



July 22

Festival:

Mary Magdalene, Apostle

On the banks of Lake Genesareth (Galilee), between the cities of Capharnum and Tiberias, was situated the small city of Magdala, the remains of which have survived to this day.

Now at this place stands only the small farming community of Migdal.

The Gospel tells us nothing about the youthful years of Mary, but tradition informs us, that Mary from Magdala was young, attractive, and came from a wealthy family. It says in the

Gospels, that the Lord expelled seven evils from Mary --- the seven deadly sins common to us all. After which she began to lead a new life becoming a true disciple of the Saviour and an example for all humanity.

The Gospels relate that Mary was the Lord's constant companion and followed Him when He went with the Apostles through the cities and villages of Judea and Galilee preaching about the Kingdom of God. Together with other pious women -- Joanna, wife of Khuza (steward of Herod), Susanna and others, she served Him from her own possessions (Luke 8:1-3) and undoubtedly, shared with the Apostles the evangelic tasks, in common with the other women. The Evangelist Luke, evidently, has her in view together with the other women, stating that at the moment of the Procession of Christ onto Golgotha, when after the scourging He took on Himself the heavy cross, collapsing under its weight, the women followed after Him weeping and wailing, but He consoled them. The Gospel relates that Mary Magdalene was present on Golgotha at the moment of the Lord's Crucifixion. While all the other disciples of the Saviour ran away, she remained fearlessly at the cross together with His Mother and the Apostle John.

The evangelists enumerate among those standing at the cross moreover also the mother of the Apostle James, and Salome, and other women followers of the Lord from Galilee itself, but all mention first Mary Magdalene; but the Apostle John aside the Mother of God, names only her and Mary Cleopas. This indicates how much she stood out from amidst all the women gathered round the Lord.

She was faithful to Him not only in the days of His Glory, but also at the moment of His extreme humiliation and agony. As the Evangelist Matthew relates, "she was present at the burial of the Lord." Before her eyes Joseph and Nikodemos went out to the tomb with His lifeless body; before her eyes they covered over the entrance to the cave with a large stone, behind which went the Sun of Life.

Faithful to the Law in which she was trained, Mary together with the other women stayed all the following day at rest, because it was the day of the Sabbath, coinciding with the Feast of Passover. But all the rest of the peaceful day the women succeeded in storing up aromatics, to go at dawn Sunday to the grave of the Lord and according to the custom of the Jews to anoint His body with funereal aromatics.

The Evangelist Matthew writes, that the women came to the grave at dawn, or as the Evangelist Mark expresses, extremely early before the rising of the sun; the Evangelist John, as it were elaborating upon these, says that Mary came to the grave so early that it was still dark. Obviously, she waited impatiently for the end of night, but it was not daybreak when she, by herself, ran to where lay the body of her beloved Lord.

Seeing the stone pushed away from the cave, she rushed away in fear to where dwelt the Apostles Peter and John. Hearing the strange message that the Lord was gone from the tomb, both Apostles ran to the tomb and, seeing the shroud and winding cloths, they were amazed. The Apostles went and told no one, but Mary stood about the entrance to the gloomy tomb and wept. Wanting proof that the tomb really was empty, she entered it -- and there a strange light suddenly shone upon her. She beheld two angels in white garments, one sitting at the head, the other at the foot, of where the Body of Jesus had once been placed. She then heard the question: "Woman, why weepest thou?" -- she answered them with the words which she had said to the Apostles: "They have taken my Lord, and I do not know, where they have put Him." Having said this, she turned around, and at that moment saw a figure standing near the grave, a man she did not immediately recognize.

The man asked Mary: "Woman, why weepest thou? Whom dost thou seek?" She answered thinking that she was seeing the gardener and said: "Sir, if thou hast taken him, tell where thou hast put Him, and I will reclaim Him." But at that very moment she recognized the Lord's voice, a voice which was known from the day He healed her and she gave a joyful shout "Rabbi!" which means "Teacher."

Respect and love, fondness and deep veneration, a feeling of thankfulness and recognition at His splendor as the great Teacher -- all came together in this single outcry. She was able to say nothing more. She threw herself down at the feet of her Lord, to wash them with tears of joy. But the Lord said to her: "Touch me not, for I am still not ascended to My Father; but go to My brethren and tell them: 'I ascend to My Father and your Father and to My God and to your God.' "

She came to herself and again ran to the Apostles, so as to do the will of He who sent her. She ran into the house, where the Apostles stayed still in dismay, and announced to them the joyous message "I have seen the Lord!"

This was the very first preaching of the Resurrection. The Apostles were obliged to proclaim these glad tidings to the world, but Mary first proclaimed this message to the Apostles themselves.

Holy Scripture does not tell us about the life of Mary Magdalene after the Resurrection of Christ, but it is impossible to doubt, that if in the terrifying moments of Christ's Crucifixion she was the foot of the cross, with His Mother and John, undoubtedly she stayed with them during the time after the Resurrection and Ascension. Thus, in the Book of the Acts of the Apostles, Saint Luke writes: that all the Apostles with one mind stayed in prayer and supplication, with a certain women and Mary the Mother of Jesus and His brethren.

