

THE WOMEN IN THE LIFE OF JESUS

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CHAPTER 17: Mary

Introduction

We have so often over-reacted against others' error to the extent that we ourselves almost fall into error. A classic example of this is in our perception of Mary. We all tend to be children, and therefore victims, of reaction. Our recoil so often blinds us to some aspects of value in the things we reject. Over reaction against Roman Catholic abuses can lead us to almost overlook the woman who was and is to be blessed and honoured above all women; the woman whose genes and parenting contributed to the sinless Son of God. Gen. 3:15, the classic prophecy of the birth of Jesus, is actually a specific prophecy of Mary *the* woman who would give birth to the Lord. It was not to be merely "a woman" but the seed of a specific woman, the Hebrew implies- *the* woman, i.e. Mary. Her spiritual perception is really something to be marvelled at, bearing in mind it was developed and articulated in a teenager who was likely illiterate. All this said, Elisabeth Fiorenza sums up the other side of the reality of Mary: "The [correct image of the] young woman and teenage mother Miriam of Nazareth, probably not more than twelve or thirteen years old, pregnant, frightened and single... can subvert the tales of mariological fantasy and cultural femininity. In the center of the Christian story stands not the lovely 'white lady' of artistic and popular imagination, kneeling in adoration before her son. Rather it is the young pregnant woman living in occupied territory and struggling against victimization and for survival and dignity. It is she who holds out the offer of untold possibilities for... christology and theology"⁽¹⁾.

17.1 Mary: Our Representative

Mary is set up as the representative and epitome of all Israel / the people of God should have been. She was the seed of David, the daughter of Zion from whom Messiah came. The "highly favoured...blessed" woman (Lk. 1:28) is the daughter of Zion of Joel 2:21-27; Zeph. 3:14-17; Zech. 2:14,15; 9:9. She "rejoiced" as the daughter of Zion was to rejoice at the coming of her king. She was the "servant Israel", the "handmaiden" (the female form of "servant") who was now "holpen" by God (Lk. 1:54). "Blessed be the fruit (LXX offspring) of your womb" (Dt. 28:1,4) was the promise made to Israel- and these words are applied to Mary in Lk. 1:42. She was who the people of Israel were intended to be, and thus she becomes our representative. Brother Peter Watkins in his excellent book *Exploring The Apocalypse* even sees the woman of Revelation 12 as a symbol of the church expressed in terms of Mary- for it was her who gave birth to "the man child" Jesus, who is to subdue the nations with a rod of iron (Rev. 12:5 = 2:27; 19:15). The stars around her head would, if we let Scripture interpret Scripture, refer to Israel (Gen. 37). There are many links between Revelation and John's Gospel, and thus it may be significant that in Jn. 19:25-27 Jesus calls Mary "Woman" and then in Revelation, He uses the same title for the "woman" who bears the man child. Yet the point of Revelation 12 is surely to show us from Heaven's point of view the huge disruption in the universe caused by the birth of Jesus that night in Bethlehem. A baby's birth, brought about by the quiet faith and indefatigable ambition of a teenage girl, shattered the whole cosmos. This is really what happens when we perform acts of faith based on slowly developed spiritual understanding. We do things which have cosmic consequences. We can, e.g., perform a baptism at which the whole cosmos becomes electric as all the Angels rejoice over a repentant sinner. But the view from here is that we're just standing in a cold, muddy stream in some isolated valley in Europe or Africa or Argentina or Mongolia.

Notice how some of the Lord's very first words on opening His ministry were "*Blessed* (Lk. 1:48) are they which do *hunger* (Lk. 1:53) and thirst after righteousness, for they shall be

filled (Lk. 1:53)” (Mt. 5:6). Clearly He is alluding to His mother’s own description of herself. It’s as if He stands up there before the hushed crowd and lays down His manifesto with those words. This was the keynote of what He had to say to humanity. Everybody was waiting to hear what His message really was. And this is what He said. He was saying ‘This, guys, is what I essentially and most fundamentally seek to inspire in you’. And He saw His dear mother as the epitome of the converts He was seeking to make. I lay great store by this allusion. For it makes Mary, at least at the time of the Angel’s visit, truly our pattern. She heard the glad tidings and believed that word in faith, holding on to it in her heart (Lk. 8:15,21). She was a model for all who hear the Gospel. It could even be that the language of Lk. 1:32,33,35 is framed in such a way as to make Mary appear to be the first person who heard the gospel about Jesus.

Mary’s quotations and allusions to the OT are nearly all from the LXX, and it is almost certain that she would have been familiar with some of the Apocryphal books bound up with the LXX at that time. Consider the words of 4 Ezra 9:45, where Zion speaks as a barren woman: “God heard your handmaid and regarded my low estate, and considered my distress and gave me a son”. Clearly she saw herself as the representative of Zion. Moses told Israel that God “has done great things in you” [cp. In her womb?] (Dt. 10:21). She felt that God had helped her “His servant Israel”- alluding to Ps. 98:3 LXX “He has remembered His mercy to Jacob”. Unto *us*, Israel, a son was to be given (Is. 9:6 cp. Lk. 2:11), but it was actually given to Mary.

Later Scripture seems to allude to Mary’s words of praise in Lk. 1 and set her up as a representative of us all. She speaks in Lk. 1:49 of her “low estate”, alluding to Ps. 136:23, which describes us all in this way. In Lk. 2:19 we read that she “kept” God’s words in her, yet the Lord in one of His allusions to His dear mother says in Lk. 5:38 that we must preserve or “keep” [s.w.] the new wine of the Gospel in us. The Lord saw His mother as a pattern for us all. When He heard the comment “Blessed are the breasts which you sucked!”, His comment is to draw attention rather to the spiritual side of Mary: “Blessed are they [like My dear mother] who hear the word of God and keep it”. Thus He held her up as an example to them all; she shouldn’t be marvelled at just because of the fact she carried the Son of God (Catholics take note) but rather because of her reflective and tenacious attitude to the word of God.

Bro. Paul Wyns has spotted the following connections:

REVELATION 1

Blessed is he that readeth, and they that hear the words of this prophecy, and keep those things that are written therein. (v.3)

Seven spirits (angels) before the throne. (v.4)

The resurrected Christ – I was dead, and behold I am alive for evermore. (v.12-19)

LUKE 11

Blessed are they that hear the word of God and keep it. (v.28)

Contrast – seven unclean spirits invited into the house. (v.24-26)

The sign of Jonah the prophet. (v.29-32)

The seven golden candelsticks.
(v.12,13,20)

*The parable of the lighted
candelstick. (v.33-36)*

The lesson for us is that the Lord even in His Heavenly glory alluded to his dear mother's attitude, and held her up as the pattern for all His people. She had an eternal influence upon Him. Even in His Heavenly glory, the incidents of that day in Lk. 11, and the example of His mother, remained with Him. This is surely a tremendous incentive to parents- their influence on their children may be a factor in how their children will eternally be.

Mary felt that through her being granted the honour of bearing Jesus, the hungry had been filled (Lk. 1:53). The Lord in Lk. 6:21 alludes to all this. He speaks of how blessed [=Mary] are the hungry who will be filled, using the same three words as in Lk. 1- *blessed* was Mary, the *hungry*, who was *filled* in her stomach. He states that there is a blessedness upon all of us who believe (Jn. 20:29)- just as His mother was proclaimed blessed for her belief (Lk. 1:45).

Mary was "highly favoured" (Lk. 1:28); yet the only other place the word occurs is in Eph. 1:6, where we are told that "He has made *us* accepted [highly favoured] in Christ". Thus in the thinking of Paul and the Spirit, Mary is to represent all of us.

Mk. 15:40,41 makes the point that the women who followed the Lord in fair weather times in Galilee also followed Him to the darkness of the cross: "There were also women beholding from afar: among whom were both Mary Magdalene, and Mary the mother of James the little and of Joses, and Salome; who, when he was in Galilee, followed him and ministered unto him". Mt. 13:55 makes it apparent that Mary the mother of James and Joses is clearly enough Mary the mother of Jesus- for He had brothers of those names. She had followed Him to Cana, and now, she faithfully followed Him to the cross. But Rev. 14:4 alludes to all this by saying that all the redeemed follow the Lamb wherever He goes. Thus Mary and the ministering women, following even to the cross, become typical of us all. Not only following the Lord in popularity, but also in the real and radical demands of His cross.

Mary Sees Herself As In Christ

Yet not only did Mary see herself as representative of Israel; she also felt a strong connection between herself and her Messiah Son. Any woman would feel this connection and identity with her child; but in Mary's case, her child was the Son of God, Messiah of Israel. And she had the spiritual ambition to see herself in some way, thereby, as Messiah. Consider the evidence:

- Lk. 1:38 "the handmaid of the Lord" uses the Greek female form for "servant of the Lord", a clear title of Messiah.

- She appropriates words spoken in the spirit of Christ to herself: "You have reduced the proud to lowliness like a wounded thing; and by your powerful arm you have scattered your enemies" (Ps. 89:10 cp. Lk. 1:51-53).

- She refers to herself in saying that God has helped His servant Israel in remembrance of His mercy; yet His Servant was Messiah, according to Isaiah's servant songs (Lk. 1:54,55).

- Lk. 1:28,42 “blessed among women” alludes to Jud. 5:24, as if Mary was already as Jael who had killed Sisera, an incident typical of the Lord's destruction of sin with the hammer of God's word. Mary is tied up with her son's victory- for He was part of her. There is a parallel between Mary and the "fruit of thy womb", they were both to be blessed together (:42), as if God recognized this link between the mother and Son. The fact He ‘allowed’ this, rather than just using a cold ‘channel’ for His purpose, is simply surpassing in its wonder.

- Her words of Lk. 1:47 “my spirit shall rejoice in God” allude to Ps. 63:11: “But *the king* shall rejoice in God; every one that sweareth by him shall glory: but the mouth of them that speak lies shall be stopped”. Mary parallels herself with “the King”, seeing herself as connected with Messiah.

- “The servant of the Lord” would rejoice in God: “I will greatly rejoice in the LORD, my soul shall be joyful in my God” (Is. 61:10), and yet Mary as the female “servant of the Lord” also rejoices, sharing the joy of her Son.

- Lk. 1:48 has Mary rejoicing: “All generations shall call me blessed”, alluding to how in Ps. 72:17 “all nations shall call *him* [Messiah] blessed”. Mary is equated with her son, Messiah, and she recognized this. He was part of her.

- Mary understood that through her conception, God had put down the mighty from their thrones and exalted *them* of low degree (Lk. 1:52). This clearly alludes to Ez. 21:26, where the princes are to be put down and *him* that is low is to be exalted, i.e. Messiah. But Mary felt that she had been exalted; thus she shared Messiah’s exaltation because He was in her and she in Him. We too are in Him, and we should feel something of the pride and joy, along with the suffering, that comes from that identification. She parallels *her* low estate with *them* of low degree (Lk. 1:48,52)- perhaps referring to her and Jesus?

- She appropriated the promises to Abraham’s seed [which according to Galatians 3:16 is one man, Jesus] to her personally (Lk. 1:55).

Notes

(1) Elisabeth Schussler Fiorenza, *Jesus- Miriam's Child, Sophia's Prophet: Critical Issues In Feminist Theology* (New York: Continuum, 1994) p. 187.

17.2 The Character Of Mary

17-2-1 The Loneliness Of Mary

The descriptions of Mary as keeping things in her heart (Lk. 2:19,52), and the way it seems she didn’t tell Joseph about the Angel’s visit, but instead immediately went down to Elisabeth for three months...all these are indications that Mary, like many sensitive people, was a very closed woman. Only when Mary was “found” pregnant by Joseph (Mt. 1:18- s.w. to see, perceive, be obvious) was the situation explained to him by an Angel. It seems His move to divorce her was based on his noticing she was pregnant, and she hadn’t given any explanation to him. She “arose” after perhaps being face down on the ground as the Angel spoke with her,

and went immediately off to Elisabeth. And then, after three months she returns evidently pregnant (Lk. 1:39). Mary is portrayed as somehow separate from the other ministering women. It would have been psychologically impossible, or at best very hard, for the mother of the Lord to hang around with them. The group dynamics would have been impossible. Likewise in Acts 1:14 we have “the women, and Mary the mother of Jesus”, as if she is separate from them. She followed Him to Cana, uninvited, and also to Capernaum. Next she is at the cross risking her life, but she isn't among the women who went to the grave. Why not? It was surely natural that she would go there, and that the other women would go with her to comfort her. But she was a loner; either she went alone, as I think I would have tried to, or she just couldn't face contact with the others and simply hid away. And could it be that Jesus, in recognition of her unique perception of Him, appeared to her first privately, in a rightfully unrecorded meeting? But by Acts 1:14, she was in the upper room, as if His death led her to be more reconciled to her brethren, to seek to get along with them.. although by nature, in her heart and soul, she was a loner, maybe almost reclusive. A struggler to understand. A meditator, a reflector, who just wanted to be alone, one of those who take their energy from themselves rather than from other people.

The usual girlie teenage thing would have been to go talk to her contemporaries about it. But not Mary. She went on probably the longest journey she had ever made, and alone, to see Elisabeth. She describes herself as the lowly, the hungry, who had been exalted and fed...whereas the proud and haughty had been disregarded. These words, and the evident allusions she makes back to Hannah's song, could be read as reflecting what had actually been wrought in Mary's own person and experience by some kind of persecution in her childhood. And it drove her within herself. It seems that she had been deeply humbled in order for her to be highly exalted. One wonders if she had been sexually abused. If Joseph was indeed much older than her, then we can understand how it happened that this girl, mature as she was beyond her years, got attracted to an older and spiritual man. Her spirituality and intelligence [for her allusions to Scripture indicate a fine appreciation of so much] would have been enough to spark plenty of village jealousy.

Jn. 2:11,12 speak of three groups- the disciples, who believed, the brothers of Jesus who didn't (Jn. 7:5), and Mary, whose level of faith isn't commented upon. She stands alone. Recognizing this tendency to isolationism within her, the Father seems to have encouraged Mary to open herself up to Elisabeth, encouraging her that her relative was in a somewhat similar position, having been barren for a lifetime and now expecting a child. Although Elisabeth was somewhat distant from Mary- for Mary hadn't heard the wonderful news that this elderly, barren relative was six months pregnant- Mary immediately goes to see her, following the prompting of the Lord. The record is styled to show the experiences of the two pregnancies as parallel:

- “The virgin's name was Mary” (1:27) = “her name was Elisabeth” (1:5).
- Both were startled at the Angelic appearances (1:12,29), and were comforted not to be afraid.
- “You will call his name John...you will call his name Jesus”.
- “He will be great...he will be great”.

- “How am I to know this?”, and the Angel responded; “How shall this be?”, and likewise the Angel responded.

- Both were given signs- the dumbness of Zecharias, and the pregnancy of Elisabeth.

- Both John and Jesus are described as growing up and becoming strong (Lk. 1:80; 2:40).

This is not the only time when we see circumstances repeating between Bible characters. More examples are given in *Samson*. The similarities were to direct them back to former and contemporary examples, to find strength. And this is one of the basic reasons for Christian fellowship amongst believers. Yet it would seem that as time went on, Mary became more introverted, she stored up “all these things” in her heart and couldn’t share them with others. Whilst due to her unique path this is understandable, it may be related to the loss of spiritual perception and activity which it seems set in after she gave birth to Jesus.

The Lord shared the characteristics of Mary, including the loneliness of Mary. He could so easily have allowed Himself to be influenced by her genes, and just remain locked up within Himself. And yet He “came down from Heaven” at age 30 and entered so fully and openly, with a heart that bled, into the things of ordinary men and women. He poured out His heart as men and women were able to hear it. He overcame the tendency we all have, to retain our relationship with God as a totally private thing, considering that the validity and truth of our relationship with the Father somehow of itself justifies our not breathing a word to the man next to us about it. We too must learn that Western insularity is not the way to live. Isaiah 53, as I understand it, is an explanation of why Israel refused to accept the message / report of the cross. One of the reasons given is that “we have turned every one to his own way”. Note, in passing, how Isaiah identifies himself with his unbelieving people, after the pattern of Ezra and Daniel. Each person was so dominated by their own individual miseries, loneliness, sins, griefs, that they failed to accept the real message of the cross. And so it is, that the world lacks cohesion and unity; for they turn each to their own way. For those who respond to the report of the cross, there is, conversely, a unity which comes from the common knowledge that all our private sins and personal struggles are resolved in Him, as He was there. So we each have the tendencies of Mary, to turn to our own way. But the cross should convert us from this. And it seems to me that Mary’s conversion was due to the cross; for all we know of her after it was that she was meeting together with the other believers in the upper room.

17-2-2 The Spiritual Ambition Of Mary

It seems to me that Mary had prayed to be mother of Messiah, thus showing the ultimate level of spiritual ambition. Consider the evidence:

- In Lk. 1:48 Mary exalts: " he hath looked upon..." (ASV). Mary is reflecting how God " looked upon" Elisabeth and also gave her conception- ‘looking upon’ is an idiom for answered prayer or God’s response to human request (Gen. 6:12; 29:32; Ex. 2:25; Dt. 26:7; Jud. 6:14). All this implies that Mary like Elisabeth had requested to have this child- to bear Messiah. She sees what God has done as “His mercy” to her (1:50), as if a request had been granted.

