

## Three Marys

There are 6 individuals in Scripture who were named “Mary,” but in our considerations today, we shall examine the record concerning 3 of them: Mary the mother of our Lord, Mary Magdalene, and Mary the sister of Martha. Each of these women demonstrated a great faith that was rare in Israel at the time, and perhaps even more rare in the days in which we live.

### **MARY THE MOTHER OF OUR LORD**

The Lord Jesus Christ was “made of a woman, made under the law” (Gal. 4:4). Our Lord’s mother was of a sufficiently virtuous character for her to bear and bring up the holy child of Yahweh. So it was that “the angel said unto her, Fear not, Mary; for thou hast found favour with God” (Lu. 1:30). Finding favour with God is the desire of all the faithful: it is written of Messiah himself, that he “increased in wisdom and stature, and in favour with God and man” (Lu. 2:52). The favour of man soon dissipated however, yet he always had the approval and favour of his Father.

Luke chapter 1 describes the wonderful song of thanksgiving uttered by Mary, based firmly upon the Old Testament Scriptures – particularly the prayer of Hannah. We cannot speak particularly about this song in our present considerations, but she began by saying: “My soul doth magnify the Lord, And my spirit hath rejoiced in God my Saviour. For he hath regarded the low estate of his handmaiden ...” (Lu. 1:46-48). It is worthy of note and wonderment, that Mary’s family unit were in a poor and frugal situation. Here, the Son of the Almighty Creator was to be born. Not in the palace of kings: not of a high and exalted family position, but rather a poor handmaiden living in poverty. Here is the wisdom of God:

“... God hath chosen the foolish things of the world to confound the wise; and God hath chosen the weak things of the world to confound the things which are mighty; and base things of the world, and things which are despised, hath God chosen, yea, and things that are not, to bring to nought things that are: that no flesh should glory in his presence” (1 Cor. 1:27-29).

The frugal poverty of Marys family is again demonstrated in the offerings that she made for her purification. She went to Jerusalem “to offer a sacrifice according to that which is said in the Law of the Lord, A pair of turtledoves, or two young pigeons” (Lu. 2:24). This was “when the days of her purification according to the Law of Moses were accomplished” (vs. 22). This offering raises many questions. The allusion is back to Leviticus 12, where we read of the sacrifices of the poor, who could not afford to provide a lamb:

“and if she be not able to bring a lamb, then she shall bring two turtledoves, or two young pigeons; the one for the burnt offering, and the other for a sin offering: and the priest shall make an atonement for her, and she shall be clean” (Lev. 12: see verses 6-8).

Mary’s offering then, was the offering of a pauper. But the question arises, why was it that she needed to be made “clean”, or “purified” for giving birth to the Son of God? Notice that these offerings were not for a particular committed sin, like other offerings were. They were not for forgiveness, but for purification. A “man child” had just been born – and even though he were “holy” and “the son of God” (Luke 1:35), his mother was considered unclean, and needed purifying. The point being, that in

childbirth we have the perpetuation of the fallen state of human nature, which is in itself considered “unclean” by God.

Hebrews 9 describes how even the Lord needed purification: “... it was therefore necessary that the patterns of things in the heavens should be purified with these; but the heavenly things themselves with better sacrifices than these ...” (Heb. 9:23). Human nature itself needs a cleansing, and therefore so did the Lord – and his mother who bare him. As part of the “heavenly things themselves”, he was purified with his own sacrifice: and we look forward to our cleansing also, that we might be like him: pure in glorious immortality.

#### **MARY MAGDALENE**

Matthew 15:39 contains the seemingly incidental detail that the Master “sent away the multitude, and took ship, and came into the coasts of Magdala.” Mary Magdalene (which signifies of Magdala) could well have been the product of this visit, believing in the Lord, and trusting in his power to save her from her afflictions.

Mary Magdalene is mentioned again in Luke chapter 8, where we read of how there were “certain women, which had been healed of evil spirits and infirmities, Mary called Magdalene, out of whom went seven demons” (Lu. 8:2). She had evidently been afflicted with some mental disorder, perhaps Schizophrenia, or maybe a multiple personality disorder. But be that as it may, the Master “healed” her of this condition, and she became a faithful follower of his. Despite her condition, this Mary seems to have had some wealth, for she is mentioned in the next verse as being among those “which ministered unto him of their substance”.

John chapter 19 describes how in the time of our Lord’s anguish upon the cross, she stood with him (Jno. 19:25). She was also the first individual to whom Messiah appeared following his resurrection:

“Now when Jesus was risen early the first day of the week, he appeared first to Mary Magdalene, out of whom he had cast seven demons” (Mrk. 16:9).

This was a most privileged position to be in, for the Master only appeared to selected individuals: “him God raised up the third day, and shewed him openly; Not to all the people, but unto witnesses chosen before of God ...” (Acts 10:41). Mary was chosen by him to be the very first person to see him in his resurrected state.

