

Mary's Story

Matthew 28:1-10

John 20:1-18

He is risen! He is risen indeed! Greetings today in the name of the risen Christ!

Mary Magdalene was a woman who had been healed of demons by Jesus, had become a faithful follower of his, and was included in the number of women at the foot of the cross the day Jesus died. Today we read she was the first person at Jesus' tomb on Easter morning. You may have noticed that these two stories aren't exactly alike. That's often the case with stories in the Bible. We need to keep in mind that each of the Gospels was written for different audiences, yet the key parts of the stories remain the same.

In both stories Mary is not alone, she visits the tomb with at least one other woman. Matthew tells us the name of the woman, John simply refers to "we" when reporting to Peter and John that Jesus' body is missing.

The stone that had been sealed to prevent entry into the tomb had been removed. The women certainly would have wondered how they would enter the tomb without someone to move the heavy stone. Fortunately for them, God took care of that detail. In Matthew's story an earthquake,

apparently precipitated by an angel's appearance moved the stone, in Mary's presence. In John's account the stone was already removed when Mary arrived. The Roman guards in Matthew's story have all fainted and in John's story it would appear they have left the scene. In both accounts angels play a part in telling Mary that Jesus is not there, that he is risen.

In John's telling, the women run to tell Peter. Even though he had denied knowing Jesus, he was still seen as the leader of the group. Based on Mary's report, Peter and John ran to the tomb. Impulsive Peter runs straight into the tomb but doesn't quite catch on to what has happened. John on the other hand has an epiphany and realizes that Jesus has risen, just as he had told them he would. Both simply return to where they had come from.

Mary lingers, overcome with grief that Jesus' body is gone. Then Jesus appears. In both accounts Mary clings to Jesus once he is revealed to her. In Matthew's account both women cling to Jesus in order to worship him. In John's account Jesus tells Mary not to hold onto him, which might confuse some folks who remember that he allowed Thomas to actually touch him in the upper room when he appeared to the disciples a second time. It is thought that Jesus asking Mary not to hold him is more a matter of haste - "Don't hold me, but rush to tell my brothers that I will come to them."

In both accounts Jesus tells Mary to go to the others to tell them the Good News. Part of that Good News is their new relationship with Jesus. Earlier in the Passover narrative he had referred to his disciples as servants, later he referred to them as friends. “¹⁵ I no longer call you servants, because a servant does not know his master’s business. Instead, I have called you friends, for everything that I learned from my Father I have made known to you.” (John 15:15) After the resurrection he refers to them as “Brothers.” He had paid the penalty for their sins so now God was fully accessible to them. They, and we, can now call God Father, making us brothers and sisters in and with Christ.

Mary shared this news with the disciples. But why Mary? We’ll never know why Jesus appeared to Mary first. We might expect him to reveal himself to Peter or John when they came to the tomb. After all, these men had been part of his ministry for three arduous years. And let’s not get into the many cultural restrictions surrounding women in ancient Palestine. Among the Jews, women were not allowed to give witness, yet here was Jesus allowing Mary to be the very first witness to the resurrection. Even after death, Jesus was shaking up the societal norms.

We will never know why Jesus chose Mary to be the first witness to the resurrection. What we do know is that Mary’s devotion to her Lord was complete. While the disciples were in hiding, fearful of the political forces at play, Mary boldly made her way to the tomb to anoint the body of Jesus. She was unafraid of the dubious political mechanisms that had

brought about Jesus' death, she boldly declared her loyalty by demanding to know the final resting place of the Lord's body. Her grief was real, her devotion genuine. The risen Christ rewarded her unselfish devotion by revealing himself to her first. Jesus' disciples may have doubted her, but she knew what she had seen.

We don't know why Mary was chosen to be the first to see the risen Lord. Whatever God's purpose, we would do well to love the Lord as Mary did – to search for Him and to embrace Him with grateful hearts when He comes and calls us by name. May it be so.

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April 5, 2026

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