- She was “graciously accepted” (Lk. 1:28 AVmg.); she “*found* favour” with God (1:30), using the same word as in Heb. 4:16 about us *finding* answers to prayer.

- Lk. 1:42 “blessed be the fruit of thy womb” alludes to Dt. 7:13, where the fruit of the womb was blessed if Israel kept the words of God's covenant. For Mary to have the fruit of her womb blessed therefore implied that she was being rewarded for her obedience. She was not just a channel for the fulfilment of God's purpose to the extent that any womb or woman could have been used.

- “Hail!” is translated by e.g. the LNT as “Congratulations!”, as if a request had been heard, and an honour striven for.

- Hannah's prayer of thanks is clearly the basis for Mary's emotions; and Hannah had prayed for a child, and received it. As Hannah described herself as “thine handmaid” (1 Sam. 1:18), so now did Mary too (Lk. 1:38). God remembered His mercy in making Mary conceive (Lk. 1:54), just as God had remembered Hannah in answering her prayer (1 Sam. 1:19). And just as Hannah “rose up” and went to Ramah, so Mary “rose up” and went to Judea (Lk. 1:39). Yet there is reason to think that Hannah too desired to bear Messiah. She speaks of how her “horn” has been exalted in the same way as Yahweh's horn has been (1 Sam. 2:1,10); and the language of a horn being exalted was understood to be referring to Messiah (Ps. 89:24).

- Gabriel appeared to her; yet Gabriel in the OT is nearly always the Angel associated with answered prayer.

- To me the clearest indication that she had prayed for Messiah to be her baby is in her joyful reaction to the Angel's message. She was engaged, and then suddenly she is told that she will soon be pregnant, before she marries, but not from any human being. On a worldly level, her life had just been messed up. There would have been major doubts in her mind as to whether Joseph would ever believe her story. And her parents...her brothers...the villagers... But amazingly enough, she is ecstatically joyful (Lk. 1:47). This would be psychologically unlikely, unless she had specifically requested this honour. She'd have been hopelessly confused and worried and upset that her planned marriage would likely founder because she had been made pregnant. The fact Mary so rejoices, and joy is a major theme both of her words and of the OT allusions she makes, is to me the greatest proof that she had requested to be the mother of Messiah, and now this was being granted.

- She knew that Joseph her boyfriend was the rightful king of Israel, according to the genealogies presented in Matthew 1 and Luke 3. Yet for the promise to David to be fulfilled, that of the fruit of his body according to the flesh there would come Messiah, Mary must have been also in the direct line of David. Jesus was “born of the seed of David” (Rom. 1:3)- this passage surely implies that Mary was also “of the seed of David”. Likewise Heb. 7:14 says that Jesus “sprang out of Juda”, which could only have been true if Mary was of this tribe too. Mary had to go to Bethlehem to be taxed presumably because she was from Judah. The Old Syriac [Sinaiticus] text of Luke 2:4 says that Joseph and Mary went “to the city of David because *both were* [AV “he was”] of the house and lineage of David”. Yet her cousin Elisabeth was from Levi. Mary would have perceived that she was in an ideal position to give birth to a king-priest, which various OT prophecies implied Messiah would be. She therefore would have thought that the offspring of Joseph and herself would be ideally suited to be Messiah. Hence her confusion when she was told that her child would be produced without intercourse with Joseph. It has been suggested that the fact Luke makes no reference to the parents paying five shekels to buy back the child (required for non-Levites under Num. 18:15,16) is because Luke frames Jesus as a Levite who would remain in the Lord's service.

- The Angel repeats the words of 1:28 in v. 30: "Thou that art highly favoured... Fear not Mary, for *thou hast* found favour with God". She had some understandable tendency to self-doubt. After all, could it really be that she alone was to be pregnant without any man's intervention...? It must have all sounded like a fairy tale or pagan myth, or maybe a hallucination. No wonder she ran off to see Elisabeth and see whether these strange pregnancies really were possible in reality; whether prayer really was heard in the way it seemed hers had been. 'Finding favour' is an idiom for prayer / request being heard. She is being comforted that yes, her prayers really had been heard. We too can struggle in just the same ways- for the Gospel is often too good news for us. That we, the nothing and nobodies, really are the highly favoured ones.

- She comes to see the solid truth of it all when she exalts in Lk. 1:48 that God 'took notice of me', another idiom for prayer being answered.

- Jn. 1:13 in some texts reads: " Who [i.e. Jesus] was born not of blood, nor of the will of the flesh, nor of the will of man [Joseph], but of God [through the Holy Spirit]. And the word was made flesh..." . This was John's account of the virgin birth. My point is that the Lord was born not of the will of the flesh- but of the spiritual will of a woman.

For all these reasons, she was motivated to ask to be the mother of Messiah. And yet when the Angel appeared and told her that it had all been heard and arranged, she was scared. Initially she was scared, and then becomes ecstatically joyful that her dream is coming true. This has the ring of truth and likelihood about it. We can pray for something and yet when it comes true, disbelieve it. Consider how when a prayer meeting was called by the early brethren for Peter's release, they considered any such possibility that he had actually been released, i.e. that their prayers had been heard, as being absurd. Zacharias and Elisabeth had prayed all their lives for a child but when it was announced as coming true, Zacharias just didn't believe it. And so we must be the more careful what we ask for, and live in the real expectation it will come true. Jeremiah prayed for hard things to come upon the men and women of Jerusalem; and then spends the whole of Lamentations praying for God to lift the effects of his earlier prayers.

Mary And Ambition

All this reflects the level of spiritual ambition to which Mary attained. Her self-perception went beyond that of Leah to whose words she alludes ("all women call me fortunate", Gen. 30:13 LXX). Elisabeth had said the same: "Blessed are you among women" (Lk. 1:42). But Mary perceives that all generations, not just all contemporary women, would call her blessed. Yet she was the most humble woman- who was the most highly exalted. In this she not only lived out the pattern of her dear Son, setting Him an example, but she showed us a lesson: that humility does not mean that we do not have a high self-perception. She saw her strength, i.e. her humility, and perceived the high status of her place in God's plan without being proud. It seems to me that our view of human nature has resulted in our feeling we are lumps of sin walking around on this earth who can never please God. But we are made in His image, we may be animals in the way that we die, but we are still wonderfully highly perceived by our maker if we are in Christ. We can only love our neighbour if we first of all love / respect ourselves. This is a fundamental truth we do well to reflect upon more deeply. Lack of self respect means we will not truly respect or care for anyone else either. We are seen by Him as His beloved Son. And this is the essence of being brethren in Christ.

The fact we have the opportunity to be spiritually ambitious raises the question of whether God has a predetermined plan that He forces men and women to fulfill. We would rightly reject this view of predestination; rather, we have total and real freewill to choose to serve God. Mary could have declined to be the mother of God's Son; she could have simply focused on her boyfriend and upcoming marriage, and never given a thought to daring to wish to be the virgin of Is. 7:14. But she rose up to this height. She says that "nothing said by God can be impossible" (Lk. 1:38), as if to imply that although God is almighty, there is an element of possibility and conditionality in His promises. Nothing He says need be impossible; but it can be impossible if we refuse to do our part. And she continues: "May it be to me as you have said" (NIV), as if her agreement was required for God's wondrous plan to be realized. Hence the comment: "Blessed is she that believed, that there may be a performance of those things which were told her" (Lk. 1:45- same construction Acts 27:25). Thus the wonderful promise that she would have a child that would be God's Son was all conditional upon her faith and agreement and participation, even though that condition isn't directly stated.

In Lk. 1:49 Mary speaks of "He that is mighty". The Greek word *dunatos* is translated "possible" 13 times, "able" 10 times, "mighty" 6 times. She speaks of the possibilities of God in that she knew that it was due to her prayers, her spiritual ambition, that she was to be the mother of Jesus. God's mightiness is His possibility, which we limit. All things are possible to God, and all things are possible to the believer (Mk. 10:27; 9:23)- in that we limit what God can do. All the *dunamos* family of words carry not only the idea of naked power, but more of possibility. This means that God's power is under various possibilities of directing it. Recall how the man asked whether, if Jesus could do anything, He would. And the Lord replied by putting it the other way: If you can believe, all things are possible to him that believes. The believer limits the Lord's ability; He Himself has boundless possibility. Mary believed *so that* there was a performance of what God had promised (AVmg.). Without her faith, God's promise would not have been fulfilled, just as her dear Son was to have the same struggle later on. Only by His obedience would the Scriptures be fulfilled; but there was the real possibility that He could have failed.

17-2-3 Hannah And Mary

Hannah's example not only influenced Mary, but also Anna. 'Anna' is an unusual first century name; "of the 247 Jewish women in Palestine from the period 330 BCE - 200 CE whose names are known, Anna [in Luke 2] is the only one who bears this name" (Tal Ilan, 'Notes of the distribution of Jewish women's names in Palestine', Journal of Jewish Studies Vol. 40 (1989) pp. 186,193). She therefore named herself this after Hannah, the Hebrew equivalent of Anna; she was inspired by Hannah's example of waiting and praying in the sanctuary for a child. For Anna, the coming of Messiah was equivalent to having her own child. Her hope for Messiah's coming was something which she felt personally. We too are awaiting the Lord's coming- but with anything of her intensity and feeling? She looked for redemption to appear in Jerusalem (Lk. 2:25,38), clearly alluding to the LXX of Is. 52:9: "The Lord has comforted his people, he has redeemed Jerusalem". She saw the coming of that little baby as the redemption of God's people; she had the faith to see things yet unseen. The Hebrew for 'redemption' can imply 'with blood'- is it going too far to suggest that she perceived the need for that little baby to grow up and then shed His blood for Israel's redemption? Her father's name, Phanuel, is the Hebrew 'Peniel', meaning 'the face of God'. And 'Hannah' means 'God's grace'. Straight away we see a link to Num. 6:25: "The Lord make his face to shine upon you, and be gracious unto you". The connection implies God's

passionate joy at her attitude and existence. Her remaining in the temple was perhaps inspired by passages like Ps. 27:4, where David spoke of his desire to dwell in the temple all the days of his life in order to see God's beauty- which she understood in terms of His Son. And especially, Mal. 3:1, which speaks of the Lord's coming to His temple. We must ask ourselves what our Bible study and knowledge actually leads to. A study of Romans 6 may lead to baptism; but all God's word demands of us an actual and concrete response in the things of real life. She allowed the example of another woman, Hannah, to influence her, perhaps even to the point of changing her name; what of us?

17-2-4 A Bible Mind: Mary And The The Magnificat

Mary's Bible minded-ness was really quite something. The Greek word translated "ponder" (Lk. 2:19) comes from *syn*, "with", and *ballein*, "to throw", as if she combined Scripture with her experience of life, seeking to find her place in the mass of OT allusion and teaching which she was being presented with. Her every phrase has multiple allusions to Scripture, which in itself indicates a fair level of intelligence to think on so many levels simultaneously. In Lk. 2:51 it is recorded that she "kept these sayings". It could be that she had pondered from the LXX of Gen. 37:11 how Jacob "observed" (s.w.) the saying of Joseph / Jesus, and therefore felt that she too must meditate on all the words associated with her Son. She speaks in Lk. 1:55 Gk. of "*the* seed of him"- she understood the seed of Abraham to be Messiah, her son, and makes many references and allusions to the promises to Abraham. She had clearly reflected upon her 'first principles'.

Hannah's song was clearly a major influence in the mind of Mary. But there are some background similarities as well as the verbal ones. The LXX of 1 Sam. 1:18 [not the Hebrew text] speaks of Elkanah and Hannah staying in a *katalyma* on their journey to Shiloh- the very word used of the "inn" in whose stable Mary had to stay. If we ask *why* Mary based her song so heavily on that of Hannah, we find a clue in considering how she was greeted by the Angel as "favoured" (Lk. 1:28). The Greek *kecharitomene* virtually translates the Hebrew name 'Hannah'. The record is written in Greek, but Mary was a Jewess and spoke Aramaic and Hebrew; and probably the Angel spoke to her in those languages. So the link would have been all the stronger- 'Hail, Hannah-like one'. And this set the mind of Mary thinking about Hannah, and in the days between hearing these words and meeting Elisabeth, Mary had perceived the similarities between her position and that of Hannah. She allowed the spirit of Hannah to genuinely become hers, in perceptive obedience to the Angel's bidding. She came to share God's perception of her as a woman like Hannah. 'Hannah' comes from the Hebrew root *hnn* – favour. Mary is told that she has been favoured / 'Hannah-ed' by God (Lk. 1:30)- as if to lead her to see the similarities between her and Hannah. And she responds magnificently, by alluding to Hannah's song so closely. Tragically as we shall see, she later came to be more influenced by the world's perception of both herself and her Son. The theme of joy is very great in her song- again, because she was obedient to the greeting "Hail!", literally, 'rejoice!'. The points of connection between the songs of Hannah and Mary's Magnificat are really quite detailed:

1 Samuel Luke / Magnificat

1:3 1:7

1:18 :38

“ :30

2:1 :46

1:11 :48

2:2 :49

2:4 :51

:3 :51

:4 :52

:8 :52

:5 :53

:10 :69

:26 2:52

:10 anointed LXX “His Christ”- the first occurrence of ‘Messiah’ in the O.T.

And there are plenty of allusions in the Magnificat to other parts of Scripture and well known Apocryphal writings, especially the Psalms, which Mary evidently had committed to memory:

My soul proclaims the greatness of the Lord,

And my spirit has found gladness in God my Saviour;

Ps 35:9

Then my soul will find gladness in the Lord;

It will take pleasure in His salvation.

I Sam 2: 1-2 (Hannah’s hymn):

My heart is strengthened in the Lord;

My horn is exalted in my God...

I delight in your salvation.

Hab. 3: 18 (Habakkuk’s hymn):

I shall find gladness in the Lord;

I shall rejoice in God my Savior.

Because He has regarded the low estate of His handmaid-

I Sam 1:11 (Hannah praying for a child):

O Lord of Hosts, if you will look on the low estate of your handmaid,

Gen 29:32 (Leah after childbirth):

Because the Lord has regarded my low estate.

4 Ezra 9:45 (Zion speaking as a barren woman):

God heard you're your handmaid and regarded my low estate,

And considered my distress and gave me a son.

For behold, henceforth all generation will call me fortunate-

Gen 30:13 (Leah after childbirth):

Fortunate am I, for all women call me fortunate.

Because He who is mighty has done great things for me.

Deut. 10:21 (Moses to Israel):

He is your God who has done great things in you.

Zeph. 3:17:

The Lord your God is in you,

A Mighty One will save you.

And holy is His Name,

Ps. 111:9:

Holy and awesome is His name.

And His mercy is from generation to generation

On those who fear Him.

Ps 103:17:

But the mercy of the Lord is from everlasting to everlasting

Upon those who fear Him.

Psalms of Solomon 13:11:

His mercy upon those who fear Him.

He has shown His strength with His arm;

He has scattered the proud in the imagination of their hearts.

He has put down the mighty from their thrones

and has exalted those of low degree.

He has filled the hungry with good things,

and the rich He has sent away empty.

I Sam 2:7-8 (Hannah's hymn):

The Lord makes poor and makes rich:

He reduces to lowliness and he lifts up.

He lifts the needy from the earth,

and from the dung heap He raises up the poor

to seat them with the mighty,

making them inherit a throne of glory.

Ps. 89:11(10- a hymn praising God's action for the Davidic king):

You have reduced the proud to lowliness like a wounded thing:

And by your powerful arm you have scattered your enemies.

Sirach 10:14:

He has put down the thrones of princes

And has seated the humble before them.

Job 12:19:

He has overthrown the mighty.

1QM xiv 10-11:

You have raised the fallen by your strength,

And have cut down the high and mighty.

Ezek 21:31 LXX (26 Heb.):

Having reduced the proud to lowliness,

and having exalted the man of low degree.

Ps 107:9:

He has filled the soul of the hungry with good things.

He has helped His servant Israel

in remembrance of His mercy,

as He spoke unto our fathers,

to Abraham and his posterity forever.

Isa. 41:8-9:

You, O Israel,

My servant Jacob whom I chose,

Seed of Abraham whom I loved,

Whom I have helped from the ends of the earth.

Ps. 98:3:

He has remembered His mercy to Jacob

And His goodness to the House of Israel.

Psalms of Solomon 10:4:

And the Lord will remember His servants in mercy.

Micah 7:20:

You will give truth to Jacob and mercy to Israel,

As you have sworn to our fathers from days of old.

2 Sam. 22:51 (David's hymn at the end of his life)

Showing mercy to His anointed one,

To David and his posterity forever.

And a few more:

Luke

1:47 = Gen. 21:6

1:48 = Ps. 138:6 LXX; Gen. 30:13

1:49 = Ps. 126:2,3; 111:9

1:50 = Gen. 17:7

1:51 = Ps. 118:14,15

Yet despite all this undoubted spiritual perception in the Magnificat, she didn't have totally pure understanding. It seems that her allusion in Lk. 1:52 to Ez. 21:26 [the mighty being put down from their thrones and the humble one exalted] that she thought that Ezekiel's prophesy about Messiah's restoration of the Kingdom had already been fulfilled in her conception of Jesus. It could be that she was so sure that her child would one day do this that she saw the time of the coming of "Him whose right it is" as being right there and then; and yet we know that it is in fact still future. Likewise "How shall this be, seeing I know not a man?" *may* imply [although not necessarily- see later] that she hadn't grasped the implications that Messiah must be the result of a virgin birth, as per Is. 7:14. Yet for all this, she still had acceptability before God, and the required spiritual ambition to be Messiah's mother.

