

### **Renewal overview 8. John 20:1 - 18. Will the real Mary please rise!**

Best selling author Dan Brown is among recent writers that claim Mary Magdalene was the romantic interest of Jesus Christ. In his novel, *'The Da Vinci Code'* Brown portrays Jesus' marriage to Mary as one of the Roman Catholic Church's best kept secrets. According to Brown's conspiracy theory, the Vatican has tried to keep Christ's relationship with Mary a secret because they don't want a woman competing for attention with Jesus. [Someone should point out to Dan Brown the extent to which the Catholic Church has exalted another woman named Mary]. Even more recently, film-maker James Cameron released a documentary in which he claims to have found the tomb where Jesus and Mary Magdalene were buried together. It seems that for Cameron (creator of the movie 'Titanic'), no great historical event is complete until a love story is added. However, the Biblical facts about Mary Magdalene are as follows:

- Mary Magdalene wasn't the woman who poured perfume on Jesus' feet and wiped them with her hair. This was Mary, the sister of Martha and Lazarus (John 11:1 - 2). And this was an act of humility, not eroticism.
- There is nothing in the gospels that suggest that Mary Magdalene is the woman that Jesus saved from being stoned to death after she was caught in the act of adultery (John 8:1 - 11). If this woman had been a well-known Biblical figure such as Mary Magdalene then the gospel writers more than likely would have named her.
- Mary Magdalene is mentioned by name 14 times in the gospels.
- All (but one) of these 14 references are at the end of one of the four gospels that name her among Christ's followers who witnessed his crucifixion and resurrection.
- The other earlier reference to Mary (Luke 8:1 - 3) lists her among the women who followed Jesus and supported him during his earthly ministry. This reference also tells us that Jesus healed Mary by driving seven demons from her.
- John's gospel names Mary as the first witness of Christ's resurrection.

These Biblical facts apparently don't present Mary as good fodder for popular writers and film makers. However, they do elevate her to a much higher place. Rather than merely being Jesus' romantic interest, the gospels portray Mary as one of Christ's disciples for whom he laid down his life. In the eyes of people like James Cameron, Mary was buried beside Jesus. But according to the Scriptures, Mary saw the risen Lord. Furthermore, she was the first believer to be entrusted with the message, 'Jesus is risen', and the one commissioned to declare this message to the apostles. Now Mary is a member of the Church: the eternal Bride of Christ, and will be raised on the last day to live and reign with him forever. To have a temporary relationship with Jesus on earth is one thing. But to be raised with him into eternal glory is quite another. Offered the choice, which role do you think Mary would choose to play?

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1. The first three gospels mention other women who went to Jesus tomb. However, John focuses only on Mary Magdalene<sup>1</sup>. Why? (See Matthew 28:1; Mark 16:1; Luke 24:1; and John 20:1)
2. Given that the disciples still didn't understand that Jesus had to rise from the dead (John 20:9), what was it that 'the other disciple' (John) saw and believed? (John 20:8)
3. Why do you think Mary Magdalene remained weeping outside Jesus' tomb after Peter and John returned to their homes?
4. How do you think Mary reacted when she saw the angels<sup>2</sup> in the tomb?
5. Why do you think Mary didn't recognise Jesus at first? (20:14 - 15)
6. What does Mary's exclamation, 'Rabboni!' ('Teacher!') tell us about the nature of her relationship with Jesus?
7. Why does Jesus tell Mary not to hold on to him? (20:17)
8. Why do you suppose Jesus gave Mary Magdalene the special privilege of declaring his resurrection to the other disciples? (20:17 - 18)
9. After reflecting on this account, why is the resurrection so important to ordinary Jesus-followers like Mary Magdalene (and us)?

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<sup>1</sup> Note in John 20:2 that Mary tells the disciples, "...we don't know where they have put him." Apparently Mary did have others with her, but for some reason they aren't mentioned.

<sup>2</sup> The word translated 'angel' literally means 'messenger' and can be human or supernatural.