification. Sustained literary motifs also build a consistent characterization. An intriguing story emerges which, far from discrediting Mary from influence or ministry, honours her as a woman called by Christ to be an apostle even to the apostles and an eyewitness to his resurrection and transformative grace, the essence of his message.

Key Words: Mary Magdalene, Mary of Bethany, "sinful woman," women, sexism, women's ordination

1. Introduction

Western Christian tradition long held that the anonymous woman "sinner" of Luke 7:36-50, the woman who anoints Jesus in Bethany (Matt 26:6-13; Mark 14:3-9; John 12:1-8) who is named Mary the sister of Lazarus (John 11:2), and Mary Magdalene who is mentioned by all four Gospels in connection with the resurrection of Jesus, are all one and the same person.[1] Tertullian (ca.155-220 A.D.) linked the Lucan and Marcan characters, using an idea common to the other two Gospels.[2] A sermon by Pope

[1] H. Pope, "St. Mary Magdalen," *The Catholic Encyclopedia* (New York: Robert Appleton Co., 1910). Retrieved Jan 1, 2009: http://www.newadvent.org/cathen/09761a.htm. The Greek fathers saw three separate people. For a historical summary, see U. Holzmeister, "Die Magdalenenfrage in der kirchlichen Überlieferung," *Zeitschrift für Katholische Theol*ogie, 46 (1922): 402-422, 556-684.

[2] Tertullian, *De pudicitia*, XI, 1, PL2, col 1001B, writes: "He permitted contact even with His own body to the 'woman, a sinner,'—washing, as she did, His feet with tears, and wiping them with her hair, and inaugurating His sepulture with ointment." (Trans. by Thelwall, "On Modesty": tertullian.org/works/de_pudicitia.htm). Tertullian links together the "sinner," an idea only in Luke, with getting Jesus ready for burial ("inaugurating his sepulture" or "inaugurating his own decease"), an idea

Gregory (ca. 591 A.D.) identified Mary Magdalene with Luke's unnamed sinner, "She whom Luke calls the sinful woman, whom John calls Mary [of Bethany], we believe to be the Mary [Magdalene] from whom seven devils were ejected according to Mark."[3] For centuries paintings portrayed a seductively clothed Mary Magdalene, often with red or gold hair and an alabaster jar of perfumed oil.[4] In Cecil B. DeMille's classic film *King of Kings* (1927) she is a jewelled courtesan with pet leopards and male slaves. In *Jesus Christ Superstar* (1970), Mary is the ex-prostitute singing of Christ, "I don't know how to love him."

Yet in the late 20th century, the Roman Catholic Church officially changed its view, removing any suggestion of prostitution from Mary's name.[5] More recent scholarship discounts the previous tradition as based on a conflation of Gospel texts, motivated by the mediaeval aversions to women and the body, and now regards Mary Magdalene as a wealthy woman, perhaps married, who befriended Jesus after he freed her from demons, and who supported Him financially. This re-examination occurs in the context of feminism, the quest for gender equality in the Christian texts,[6] and questions of women's ordination.[7]

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found in all Gospels except Luke. Contact with Christ's body is mentioned in Matt 26:12 and Mark 14:8. Thus Tertullian brings together the Gospel accounts of this story.

3 S. Grégoire Le Grand, *Homiliae in evangelia,* II, xxxiii, PL76, col.1239C, cited in A. Feuillet, "Les deux onctions faites sur Jesus, et Marie-Madeleine," *RevThom* 75 (1975): 361, n. 12.

4 Susan Haskins, *Mary Magdalen: Myth and Metaphor* (London: Pimlico, 2005), fascinatingly chronicles Mary's portrayal in two millennia of art, literature, and theology.

5 The Roman Calendar was changed in 1969 to remove the reading of Luke 7:36-50 and the reference to Lazarus as her brother. In 1978 the entry for Mary Magdalene in the Roman Breviary had the names "Maria poenitens" (penitent Mary) and "magna peccatrix" (great sinner) removed, a result of scholarly reconsideration. See Haskins, 388, 486, n. 35.

6 Compare among others, Ben Witherington III, *Women in the Ministry of Jesus: A Study of Jesus' Attitudes to Women and their Roles as Reflected in His Earthly Life* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1987); Elaine Pagels, *The Gnostic Gospels* (London: Vintage, 1979); Leonard Swidler, *Biblical Affirmations of Woman* (Philadelphia: Westminster John Knox Press, 1979). By contrast see also Susanne Heine, *Women and Early Christianity: A Reappraisal* (London: SCM Press, 1987).

7 As one example, Gruppe Maria von Magdala was a German Roman Catholic group formed in 1986 to campaign for equal rights for women in the church and for women's ordination. Haskins 397.

This article attempts a fresh examination of the Gospel texts connected with Mary's identity. It will argue[8] that Mary Magdalene, Mary of Bethany and the Lucan αμαρτωλός are likely the same person, and that the Gospels contain clues that tend to support this longstanding Christian tradition. It will find that this view affirms rather than discredits Mary Magdalene, portraying her as a prime eyewitness to Christ's resurrection and as an apostle to the apostles.