All these wonderful observations about Mary could lead us to think that she was some head in the clouds fanatic. But it seems to me she wasn't. It has been commented that there was at that time in Palestine a reluctance amongst young women to marry. The school of Hillel was quite popular, whereby a woman could be divorced for very petty things (see Ketuboth 7.6; Gittin 9.10). The fact she wanted to get married when many other girls didn't reflects not only on Joseph's good character, but also indicates that she *wanted* to marry. She wasn't a white faced nun who wanted nothing more than to be hidden away with her scrolls. She wanted to marry, and willingly went along therefore with the arranged marriage that presumably she was involved with rather than delaying it.

Mary And God Manifestation

The Magnificat Mary had a fair appreciation of God's Names, in that she refers to Him as "He that is mighty", interpreting for us the Old Testament idea of El Shaddai, the God of fruitfulness [Heb. *shad* = 'breast']. Note how neither Mary nor the NT writers transfer the OT Hebrew titles of God, e.g. 'Yahweh', rather they interpret them. She sees her conception of the Son of God as an example of how "holy is His Name" (Lk. 1:49). The Lord Himself understood that "Hallowed be Thy Name" is to be paralleled with the Father's will being done. The Name of God speaks of His actions; because He is who He is, He will articulate this in how He acts. This is why all His actions are understandable and broadly predictable in terms of the basic characteristics that comprise His Name. The Name is not just a word, a

lexical item. And Mary perceived all this- that the Holy Name of Jehovah was to be manifested ultimately and supremely in the Son she would bear. For this is the climax of God manifestation. Because “Holy is His Name”, she would bear a “holy thing” that manifested that Name. There is in Hebrew an ‘intensive plural’, whereby the plural form is used to reflect the greatness of a singular thing. Thus ‘Jehovah Elohim’, Jehovah who will be mighty ones, can be read as a specific prophecy of His definitive revelation in the ‘mighty one’ of His Son. And could it be that Mary grasped all this? I for one think she did.

“*My soul doth magnify the Lord*” (Lk. 1:46) is alluded to by Paul, when he uses the same Greek word in Phil. 1:2: “Christ shall be *magnified in my body / soul*”. If this is a valid allusion, then “the Lord” is a reference to Jesus. In Lk. 1:43 Elisabeth had just described Jesus as “my Lord”. And then Mary in v. 46 parallels “the Lord” with “God my saviour / my Jesus”. She understood how God was to be manifest in Jesus, as she parallels “my soul” with “my spirit”. It’s amazing that an illiterate teenager should have risen to such heights of understanding, probably without learning much at all from the local synagogue.

17-2-5 The Faith Of Mary

Such a Bible minded woman inevitably had faith. For faith comes by hearing the word of God. Mary believed the Angel’s words fully- hence her rejoicing. The aorist tenses of Lk. 1:51-53 seem the equivalent of prophetic perfect tenses in Hebrew- Mary firmly believes that what is still future is as good as happened. She had the faith that considers what has been promised to have actually happened. At that moment it was as if God *had* scattered the proud, the rulers and the princes- even though this would only be achieved by the Lord’s life, death and glorification (Acts 2:33; 4:24-27; 5:31). The Holy Spirit came upon her, and so *Mary’s* spirit was full of gladness (Lk. 1:35,47). She walked in step with the spirit (Gal. 5:25 NIV). Because she believed that really the child she would bear would be “holy”, she can extol God as “holy” (1:35,49). She says that God “*Hath* done to me great things”- she believed that what was promised would actually happen, to the point she felt it had already happened. Now this surely is the essence of faith.

Potential Connections

Not only are the words of Mary packed with allusion to Scripture, but the words of the Angel to her are also. Whether or not she grasped all the allusions we don’t know, but it is likely that the allusions were there because it was within her potential to perceive them, Mary’s faith was big enough for this, especially as she later meditated upon all these things in her heart. Someone with her evident knowledge of Scripture was surely capable of picking them up. Consider some examples:

Zeph. 3:14-17

When the LXX and Hebrew readings are combined, it becomes evident that the Angel is inviting Mary to see herself as the “daughter of Zion”:

Zeph. 3

Rejoice [LXX *chaire*], daughter

Luke 1:28-31

Rejoice [*chaire*]...[Mary] Notice how

of Zion (Zeph. 3)

chaire is also addressed to the Daughter of Zion in Zech. 9:9, a passage also applied to Jesus in Mt. 21:5; Jn. 12:14,15.

The King of Israel, the Lord, is in the midst of you [*en meso sou*] (Zeph. 3)

The Lord is with you [*meta sou*]. “The king of Israel” was a well known Messianic title. He was in the midst of Mary in the sense that He was now in her womb.

Do not be afraid, Zion (Zeph. 3)

Do not be afraid, Mary

The Lord your God is with / in you (Zeph. 3)- the Hebrew can imply ‘in your interior parts’, cp. the womb

You have found favour with God. We can perceive a double meaning now in Zephaniah’s words- the Lord God was with Mary, but was also within her manifest in His Son.

The mighty one will save you (Zeph. 3)

“God my Saviour”- as if Mary picked up the allusions and responded to them.

A spiritually minded person has situations brought about in their lives which they can interpret as thrilling encouragement, if they perceive the links between the situation they find themselves in and the Scriptures. This is one reason why regular, daily Bible study must be persevered in, even if *at the time* we seem not to have discovered so much. Mary was “the daughter of Zion”- a symbol of us all. Thus we are left to wonder whether Mary grasped the connection between various events in her life and the Old Testament prophecies which were so personally and intensely relevant:

- Did she see the link between her giving birth in a stable and laying Jesus down in a “manger” (Gk. *phatne*), perhaps with oxen and donkeys onlooking, and Is. 1:3 LXX: “The ox knows its owner, and the donkey knows the *phatne* (“manger”) of its Lord (*kyrios* as in Lk. 2:11), but Israel has not known me”.

- I likewise wonder whether she grasped the relevance of Ps. 87:6 LXX to the fact she gave birth to Messiah during a census: “In the census of the peoples, this one [Messiah] will be born there”. The relevance of this verse to the Lord’s birth may explain why Luke says that the census of Quirinius was part of a census of the whole world, which wasn’t strictly true.

- And Jer. 14:8 was addressed to the Lord and Saviour of Israel, Jesus-Messiah: “Why are you like an alien in the land, like a traveller who stays in *lodgings*?”. If Mary had made all these connections, the hurt of being told there was no room in the lodging, and having to give birth in a stable, laying her dear child in a cattle manger...would have been far less felt by her. These things would have thrilled and rejoiced her heart rather than hurt her, just as we can joyfully perceive how present sufferings are working out so analogous to a Biblical verse or character.

The Ark

The Angel's description of Holy Spirit overshadowing Mary (Lk. 1:35) could have sent her mind back to how the Spirit-Cherubim and the cloud of Spirit glory overshadowed the ark (Ex. 25:20; 1 Chron. 28:18). The LXX uses the word for "overshadow" about the cloud of glory overshadowing the ark in the wilderness (Ex. 40:35; Num. 9:18,22). If Mary's mind had been alerted to this possibility, she would have seen the relevance of Elizabeth's words: "Who am I, that the mother of my Lord should come to me?" (Lk. 1:43). For they are remarkably similar to the LXX of 2 Sam. 6:9, where David asks "How can the ark of the Lord come to me?". As a result of this question of David's, the ark remained three months in the house of Obed-Edom (2 Sam. 6:11). And was this why Mary, seeing herself as the ark, remained for three months in the house of Elisabeth straight after hearing this same question asked (Lk. 1:56)? There are further links, between the gladness of Lk. 1:44 and the joy of 2 Sam. 6:12; and the loud cry of Lk. 1:42 and that of 2 Sam. 6:15. If one combines Lk. 1:31 and Jn. 1:14 we have the word of God becoming flesh and "tabernacling" among us in the womb and faith of Mary. If these connections are valid, then Mary would have felt that within her was He who would be the covenant of the Lord, the stones of the word of God made flesh in a little boy. This was perception indeed.

17-2-6 Mary And The Virgin Of Isaiah 7

So great is the depth of Mary's perception that I am led to make the suggestion that she may have actually comprehended that Isaiah 7:14 required a virgin to be made pregnant by God, and she was anticipating this happening. I am led to this possibility by musing upon her question in Lk. 1:34: "How shall this be, seeing I know not a man?". She had been told that she was to bear the Son of God, Messiah, but initially she is not told that this would be due to the Holy Spirit coming upon her. Her response is to ask how this will be possible, seeing she doesn't know a man. Yet she was engaged to a man, and engagements in Galilee rarely lasted longer than a year. The obvious deduction for her would have been to think that when her and Joseph married, their child would be Messiah. So why does she ask how it can be, seeing she doesn't know a man sexually? Is there not here the implication that she had picked up on the Angel's allusion to Isaiah 7:14 and realized that it required a virgin to conceive in order to make the Messiah both Son of God and son of David through a woman? And so she asks how actually this is going to come about; as if to say 'OK I understand it requires a virgin conception, but how physically is it going to work out?'. Most marriages were arranged marriages; she had been betrothed to Joseph, but was earnestly praying to be mother of Messiah, and yet she realized that it required a virgin conception. And yet soon, she would be married. She must have feared that her life was going to become just like that of any other woman. But now with ecstatic joy she realized that God had heard her, and intervened. She was to have a virgin conception before she got married to Joseph! It must have all seemed too wonderful to be true, and yet she believed. One can only be impressed at the speed and depth of her response to the Angel. The Lord's same ability was surely at least partly inherited from His mother.

17-2-7 The Humility Of Mary

Mary perceived the importance of humility. Her song of rejoicing is a consciously arranged poem by her. It is in two strophes, each climaxing with the themes of lowliness / exaltation. She saw humility as the true exaltation, and the structure of her little song reflects this. She perhaps prepared the song in her mind as she walked down from Nazareth to the Judaeian hills

to meet Elisabeth; there is a rhyme established by the last words of the four lines in Lk. 1:52,53: *thronon* with *agathon*, and *tapeinous* with *kenous*. In all this she reached a new paradigm for humility was a concept foreign to the first century mind. Strength, wealth and ability were to be demonstrated; to show strength by being humble was just unheard of. Only those who were forced into humble submission by the stronger were 'humble'. To clean the toilets when nobody else notices, and the host of other such opportunities for service in ecclesia life...this is the true humility, the real strength and exaltation before God.

When Mary spoke of all generations calling her blessed, her mind was in Gen. 30:13: "the daughters [i.e. future generations of them] shall call me blessed", and yet at the same time on Zilpah the servant maid [cp. Mary the handmaiden] bearing Asher [happy]. These women were seen by Mary as representatives of her. She was so humble to compare herself with the servant girl. Yet she also had in mind Prov. 31:28, where the virtuous woman is blessed by all. She saw herself as the virtuous woman who excelled all- yet she was so humble. She was the most highly favoured woman, but was so humble. It's hard to know your true value without being proud about it. It seems to me that we must learn to value ourselves far more, to love our neighbour AS we do really love / respect ourselves, without being proud. The ability to see your own worth and value in God's purpose is crucial; we tend to be either proud, or too negative about ourselves. Mary was so spiritually ambitious to want to be the mother of Messiah, understanding He would be God manifest.

Mary realized that her great honour was being given in response to her humility- God had regarded her "low estate (Lk. 1:48)", her humility. She was humble enough to know God had noticed her humility- and still not be proud about it. She had enough self knowledge to perceive this. It's as if she is saying "Thank you for taking note of my humility". This is really a deep essay in humility- to recognize she was humble without being proud about it. And to be able to say it sincerely. Mary's humility was programmatic for Jesus on the cross; for there He humbled Himself that He might be exalted. This was the theme that, according to Phil. 2, was ever in His mind.

In passing, one is hard pushed to find women-only scenes in contemporary literature written during Biblical times. The women are presented in terms of the men with whom they inter-relate. Yet Elizabeth and Mary are recorded as having a conversation with no male present (Lk. 1:39-45); and there are other such passages in Scripture (Gen. 19:32,34; 30:14,15; Ex. 2:1-10; Jud. 5:28-30; Ruth 1:6-2:2; 3:16-18; 4:14-17; 2 Kings 5:2,3). The narrative of the women at the tomb and the resurrection is another example (Lk. 23:55-24:4). In all these passages, the reader is invited to share the woman's perspective.

17-3-1 Mary's Crisis Of Faith

Idealism Ground Away

After the record of Mary's song of praise, most of the other references to Mary reveal a lack of perception and understanding, to such an extent that the miserable higher critics doubt whether Mary's song could really have been by her. We accept of course that she did really did feel and say and perceive these things; yet it seems that over time, this world ground away her teenage idealism. Motherhood, lack of cash, brooding on the past in a wrong way, becoming caught up inside herself, not sharing anything of herself and her experience with

others emotionally...it all took its toll upon her spiritually. And so it can be with us; the idealism of early conversion is diluted, this world can grind our dreams away if we're not careful. Consider all the other references to her:

a. When The Shepherds Came

When the shepherds came to worship, Mary pondered within herself what it all meant, as if she was now rather lacking in comprehension (Lk. 2:19). [Consider in passing the fact that Luke describes his Gospel as a compilation of eyewitness accounts. Where did he get the material from about Mary pondering things in her heart [2:19,51]? Was it from interviewing her himself? Or was her inward meditation and frozenness evident to others who on this basis told Luke?].

17-3-2 Mary And Jesus In The Temple

b. In The Temple

12 years later, when Jesus is lost in the temple, she scolds Him that his father [Joseph] and her have been seeking for Him. The surrounding world perceived Him as the carpenter's son (Mt. 13:55), the son of Joseph (Jn. 6:42). He was "as was supposed" ['reckoned legally'?] the son of Joseph" (Lk. 3:23). Even Philip perceived Messiah to be "the son of Joseph" even after he had accepted Him (Jn. 1:45). Hence Jesus gently rebuked her that He was about His true Father's business, in His true Father's house. Her description of Joseph as "thy father" is surely worthy of the Lord's rebuke. She had allowed the views of the world to influence her view of the Lord. "Is not this the son of Mary?" (Mk. 6:3) is paralleled in Mt. 13:55 by "the carpenter's son", and in Lk. 4:22 Joseph's son; everyone assumed they were His natural parents, the son of Mary & Joseph, and this came to influence her. Jesus told them that they should have sought Him in His true Father's house- and this may not only be a reference to the temple, but to the way in which they had assumed He was somewhere with the house / family of Joseph in the convoy; and perhaps they had gone round Joseph's relatives in Jerusalem hunting for Him.

Mary and Joseph were "amazed" (Lk. 2:48). She shared Joseph's amazement; and the word is only used of the amazement / incomprehension of the crowds- Mt. 7:28; 13:54; 19:25; 22:33; Mk. 10:26. Slowly she became influenced by the world's view of her son- not totally, but partially, to the extent that she lost that keen perception and height of spiritual ambition which she had earlier had. And so it can be for so many of us; the world comes to influence our view not only of our own children, but of all things in spiritual life. Lk. 2:50 records that "she understood not", using the same phrase as is on the lips of the Lord in Mt. 13:13, speaking of those without who "hear not neither do they understand"; and ominously, Mary stood without and asked to see Jesus, only to be told that His real mothers were those women sitting around Him listening to His words. In passing, note how the disciples also often "understood not" (Mt. 16:12; Mk. 6:52; 8:17,21; Lk. 18:34). And yet the Lord counted them as more understanding than they were. As with Mary.

Mary sought Jesus "sorrowing", using a word elsewhere used about despair and anguish for the loss of life (Lk. 16:24,25; Acts 20:38). She feared He was dead. But where, then, was her faith in the promise that He would have an eternal Kingdom...? The distraction of poverty,

the demands of the other children, perhaps an unsupportive partner, self-doubt...all these ground away at her earlier spirituality and faith, just as happens to so many of us after baptism too. "Why have you done this to us?" is a rebuke- as if she implied that Jesus had sinned / done wrong by what He had done? Surely her faith in a sinless Messiah was now put to a brutal test by a domestic upset; just as, in barest essence, ours is too by such things. Yet notice that she frames those words in the LXX language of Gen. 3:14; 4:10; 1 Sam. 13:11. Those allusions would imply that she felt Jesus had sinned; and yet at the same time as revealing that gross lack of perception, another part of her mind is still back in Scripture. Unlike 12 years previously, she is now using Scripture without correct context; but she has far from totally lost her spirituality. She "understood not" (Lk. 2:50) the clear enough statement that He was in *His* Father's house. And the Lord rebuked her for spending so long, three days, looking elsewhere when she should have perceived quicker that He was going to be in the house of His true Father. I take His words not as a sharp rebuff but rather more of grief, that Mary had known him so poorly, sad at her loss of perception.