Holy Tradition testifies, that when the Apostles departed from Jerusalem for preaching to all the ends of the earth, with them also went Mary Magdalene to preach. A daring woman, whose heart was full of reminiscence of the Resurrection, she went beyond her native borders and set off to preach in pagan Rome. And everywhere she went, she proclaimed to people about Christ and His Teaching, and when many did not believe that Christ is risen, she repeated to them what she had said to the Apostles on the radiant morning of the Resurrection: "I have seen the Lord!" With this preaching she made the rounds of all Italy.

Tradition relates, that in Italy Mary Magdalene visited the Emperor Tiberias (14-37 AD) and proclaimed to him about Christ's Resurrection. According to tradition, she took him an egg as a symbol of the Resurrection, a symbol of new life with the words: "Christ is Risen!" Then she told Tiberias that, in his Province of Judea, Jesus the Nazarene, a holy man, a maker of miracles, powerful before God and all mankind, was executed on the instigation of the Jewish High-Priests and the sentence affirmed by the procurator Pontius Pilate. Tiberias responded that no one could rise from the dead, anymore than the egg she held could turn red. Miraculously, the egg immediately began to turn red as testimony to her words. Then, and by her urging, Tiberias had Pilate removed from Jerusalem to Gaul, where he later suffered a horrible sickness and an agonizing death.

From this, the miracle of Mary Magdalene, the custom to give each other paschal eggs on the day of the Luminous Resurrection of Christ spread among Christians over all the world. On one ancient hand-written Greek *ustav*, written on parchment, kept in the monastery library of Saint Athanasias near Thessalonika (Solunea), is an established prayer read on the day of Holy Pascha (Easter) for the blessing of eggs and cheese, in which it is indicated, that the Hegumen (Abbot) in passing out the blessed eggs says to the brethren: "Thus have we received from the holy fathers, who preserved this custom from the very time of the holy apostles, wherefore the holy equal-unto-the-apostles Mary Magdalene first showed believers the example of this joyful offering."

Mary Magdalene continued her preaching in Italy and in the city of Rome itself. Evidently, the Apostle Paul has precisely her in view in Romans 16:6, where together with other ascetics of evangelic preaching he mentions Mary (Mariam), who as he expresses "has done much for us." Evidently, she extensively served the Church, being exposed to dangers, and sharing with the Apostles the labours of preaching.

According to Church tradition, she remained in Rome until the arrival of the Apostle Paul, and for two more years still, following his departure from Rome after the first court judgment upon him. From Rome, **Saint Mary Magdalene, already bent with age, moved to Ephesus where unceasingly laboured the holy Apostle John, who with her wrote the first 20 Chapters of his Gospel (John 1-9, John 10-20).** There the saint finished her earthly life and was buried.

Her holy relics were transferred in the 9th Century to the capital of the Byzantine Empire -- Constantinople, and placed in the monastery Church of Saint Lazarus. In the era of the Crusader campaigns they were transferred to Italy and placed at Rome under the altar of the Lateran Cathedral. Part of the relics of Mary Magdalene are located in France near Marseilles, where a splendid church (Saint Maximum's *basilica*) was built over them at the foot of a steep mountain in her honour.

Mary Magdalene is mentioned in the Gospels as being among the women of Galilee who followed Jesus and His disciples, and who was present at His Crucifixion and Burial, and who went to the tomb on Easter Sunday to

anoint His body. She was the first to see the Risen Lord, and to announce His Resurrection to the apostles. Accordingly, she is referred to in early Christian writings as "the apostle to the apostles."

The misreading of Mary Magdalene is almost as ancient as the Gospels of the New Testament themselves. There are up to five different Marys in the Gospels and seven in the New Testament as a whole. Mary Magdalene, Mary of Bethany (sister of Martha and Lazarus), and the unnamed penitent woman who anointed Jesus' feet (Luke 7:36-48) are often mistaken as being the same woman. From this, plus the statement that Jesus had cast seven demons out of her (Luke 8:2), has risen the erroneous belief that she had been a prostitute before she met Jesus. This image had been officially sanctioned by the Catholic Church in the sixth century and it's that image that has been perpetuated by dozens of Christian paintings and teachings.

Formerly immersed in sin, she received healing and was repentant. She sincerely and irrevocably began a new life and never wavered from that path. Mary loved the Lord who called her to a new and blessed life. She was faithful to Him not only in the beginning when surrounded by enthusiastic crowds as they passed through the cities and villages of Palestine, winning for Himself the glory of a miracle-worker -- but also then when all the disciples in fear deserted Him and He, humiliated and crucified, hung in torment upon the Cross alone. This is why the Lord, knowing her faithfulness, appeared to her first, and esteemed her worthy to be first to proclaim His Resurrection. She was indeed an influential figure, a prominent disciple and a valuable leader of the early Christian movement.

Mary Magdalene Saints Day is July 22