2. Is Mary of Bethany the Lucan ἁμαρτωλός?

The following is an examination of possible connections between Mary of Bethany and the unnamed woman sinner (ἁμαρτωλός) of Luke 7. Carefully laying the four Gospel accounts alongside each other reveals striking similarities (see Table 1): (1) Ten details are clearly agreed upon by two writers without contradictions elsewhere (#12, 17, 21, 22, 23, 26, 27, 28, 29). For example, Mary of Bethany wipes Jesus' feet with her hair (John 11:2; 12:1, 3), as does the unnamed woman sinner (Luke 7:38). This was a striking action, since the rabbis considered a woman's hair too seductive to be shown in public.[9] One could reasonably expect this action to be unique and strongly suggests the connection between the stories and the characters. (2) Six details show that three writers agree with each other without contradictions elsewhere (#1, 9, 16, 18, 20, 24). (3) Three details without differences occur in all four writers (#2, 7, 11). (4) Thirteen details are mentioned in only one writer, without contradictions elsewhere (#5, 10, 13, 15, 25, 31, 32, 33, 34, 35, 36, 37, 38). The table totals a number of thirty-two details without differences[10] and seven details with differences (#3, 4, 6, 8, 14, 19, 21).

8 As do Andre Feuillet, "Les deux onctions faites sur Jésus, et Marie-Madeline," 357-394; and John Wenham, *Easter Enigma: Are the Resurrection Accounts in Conflict?*, 2nd ed. (Grand Rapids, MI: Baker, 1992).

9 J. Jeremias, *The Parables of Jesus* (London: SCM Press, 1954), 101-102, "It was the greatest disgrace for a married woman to unbind her hair in the presence of men." "According to Tos. Sota 5, 9; j. Gitt. 9, 50d it was a reason for divorce." Similar rules presumably applied to single women.

10 These are conservative figures. For example, #19 is clearly agreed upon by two writers, but we have not counted this as agreement because another writer offers a different detail. Also, our figures would look even more favourable if we included obvious details—for example, that Jesus was there.

Detail	Matt 26:6-13	Mark 14:3-9	Luke 7:36-50	John 12:1-8
1. Town	Bethany	Bethany	–	Bethany
2. Location	house	house	house	house (v. 3)
3. Timing	two days before Passover (v. 2)	two days before Passover (v. 1)	–	six days before Passover (v. 1)
4. Host	Simon the leper (v. 6)	Simon the leper (v. 3)	Simon the Pharisee (vv. 36, 37, 39, 40)	–
5. Others present	–	–	–	Martha, Lazarus
6. Woman	unnamed (vv. 7, 10, 13)	unnamed (v. 3)	unnamed (vv. 37, 39, 47)	Mary, sister of Lazarus and Martha (vv. 1, 2)
7. Reclining	lie at table (v. 7)	lie down at table (v. 3)	recline at table (v. 36)	lie at table (v. 2)
8. Anointed parts	head (v. 7), body (12)	head (v. 3), body (v. 8)	feet (vv. 38, 46)	feet (v. 3)
9. Alabaster jar	yes	yes	yes	pint or *litra* (v. 3)
10. Jar broken	–	yes	–	–
11. Perfume	very expensive (v. 7)	very expensive (3)	perfume (38)	expensive perfume (v. 3)
12. Pure nard[11]	–	yes (v. 3)	–	yes (v. 3)
13. Scent fills house	–	–	–	yes
14. Objections by	disciples (v. 8)	guests (v. 4)	–	Judas (v. 4)
15. Judas' motive	–	–	–	thief (v. 6)
16. Indignant	yes	yes (v. 4)	–	objected (v. 4)
17. Why waste?	yes (v. 8)	yes (vv. 4-5)	–	–
18. Should be sold	yes	yes	–	yes
19. Cost	high price	year's wages	–	year's wages
20. Money to poor	yes	yes	–	yes (v. 5)
21. Jesus defends	don't bother her	leave her alone	–	leave her alone
22. Jesus: she did	what she could	a beautiful thing (v. 6), what she could (v. 8)	loved much (v. 47)	–
23. Poor always[12]	yes	yes	–	–
24. Prepare for burial	yes (v. 12)	yes (v. 8)	–	yes (v. 7)
25. Faith saved you	–	–	yes (v. 50)	–

Table 1: Comparing Details of the Gospel Accounts

[11] Nard is extracted from the spike of the nard plant, which grows near the foothills of the Himalayas. It had probably come via the spice markets of India by ship to Arabia, then by camel train to Jerusalem. Pure nard, not mixed with cheaper substances, would be worth a working person's wages for a year (300 denarii). One can only imagine the personal cost of earning this as a prostitute.

[12] Only Mark adds the phrase "and you can help them whenever you want," alluding to Deut 15:11, the command to be open-handed to the poor and needy.