17-3-3 Mary At Cana

c. At Cana

The incident at Cana shows her lack of perception of the true nature of her son's work at that time. The *mother of Jesus* is said to be *there*, and not to be *called*, as Jesus and his disciples were (Jn. 2:1,2), which suggests that she was following Him around, fascinated and prayerfully concerned as He began His ministry. He hadn't done any miracles before, so was she asking Him to begin His ministry with a miracle? She knew He had the power to do them- she had perceived that much. When the Lord speaks about His hour not having yet come, He is clearly alluding to His death. For this is how "the hour" is always understood in John's Gospel (Jn. 4:21, 23; 5:25, 28, 29; 7:30; 8:20; 12:23, 27; 13:1; 16:25; 17:1). So Jesus replies to Mary's nudge 'make them some wine!' by saying that the time for His death has not yet come. He assumes that by 'wine' she means His blood. He assumes she is on a higher level of spiritual symbolism than she actually was. He wouldn't have done this unless He had previously communed with her on this level. But apparently she was no longer up to it. She was correct in expecting Him to do a miracle [for Cana was His beginning of miracles]; and she was right in thinking that the need for wine was somehow significant. But she didn't see the link to His death. Her perception was now muddled. Yet even at this time, she is not totally without spiritual perception. When she tells the servants to do whatever Jesus says (Jn. 2:5), she is quoting from the LXX of Gen. 41:55, where Joseph's word has to be obeyed in order to provide food for the needy Egyptians. The world had ground her earlier spirituality away, but not totally. For it would in due time revive, to the extent that she would risk her life in standing by the Lord's cross, and then later join the early ecclesia (Acts 1:14).

" Whatsoever he saith unto you, do" (Jn. 2:5) uses three Greek words which recur in Mt. 7:24,26: " Whosoever heareth these sayings of mine, and doeth them" . Mary had heard these words but applies them in a more material way rather than the spiritual, moral way which Jesus intended. Is this another indication she had slipped from her teenage intensity and spirituality by the time His ministry began? Perhaps when Jesus said to her, "Woman, what concern is that to you and to me? My hour has not yet come" (Jn. 2:4 RSV), He was trying to get her back to spiritual mindedness and is frustrated with her low level of spiritual perception. He tries to lead her back to a higher level by linking the giving of wine with His

hour which was to come, i.e. the cross. In Lk. 1 her song shows how spiritually perceptive she was- now she seems to have lost that. She is concerned with the immediate and the material rather than the spiritual. " Woman" was a polite form of public address, but apparently it was unusual for a man to use it to his mother. The Lord felt and stressed that separation between her and Him right now at the start of His ministry, coming to a climax at His death where He told her that He was no longer her son but John was. She must have been *so* cut by this, if indeed as I have suggested it was the first time He had said this to her.

17-3-4 Mary And Her Other Children

d. Standing Outside The House

When she stands outside the house asking to speak with Jesus, Mary is identified with her other children who considered Jesus crazy. Jesus says that His mothers are those who hear the word of God and do it. This must have so cut her. There is a rather unpleasant connection between Mk. 3:32 "they stood without" and Mark 4:11 " unto them that are without, all these things are done in parables" . And further, Lk. 13:25 speaks of how the rejected shall stand without [same words] knocking and asking to speak with the Lord. Mk. 3:20 RVmg. says that Jesus came home- i.e. to the family home in Nazareth, and it turned out that the interested visitors took the house over, with His relatives, mother, brothers, sisters etc. left outside (Mk. 3:21 RVmg.). No wonder the point was made that He now had a new family; and His natural family, Mary amongst them, resented it.

The incident of Mary and her other children coming to Jesus is inserted by Mark in the context of his record that the Scribes concluded that He had "an unclean spirit". In that same context, we read that Mary and His brothers concluded that He was "beside himself" (Mk. 3:21,22). The language of demon / unclean spirit possession is used in the Gospels to describe mental rather than physical illness. The Scribes thought that Jesus was demon possessed; His family and mother thought He was mentally ill. The two thoughts are parallel, as if to imply that His family had been influenced by the prevailing opinion of the elders about Him. The Lord responded to the Scribes by warning them that they ran the risk of blaspheming the Holy Spirit by saying this of Him. And it would appear that His own mother may have been running the same risk. This is such a tragic difference from the young, spiritually minded woman who was so convinced that her Son was indeed Messiah and the uniquely begotten Son of God. And it happened simply because she was influenced by what others thought of Jesus, rather than what she had learnt from the word and experienced herself. It's a powerful warning to us.

In Mk. 3:21,31-35 we read of how "his own" family thought He was crazy and came to talk to Him. Then we read that it was His mother and brothers who demanded an audience with Him, perhaps linking Mary with her other children. Their cynicism of Jesus, their lack of perception of Him, came to influence her- for He effectively rebuffs her special claims upon Him by saying that His mother and brethren are all who hear God's word. The parallel Mt. 12:46-50 five times repeats the phrase "his mother and his brethren", as if to link her with them. Clearly the brothers, who didn't believe in Jesus (Jn. 7:5) influenced her. When He speaks of how His real family are those who hear the word of God and do it, the Lord is alluding to Dt. 33:9, where we have the commendation of Levi for refusing to recognize his apostate brethren at the time of the golden calf: "Who said unto his father and to his mother, I

have not seen him; neither did he acknowledge his brethren...for they [Levi] have observed thy word, and kept thy covenant". The last sentence is the essence of the Lord's saying that His true family are those who keep God's word and do it. The strong implication of the allusion is that the Lord felt that His mother and brethren had committed some kind of apostasy.

Note how in Mk. 3:32 we read that "thy mother and brethren seek for thee", and in Mk. 1:37 the same word occurred: "all men seek for thee" ; and also in Lk. 2:45, of how Mary sought for Jesus. The similarity is such that the intention may be to show us how Mary had been influenced by the world's perception of Him. And we too can be influenced by the world's light hearted view of the Lord of glory. It's so easy to allow their patterns of language use to lead us into blaspheming, taking His Name in vain, seeing His religion as just a hobby, a social activity...

In passing, it was not that the Lord was insensitive or discounted her. It is in Mt. 12:46 that Mary wanted to speak with Him, and presumably she did- but then He goes to His home town, back to where she had come from (Mt. 13:54), as if He did in fact pay her attention .

17-3-5 Mary In Mid-Life Crisis

Lost Sense Of Reality

The only open revelations to Joseph and Mary are those recorded at the time of His conception and birth. As the years went by, these could have come to seem as mere dreams. The reality for Joseph was that his bride had suddenly disappeared for 3 months and then returned pregnant, and then he had a dream telling him that she was the one and only woman of all time who had gotten pregnant without intercourse. Joseph comes over in the record as very obedient and spiritually minded initially. He doesn't divorce her, and in any case He had wanted to do it discreetly so as not to humiliate her. And perhaps He took her with him to Bethlehem because He wanted to be with her when the baby was delivered. And yet I wonder, and no more than wonder, whether his disappearance from the narratives is not because he died [which is pure assumption too] but because he left Mary, deciding that the story was just a hoax, and all he had to go on were two dimly remembered dreams of years ago. For Mary too, it must have been tempting to just shake her head and wonder at her own sanity...for after all, could it really have been so that she got pregnant through an Angel visiting her...? For the Angel only appeared once to her, as far as we know. The world around them would have considered Jesus to be illegitimate- hence the Jews saying that they did not know "from whence this man is" whereas they were sure who *their* fathers were. "We were not born illegitimate..." they scoffed (Jn. 8:41). And the Talmud and other Jewish writings record the charge that Jesus was the illegitimate son of a Roman soldier. He would surely have been teased as a child about His father. It has been suggested that the title "son of Mary" given to Him in Mk. 6:3 implied that they considered Him illegitimate- for men were usually called by their father's name. "'Jesus, son of Mary' has a pejorative sense...[there is a] Jewish principle: A man is illegitimate when he is called by his mother's name" (1). The perception of the surrounding world may have influenced Joseph, and must have surely given rise to at least temptations of doubt within Mary as the years went by.

In this context, let's note that the Lord was accused of being a drunkard, a glutton, and a friend of tax collectors and sinners (Mt. 11:19; Lk. 7:34). This is all language reminiscent of the commands for the parents to slay the 'rebellious son' of Dt. 21:18-21. It's conceivable that one of the reasons why His death was demanded was because of this. Hence His relatives sought to take Him away out of public sight. It's also been claimed that the Jews' complaint that Jesus 'made Himself equal to the Father' (Jn. 5:18) is alluding to a rabbinic expression which speaks of the 'rebellious son' of Dt. 21 as being a son who makes himself equal to his father (2). The shame of being Jesus' mother eventually wore off upon Mary, or so it seems to me. Just as the shame of standing up for Christian principles can wear us down, too. In passing, note that the prodigal son is likewise cast in the role of the 'rebellious son' who should be killed; the correspondence suggests that the Lord Jesus can identify with sinners like the prodigal because He was treated *as if* He were a sinner, a rebellious son; even though He was not in actuality.

To my mind, one of the most artless and surpassing things about the Lord was that He lived a sinless life for 30 years, and yet when He began His ministry those He lived with were shocked that He could ever be the Messiah. He was "in favour" with men (Lk. 2:52), not despised and resented as many righteous men have been. He was the carpenter, a good guy- but not Son of God. Somehow He showed utter perfection in a manner which didn't distance ordinary people from Him. There was no 'other-worldiness' to Him which we so often project to those we live with. We seem to find it hard to live a good life without appearing somehow distasteful to those around us. In fact the villagers were scandalized [*skandalizein*] that Jesus should even be a religious figure; they had never noticed His wisdom, and wondered where He had suddenly gotten it from (Mk. 6:2,3). This suppression of His specialness, His uniqueness, must have been most disarming and confusing to Mary. Her son appeared as an ordinary man; there was no halo around His head, no special signs. Just an ordinary guy. And this may well have eroded her earlier clear understanding that here in her arms was the Son of God. Until age 30, the Lord was "hidden" as an arrow in a quiver (Is. 49:2). So profound was this that Mary may have come to doubt whether after all He was really as special as she had thought, 30 years ago. 30 years is a long time. We also need to bear in mind that opposition to Jesus both from the other siblings and from His home town was significant. A fair case can be made that He actually moved away to Capernaum, perhaps before the start of His ministry. Mk. 2:1 RVmg. describes Him as being "at home" there; Mt. 4:13 NIV says He lived there; Mt. 9:1 calls it his "own city" (cp. Mk. 2:1). Don't forget that the Nazareth people tried to kill Jesus early on in His ministry- this was how strong the opposition was. And Mary had to show herself for or against...and it seems she at least on the surface didn't exactly show herself for Him.

Mary's lack of perception caused her great pain. The way the Lord refers to her as "Woman" both in Cana was, apparently, an unusually cold way for a man to refer to his mother. He effectively rebuffed her in Cana for her lack of perception; He responds to the woman who tells Him how blessed His mother is by saying that all who hear the word of God and keep it are equally blessed. And when His mother wants to speak to Him, He says in front of the whole crowd that His mothers are all who do God's will. And the final pain must have been at the cross, where in His dying words He tells her that she is no longer His mother, but she must now be the mother of John. Simeon's prophecy that a sword would pierce her soul (Lk. 2:35- the Syriac text has 'a spear') may refer to her feelings on beholding the literal piercing of her son's side- remembering that He was pierced with "the *staff* of a spear" (2 Sam. 23:7), it went in so deep. The fact water as well as blood came out is further evidence that the spear penetrated deeply. Yet there is an allusion surely to Is. 49:1,2, where Messiah's mouth is

likened to a sharp, piercing sword. Note how the passage has reference to Mary: “The LORD hath called me from the womb; from the bowels of my mother hath he made mention of my name. And he hath made my mouth like a sharp sword”. Could it not be that Simeon foresaw how the Lord’s words would pierce Mary to the quick? For in all the incidents above, she must have thought with a lump in her throat: ‘But come on Jesus...I’m your *mum*...the one who knitted and mended your clothes as a child...how can you speak to me like that...?’. And as a sensitive, reflective soul she would have reflected and hurt deeply at these words.

Mary’s Re-Conversion

Yet as for us, Mary’s salvation was in the cross. Being there, meditating upon it, resulted in her overcoming all her barriers and isolationism, her locked up in herself-ness, and meeting with the other brethren (Acts 1:14). I imagine her somewhere in the crowd, as the majority cried out “Barabbas! Barabbas!”. Eyes wide with desperation, I imagine her and a few others waving their arms and screaming “Jesus! Jesus!”. And watching Him as He was pushed and dragged along the Via Dolorosa to Golgotha. But in the end, the sword / spear that pierced the Lord pierced her heart, “that the thoughts of many hearts may be revealed”. The cross is therefore the ultimate source of self-examination. The Greek for “thoughts” means “inmost thoughts”, and all 13 uses of *dialogismos* in the NT are negative- bad thoughts, vain thoughts, doubting thoughts. The five other references in Luke are all very pointedly like this (Lk. 5:22; 6:8; 9:46,47; 24:38). We all find self-understanding and self-examination difficult; and we find it hard to feel our sinfulness as we should. Yet the cross is the ultimate stimulus to self-examination, to conviction of sin, and then of salvation and the reality of grace and God’s love. This same process happened for Mary “also”. Over the years she had perhaps lost something of her initial humility, feeling that her exalted place in God’s plan was due to some personal righteousness, and therefore the cross experience had to pierce her too, so that she too had the inmost thoughts of her heart revealed to herself. We have shown earlier how Mary so identified herself with her dearest Son that she felt in some way part of Messiah. Yet over the years of repetitive domestic life in Nazareth, the height of the call to be “in Christ”, really part of Him and His work, must have been ground away. Yet at the cross, her soul was as it were pierced with the same sword / spear that pierced her Son. Ps. 22:20 prophesied how the Lord would suffer “the sword” on the cross, and 2 Sam. 24 had spoken of Him being filled with a spear. “A sword shall pierce through thine own soul *also*” meant that as Mary was part of Jesus, so she must also share in His sufferings too. The proud and happy mother as she stood before Simeon was so thrilled to be as it were “In Christ”, connected with Messiah. But she had to be reminded that to share in His life is to share in His death- and it was only the actual experience of the cross which brought this home to her. And so with us, brethren in Christ, and rightfully proud of the high calling and association with Him which we have...there is a darker side to our being in Christ. It involves sharing in His death, that we might share in His life. Mary’s achievement of this is perhaps reflected in the way the mother of the man child [Jesus] in Rev. 12 is persecuted after the pattern of her Son Jesus, and yet survives.

The re-conversion of Mary resulted partly from her having her soul cut by the sharp sword of the mouth of her son, when He told her that He was no longer her son, and she was no longer His mother. It is entirely possible that the sister of Jesus’ mother mentioned in the account of the crucifixion is to be identified with the woman named Salome mentioned in Mark 15:40 and also with the woman identified as “the mother of the sons of Zebedee” mentioned in Matt 27:56. If so, and if John the Apostle is to be identified as the beloved disciple, then the reason for the omission of the second woman’s name becomes clear; she would have been John’s

own mother, and he consistently omitted direct reference to himself or his brother James or any other members of his family in the fourth Gospel. Therefore "behold your mother" meant he was to reject his mother and take Mary as his mother, to alleviate the extent of her loss. Finally Mary came to see Jesus as Jesus, as the Son of God, and not just as her son. This was her conversion- to see Him for who He was, uncluttered by her own perceptions of Him, by the baggage of everything else. And so it can be with us in re-conversion. We each must face the reality of who Jesus really is, quite apart from all the baggage of how we were brought up to think of Him: the Sunday School Jesus, the Jesus of the apostate church, the Jesus we have come to imagine from our own human perceptions...must give way when we are finally confronted with who He really is.

This line of thought is born out by a consideration of Mk. 15:40,41: "There were also women beholding from afar: among whom were both Mary Magdalene, and Mary the mother of James the little and of Joses, and Salome; who, when he was in Galilee, followed him and ministered unto him: and many other women which came up with him unto Jerusalem". Jesus had two brothers named James and Joses (Mt. 13:55). If the principle of interpreting Scripture by Scripture means anything, then we can fairly safely assume that the Mary referred to here is Mary the mother of Jesus. It was perhaps due to the influence and experience of the cross that His brother James called himself "the little", just as Saul changed his name to Paul, 'the little one', from likewise reflecting on the height of the Lord's victory. So within the crowd of women, there were two women somehow separate from the rest- "among whom were both Mary Magdalene, and Mary". Mary Magdalene was the bashful ex-hooker who was almost inevitably in love with Jesus. The other Mary was His mother. Understandably they forged a special bond with each other. Only Mary Magdalene had fully perceived the Lord's upcoming death, hence her anointing of His body beforehand. And only His Mother had a perception approaching that of the Magdalene. It's not surprising that the two of them were somehow separate from the other women. These women are described as following Him when He was in Galilee; and the mother of Jesus is specifically recorded as having done this, turning up at the Cana wedding uninvited, and then coming to the house where Jesus was preaching. The description of the women as 'coming up' (the idiom implies 'to keep a feast') with Him unto Jerusalem takes the mind back to Mary bringing Jesus up to Jerusalem at age 12. But my point is, that Mary is called now "the mother of James...and of Joses". The same woman appears in Mk. 16:1: "Mary Magdalene, and Mary the mother of James...had bought sweet spices that they might come and anoint him". Earlier in the Gospels, Mary is always "the mother of Jesus". Now she is described as the mother of her other children. It seems to me that this is the equivalent of John recording how Mary was told by Jesus at the cross that she was no longer the mother of Jesus, He was no longer her son. The other writers reflect this by calling her at that time "Mary the mother of James" rather than the mother of Jesus. The way that Jesus appears first to Mary Magdalene rather than to His mother (Mk. 16:9) is surely God's confirmation of this break between Jesus and His earthly mother.