When he appeared to Mary, “Jesus saith unto her, Touch me not; for I am not yet ascended to my Father: but go to my brethren, and say unto them, I ascend unto my Father, and your Father; and to my God, and your God” (Jno. 20:17). The question is, What did the Lord mean by his reference to ascending to his Father? The sense of “touch me not” seems to carry the sense of “detain me not”, but why? Later, we read of others who did detain him (Mat. 28:29), so whatever this ascendancy is, it must have taken place before this second appearance.

Brother John Thomas indicated his belief that Messiah was ascending to a higher state of being. And there is support for that in Scripture. In his mortal state, the Lord was made a little lower than the Angels, in terms of his physical constitution:

“But we see Jesus, who was made a little lower than the Angels for the suffering of death, crowned with glory and honour; that he by the grace of God should taste death for every man” (Heb. 2:9 see Psa. 8:5).

But in his glorified state, the Lord is no longer a little lower than the Angels: he is higher than they:

“for such an high priest became us, who is holy, harmless, undefiled, separated from sinners, and **made higher than the heavens**” (Heb. 7:26).

This is his exalted position as an immortalised man – indeed, speaking of his resurrection – when he led captivity captive – it is written that he has ascended: “When **he ascended up** on high, he led captivity captive, and gave gifts unto men.” (Eph. 4:8). It is evident therefore, that being “made higher than the heavens” involved an ascension “up on high”. That the Lord was not raised immortal, but was granted immortality after he was raised, presumably after he saw Mary, and before he saw the others. Maybe it is this that is alluded to in the words “to this end, Christ both died, and rose, **and revived**, that he might be Lord both of the dead and living” (Rom. 14:9).

#### **MARY THE SISTER OF MARTHA**

This Mary was also of a wonderful character and disposition. Wherever she is mentioned, she is always at the feet of Messiah, her Lord. We read of this in today’s New Testament reading:

“Now it came to pass, as they went, that he entered into a certain village: and a certain woman named Martha received him into her house. And she had a sister called Mary, which also sat at Jesus’ feet, and heard his word” (Lu. 10:38-39).

Sitting at the feet is a posture of learning. So we read in Deuteronomy 33:

“Yea, he loved the people; all his saints are in thy hand: and they sat down at thy feet; every one shall receive of thy words” (Deut. 33:3).

This was the character of Mary, she received the words of the Master – and had faith in his power to save. In Luke 10, we read of the two sisters: one was occupied with the practical affairs of this life, the other sat at Messiah’s feet, receiving his words. In the verse cited above, we read of Mary, in the next we have reference to Martha:

“But Martha was cumbered about much serving, and came to him, and said, Lord, dost thou not care that my sister hath left me to serve alone? Bid her therefore that she help me. And Jesus answered and said unto her, Martha, Martha, thou art careful and troubled about many things: but one thing is needful: and Mary hath chosen that good part, which shall not be taken away from her” (Lu. 10:40-42).

Whilst Martha could have been commended for providing the best she could to meet the needs of Messiah her Lord, actually it was Mary who had chosen the good part – to sit and listen to the One who was the Word made Flesh. “Better is an handful with quietness, than both the hands full with travail and vexation of spirit” (Eccl. 4:6). A more basic meal would have sufficed, and would have provided more opportunity to listen to the Master’s teaching.

When her brother Lazarus had died, she and her sister called for the Lord, and when he journeyed, Mary went out to meet him:

“Then when Mary was come where Jesus was, and saw him, she fell down at his feet, saying unto him, Lord, if thou hadst been here, my brother had not died” (Jno. 11:32).

Notice that again we have Mary at the feet of Jesus. She was confident in his power to have saved Lazarus, and it would appear that part of their motive in calling for him, was an expectation that even now, he could do something. As the Lord said to Martha: “Said I not unto thee, that, if thou wouldst believe, thou shouldst see the glory of God?” (vs 40). God was glorified in the raising again of Lazarus from the dead, and the Son was magnified also (see verse 4).

Finally, we read of this Mary again in the next chapter:

“... then took Mary a pound of ointment of spikenard, very costly, and anointed the feet of Jesus, and wiped his feet with her hair: and the house was filled with the odour of the ointment...” (Jno. 12:3).

The Lord recognised what Mary was doing, as he told Judas the thief and betrayer:

“Then said Jesus, let her alone: against the day of my burying hath she kept this. For the poor always ye have with you; but me ye have not always” (Jno. 12:7-8).

From these words, we can see how that Mary had a deeper and more profound understanding than most of those around her. She knew that the Lord would be buried in the grave, and she also appeared to have the faith that he would be raised again! But notice also that yet again, this Mary is at the feet of Jesus, anointing his feet for his coming burial.

In each of these Mary's then, we have wonderful examples for our learning. The Mother of Jesus was specially chosen to bear and nurture the Son of the Almighty, and so found favour in His Sight. Mary Magdalene was chosen by the Lord to be the first witness to his resurrection, and ministered to him of her substance. And Mary the Sister of Martha and Lazarus is always portrayed as being at the feet of the Master, learning from his words and example. The examples are there for us to emulate – let us go forth and do likewise!

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