26. Her story told	yes	yes	–	–
27. Judas will betray	yes (vv. 14-16)	yes (v. 10)	–	suggested (v. 4)
28. Mary Magdalene travels with Jesus	mentioned later (27:55-56)	mentioned later (15:40-41)	follows immediately (8:1-3)	–
29. Mary Magdalene had demons	–	yes (16:9)[13]	yes (8:2)	–
30. After stories of Mary of Bethany	–	–	–	yes (chap. 11)
31. She stood behind Jesus	–	–	yes	–
32. She wet Jesus' feet with tears	–	–	yes	–
33. She wiped Jesus' feet with hair	–	–	yes	yes
34. She kissed Jesus' feet	–	–	yes	–
35. Simon thinks: if prophet . . .	–	–	yes	–
36. Jesus reads thoughts	–	–	Simon's (39ff)	–
37. Two debtors story	–	–	yes	–
38. You gave me no water	–	–	yes	–
39.Sins forgiven, loved	–	–	yes	–

Table 1: Comparing Details of the Gospel Accounts—Continued

If one takes the position that the writers were accurate and that the manuscripts are reliable, unless there is convincing evidence to the contrary (an assumption whose justification is beyond the scope of this paper), then this would suggest that different events were being described. Yet Carson has observed that "details in the text encourage the reader to inject a small dose of historical imagination before resorting too quickly to the critic's knife."[14] In that vein, careful examination of some of the details listed in Table 1 will find that the apparent differences are quite compatible, without contrived or forced harmonisation:

#3. Matthew and Mark date the Bethany feast two days before Passover. John says Jesus *arrived* in Bethany six days before Passover, but does not say the feast was held that first day. This is not a contradiction.

#4. Matthew and Mark call the host "Simon the leper." Luke's narration at first conceals the personal name, four times referring to the host

[13] This text forms part of the longer ending of Mark, the originality of which is debated.

[14] D.A. Carson, *The Gospel According to John* (Grand Rapids, MI: Eerdmans, 1991), 426, describes the connections between the Matthean, Marcan and Johannine accounts.

merely as a Pharisee (11:36 [2x], 37, 39), but then Luke lets Jesus' speech make the surprise revelation of the name Simon (v. 40), after which the narrator twice uses the name (vv. 43, 44). The personal name agrees with Matthew and Mark, who also give the same small town as the location, yet are leper and Pharisee compatible titles? Since a leper would not be allowed social contact for fear of contagion, one logical way to assemble the data is to infer that Simon was once a leper but was healed by Jesus[15] who is often described as healing lepers (e.g. Matt 8:2-4; 11:5; Mark 1:40-45; Luke 7:22; 17:12). Since the Pharisees often saw sickness as caused by God's judgment upon sin (cf. John 9:2), Simon's leprosy would have seemed like God's curse and Christ's healing would powerfully demonstrate forgiving grace. Yet still Simon's heart had no place for Mary, and his religion had "no real answer to the problem of sin." He could only condemn her and feel superior. "But Jesus could actually do away with sin, and in this deepest sense bring salvation and peace."[16] Jesus told Mary that her faith—the simple belief in the love and forgiveness of Jesus—had saved her (Luke 7:50). The key theme of the story is showing Jesus as forgiver of sin: the woman is a sinner (vv. 37, 39, 47) but Jesus freely forgives sins (vv. 42-43, 47, 48, 49). Luke referring to her simply as a sinner fits this theme. Thus, Simon the leper of Bethany could also have been Simon the Pharisee and the unnamed host in John's narrative, with various Gospel writers giving different details to suit their purposes.

#6. Mary of Bethany could well be unnamed in the other gospels, which call her γυνὴ ἥτις ἦν ἐν τῇ πόλει ἁμαρτωλός, which probably meant a prostitute.[17] We will discuss below possible reasons for leaving her unnamed.

#8. Mary could well have anointed the "head" (Matt, Mark) and "feet" (Luke, John) or, speaking more generally, the "body" (Matt, Mark) of Jesus.[18] Anointing the head was standard hospitality for guests in the

[15] Compare Richard Bauckham, "Names in the Gospel Traditions," in *Jesus and the Eyewitnesses: The Gospels as Eyewitness Testimony* (Grand Rapids, MI: Eerdmans, 2006), 53, 81; Craig A. Evans, *Mark 8:27-16:20*, World Biblical Commentary (WBC), vol. 34b, ed. Bruce M. Metzzger (Nashville, TN: Nelson, 2001), 359; Donald A Hagner, *Matthew 14-28*, WBC, vol. 33b, ed. Bruce M. Metzger (Dallas, TX: Word, 1995).

[16] Wilcock, 91.

[17] Or an adulteress. Usage helps define meaning and the phrases "tax collectors and sinners" and "tax collectors and prostitutes" seem to be almost interchangeable. Cf. Matt 9:10, 11 with 21:31, 32. The phrase "sinner in the city" in Luke's story probably has the sense of "public sinner," and the story makes most sense when "'sinner' is understood as a euphemism for 'prostitute' or 'courtesan,'" argues John Nolland, *Luke 1-9:20*, WBC, vol. 35A, ed. Bruce M. Metzger (Dallas, TX: Word, 1989), 353.