Isaiah 53, as I understand it, is an explanation of why Israel refused to accept the message / report of the cross. One of the reasons given is that "we have turned every one to his own way". Note, in passing, how Isaiah identifies himself with his unbelieving people, after the pattern of Ezra and Daniel. Each person was so dominated by their own individual miseries, sins, griefs, that they failed to accept the real message of the cross. And so it is, that the world lacks cohesion and unity; for they turn each to their own way. For those who respond to the report of the cross, there is, conversely, a unity which comes from the common knowledge that all our private sins and personal struggles are resolved in Him, as He was there. So we each have the tendencies of Mary, to turn to our own way. But the cross should convert us

from this. And it seems to me that Mary's conversion was due to the cross; for all we know of her after it was that she was meeting together with the other believers in the upper room.

The more one reads Mary's song, the more it becomes apparent that these words are poetic, and carefully thought out rather than just instantly uttered. There are also many past tenses in the context of the salvation that had been achieved. One wonders whether Mary re-phrased her composition, under inspiration, after the resurrection, and this is the version that Luke has recorded. Remember that Luke says that all he writes he assembled from eyewitnesses; therefore after the resurrection he would have asked Mary to give her account in order to provide his material. If this is so, then we have more evidence for believing that the victory of Jesus through death and resurrection had a deep impact upon Mary. And yet it must still be accepted that Mary did perceive in the very birth of Messiah, the victory of God. Her rejoicing clearly alluded to Hab. 3:18 "I shall rejoice in the Lord; I shall take joy in God my saviour / Jesus", and also Ps. 35:9: "Then my soul shall rejoice in the Lord; it will delight in his salvation / Jesus".

One would have expected that Jesus would have first of all appeared to His dear mother, after resurrecting. Indeed there was a time when I assumed that this happened, although inspiration has more spiritual culture than to record such a personal event in the Lord's life. But I have to face up to Mk. 16:9: "Now when he was risen...he appeared first to Mary Magdalene". His mother could so easily have taken this as yet another snub, similar to the way in which He had rebuked her for not knowing He must be in His Father's house, how He addressed her at Cana as "Woman" and asked her what He had to do with her; how He told those who informed Him that His mother was outside that all those who heard God's word were His mothers; how He said that His mother wasn't blessed for suckling Him, but rather, blessed were all those who heard God's word. And the way He chose to appear to the other Mary rather than His own mother could have been taken by her as yet another snub. Yet these incidents weren't snubs. The Lord loved His mother, with a depth of passion and emotion that maybe we [and she] will never know. Yet He wanted the best for her spiritually. He wanted her to relate to Him for who He really was, not for who she perceived Him to be. It must have so hurt the Lord to work with her in this way. And so it is with His workings with us, as He seeks to bring us to know Him in truth. It must be hard for Him to bring distress into our lives. Yet with His dear mother, it worked. For the next we read of her, she is meeting with the rest of the ecclesia in Jerusalem (Acts 1:14), and, according to how we read Revelation 12, the Lord Himself saw her as clothed with the sun in glory, responsible for the birth of Himself as the man child, who would bring the Kingdom of God on earth. She made it in the end. They say you get there in the end, and so it will ultimately be with each of us, after her pattern.

Notes

(1) Raymond Brown, *The Birth Of The Messiah* (New York: Doubleday, 1993) p. 540.

(2) James F. McGrath. "A rebellious son? Hugo Odeberg and the interpretation of John 5.18" *New Testament Studies* 44.3 (1998): 470-473. Available at: <http://works.bepress.com/jamesmcgrath/21>

17-3-6 The Jesus-Mary Relationship

The Influence Of Mary

There must have been certain similarities of personality type between the Lord and His mother. Thus in Lk. 2:33 Mary “marvelled”, and the same word is used about Jesus in Mt. 8:10 and Mk. 6:6. The Lord at 12 years old displayed such piercing knowledge and spirituality, but it seems He returned to Nazareth and suppressed the expression of it (Lk. 2:51). This is why the villagers were so amazed when He stood up in the Nazareth synagogue and on the basis of OT exposition, indirectly declared Himself the Messiah. He must have stored up so much knowledge and spirituality within Him, but hid it from the eyes of men. This was quite an achievement- to be perfect, and yet not to be noticed as somehow other-worldly. There is a tendency, it seems to me, for brethren particularly to insist on flaunting their knowledge, to have to correct others who have inferior knowledge or less mature interpretations (I do not refer to matters of the basic Gospel). The Lord taught men the word “as they were able to hear it” (Mk. 4:33), not as He was able to expound it. If we ask where He obtained this humility and ability from, it is clearly an inheritance from His dear mother, who stored up things in her heart and didn’t reveal them to others, just quietly meditating over the years. Both of them must have heard so much that was wrong and immature over the years; but they said nothing, in the Lord’s case, biding His time. It has been observed that it was unusual for the villagers to describe Jesus as “the son of Mary” (Mk. 6:3)- even if Joseph were dead, He would have been known as Jesus-ben-Joseph. It could well be that this was a reflection of their perception of how closely linked Jesus was to His mother.

The influence of Mary upon Jesus is reflected in His many allusions to her words, both conscious and unconscious.

Unconscious Allusions Of Jesus To Mary

Mary’s words of Lk. 1:47 “my spirit hath rejoiced” are alluded to by Jesus unconsciously in Lk. 10:21 [the only time the Greek phrase “spirit...rejoices” is used]. “In that hour Jesus rejoiced in spirit” and thanked God that the humble not the wise had been chosen- showing exactly the spirit of Mary’s words of Lk. 1:52,53, the words she had probably sung to Him around the house as a child. Unconsciously [?] Jesus was alluding to Mary His mother’s attitude. Such was the Jesus-Mary relationship. Luke brings this out in his record in the connections he makes. Mary had an influence even on the Son of God- quite some encouragement to all parents and those who spend time with children as to the influence they have.

The Lord had called His mother “Woman...” in Cana. She had also said and later sung to Him perhaps: “Be it unto me according to thy word” (Lk. 1:38). In Mt. 15:28 we have the Lord addressing the Canaanite woman: “Woman....be it unto thee even as thou wilt”. That woman restimulated memories of His dear mother.

Conscious Allusions Of Jesus To Mary

When the Lord spoke of the Son of man having nowhere to lay His head (Lk. 9:58), He surely had His mind upon how His dear mother had told Him that when He was born, there was no place to lay Him, and His dear head had to be laid in an animal’s feeding trough.

Mary’s praise that “He hath done to me great things” is surely behind her Son’s words in Lk. 8:39, where He bids a man go home “and shew how great things God hath done unto thee” .

Mary had felt that God had “Filled the hungry [i.e. their stomach, cp. the womb of Mary] with the good thing [Gk.]”- Jesus (Lk. 1:53). He calls Himself this good thing, using the very same Greek word in Mt. 20:15: “I am the good one” ; Jn. 1:46; 7:12 [where the “good thing” is Messiah]. Her perception of Him became His. And so with us; if we perceive our children as future brethren, so, hopefully and prayerfully, they will be. Jesus could have sinned; He could have failed. But Mary right from His babyhood believed that He wouldn’t. She believed in Him and in His successful completion of His destiny from when she first conceived Him. And surely this is a pattern for Christian mothers too. Notice how some of the Lord’s very first words on opening His ministry were “Blessed are they which do hunger and thirst after righteousness, for they shall be filled”. It’s as if He stands up there before the hushed crowd and lays down His manifesto with those words. This was the keynote of what He had to say to humanity. He was saying ‘This, guys, is what I essentially and most fundamentally seek to inspire in you’. And He saw His dear mother as the epitome of the converts He was seeking to make. I lay great store on this allusion. For it makes her truly our pattern.

17-4 Mary’s Victory

17-4-1 Mary At The Cross

Men in their time of dying think of their mothers; and this, it seems to me, was supremely true of the Lord, as a genuine human being. Mary “performed [fulfilled] all things according to the law” in her dedication of Jesus (Lk. 2:39). In doing this, she anticipated the spirit of the cross and whole ministry of Jesus, where He performed [s.w. fulfilled] all things of the law- Lk. 18:31; Jn. 19:28; 30; Acts 13:29. These passages each use the same three words for all things, law, and fulfilled. She brought the Lord up in the way of the cross; and He continued in that path.

The humility of Mary was the pattern for the Lord’s self-humiliation in the cross. Here above all we see the influence of Mary upon Jesus, an influence that would lead Him to and through the cross. Her idea of putting down the high and exalting the lowly (Lk. 1:52) is picking up Ez. 17:24: “I have brought down the high tree, have exalted the low tree, have dried up the green tree, and have made the dry tree to flourish”. And yet these very words of Ezekiel were quoted by the Lord in His time of dying. With reverence, we can follow where we are being led in our exploration and knowing of the mind of Christ. His dear mum had gone around the house singing her Magnificat. He realized that she felt the lowly who had been exalted [and perhaps in some unrecorded incident before her conception she had been recently humbled?]. And Jesus had realized her quotation of Ez. 17:24. And He had perceived His linkage and connection with her, and how she saw all that was true of Him as in some way true of her, and vice versa. And now, in His final crisis, He takes comfort from the fact that like His dear mother, He the one who was now humbled, would be exalted. How many other trains of thought have been sparked in men’s minds by the childhood instructions of their mothers...?

God recognized her “low estate” [humility] and exalted her above all women, just as He would His Son among men. The same Greek word is used in Acts 8:33: “In his humiliation [‘low estate’] his judgment was taken away”. It occurs too in Phil. 2:8: “He *humbled himself*”. In the cross, indeed throughout the seven stage self-humiliation of the Lord which Phil. 2 speaks of, He was living out the spirit of his mother. She taught him the life and the

way of the cross. Hence the way she insisted on being there at the end, and the comfort she would have given Him, and the love He showed by asking for the only one who really understood Him to be taken away, for her sake as well as His own. The Lord directly alluded to His mother's pattern of humiliation and exaltation by using the same word again in Mt. 23:12: "Whoever shall exalt himself shall be abased; and he that shall humble himself [s.w. be abased- we must either humble ourselves or be humbled, it's such a powerful logic] shall be exalted". Thus Jesus alludes to His mother's words in order to set her up as our pattern ["whosoever"]. And yet He Himself showed the ultimate obedience to her pattern in the death of the cross.

For this and many other reasons, the Lord's mind was upon His mother in His time of dying. And according to the Messianic Psalms, He even asks God to have mercy upon Him *for Mary's sake*. Consider the following words of John Thomas in *Phanerosis*:

"In two places David refers to the Mother of the Son of God. In his last words, he tells us "that Yahweh's Spirit spoke by him, and that his word was upon his tongue." He spoke then, by inspiration. The Spirit, then, afterwards, incarnate in the Son of God, says in Psalm 116:16: "*Yahweh*, truly I am Thy servant; I am Thy servant, the Son of Thine Handmaid; Thou hast loosed my bonds." This deliverance is in answer to his prayer in Psalm 86:16: "O turn unto me, and have mercy on me; give Thy strength unto Thy servant, and save the Son of Thine Handmaid. Show me a token for good; that they which hate me may see, and be ashamed; because Thou, *Yahweh*, hast helped me, and comforted me." The person here styled Yahweh's Handmaid, is the woman of Gen. 3:15, and, as Christians believe, the Mother of Jesus, whom Elizabeth, her cousin, styled "the Mother of our Lord".

Jesus states He is the son of thine handmaid" as a reason why God should have mercy on Him, implying the high favour with God which Mary enjoyed. In Ps. 86:16; 116:16 we have the Son pleading to the Father to save the mother's son. Father and mother were brought together by the cross- in the same way as both are described as being "pierced" by it.

Thus in Ps. 86:16 the Lord says that Jehovah has "helped me", alluding to the very words of Mary at His conception- she considered herself "holpen" by God (Lk. 1:). The Lord felt this great bond with her then. After all, amidst the cat calls of "crucify the bastard" (and don't mistake what they were yelling), and the crude remarks about Mary having produced a child by a Roman soldier (1)...Jesus knew that only Mary alone knew for sure that He was God's Son. He knew that all the others had their doubts, to the point that they would flee, and leave Him alone. The spirit of Christ speaks of "thy [male] servant ...the son of thine handmaid" [female servant]- He saw the solidarity between Himself and His mother when on the cross, He felt they were both the servants of God. Ps. 86:8-17 has many references back to Mary's song. He had that song on His mind on the cross. Her example and her song which she had taught him as a little boy sustained His faith in the final crisis. This surely shews the value and power of the upbringing of children when young. In the Lord's case, His mother's influence sustained Him through the cruellest cross and deepest crisis any human being has ever had to go through. It was as if He was humming the song in His mind, which His dear dear mum had sung around the house as she cared for Him, cooked, sewed...

Is. 49:1,4 is another prophecy of the cross, and again we find the Lord's mind back with His mother. To quote John Thomas again from *Phanerosis*:

“In Isaiah 49:2, the effect of the anointing is thus foretold: “Yahweh hath chosen me from the womb; from the bowels of my mother (Mary) hath He made mention of my name (by Gabriel). And He hath made my mouth like a sharp sword; in the shadow of His hand (or power) hath He hid me, and made me a polished shaft; in His quiver hath He hid me; and said unto me, thou art My servant, O Israel, in whom I will be glorified””.

Ps. 116:15-19, another Messianic Psalm, has several references to Mary presenting Jesus in Jerusalem, and to His death. He thought back to her and childhood memories when facing death- it has been said that condemned men think back to childhood, and the Lord was no exception. In this we have perhaps the finest proof of His humanity. “Truly I am the son of thine handmaid” shows the Lord encouraging Himself that the virgin birth really happened...fighting off the temptation to share the view of Himself which the surrounding world had. That He was son of a soldier, or of Joseph. And his mum was just a bit weird and mystic. The way others perceive us can influence us until we become like that. The world cannot understand us, and we must allow God’s high and exalted view of us as His sons and daughters to be our influence. The Psalm comments: " Precious in the sight of the Lord is the death of [Heb. 'for'] His saints" - s.w. LXX 1 Pet. 1:19 " the precious blood of Christ" . Surely here we have the Father and mother of Jesus again connected- for His blood was precious to them both at that time.

It seems to me that for all these reasons, the Lord asks John to take Mary away from the foot of the cross. I take the comment that John therefore took her to his own [home] as meaning His own house, back in Jerusalem (Jn. 19:27). The same construction is used in Jn. 16:32 cp. Acts 21:6 as meaning house rather than family. “Took to” is a verb of motion as in Jn. 6:21. His feelings for her were so strong, so passionate, that He saw it could distract Him. He wanted to stay on earth with her, and not go to His Heavenly Father. This accounts for His again using the rather distant term “Woman”, and telling her that now, He wasn’t her Son, John was now, and she wasn’t His mother, she must be John’s mother. And many a man has chosen to leave mother for the sake of the Father’s work, as Hannah sacrificed her dear Samuel, to be eternally bonded in the gracious Kingdom to come. And even if one has not done this in this form, there is scarcely a believer who has not had to make some heart wrenching break with family and loved ones for the Lord’s sake. Only His sake alone could inspire men and women in this way.

It seems that when the Lord was offered the pain killer which He refused, this would have been arranged by some well meaning friend. One can’t help but wonder whether or not Mary was involved in this. Surely all her maternal instincts would have been to do this. Seeing she was at the foot of the cross, from where the pain killer was offered, it is leaving too much to chance to think that she wasn’t involved in it. It seems to me that such was Mary’s human love for her Son, such was her spiritual inspiration of Him at the cross, that He felt that His torn feelings for her in response could almost lead Him to sin, or at least to deflection from His vital purpose. Flesh and spirit came so closely together. Perhaps He felt she would discourage Him from the cross and He couldn’t resist her? Like the mother begging her son not to make a dangerous mission in the Lord’s service, as those who begged Paul not to go up to Jerusalem. And so it seems to me that He sent her away from cross because her support for Him, her love for Him, was just too distracting. With all His heart He wanted to cling on to her. For on earth, she alone understood, and she had walked out across the no man’s land between the crowd and the cross, despite the threat of crucifixion hanging over those who stood by the cross and showed solidarity with the condemned [so Tacitus records]. Her inspiration to Him, her willingness to die with Him in the same way, despite all her years of

misunderstandings and mental struggles with Him [and she likely still had many]...this must have been the most touching and comforting thing for the Lord, and yet also the most distracting. It was perhaps His last divestment of humanity, His last great temptation overcome, when He finally separates Himself from her as His mother, by saying that now she is John's mother, and she must leave Him. It was when Jesus knew that all was finished that He broke with His mother (Jn. 19:28)- as if He realized that His separation from her was the very last and final connection with His flesh which He must break.

