

Turn Toward Jesus This Easter

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In "The Passion of the Christ," as well as in many other narrations of the life of Christ, Mary Magdalene is identified as a converted prostitute who was forgiven by Christ. Furthermore, many see her as the woman that anointed Jesus' feet and dried them with her hair.

While these connections could be true, the Bible does not identify Mary Magdalene as such. In fact, the Bible says little about Mary Magdalene at all. Even her name is a mystery, although many scholars believe her name identifies her as Mary from the town of Magdala in Galilee.

In Luke 8:1-3 she is identified as one of *"the women who had been cured of evil spirits and diseases."* Luke goes on to say that Jesus had cast seven demons from her. She is identified with a group of women who *"were helping to support them out of their own means."* Perhaps she was from a wealthy family instead of the poor, sinful background often identified with her.

Nothing more is known of Mary Magdalene except for the events surrounding the first Easter morning. Matthew and Mark indicate that she set out with a group of ladies who intended to anoint the body of Jesus. John says that she got to the tomb first, so apparently she ran on ahead of the others and saw that the stone had been rolled away.

John tells us that Mary Magdalene's first reaction was to run and tell Peter and the other disciples what had happened. While she was still telling the other disciples, the rest of the women must have come with the same report. (See Luke 24:10).

Peter and John ran to the tomb, with Mary Magdalene close behind them. As soon as Peter and John saw that the tomb was empty they went back home, but she stood outside the tomb weeping. In the twilight of the morning, she saw someone she thought was the gardener. *"Woman, why are you crying," he asked. "Who is it that you are looking for?"*

"Sir," Mary replied, "if you have carried him away, tell me where you have put him and I will get him."

"Mary," the person replied. At that moment Mary Magdalene realized that she was speaking with Jesus, who was certainly not dead. She then went to find the disciples and said, *"I have seen the Lord!"*

Why did Mary Magdalene fail to recognize Jesus at first? Perhaps because her eyes were full of tears. Persons who live in sorrow have a hard time seeing Jesus. Those who continually concentrate on their problems often cannot see beyond their problems. Mary did not expect anything good to happen, and for a while her focus on problems caused her to fail to see the solution.

Besides, it was still dark. It is hard to see God in the dark times of our lives. But what Mary failed to realize is that it was almost day. The Bible says that *"weeping only lasts for a while but joy comes in the morning."* Looking at the darkness around us only makes things darker; looking at what is positive, small as it may be, brightens our lives.

In addition, she was looking the wrong way. The Bible says that she recognized him after she turned toward him.

There are many things that clamor for our attention. Sports, jobs, vacations, children's activities, TV, camping, yard work, hobbies – they can all have their place – but if they cause us to take our eyes off Jesus they can also cause us to grow cold spiritually.

Easter is this Sunday. I hope that you will join Mary Magdalene in turning toward Jesus and worshipping the Risen Lord.