[18] Contra David P. Scaer, "The One Anointing of Jesus: Another Application of the Form Critical Method," *CTQ* (1977): 54-55. Scaer sees these as "obvious differences"

ancient world, where oil was commonly used for personal grooming (Luke 7:46; cf Ps 23:5; 133:1-2). Thus, John may be suggesting both head and feet when he writes of "Mary . . . who poured perfume on the Lord [the head would be expected] and wiped his feet with her hair" (John 11:2).[19] However, the quantity of ointment described (approximately 11 ounces) seems too great for anointing the head alone; also the two references to anointing his body would be "a strange way of referring to his head alone."[20]

Guests reclining at the table with their feet furthest away could be anointed on any part of their body.[21] Mark and John show the woman anointing Jesus' head.[22] Luke and John show her anointing Jesus' feet. The only time feet were anointed in Jewish culture was as a funeral ritual.[23] Brown notes: "One does not anoint the feet of a living person, but one might anoint the feet of a corpse as part of the ritual of preparing the whole body for burial."[24] Further, it was a Jewish tradition that when anointing a dead person, the neck of the ointment bottle should be broken, perhaps as a symbol that it would not be used again, or as a sign of loss, and later the bottle would be put into their burial cask.[25] This suggests why Mary broke the box, even though it was made of alabaster (Mark 14:3), which presumably had resale value. Jesus recognized this symbolic meaning: "She poured perfume on my body beforehand to prepare for my burial" (Mark 14:8). While the other disciples misunderstood and resisted the idea of His crucifixion, which did not fit their plans for the Messiah (e.g. Matt 16:21-23), Mary listened (cf. Luke 10:39, 42) and understood that He would die to pay for the forgiveness of human sin, including hers. Apparently she decided to show her love and gratitude by this memorial while He was still alive.

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which would "raise red flags" for anyone "working with anything like the doctrine of inerrancy."

19 Wenham, 25.

20 Carson, 426.

21 Ibid., 428.

22 In Jewish culture, anointing is also a mark of being king or "Anointed One," Messiah or Christ (cf. 1 Sam 10:1; 16:1, 13; 1 Kgs 1:39; 19:15-16; 2 Kgs 9:3, 6; Ps 89:20). See Bauckham, 190; Carson, 427. Anointing the head could be seen as Mary's statement that Jesus was Messiah. Compare Matt 16:13-20.

23 Feuillet, 382, citing Legault and Schnackenburg. See John 19:38-42 for the description of the burial rituals for Jesus' body, performed by Joseph of Arimathea and Nicodemus.

24 Raymond E. Brown, *The Gospel According to John I-XII* (New York: Doubleday, 1966), 454.

25 A. M. Hunter, *St. Mark* (London: SCM, 1948), 127; cited in George R. Beasley-Murray, *John*, *WBC*, vol. 36, ed. Bruce M. Metzger (Waco, TX: Word, 1987), 209.

#14. Mark simply records that some people present criticized Mary. Matthew focuses on the disciples, and John is even more specific about which disciple was the ringleader. Perhaps they observed different things from different places around the table.

#19. Two Gospels agree on the price as 300 denarii. Matthew does not give the figure, but a year's wages is indeed a "high price" for perfume. Judas' objection to "waste" fits with this and is not without substance.

#21. Two writers have Jesus say, "leave her alone." Matthew cites, "don't bother her." These words express the same idea; Jesus may even have used both lines.

While there exist differences in the Gospel accounts, some have argued that Luke's feast story must be different because he puts it earlier in the overall narrative of Jesus and does not give a location. But Luke may be structuring his material around an idea, grouping stories around themes so that his subjects suit his object. Scholars have recognized that the evangelists may group their narratives logically rather than chronologically or according to the geography of various travels.[26]

In summary, there are differences in details recorded by the evangelists but none that necessarily contradict, which allows the conclusion that they are describing the same incident and characters. Thus Mary of Bethany, the Matthean and Marcan woman and the Lucan ἁμαρτωλός could well be one and the same.[27]

[26] For example, Bauckham, 192, argues that Mark sandwiches the anointing story between the plot to arrest Jesus (14:1-2) and Judas' visit to the chief priests (14:10-11), at which time he would have reported the planned "messianic uprising." He argues that John, dating the anointing two days before Passover, may be most historically accurate (196-197). D. A. Carson, 426, observes that "the time indicators in Matthew/Mark are notoriously loose. These Evangelists often order their accounts according to topic, not chronology." See also Feuillet, 370.

[27] Robert Holst, "The Anointing of Jesus: Another Application of the Form-Critical Method," *Journal of Biblical Literature* 95/3 (1976): 435-446. Holst sees the same incident in all four accounts. Joseph A. Fitzmyer, *The Gospel According to Luke 1-9: Introduction, Translation and Notes* (New York: Doubleday, 1981), 686. Fitzmyer finds seven reasons to connect Mark's and Luke's versions. C. H. Dodd, *Historical Tradition in the Fourth Gospel* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1963), 162-173. Dodd sees one incident behind all the accounts. Andreas J. Köstenberger, "A Comparison of the Pericopae of Jesus' Anointing," in *Studies on John and Gender: A Decade of Scholarship* (New York: Peter Lang, 2001). Köstenberger treats Mark, Matthew, and John as referring to the same occasion but Luke telling of another occasion. He lists (p. 55) scholars who see one anointing: Bernard, Bultmann, Dauer, Dibelius, Dodd, Elliot, Holst, Klostermann, R.H. Lightfood, Nesbitt, O'Rahilly, D. F. Strauss, et al; scholars who see two separate occasions: Chrysostom, Tatian, Bevan, R.E. Brown, Carson, Cribbs, Drexler, Grubb, Lagrange, Legault, Lindars, I. H. Marshall, Morris, Nolland, Schnackenburg, Smalley, de Solages, et al; and Origen who saw