Perhaps when He crossed Kidron He would have thought back to how Asa had to separate himself from his mother in the very same place (1 Kings 15:13). The crucifixion record describes Mary the mother of Jesus as Mary the mother of James and Joses (Mk. 15:40 cp. Mt. 13:55)- not Mary the mother of Jesus. It's as if the record itself seeks to show that separation between mother and Son which occurred there. Both Mary Magdalene and Mary the mother of James- i.e. the mother of Jesus too (Mk. 16:1 = Mk. 15:40 = Mt. 13:55) came to the sepulchre, but Jesus chose to appear to Mary Magdalene first (Mk. 15:9), and not His own dear mother. Mt. 27:61 almost cruelly rubs the point in: "There was Mary Magdalene, and the other Mary, sitting over against the sepulchre", but the Lord appeared to Mary Magdalene first. Indeed, there is no record that He ever appeared to His mother. This would presumably have been to help her in realizing that she must relate to Him as her Lord and Saviour now, like any other woman had to, and not as a woman with special maternal privileges in her relationship with her now Almighty Son. It must have so pained the Lord to do this- to not appear to his dear mother first. But as He oftentimes acts with us, so He did with her- doing something which even in Divine nature must have been so painful for Him, in order to help her in her growth.

It is worth noting that "relatives were not allowed to approach the corpse of their crucified one"⁽²⁾. That Mary stood by the cross, that she went to the tomb, all indicates to me that she was inspired by something more than motherly compassion. Here was a love begotten by the cross.

Perhaps this was one of His more hidden struggles. He addresses his mother in the same way as He does the Samaritan woman (Jn. 4:21) and Mary Magdalene (Jn. 20:13). And yet He clearly felt so much more for her. When He says "What have you to do with me?" (Jn. 2:4), He seems to be struggling to dissociate Himself from her; for the idiom means 'How am I involved with you?' (2 Kings 3:13; Hos. 14:8). It can be that "My hour has not yet come" can bear the translation "Has not my hour come?" (Jn. 2:4), as if to imply that, as they had previously discussed, once His ministry started, their bond would be broken in some ways. And yet Mary understandably found this hard to live up to, and it took the cross to lead her to that level of commitment to her son's cause.

The whole structure of the records of the crucifixion are to emphasize how the cross is essentially about human response to it; nothing else elicits from humanity a response like the cross does. Mark's account, for example, has 5 component parts. The third part, the centrepiece as it were, is the account of the actual death of the Lord; but it is surrounded by cameos of human response to it (consider Mk. 15:22-27; 28-32; the actual death of Jesus, 15:33-37; then 15:38-41; 15:42-47). John's record shows a similar pattern, based around 7 component parts: 19:16-18; 19-22; 23,24; then the centrepiece of 25-27; followed by 19:28-30; 31-37; 38-42. But for John the centrepiece is Jesus addressing His mother, and giving her over to John's charge. This for John was the quintessence of it all; that a man should leave His mother, that Mary loved Jesus to the end...and that he, John, was honoured to have been

there and seen it all. John began his gospel by saying that the word was manifest and flesh and he saw it- and I take this as a reference to the Lord's death. Through this, a new family of men and women would be created (Jn. 1:12). In the cross, and in the Lord's words to Mary which form the pinnacle of John's inspired observations, this new family / community is brought into being, by John being made the son of Mary, and her becoming his mother. And he felt his supreme privilege was to have a part in all this. It was only close family members who could beg for the body of the crucified. The way Joseph of Arimathaea is described as doing this is juxtaposed straight after the description of the Lord's natural family standing afar off from Him (Lk. 23:49,52). The effect of the cross had brought forth a new family in that the Lord had now broken all His natural ties, not least with His beloved mother.

The female element in Old Testament sacrifice pointed forward to the Lord's sacrifice. His identity with both male and female, as the ultimate representative of all humanity, meant that He took upon Himself things that were perceived as specifically feminine. The mother was the story teller of the family; when people heard the Lord tell parables and teach wisdom, it would have struck them that He was doing the work of the matriarch of a family ⁽³⁾. "Typical female behaviour included taking the last place at the table, serving others, forgiving wrongs, having compassion, and attempting to heal wounds", strife and arguments ⁽⁴⁾. All this was done by the Lord Jesus- especially in His time of dying and the lead up to it. He was in many ways the idealized mother / matriarch. His sacrifice for us was very much seen as woman's work. And this is why the example of his mother Mary would have been a particular inspiration for Him in going through the final process of self-surrender and sacrifice for others, to bring about forgiveness and healing of strife between God and men. In a fascinating study, Diane Jacobs-Malina develops the thesis that a psychological analysis of the Gospels shows that the Lord Jesus played his roles like "the wife of the absent husband" ⁽⁵⁾. And assuming that Joseph disappeared from the scene early in life, His own mother would have been His role model here- for she was indeed the wife of an absent husband. You'd have to read Jacobs-Malina's study to be able to judge whether or not you think it's all valid. But if she's right, then it would be yet another tribute to the abiding influence of Mary upon the character of the Son of God.

Notes

(1) Jonathan Burke provided me with the following confirmation of this view:

Professor Joseph Gedaliah Klausner: "The illegitimate birth of Jesus was a current idea among the Jews..." Babylonian Talmud, Yebamoth 49b, p.324 'Jesus was a bastard born of adultery.' Yebamoth IV 3; 49a: "R. Shimeon ben 'Azzai said [concerning Jesus]: 'I found a genealogical roll in Jerusalem wherein was recorded, Such-an-one is a bastard of an adulteress.'" Klausner adds to this: 'Current editions of the Mishnah add: 'To support the words of R. Yehosua (who, in the same Mishnah, says: What is a bastard? Everyone whose parents are liable to death by the Beth Din). That Jesus is here referred to seems to be beyond doubt.' Shabbath 104b: 'Jesus was a magician and a fool. Mary was an adulteress.' Sanhedrin 106a & b: 'Mary was a whore: Jesus (Balaam) was an evil man.' Origen refers to the tradition (still current in his day during the 4th century), that Christ was the illegitimate son of a Roman soldier: Refutation I 28: 'Mary was turned out by her husband, a carpenter by profession, after she had been convicted of unfaithfulness. Cast off by her spouse, and wandering about in disgrace, she then gave birth in obscurity to Jesus, by a certain soldier, Panthera.'

It could also be pointed out that Matthew's genealogy features [unusually, for Jewish genealogies] several women, who had become the ancestors of Messiah through unusual relationships. It's almost as if the genealogy is there in the form that it is to pave the way for the account of Mary's conception of Jesus without a man.

(2) Raymond Brown, *The Death Of The Messiah* p. 1029.

(3) V.C. Matthews and D.C. Benjamin, *The Social World Of Ancient Israel* (Peabody, Mass: Hendrickson, 1993) pp. 28-29.

(4) B. J. Malina, *The New Testament World: Insights From Cultural Anthropology* (Louisville: Westminster / John Knox Press, 1993) p. 54.

17-4-2 The Influence Of Mary

The Lord alluded to the things of His mother not only during His ministry, but even in the words of His Heavenly glory as recorded in Revelation. Ps. 110:3 LXX makes the same connection between the events of His future glory, both at His ascension and the second coming, and His begetting of Mary: “From the womb, before the morning I have begotten you”. This is sandwiched between prophecies of His ascension and return: “The LORD said unto my Lord, Sit thou at my right hand, until I make thine enemies thy footstool. The LORD shall send the rod of thy strength out of Zion: rule thou in the midst of thine enemies... *From the womb, before the morning I have begotten you...* the LORD hath sworn, and will not repent, Thou *art* a priest for ever after the order of Melchizedek. The Lord at thy right hand shall strike through kings in the day of his wrath”. The Lord was “subject unto” Mary (Lk. 2:51)- to train Him for the time when we would be subject to Him as we are now (1 Cor. 15:27,28; Eph. 1:22; 5:24;), and all the world subject unto Him (1 Pet. 3:22; Heb. 2:8). And so, wondrous thought that it is, the training of His mother has effect even now; with literally *all* subject to Him, He was prepared for this by having been subject unto His mother.

Lk. 1:45 records Elisabeth’s comment on Mary: “Blessed is she that believed”. In Jn. 20:29, Jesus unconsciously alludes to His mother's blessedness even after His glorification. Mary must have many times recounted the story of Elisabeth to Jesus, and His memory of it influenced His sentence construction even after His glorification. This gives a window into the extent to which we will be still who we are now in the Kingdom. Divine nature won't totally change who we are nor the influence of our parents upon us. This is a great encouragement to parents- who they influence their children to be, will be what they eternally will be. For Jesus alluded to the memory of His mother even in Divine nature.

Mary's Wider Influence: Others Alluded To Her

Not only was the Lord Himself influenced by His mother. Paul and Peter allude to Mary and her words in their writings. The hymn to Jesus which Paul wrote in Phil. 2 is full of themes taken from Mary’s song- the same themes of God’s manifestation in His Son, humiliation and exaltation, occur there. There are several connections between the accounts of the early preaching of the Gospel in Acts, and Mary’s song of praise. Her words came to influence the brethren who stood up there and preached. Perhaps Mary, who was meeting with them (Acts 1:14), sung the words to them and they all memorized it. Raymond Brown claims there are 18 words or items shared by the preaching of Peter (Acts 3:12-26) and the Magnificat [Mary’s song of praise] (*The Birth Of The Messiah*, New York: Doubleday, 1993 p. 354). Mary had quoted Ps. 107:9 about how she had been filled with good things; but Zacharias quoted the next verse, Ps. 107:10, shortly afterwards (Lk. 1:79). Surely Mary had gotten him thinking in the same paths as she did. And she should likewise influence us.

17-4-3 The Psychological Matrix Of Jesus

Jesus as the perfect man was a function both of His Father and mother. Until relatively recently, there was very limited knowledge of the early stages of human development. Biographies tended to be long at the end, focusing on the achievements of a person, and short at the beginning. But now, biographers and psychologists are realizing that the traumas, triumphs and parental influence of childhood are crucial in a person’s later achievements.

And so it is surely significant that the Biblical record gives so much attention to the babyhood and childhood of Jesus, telling us virtually nothing about the rest of His life until age 30. Mary's crucial role is thus tacitly recognized. Jesus was fully human. Of this there must never be any doubt. As such, He would have passed through all the stages of growth and socialization which we all do. We become what we are emotionally, intellectually, morally, not only by prolonged acts of sheer willfulness, but also simply by living through a sequence of biological, personal and interpersonal developments, beginning in the very first weeks of our lives. For Jesus to have been perfect says a huge amount about His mother. The Lord had an exceptional sense of self-identity, He knew who He was and clearly had a sense of mission from an early age. Because of this, He developed into a person about whom it was difficult to remain neutral; people had decided opinions either for or against Him. This sense of self-identity was surely developed in Him by Mary getting through to Him from a very early age that He was uniquely special, with a mission of ultimate consequence.

There must have been certain similarities of personality type between the Lord and His mother. Thus in Lk. 2:33 Mary "marvelled", and the same word is used about Jesus in Mt. 8:10 and Mk. 6:6. The Lord at 12 years old displayed such piercing knowledge and spirituality, but it seems He returned to Nazareth and suppressed the expression of it (Lk. 2:51). This is why the villagers were so amazed when He stood up in the Nazareth synagogue and on the basis of OT exposition, indirectly declared Himself the Messiah. He must have stored up so much knowledge and spirituality within Him, but hid it from the eyes of men. This was quite an achievement- to be perfect, and yet not to be noticed as somehow other-worldly. If we ask where He obtained this humility and ability from, it is clearly an inheritance from His dear mother, who stored up things in her heart and didn't reveal them to others, just quietly meditating over the years. It has been observed that it was unusual for the villagers to describe Jesus as "the son of Mary" (Mk. 6:3)- even if Joseph were dead, He would have been known as Jesus-ben-Joseph. It could well be that this was a reflection of their perception of how closely linked Jesus was to His mother.

Whether or not Joseph died or left Mary by the time Jesus hit adolescence, the fact was that Joseph wasn't His real father. He was effectively fatherless in the earthly sense. As such, this would have set Him up in certain psychological matrices which had their effect on His personality. He could speak of His Heavenly Father in the shockingly unprecedented form of 'abba', daddy. He grew so close to His Heavenly Father because of the lack of an earthly one, and the inevitable stresses which there would have been between Him and Joseph. A strong, fatherly-type figure is a recurrent feature of the Lord's parables; clearly He was very focused upon His Heavenly Father. He could say with passionate truth: "No one knows a son except a father, and no one knows a father except a son" (Mt. 11:27; Lk. 10:22). Yet as a genuine human being, Jesus would have gone through some of the psychoses which any human being does when deprived of the presence of his true Father. Such an experience produces a major hole in the human psyche; yet if coped with successfully, "the hole in the psyche [of the fatherless child] becomes a window providing insights into the depths of being"(8). This is surely why so many geniuses have been fatherless children. Yet there is a very strong tendency for such children to be fixated on their mothers, and to be generally ill at ease with fathers and father figures. Yet Jesus was clearly enough at home with His Heavenly Father, and most of his parables feature a strong fatherly figure in them. The tensions evident between Jesus and Mary shew clearly enough that He wasn't fixated on her, either. Yet this explains the terrible tension there must have been within the Lord when He considered His mother; there would have been a natural desire to be as fixated upon her as she was upon Him. And yet He overcame this, whilst still loving her, in order to focus upon His Heavenly

Father. This explains, to me at last, His unusual addressing of Mary as “woman”, and the final tragic scene of separation from her at the cross. Yet it had to be, for the sake of a true relationship with His Father; and, as with all aspects of the crucifixion sufferings, the essence of it had been going on throughout the Lord’s life. Again we bow in admiration before the Lord; that He was no mere victim of background, but that every negative in His life [e.g. not having the presence of a father] He turned into a positive in progressing in His unique relationship with His invisible Heavenly Father.

Assuming Joseph disappeared from the scene quite early on, Jesus would have had to take financial responsibility for the household, and would have become the emotional and spiritual head of the home. This would have played its part in maturing the Lord. His latent talents would have been brought out, His personal development accelerated. And yet Mary would have likely sought to cope with the loss of her husband by relying increasingly on her capable firstborn, Jesus, and becoming fixated on Him. This is the backdrop for the evident tension between them throughout the ministry, as the Lord struggles to be the person God intends Him to be, and not to be merely caught up in the hand-to-mouth existence as supporter of His mother and younger siblings. It has been observed by counsellors that mothers in this situation become very blind to the needs of their sons on whom they have come to rely. Her sensitivity to who Jesus really was would have likely decreased; she would perhaps have seen Him merely as the clever, hard working, amazing solver of all the myriad daily problems the poor young widow faced. And so we too can be worn down by life into making the same mistakes Mary made in our relationship with the Lord. The wonder of who He is must never be lost upon us.

Another part of the psychological matrix would have been that by the time the Lord was 30, the younger siblings would have grown to self-sufficiency; the need for Him to stay in the home as provider was now past. The normal psychological pressure would have been for Him to start His own family and home. Yet instead, He channeled those energies into His true bride, the band of Palestinian peasants who were to slowly and falteringly come to love Him back and bring forth fruit to His glory.

CHAPTER 18: Mary Magdalene

18-1 The Identity Of Mary

These studies begin with the assumption that Mary Magdalene is the same as Mary of Bethany, and the same as the woman who anointed the Lord in Lk. 7. The evidence for this has been provided by Harry Whittaker in chapter 74 of his monumental *Studies In The Gospels*, and it is reproduced below.

Three Women

After consideration of the very moving story at the end of Luke 7 it is not inappropriate to review the evidence for the attractive idea that this woman who anointed Jesus is to be identified with Mary Magdalene and also with Mary of Bethany, the sister of Lazarus. This can hardly be said to be a *proven* conclusion, but there is certainly a remarkable accumulation of circumstantial evidence pointing in this direction.

There are three sides to this triangle of identity:

- " The woman in the city" ,
- Mary Magdalene, and
- Mary of Bethany.

It will be convenient to deal with each of these equations separately. But before embarking on an examination of the evidence, it needs to be said that the three records of the anointing of

Jesus at Bethany, as recorded in Mt.26:6-13, Mk.14:3-9 and Jn.12:1-8, are taken as describing the same incident and not two separate occasions. For full justification of this assumption reference will have to be made to Study 155.

1. *Mary of Bethany the same as the woman of Luke 7.*

(a) Jesus spoke a remarkable encomium regarding Mary's action: " Verily I say unto you, Wheresoever this gospel shall be preached in the whole world, there shall also this, that this woman hath done, be told for a memorial of her" (Mt.26:13). It is difficult to see how Jesus could have spoken so enthusiastically about this action if it had already been done by *another* woman in much more trying circumstances. But if this incident was a reminiscence or recapitulation of the earlier occasion, done out of gratitude for all that it meant to Mary, as one redeemed by Jesus from an evil way of life, no difficulty remains. It is almost what might be expected. The words just quoted from Mt.26:13 have an even stronger force. In effect they ' are an instruction to all who set out to tell the story about Jesus to include in their account the details of this wonderful act of

devotion. Accordingly, this has been done by Matthew, Mark and John. But where is it in Luke, if not in his chapter 7? Apart from this identification of the two women, it would appear that Luke has failed to follow his Lord's instruction!

(c) Jn. 13:2 introduces the account of the raising of Lazarus with this allusion to Mary: " It was that Mary which anointed the Lord with ointment, and wiped his feet with her hair" . Is this an anticipation of the record which is to follow in the next chapter?-in which case it reads very strangely (especially those past tenses). Or is it an allusion to an act of service which Mary had already performed on some occasion *prior* to the raising of her brother, i.e. Luke 7? The latter explanation is not hindered by having to be read as an allusion by John to one of the other gospels, for there are quite a few examples of this in the Fourth Gospel.

(d) Mark 14:3 places that anointing in the home of " Simon the leper" , who presumably was either the father of Lazarus and his sisters or else the husband of Martha. The record of Luke 7 has that anointing taking place in the house of Simon the Pharisee. This coincidence of name, if it stood by itself, would carry little weight as evidence of identification because Simon was a very common name among the Jews, but when set alongside several other lines of evidence it becomes much more cogent. Equating the two Simon's also puts much more point to the Lord's miniparable of the two debtors. If he had been healed of his leprosy and she of her moral leprosy, the fifty and five hundred pence take on much greater relevance.

(e) The astonishing identity of detail between Luke 7 and the records in the other gospels calls for some sort of explanation -Jesus at the meal table, the use of an alabaster container, the anointing of his feet, and the wiping of them with the woman's hair. Such things-three of them very unusual-are not to be explained by an airy use of the word " coincidence" . They demand some kind of connection between the two incidents. One possible explanation is that Mary was repeating earlier occasion and was deliberately imitating it (but then Mt.26:13 is decidedly difficult). The other explanation that Mary was repeating her earlier action, is much more forceful and much more likely.

(f) The details of Luke 7 pose several problems which the commentators almost invariably slide past. How did *Simon* know " *who* and what manner of woman this is" ? She was known to him personally! Also, it is evident from the detailed description given by Jesus himself that this woman was aware precisely what courtesies Simon had studiously neglected to offer to Jesus. How did she know to make good these very omissions? Is the reader not bound to conclude that she had been a witness of the systematic neglect of courtesy as Jesus arrived in the house? Again, how did she get into the house at all? The common slick assumption, with negligible supporting evidence, that in those days it was permissible for onlookers to walk into a home to view the progress of a meal, is just too ridiculous. And is it conceivable that such a man as this Pharisee would readily grant the freedom of his home to such a woman known to be such a woman. Clearly she was there because she had a right to be there. Further, in the

expression " she *brought* an alabaster box of ointment (7:37) the verb strictly means " received" (it is so translated in all its ten other occurrences in the New Testament). She " received" this " when she knew that Jesus sat at meat" . From whom? The most obvious explanation is: from one of the servants in the house. She was in a position to issue instructions there. Does not this considerable combination of details require the conclusion that she was one of the household? This was her home.

(g) There is a strange inconsistency between the Pharisee's issuing of an invitation to Jesus and then carefully snubbing him on arrival by neglecting all signs of welcome. But if indeed Simon had himself been healed by Jesus and if there were three (or maybe four) other members of the family eager to offer hospitality, it is easy to understand how the invitation was grudgingly offered and then, to save face with his Pharisee friends, followed with a cool reception.

(h) Mk.14:3 uses the puzzling description: " pistic nard" about the ointment used by Mary. The phrase has had commentators guessing. Since *pistikos* is obviously connected with *pistis*, faith, the most likely reading is " faith ointment" . Then is it called by this name in this gospel to recall the earlier warm approval of Jesus: Thy faith hath saved thee" (Lk.7:50)?

(i) A further small detail. Judas was the son of Simon Iscariot (Jn.6:71). This is a slender reason for making him the son of the Simon in Luke 7, Simon the leper (Mk.14:3). But if correct, then Judas was a brother of Lazarus, Martha and Mary. It is now more significant that he should lead the criticism of Mary (Jn.12:4,5-where he is specially called Simon's son). If this took place in his own home, and Mary were his own sister, he would be the more ready to voice such criticism. And the line he took was not dissimilar to that taken by Simon in Luke 7:39.

2. Mary of Bethany the same as Mary Magdalene

(a) This identification rests primarily on an argument from omission which, in this particular instance (though by no means always), has special force. The sudden prominence of Mary Magdalene at the crucifixion and resurrection is given no explanation in the gospels. Before this she is mentioned, with the utmost brevity, only in Lk.8:2. Alongside this fact is the unexplained absence of Mary of Bethany from both crucifixion and resurrection. Yet she was the one who loved Jesus so intensely, and her home was at most only a mile and a half away from all the happenings which were more important to her than anything else in life. These facts have an air of strangeness about them until the equation of these two Mary's is attempted, and then there is no problem.

(b) The next two points to be mentioned here will be of no value whatever to some readers of the gospels, but for others will be almost decisive. So much here depends on one's personal approach to Scripture. Is it just a coincidence that every time these two women are mentioned, they are *at the feet of Jesus*. Mary of Bethany sat at his feet, hearing his discourse, when Martha

wished her to help with the meal (Lk.10:39-42). On the occasion of the raising of Lazarus, Mary "fell down at his feet" (Jn.11:32). And, of course, the anointing of Jesus brought her kneeling at his feet (Jn.12:3). Mary Magdalene was at the feet of Jesus at the cross (Jn.19:25). And at the resurrection it was surely because she worshipped him and held him by the feet that he had to say to her: "Do not keep on touching (or, holding) me" (Jn.20:17; Mt.28:9). The same was, of course, true of the woman described in Lk. 7:38.

(c) Also, with perhaps one exception, these women are described as being in tears (or this is fairly clearly implied). Certainly, at the grave-side of Lazarus and at the foot of the cross. Certainly also, at the tomb of Jesus, both at his burial and at his resurrection (Lk.23:55; Jn.20:13). And since in two other instances (Lk.10:40; Jn.12:5,7) she was the object of censure and complaint, tears were very probably the consequence then. Lk.7:38 specifically mentions tears at that anointing of Jesus. Is such remarkable harmony admissible as evidence or not?

3. Mary Magdalene the same as the woman of Luke 7

(a) The only mention of Mary Magdalene before the crucifixion narrative comes immediately offer the record of the anointing of Jesus (Lk.8:2). Is this just accident, or is it Luke's delicate way of suggesting identity?

(b) The name "Magdalene" is often taken as meaning "from Magdala". But it could just as easily be "the hair-braider", that is, the harlot. Such a name would have special relevance if at her first meeting with Jesus she wiped his feet with her hair (Lk.7:38).

(c) The phrase: "which ministered to him of their substance" (Lk. 8:3) is specially apposite to the anointing of Jesus, which was lavish in its costliness and was yet the most humble ministry imaginable.

(d) "Out of whom went seven devils" can be interpreted only by its one other occurrence—the parable of the cleansed house taken over by unclean spirits (Lk. 11:26). This rather grotesque little parable is interpreted by Jesus as a picture of the moral depravity which would overtake his nation because of a their refusal to receive him as the rightful "tenant" of the "house" (Mt.12:45). Then does not this indicate indirectly the 10 earlier character of Mary Magdalene?

If this identification be accepted, then it is possible to piece together an impressive story of the family at Bethany.

They were a wealthy and socially important family (Jn.11:31,45). The father Simon, one of the Pharisees, had also been an incurable leper yet he was cured by Jesus. Hence the ensuing tension between his hospitality and his Pharisee prejudices. Mary had evidently given herself over to a profligate life, and she too was rescued by Jesus, to continue thereafter the most devoted of all his disciples. These experiences would provide more than ordinary ground for the later expectation of Martha and Mary that Jesus would hasten to the bedside of their

sick brother and restore him. There is also the possibility that Judas, the son of Simon (Jn.6:71), was another member of the family. There is not much point in identifying Judas as "son of Simon" unless this Simon were himself known in the circle of disciples. This suggestion would explain why Judas spoke up so boldly in criticism of Mary's "waste" of precious ointment. In his home he would feel the more ready to speak his mind, and with reference to his own sister! This interpretation concerning Judas is not so well supported as the other ideas in this study. It has nothing intrinsically improbable about it, but the positive evidence is hardly substantial.

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Assuming the above identifications are correct, we now have a whole series of incidents in the Gospels to consider which seem to concern this same woman. The description of her as having had seven demons cast out clearly links with the parable of Lk. 11:14-26. She'd been cleansed once in conversion, but it seems she had lapsed back and yet, been converted yet again. She truly must have been a woman of remarkable spiritual experience by the end of it all.

18-2 The Primacy Of Mary Magdalene

Note that Mary Magdalene is the most frequently named person in the passion narratives. Clearly the Gospel writers, under inspiration, perceived her as the central figure amongst those who were witnesses of it all. In doing so they turned on its head the prevailing idea that the witness of a woman was worthless. They saw her as the main witness.

The Gospel writers clearly see Mary Magdalene as of prime importance amongst the women who followed the Lord. Luke twice places her first in his lists of the ministering women (Lk. 8:2; 24:10). Matthew likewise focuses on how she was at Calvary, at the burial and at the empty tomb (Mt. 27:56, 61; 28:1,9). She clearly captured the attention of the gospel writers.

Mary Magdalene, coming to the sepulchre, finds the *stone taken away*. This evangelist does not mention the other women that went with Mary Magdalene, the focus is totally upon her as the leading witness. Or it could be that Mary Magdalene came to the sepulchre while it was still dark (Jn. 20:1). The other women came early in the morning, even though they together with Mary had bought sweet spices together when the Passover Sabbath was ended (Mk. 16:1,2). It seems to me that although the women all came to see the tomb early that morning, and Mary Magdalene is sometimes included amongst them in the account of this, Mary came before the others. And this is why she saw the Lord. It seems to me that she came alone.

A Pattern For Us All

- After the Lord's resurrection, all things were put under His feet (Heb. 2:8)- and straight after it, Mary Magdalene is to be found at His feet. Surely she is representative of the "all things" of the new creation. Something of her struggle, the essence of her relationship with the Lord, is intended to be found in each of us.

- When John records Mary Magdalene as saying "I have seen the Lord" (Jn. 20:18), he is consciously alluding to Jn. 14:19 and Jn. 16:16, where the Lord had prophesied that the disciples would see Him. It's as if John saw her as the representative of them all. Further evidence of this is found in the way John records the Lord as saying that He calls His sheep by name, and they recognize His voice (Jn. 10:5)- and by then recording how Mary Magdalene was the one who recognized the Lord's voice when He called her name (Jn. 20:16), as if she represents all the Lord's sheep. The significant role which John assigns to women is also reflected in the way he records the Lord Jesus praying for those who would believe in Him through the word of the disciples (Jn. 17:20), and yet John seems to be alluding back to the way people believed in Jesus because of the word of the Samaritan woman (Jn. 4:39,42). A woman rising early and searching for the Man whom she loves, asking the watchmen whether they have seen him, then finding him, seizing him and not letting him go...this is all the fulfilment of Song 3:1-4, where the bride of Christ is pictured doing these very things. Mary Magdalene is therefore used by John as a symbol for all the believers, or at least for the Jewish Messianic community searching for Jesus. Compare too the Lord's reassurance of Mary Magdalene with language of Is. 43:1 to the whole community of believers: "Fear not, for I have redeemed you; I have called you by name..."

- Mary Magdalene was named after the town of Magdala. The name derives from the Hebrew *migdol*, 'tower'. So the repeated description of her as the Magdalene could be implying: Mary the tower- Magdalene. Just as the shaky Simon was described as 'the rock', Simon-the-rock, so the shady Mary was surnamed 'Mary-the-tower'. It was common for Jewish rabbis to give their followers names, and it seems the Lord did this too- but the names He gave reflected the potential which He saw in His men and women. And the name He gives us likewise is a reflection of the potential we can live up to.

- Dr. Lightfoot, finding in some of the Talmudists' writings that Mary Magdalene signified *Mary the plaiter of hair*, applies it to her (as does Harry Whittaker). This would imply that she had been noted, in the days of her iniquity and infamy, for that *plaiting of hair* which is opposed to *modest apparel* (1 Tim. 2:9). This would imply that 1 Tim. 2:9 is saying that Mary's conversion is a pattern for us all.

- We find another example of Paul holding up Mary Magdalene as our example in 2 Cor. 8:12, where he speaks of how the Lord although He was rich became poor for our sakes, and we ought to be inspired by this to generosity towards our poorer brethren. The connection with Mary Magdalene goes back to Mk. 14:7, where Jesus said that Mary *had* in fact given her wealth to the poor, by anointing Him, the poor one, the one who made Himself poor for our sakes. And the comment that wherever the Gospel was preached, her example would be preached (Mk. 14:9) is tantamount to saying that her action was to be the pattern for all who would afterward believe the Gospel. Note in passing that the Gospel was not intended by the Lord to be a mere set of doctrinal propositions; it was to be a message which included practical patterns of response to it, of which Mary's was to be always mentioned. What she did was "to prepare me for burial" (Mt. 26:12 RV). This could be read as the Lord saying that what she did inspired Him to go forward in the path to death which He was treading. Note in passing that her generosity was set up as a cameo of the response to the Lord which all who

believe the Gospel should make. The Gospel is not just a set of doctrines to be painlessly apprehended. It is a call to action after the pattern of Mary. The good news was to be of the Lord's death and burial, and yet integral to that message was to be the pattern of response which was seen in Mary- to give our all, our most treasured and hoarded things, for His sake (Mt. 26:13). Peter's letters are packed with allusions back to the Gospels. When he writes that to us, the Lord Jesus should be "precious" (1 Pet. 2:7), he surely has in mind how Mary had anointed the Lord with her "very precious ointment" (Jn. 12:3 RV). He bids us to be like Mary, to perceive "the preciousness" (RV) of Jesus, and to respond by giving up our most precious things, mentally or materially, in our worshipful response to Him.

- Mary addresses the gardener as "sir", but this is the same Geek word [*kurios*] as is translated "Lord" a few verses earlier, when she describes Jesus as "the Lord" (Jn. 20:2,15). It seems to me that she half knew that this person standing there was Jesus. She was half expecting it. "They have taken away the Lord" (Jn. 20:2) almost sounds as if she felt Him to be alive and already made Lord and Christ. But the sheer grief of the situation distracted her from seeing that it was really Him. In this kind of thing there is, to me at least, the greatest proof of inspiration. It is all so real and therefore credible. She couldn't dare believe that her wildest hope of every grieving person was actually coming true. And in this we surely see some echoes of the slowness to believe that we have actually made it which it seems there will be after the judgment seat experience [see *Judgment To Come* for more on this]. Jn. 20:11 records that Mary "stood without", and yet the same word is used in a rather negative context elsewhere in the Gospels: Lk. 8:20 Mary and His brethren standing without; Lk. 13:25 the rejected "stand without" with the door closed, seeking for their Lord; Jn. 18:16 Peter stood at the door without. It's as if she was in the shoes of the rejected. And yet she is graciously accepted in a wonderful way by the risen Lord. And she is our representative.

- Paul seems to have seen Mary as one of his patterns when he speaks of how he laboured more abundantly than anyone, because of the depth of grace he had known (1 Tim. 1:14,15)- for Mary "loved much" because she had been forgiven much (Lk. 7:47). In passing, was the Lord's comment "she loved much" an indication that He thereby knew how much she had sinned, without having the knowledge beamed into Him, because He observed how much she now loved Him? In the parable which the Lord told comparing Simon and Mary, He made the comment that it was only "When they [realized that] they had nothing wherewith to pay" (Lk. 7:42 RV) that they were forgiven. He perceived how Mary had come to that point, at His feet, weeping, of knowing that she had nothing to pay. And Paul, and us, must reach that point if we are to find the motivation to "love much" in response.

- Mary's lavish anointing of the Lord may well have been what inspired Nicodemus to so lavishly prepare the Lord's body for burial. The vast quantities of spices he used was more than that used in the burials of some of the Caesars. He too must have bankrupted himself to anoint the Lord's body. That two people did this within a week of each other is too close a similarity to be co-incidental. Surely Mary inspired him.

- The parable of the good Samaritan features Jesus as the Samaritan helping the stricken man, representative of us all. However, the parable is followed immediately by the account of the Lord visiting the Bethany home of Martha and Mary. The road from Jerusalem to Jericho went via Bethany. The home where the sick man was taken was surely intended to be understood as that of Martha and Mary. The attacked man is called "a certain man", and then we read straight on that the Lord was entertained by "a certain woman", Martha (Lk. 10:30,38). The Samaritan "as he journeyed" came to the stricken man; and yet "as they went

on their way, he entered into a certain village...” (Lk. 10:33,38). The Samaritan Jesus ‘cared for him’; and yet Martha unkindly challenges the Lord ‘Don’t you care...?’ (Lk. 10:35,40). The similarities aren’t just co-incidence. Surely the Lord is teaching that whether or not Martha perceives it, she and Mary are actually the wounded man of the parable, and He is taking care of them, not vice versa as Martha thought, in the teaching He was giving them in their home. He was spiritually pouring in oil and wine. And yet Martha and Mary, especially in Martha’s incomprehension of the Lord’s spiritual and saving care for her, are set up as types of all of us who are saved and cared for in Christ.

18.3 Mary: Pattern For Witness

Those who observed Mary’s first anointing of the Lord’s feet *began* to say within themselves “Who is this that forgiveth sins also?” (Lk. 7:49). But, presumably, they didn’t verbalize it, when they easily could have done. Why not? Was it not that Mary’s anointing was an unspoken testimony that indeed, Jesus had forgiven her sins?