2. Is Mary of Bethany the same as Mary Magdalene?

The answer to this question is not clear from the biblical text. However, there are intriguing clues and "converging probabilities"[28] that seem to give room for a positive answer:

1. We have already seen that the synoptics suppressed, for whatever reasons, the identity of a woman with a sinful past and that John, usually believed to be the last to write, revealed her as Mary of Bethany.[29] If Mary was a witness to Jesus' crucifixion and resurrection and/or known in the Jerusalem church, her fellow evangelists would have a good reason to spare her from unwanted publicity.[30] After her retirement or death, John could have felt free to name her. Even then, no one uses the blunt word prostitute.[31]

An even more pressing reason for privacy may have been personal security. The three earliest Gospels do not tell the story of the resurrection of Lazarus of Bethany, and John later reports what could be seen as a good reason: leading priests were planning to kill Lazarus to silence his witness to Jesus (John 12:9-11). So perhaps the early Gospel writers kept this Bethany family anonymous for security reasons, especially if Mary's anointing was understood as acknowledging Jesus as Messiah and read as subversive and politically rebellious.[32] Luke writes "of the sinner in chapter 7, of Mary Magdalene in chapter 8, of Mary the sister of Martha in chapter 10, and of Mary Magdalene again in chapter 24, without ever

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three occasions. Benoit and Legault see in Luke a different story about another woman. Feuillet sees separate incidents but the same woman, Mary of Bethany = Mary Magdalene = the anonymous sinner.

28 Feuillet's phrase, 380.

29 John also identifies "the man who cut off the ear of the high priest's slave as Peter, and the slave himself as Malchus." Bauckham, 40.

30 Ibid., 46, 51, 298 n. 17. Christopher Wordsworth, *The New Testament of Our Lord and Saviour Jesus Christ in the Original Greek, With Notes and Introductions: The Four Gospels* (London: Rivingtons, 1886), 323. Pope argues that Luke's gospel also protects Matthew by not identifying him as Levi the former tax collector (Luke 5:27).

31 πόρνη is not applied to a character in the Gospels, and appears in only two passages, both in the teaching of Jesus (Matt 21:31-32; Luke 15:30).

32 Bauckham, 191, argues that whether Mary understood it as such or not, "in the charged atmosphere of this time in Jerusalem and with the question whether Jesus was the messianic son of David certainly being widely asked, the woman's action could easily be perceived by others as of messianic significance." He uses Gerd Theissen's phrase, "protective anonymity" (p. 190) and argues that it was for similar reasons that Simon Peter was not named as the attacker of the high priest's servant, but John could later reveal that detail. See also Wenham, 32.

saying they are the same person."[33] So Luke carefully removes her name from a story of prostitution, naming her achievements as a generous supporter of Jesus and as a resurrection eyewitness; but in sketching her relationship with Martha he suppresses her town and the other sibling, Lazarus, likely for her protection. Writing later, John gives fuller details (11:1, 5).

The title "Magdalene" meant someone from the village of Magdala near Galilee (cf. Matt 15:39). If Mary had lived there for a time as a prostitute, the alliterative name Mary Magdalene (perhaps a professional name) would be accurate, with the added advantage of distracting hostile readers from her family home in Bethany, to which she may have returned after her contact with Jesus.[34] Magdala was a very wealthy town, largely from producing woollen fabric and dyes taken from shellfish in the lake, and was regarded as morally corrupt. Edersheim records the rabbinic opinion that its sinfulness is why it was destroyed soon after: "its wealth was very great" but "its moral corruption was also great."[35] A rich, corrupt town sounds like the natural environment for prostitution, and a girl living away from home and family support would seem more likely to enter prostitution. So a change of towns could explain why Mary sometimes has the title Magdalene.[36]

2. Mary Magdalene was "possessed by seven demons" until Jesus exorcised her (see Mark 16:9; Luke 8:2). Some would explain this as a prescientific attempt to describe psychological illness[37] or some type of metaphor,[38] but Jesus seems to take it as spiritual warfare. He often

[33] Wenham, 31, argues that it would be confusing to refer to Mary of Magdala when she is in her home in Bethany.

[34] Still with the local reputation as a "sinner" she seems to find out about Simon's feast (ἐπιγνοῦσα, "learned," Luke 7:37, NIV) and appears unexpectedly rather than being invited, though her brother was an honoured guest and her sister was serving (John 12:2; διηκόνει, cf. the keyword associated with the Lucan Martha, διακονίαύ διἆ κονεῖν, Luke 10:40).

[35] Jer Taan 69 a; 11 Jer Taan us; Midr on Lament ii 2, ed Warsh p. 67 b middle; all in Alfred Edersheim, *The Life and Times of Jesus the Messiah*, Book III, chapter 22, 1883; downloaded from http://www.kjvuser.com/lifeandtimes/book322.htm. Migdal in Hebrew means a tower, so Magdala probably got its name from a defence tower. Several well-known rabbis came from Magdala and "are spoken of in the Talmud as 'Magdalene' (Magdelaah, or Magdelaya)."

[36] Wenham, 32.

[37] Especially since the 19th century. See Haskins, 14.

[38] For example, Mary Ann Getty-Sullivan, *Women in the New Testament* (Collegeville: Liturgical Press, 2001), 184, puts this down to exaggeration due to the New Testament's "primitive knowledge of the origins of mental and physical illnesses" and claims "exorcism aptly represents Jesus' struggle against evils that afflict people in many forms."

mentions "the devil" and "Satan" and his demons. Evil spirits are said to be "unclean" and to cause madness, and destruction (Mark 5:1-13), and even sin (John 8:46-49).[39] Similar ideas are reflected in *The Testaments of the Twelve Patriarchs*, a pseudepigraphical document from the first or second century B.C.E., which lists seven spirits that are sent to humans by "Beliar" (evil or perhaps Satan),[40] of which the first is sexual sin ("fornication").[41] Thus it was "understood that demons push people into all manner of sin and vice,"[42] which would fit well with the idea of Mary Magdalene having a dark past, morally and spiritually, including sexual sin.

Jesus states that He makes demons leave "by the Spirit of God" (see Matt 12:28; Luke 4:33-36), suggesting a serious conflict: Jesus bringing God's kingdom to earth under attack from Satan, the self-styled "prince of this world," whom Jesus came to throw out and to judge (see John 12:31; 16:11), a "head-on collision" between "the kingdom of Satan and the kingdom of God,"[43] which revealed both the nature and power of God's kingdom (see Luke 11:20). Jesus also warned that when He had driven out a demon, the exorcised person must allow God's Spirit to fill them or else the demon could bring back seven others, a worse condition than before (Luke 10:24-26; Matt 12:43-45). So Mary Magdalene's "seven demons" may suggest a story of being freed from her possession, then falling back into possession even more severely. This would suggest Jesus had shown incredible patience and strength. It may also parallel the comment that Mary of Bethany had "many sins" (Luke 7:47). This hardly fits with the view of Mary Magdalene as a basically upstanding woman, perhaps with a few depressed moments.

3. Luke portrays Mary Magdalene working and travelling after Mary of Bethany's changed life, and perhaps because of it. He shows Jesus telling the "sinner" (shown in the grid above to be Mary of Bethany; in point 2 above her sins are linked to the demonic) that her faith has saved her and she can go in peace; then his next scene shows Mary Magdalene, among other well-to-do women who had been "healed of evil spirits and

[39] Contra Haskins, 14: "nowhere in the New Testament is demoniacal possession regarded as synonymous with sin." Haskins explains John 8:46-49 as a "direct comparison" between being a sinner and having a devil.

[40] *The Testaments of the Twelve Patriarchs*, I, 3. See online source http://www.jewishencyclopedia.com or http://www.earlychristianwritings.com/patriarchs.html. See also Wenham, 30.

[41] Others listed are gluttony, angry fighting, flattering trickery, arrogance, lying and injustice or theft. These are said to cause darkening of the mind, not understanding God's law, not obeying parents, and ultimately death.

[42] Feuillet, 387-388.

[43] Michael Wilcock, *The Message of Luke* (Leicester, England: Inter-Varsity Press, 1979), 91.

diseases" serving with Jesus on a mission trip and supporting him from their means (Luke 8:1-3; a popular prostitute in a wealthy town would be expected to have means). Luke connects these two scenes with καθεξῆς, suggesting that this is the logical result of what went before and "denoting sequence in time, space or logic."[44] We could almost translate, "And so the next thing was . . ." Wenham writes, "Luke's introduction of Mary Magdalene at the beginning of chapter 8 would be explained if chapter 7 is the story of her conversion."[45] Note that, unlike "Joanna the wife of Chuza" (Luke 8:3) or "Mary the mother of James" (24:10), Mary is not defined by her relationship to men.[46]

4. Mary of Bethany gives an extremely generous, "enormous"[47] gift equivalent to a year's wages. Mary Magdalene is wealthy enough to do this, which also suggests a connection.

5. Mary Magdalene and Mary of Bethany never appear in a scene together.[48]

6. There is only one "other Mary" mentioned in the Gospels. Mary was a common name. Yet in describing the scene near Christ's cross, all four Gospels have only two women named Mary: Mary Magdalene and "the other Mary" (see Matt 27:61; 28:1; Jesus' mother Mary was named earlier, but is now identified only by the title "his mother" rather than her personal name). John says, "Near the cross of Jesus stood his mother, his mother's sister, Mary the wife of Cleopas, and Mary Magdalene" (John 19:25). Matthew, Mark and Luke show the same scene and identify "the other Mary" in slightly different words (see Table 2), but she is fairly clearly the same person.[49]

Matthew twice mentions "the other Mary," mother of James and Joses, alongside Mary Magdalene (Matt 27:61; 28:1). Matthew does not ever name Mary of Bethany, but it has been argued above that he suppresses her name in the anointing story, in which case he had her in mind. So if Mary of Bethany and Mary Magdalene were different people, then there would be two Marys (other than His mother) close to Jesus and prominent in His life story, and Matthew would have needed to say "one of the other Marys" so as to avoid confusion. But he does not, which suggests Mary Magdalene and Mary of Bethany are one and the same Mary.

44 In Luke 8:1 καθεξῆς "denoting sequence in time, space, or logic . . . literally in the next . . ." (Friberg); "a sequence of one after another in time, space, or logic" (Louw-Nida).

45 Wenham, 28.

46 Haskins, 14, claims "she alone stands out undefined by a designation attaching her to some male as wife, mother or daughter," but so does Susanna (Luke 8:3).

47 Carson, 429.

48 Wenham, 29.

49 Feuillet, 381, and see the discussion in Brown, 904-906.

	Matt 27:55-56	Mark 15:40	Luke 24:10 (women at tomb; cf. Mark 16:1; Luke 23:49)	John 19:25
1	Mary Magdalene	Mary Magdalene	Mary Magdalene	Mary Magdalene
2	Mary, mother of James and Joseph. Later twice called "the other Mary" (27:61; 28:1)	Mary, mother of James the younger and Joses (15:47; 16:1)	Mary (mother?) of James	Mary the wife of Cleopas
3	The mother of the sons of Zebedee	Salome	–	–
4	–	Joanna	– (8:3; a woman travelling with Jesus' team)	
5	–	–	–	His mother

Table 2: Women at the Cross and Tomb[50]

7. Viewing Mary of Bethany and Mary Magdalene as the same person builds a coherent narrative running through the Gospels, with Mary as a consistent character: "impulsive, emotional, devoted, discerning, privileged."[51] After Jesus' death, Mary Magdalene came to anoint His body for burial (Mark 16:1-2).[52] This is the very thing Mary of Bethany means to do in the feast at Simon's house, as Jesus recognized and three writers recorded (cf. Matt 26:12; Mark 14:8; John 12:7), with the Johannine reference linking it to "the day of [his] burial."

As the Synoptics describe the feast at Simon's house, the unnamed woman (later named by John as Mary of Bethany) appears suddenly without introduction, and yet Judas assumes that if her perfume was sold, the money would be given for the poor into the money bag he managed (John 12:4-6). This may suggest that he knew her as Mary Magdalene, a woman wealthy enough to be a significant financial contributor (Mark 15:40, 41; Luke 8:2).[53]

In addition, there occur literary motifs clustering around the person of Mary. Mary is often pictured at Jesus' feet. Mary of Bethany sits at Jesus' feet, listening to Him (Luke 10:39).[54] She falls at His feet to tell Him about

50 Brown, 905. See also Bauckham, 49.

51 Wenham, 29. On emotionality, compare the grieving of Martha and Mary and Jesus' response to each (John 11:20-36).

52 Apparently they intend to do so on Friday afternoon (Mark 15:47,cf. Matt 27:61) but wait until Sunday morning.

53 Feuillet, 384-385, citing A. Lemonnyer.

54 In Acts 22:3, being "at the feet of" someone means learning from them.

the loss of her brother (John 11:32). She anoints His feet (John 12:3). After His resurrection, Mary Magdalene and other women clasp Jesus' feet and worship Him (Matt 28:9). Then, after Mary and the other women told the disciples that He had risen, Jesus appeared surprisingly in the room, and they all held His feet and worshipped Him (Luke 24:39-40). Perhaps this is because His feet still show wounds from the cross, which prove to them His death and resurrection, and His supernatural character. Admittedly, many other people fall at Jesus' feet to ask Him for things or to thank Him (Matt 15:30; Mark 5:22; 7:25; Luke 8:41; 17:14), which seems to have been a fairly normal practice (Matt 18:29), or sit at His feet to listen to Him (Luke 8:35). Yet this repeated image in the gospels tends to characterize Mary and hold together the various narratives. Mary of Bethany appears near her brother's tomb, weeping (from κλαιω, describing strong audible crying; by contrast, δακρύω means to shed tears silently). Later Mary Magdalene appears near Jesus' tomb, again weeping (κλαιω; cf John 11:31-35; 20:11).[55]

In another literary motif, Jesus asks Martha and Mary of Bethany where they have laid him (John 11:34). After the crucifixion, women mark where Jesus is laid (Matt 27:60-61; Mark 15:46-47; Luke 23:53-55), but early Sunday Mary Magdalene runs to Peter concerned that Jesus' body has been taken and "we do not know where they have laid him" (John 20:1-2). She says the same thing to the angels (John 20:13) and again to the unrecognised Jesus (20:14). But then, she, among other women, is told that he has risen and she should examine the place where he was laid, and then go and tell the disciples that he has risen (Mark 16:6-7). These literary motifs seem to link Mary of Bethany and Mary Magdalene.

In two Synoptics (Matt 26:13; Mark 14:9), Jesus declares that the actions of the woman will be spoken of wherever the gospel is preached around the world "as a memorial to her," suggesting her personal identity is an important part of the story. Despite that, these writers do not name her.[56] Later, John fills this gap. Wenham finds it "hard to believe" that Mary of Bethany, having been told her beautiful deed would always be remembered, "played no part in the resurrection story, but that the privilege of first seeing the risen Lord was given to another, almost unknown, Mary."[57]

[55] F. Scott Spencer, *Dancing Girls, Loose Ladies and Women of the Cloth* (London: Continuum, 2004), 95, and Getty-Sullivan, 188, point out the parallel between these two verbs and scenes, even though they do not equate the two characters.

[56] See Bauckham, 190, who cites R.T. France, *The Gospel of Mark* (Grand Rapids, MI: Eerdmans, 2002), 555.

[57] Wenham, 29.

Each of these points, taken by itself, is not conclusive; but taken together, they sketch a consistent characterisation[58] and help to make the case: If one Mary indeed had two separate lives under two names in two towns, then hers is an impressive narrative. In one lifetime, Mary was (a) a sexually damaged person who knew Jesus' ability to heal sin and to meet emotional needs; (b) a victim of demon possession who felt Jesus' power over the spirit world; (c) a close friend of Jesus, who sat at His feet and listened by the hour to His extraordinary teaching; (d) an eyewitness to the resurrection of her brother, Lazarus; (e) a co-worker and financial supporter of Jesus' ministry team; (f) a giver, whose costly present and spontaneous tears expressed her love and gratitude; (g) a listener, who heard more clearly than most disciples that Jesus would die—and that it was to save humans from sin; (h) an eyewitness to His death, and faithful supporter when most (male) disciples "deserted him and fled" (Mt 26:56); (i) one who came to anoint his body, which would have been her second time; (j) the first human to see Jesus after He resurrected (even before his mother Mary);[59] (k) the first to tell others that He had triumphed over death; and (l) the first preacher of the resurrection to be doubted and disbelieved.

Importantly, if Mary Magdalene indeed had a background as a sex worker, this need not discredit her. The male apostles had sinful pasts: Paul for one violently attacked Christians (Acts 8:3) and does not cover this up, rather featuring his past to boast all the more about Christ's transforming power (1 Tim 1:12-16; Phil 3:6). Similarly, Mary offers an inspiring story of rising from a difficult background to an honoured role. Jesus did say prostitutes were going into heaven ahead of some priests because they believed and repented (Matt 21:31, 32), and his message was forgiveness and life-change.[60]

What of sexism? Mary and other women were the first to announce the resurrection, yet one striking irony is the sexist skepticism of Mary's first audience—Jesus' disciples. Gender is prominent in the account that the men "did not believe the women, because their words seemed to them

[58] To which some would add the anonymous story of the woman caught in the act of μοιχείᾳ (John 8:3-11); for example, Nikos Kazantzakis' book, *The Last Temptation,* which was filmed in 1988 by ex-seminarian Martin Scorcese as the hugely controversial film *The Last Temptation of Christ*. See Haskins, 26-29. Some would also connect the Woman of Samaria (John 4:4-43) to Mary's story, though the geography, chronology and background story here appear hard to harmonize.

[59] For the sequence of her visits to the tomb, see Wenham, 76-89.

[60] Pope, criticising "Protestant critics" for a reluctance to allow this "apostle to the apostles" to have past, blames it on a "failure to grasp the full significance of the forgiveness of sin." This forgiveness of sexual sin is certainly reflected in the story of the woman taken in adultery (John 8:3-11).

like empty talk" (Luke 24:9-11). "In the cultural stereotypes of the day . . . these are 'only women,' not to be believed in matters of deep importance. Their report is passed off as hysteria. . . . Though Luke has a high view of women, he reflects here his awareness of the widespread tendency to discount the word of a woman."[61] Yet it should be noted that in John's gospel Jesus called Mary Magdalene, in similar terms to his apostles, to announce his resurrection. She calls him ραββουνι, a personal and endearing term.[62] He had said, "Who is it you are looking for?" (John 20:15). This raises instructive parallels to the question he asked his disciples when he first called them to follow him. And they answered ραββουνι as well, and then became his apostles (see John 1:35-40).[63] And now Jesus asked Mary to go as an apostle to the apostles, an eyewitness[64] testifying that He was alive again as He promised (John 20:17). She did so (John 20:18; Luke 24:10). So although the church had periods of misogyny resulting from dualist theology,[65] in this it was not following Jesus. Having commissioned the first resurrection preacher, Jesus later appeared in person and powerfully confirmed what the women had said. Mary Magdalene provides strong NT precedent for women in the role of evangelists.

So Mary Magdalene and Mary of Bethany and the "woman sinner" can be read as the same person, making her story a case study in gospel transformation. This could be why Jesus said her story would be told wherever the Gospel is taught (see Matt 26:13; Mark 14:9).

61 John Nolland, *Luke 18:35–24:53*, WBC, vol. 35c, ed. Bruce M. Metzger (Dallas, TX: Word, 1993), 1193, 1191.

62 Spencer, *Dancing Girls, Loose Ladies and Women of the Cloth*, 98.

63 Ibid., 95.

64 Bauckham, 48, argues that repeated use of verbs of seeing by the women gives them eyewitness credentials.

65 For a broad historical, cultural, and theological sweep, see Haskins.