Mary Magdalene is always noted first in the appearance lists in the gospels. It is unusual that the first appearance would involve women as in that culture their role as witnesses would not be well accepted. It is a sign of the veracity of the account, because if an ancient were to create such a story he would never have it start with women. But inspiration disregards this. The Lord so wanted those women to be His leading witnesses. Joachim Jeremias quotes extensively from Jewish sources to show that “a woman had no right to bear witness, because it was concluded from Gen. 18:15 that she was a liar” (1). And Josephus (*Antiquities Of The Jews* 4.219) concurs: “Let not the testimony of women be admitted because of the levity and boldness of their sex”. And so it should not surprise us that He chooses today the most unlikely of witnesses, indeed, those who somehow shock and arrest the attention of others.

2 Cor. 2:14-17 seems to have a series of allusions back to Mary’s anointing of the Lord:

2 Cor. 2

Mary’s anointing

Maketh manifest the savour of his knowledge by us in every place (:14)

The house filled with the smell of Mary’s anointment

For we are the smell of Christ (:15) in our witness of Him to the world

Mary must have had the same smell of the same perfume on her, as was on Jesus whom she had anointed with it

Making merchandise of the word of God (:17 RVmg.)

As Judas coveting the anointing oil for mercenary gain

The simple point of the allusions is that we like Mary are spreading the smell of Christ to the world; she is our pattern for witness.

“Go tell my brethren...” (Mt. 28:10) is quoting from the LXX of Ps. 22:23, where in the context of predicting the Lord’s death and resurrection, we read that therefore “I will tell of Your name to my brothers”. The “I” is clearly Jesus Himself; and yet, as we have elsewhere shown at length, when His people preach in His Name, this is effectively Him preaching. And

so the first preacher of the Lord was to be those women. They were to tell His brethren the good news of His resurrection, or, as Ps. 22 puts it, to declare the Name of Yahweh to them. For His resurrection was the declaration and glorification of that Name to the full. Thus Acts 4:10-12 definitely connect the Lord's resurrection and the declaration of the Name. The "things concerning the name of Jesus Christ" would have been those things which concern His death and resurrection. "I will *declare* thy name unto my brethren" (Heb. 2:12) uses the same Greek words as in Mt. 28:10, where Mary is told to go tell her brethren of the resurrection. Rom. 15:8,9 speaks of how it is the Lord Jesus personally who was to fulfill those words through His death, which confirmed the promises of God: "Now I say that Jesus Christ was a minister of the circumcision for the truth of God, to confirm the promises *made* unto the fathers: And that the Gentiles might glorify God for *his* mercy; as it is written, For this cause I will confess to thee among the Gentiles, and sing unto thy name". And yet these words are applied by the Lord to Mary! She was to be Him, in the fulfillment of the great commission to tell the world. Mary was told to go and tell her brethren: "I ascend unto my Father..." (Jn. 20:17). She was not to tell them 'Jesus is going to ascend...'. She was to use the first person. Why? Surely because in her witness she was to be to them the voice of Jesus. And so it is for us all; we are witnesses in Him, we are Jesus to the eyes both of our brethren and this world.

The women were told by the risen Lord: "Be not afraid: go tell my brethren that they go into Galilee, and there shall they see me" (Mt. 28:10). In Acts 12:17 the same Greek words are used by Peter: "Go show these things...to the brethren". Peter felt that his deliverance from prison was like the Lord's resurrection, and perhaps consciously he used the Lord's words to Mary Magdalene. Peter then went "to another place" just as the Lord did on saying those words. He saw that his life was a living out of fellowship with the Lord's mortal experiences, every bit as much as our lives are too. The same words occur also in 1 Jn. 1:2,3: "That which we have seen and heard [the teaching, death and resurrection of Jesus] declare we unto you", our brethren. It's as if John is acknowledging that the Lord's commission to Mary was in fact binding upon us all; for we are represented by her.

Mary was told to spread the good news of the resurrection: "Go to my brothers and say to them..." (Jn. 20:17). And she obeyed: she "went and announced..." (Jn. 20:18). Putting this alongside the other gospel records, this is all in the context of the disciples being commanded to take the good news of the risen Lord to all men. Surely Mary is being set up as an example of obedience to that command. She overcame all her inhibitions, the sense of "Who? *Me?*", the embarrassment at being a woman teaching or informing men in the first century...and as such is the pattern for all of us, reluctant as we are to bear the good news. "Among the Hebrews women only had limited rights and above all could not act as witnesses" (2). And yet, the Lord chose Mary to be the witness to His resurrection to His brethren. He turned societal expectations on their head by setting her up as the bearer of the good news to them. Why? Surely to shake all of us from the safety of our societal and human closets; that we, whoever we are, however much we feel inadequate and 'this is not for me', are to be the bearers of the Lord's witness to all men. In passing, note how Luke's inspired Gospel was compiled from the testimonies of "those who from the beginning were eye-witnesses and servants of the word" (Lk. 1:2,3). Some of the events he records could only have been told him by women; and so the Spirit accepted their witness, and encouraged them to make it because *God* accepted their witness. Only women were witnesses of the Lord's burial- yet belief in His burial is listed by Paul as an essential part of the faith. Yet the only reason the early believers had to believe this was the testimony of women. The women went to preach the news of the resurrection with "fear and great joy". But putting meaning into words, what

were they fearful about? Surely they now realized that they had so failed to believe the Lord's clear words about His resurrection; and they knew now that since He was alive, they must meet Him and explain. So their fear related to their own sense of unworthiness; and yet it was paradoxically mixed with the "great joy" of knowing His resurrection. And there is reason to understand that those women are typical of all those who are to fulfill the great commission.

Mary went to tell others "what she had seen and heard" (Jn. 20:18), and John in one of his many allusions back to his Gospel uses these very words about all the apostles- "that which we have seen and heard declare we unto you" (1 Jn. 1:1,3). He and the other brethren took Mary as their inspiration in the work of witness, as should we. John's record seems to reflect how he saw parallels between himself and Mary in their witness to the resurrection. They both "came to the tomb" (Jn. 20:1,4), stood outside, "stooped" and looked into the tomb (Jn. 20:5,11), "beheld...saw" (Jn. 20:5,12). Yet Mary was the first to see the risen Lord. The testimony of a woman didn't count in the 1st century world, and yet God chose her to be the first witness. In doing so, He was teaching that the work of witness and the sheer power of what we are witnesses to can transform the most hesitant and inappropriate person into a preacher of the irrepressible good news, even with the whole world against them. It's as if John is saying in his account of the Gospel that Mary was in some ways his pattern; he and her were to be connected. He wasn't ashamed to thus identify himself with the witness of a woman. Ps. 68 is prophetic of the Lord's death and resurrection. Verse 18 is specifically quoted in the New Testament about His ascension. Verse 11 predicts that: "The Lord gave the word: the women that publish the tidings are a great host". This primarily concerns the publishing of the Lord's resurrection, although the imagery is based upon the singing of Miriam and the women of Israel after the Red Sea deliverance. Clearly enough, women were to play a major part in the witness to the Lord's resurrection. This was shown by the women being commanded to go tell their brethren that the Lord had risen indeed. And yet there is ample evidence that it was women who in practice were the more compelling preachers of the Gospel in the first century ecclesia. The simple fact is that God delegated to women the duty of witnessing to what was for Him the most momentous and meaningful act in all His creation- the raising of His Son from the dead. He was clearly making a point- that those whose witness this world may despise, are those He uses. And in this we can take endless personal encouragement, beset as we are by our own sense of inadequacy as preachers. Indeed, in Mt. 5:14,15, the Lord speaks of how we are the light of the world, giving light to the world in the same way as "they" light a lamp. Who are the "they"? The point has been made that to 1st century Palestinian ears, the answer was obvious: Women. Because lighting the lamps was a typical female duty, which men were not usually involved in. Could it not be that the Lord Jesus even *especially* envisaged women as His witnesses? Did He here have in mind how a great company of women would be the first to share the news that the light of the world had risen?

The zeal of Mary to be an obedient witness is remarkable. All Jerusalem knew the story of the risen Jesus still on "the third day" after His death- only someone totally cut off from society would have not heard this news, as Cleopas commented (Lk. 24:18 Gk.). If the whole of Jerusalem knew the story about the resurrected Jesus on the third day after His death, and the male disciples were evidently still nervous and doubtful about everything, it must be that this tremendous spread of the news had been achieved by Mary and the women.

Yet it must be realized that initially, Mary was not such a great witness. Jn. 12:1 RV informs us that "Jesus therefore...came to Bethany" and the home of Mary. "Therefore". Why? Because the Jews had just "given a commandment, that is any man knew where he was, he

should show it” (Jn. 11:57). And therefore Jesus came to Mary and Martha’s home. Why? So that they could no longer keep secret their faith in Him. The meal they put on was not just female, standard hospitality. It was, in this context, a brave public declaration of their identification with this wanted man. And the way in the last week of His life the Lord chose to sleep there each night was surely done for the same reason: to lead them to open identity with His cause and His cross. “Much people therefore of the Jews knew that he was there” (Jn. 12:9). And so with us, the Lord brings about circumstances so that our light can no longer remain under a bucket.

Notes

(1) Joachim Jeremias *Jerusalem In The Time Of Jesus* ((Philadelphia: Fortress, 1969) p. 374.

(2) Carla Ricci, *Mary Magdalene* (Minneapolis MN: Fortress, 1994) p. 189.

18-4 The Jesus-Mary Magdalene Relationship

Mary’s Response To Jesus

The smell of Mary’s ointment “filled the house” (Jn. 12:3). Yet every one of the 11 OT references to a house being filled refers to the temple being filled with the Shekinah glory (1 Kings 8:10,11; 2 Chron. 5:13,14; 7:1,2; Is. 6:4; Ez. 10:3,4; 43:5; 44:4). John’s sensitive use of language is surely seeking to draw a parallel. She was glorifying the Name by her gift, senseless as it may have seemed in the eyes of less spiritual people. There is a definite connection between spikenard and what incense was made from. What may seem to have no practical achievement in the eyes of men can truly be a sweet smelling savour to God. We need to remember this at times in bearing with our brethren’s efforts for Him. To judge them in a utilitarian way is to fall into the same error as the disciples did. The efforts of others are described later in the NT in the same language- the same word for “odour” occurs in Phil. 4:18 to describe the labour of believers which is “wellpleasing to God”. The way Mary anoints the Lord with spikenard is surely to be connected with how earlier she had washed His feet with her tears. The spikenard was “precious” (Jn. 12:3 RV), not only in its value materially, but in the way Mary used it in some kind of parallel to her tears. She perceived the preciousness of her tears, her repentance, her grateful love for her Lord. And any tears we may shed in gratitude of forgiveness are likewise so precious in His sight

The question arises as to why Mary anointed the Lord’s feet, when anointing is nearly always of the head. The only time the foot of anything was anointed was in Ex. 40:11, when the pedestal / “foot” of the laver was anointed in order to consecrate it. This pedestal was made from the brass mirrors donated by repentant prostitutes (Ex. 38:8 = 1 Sam. 2:22). In this there is the connection. Mary the repentant whore wanted to likewise donate way she had to the true tabernacle and laver, which she perceived to be the Lord Jesus. Her equivalent of brass mirrors was her pound of spikenard. And it could be that she had been baptized at her conversion, and saw the Lord as her laver. And this was her response- to pour all her wealth into Him. She anointed him for His death- for she perceived that it was through death that the Lord would fulfill all the OT types of the laver etc.

“Let her alone” translated a Greek phrase which essentially means ‘to forgive’, and it is usually translated like this. The Lord isn’t just saying ‘leave off her, let her be as she is’; He is saying ‘Let her be forgiven’, which is tantamount to saying ‘let her express her gratitude as she wants’. The root for her gratitude was her sense of forgiveness. This heightens the connection between Mary and the woman in the city who was a sinner of Lk. 7.

Mary anointed the Lord’s head (Mt. 26:6) in order to reflect her belief that He really was the Christ, the anointed one. She gave her life savings for this belief. It can be apparently painless to believe that Jesus is Christ, and yet the implications of accepting this simple fact can transform a life. What she did was surely rooted in her understanding of Song 1:12, where Solomon’s lover has spikenard (s.w. LXX Jn. 12:3) which sends forth its smell “While the king sitteth at his table”. Clearly enough she saw Jesus right there and then as the King- even though His Kingdom was not of that world. Her love for Him, her reflection upon the Old Testament, and her perception of Him as her future Lord and King to the extent that she even then treated Him as such, so certain was her faith in His future victory and worthiness...this all motivated her to give the quintessence of her life’s work for Him. And it should for us too.

The similarities between the anointing record in Lk. 7 and those of Jn. 12 etc. require an explanation. Could it not be that the Gospels are showing us that the intensity of Mary’s faith and love at first conversion was held by her until the end of the Lord’s ministry? We need to ask ourselves whether the fire of first love for Him has grown weak; whether over the years we would do the same things for Him, feel the same way about Him, cry the same tears over Him...or have the years worn our idealism away?

Martha was “anxious and troubled about many things” (Lk. 10:42 RV), but the Lord perceived that Mary was anxious and troubled about the “one thing” that was “needful”- and the context demands we understand this “one thing” as hearing the Lord’s words. For her, as she sat there at His feet, it was an anxious and troubling experience. To hear the Lord’s words is in this sense a troubling experience. Whilst we are saved by grace, the extent of the imperative within the Lord’s teaching is without doubt ‘troubling’ to the sensitive believer in Him. For we cannot hear Him without perceiving the enormous imperative which there is within those words for the transformation of our human lives in practice.

It can be that we take the exhortation to “be careful for nothing” as meaning that we are intended to live a care-free life. But the sentence goes on: “but in every thing by prayer and supplication with thanksgiving let your requests be made known to God”, and a few verses later we read of how the Philippians were “careful” to support Paul’s ministry in practice (Phil. 4:6,10). The idea is surely that we should have no anxiety or care about the things of this life- and the world in which we live is increasingly preoccupied with the daily issues of existence. The same Greek word for “careful” or “anxious” (RV) is repeatedly used by the Lord in the context of saying we should *not* be anxious (Mt. 6:25,27,28,31,34)- but rather, we should be anxious to serve and hear the Lord in practice. We must “be careful to maintain good works” (Tit. 3:8), “care for one another” (1 Cor. 12:25), “care” for the state of others (Phil. 2:20). So the NT teaching is that we should not have the anxious care about our daily existence which characterizes the world, but rather, should translate that into a life of anxiety for *others*.

The one thing that was needful is surely to be connected by the incident, also recorded by Luke, where the Lord tells the rich young man that he lacks “the one thing” (Lk. 18:22)- which in his case, was to give his wealth away. Yet Mary did this, when she poured out her

life savings on the Lord's feet. Sitting at His feet, hearing His words, led her to anoint those feet. She chose "the one thing", of anxiously hearing His words, the lines in her forehead showing in intense concentration. And yet that learning of Him issued in something practical- she gave her life to Him in practice, by giving all she had to those feet. The rich young man lacked the one thing- for he was not then ready to give his life's wealth to the Lord. Moving the spotlight onto ourselves, we can hear, and yet do nothing. We can read our Bibles without the intensity of devotion which Mary had, and without there being any direct translation of what we hear and read into practice. We can be as the rich young man, intellectually impressed, and yet totally failing to accept the tremendous practical demands behind the most simple, basic teachings of the Lord.

Mary came seeking the Lord early in the morning...and this inevitably takes our minds to some OT passages which speak of doing just this:

- "O God, thou *art* my God; early will I seek thee: my soul thirsteth for thee, my flesh longeth for thee in a dry and thirsty land, where no water is; To see thy power and thy glory" (Ps. 63:1,2). The resurrection of Jesus showed clearly both the power (2 Cor. 13:4) and glory (Rom. 6:4) of the Father. For Mary, life without her Lord was a dry and thirsty land. This was why she went to the grave early that morning. She was simply aching for Him. And she had well learnt the Lord's teaching, that her brother's resurrection had been associated with the glory of the Father (Jn. 11:40). She went early to the tomb to seek the Father's glory- so the allusion to Ps. 63 implies. She was the one person who had actually believed in advance the Lord's teaching about resurrection. And yet even she was confused- half her brain perceived it all and believed it, and was rewarded by being the first to see the risen Lord; and yet another part of her brain was simply overcome with grief, believing that the gardener had somehow removed the body some place else. And our own highest heights of spiritual perception are likewise shrouded by such humanity too.

- "I love them that love me; and those that seek me early shall find me" (Prov. 8:17) is written in the first instance of wisdom. And yet the Lord Jesus has "wisdom" as one of His titles (Mt. 12:42; 1 Cor. 1:24,30). Mary sat at the Lord's feet to hear His wisdom; to her, she showed in practice what it means to comprehend Jesus as "the wisdom of God". She anxiously heard His words. And thus she sought Him early...because she so wanted to hear His wisdom again. Of course, she loved Him. But that love was rooted in respect and almost an addiction to His wisdom. It was this that she loved about Him, and it was this which led her to the grave early. And it was this which led her to the honour of being the first to see the risen Jesus.

- "Yea, in the way of thy judgments, O LORD, have we waited for thee; the desire of *our* soul is to thy name, and to the remembrance of thee. With my soul have I desired thee in the night; yea, with my spirit within me will I seek thee early" (Is. 26:8,9) makes the same connection between seeking the Lord early, and loving His words.

Jewish women were not supposed to talk to men in public. The fact that Mary addresses the man whom she thinks of as "the gardener" shows how her love for Jesus, her search for Him, led her to break out of gender roles. She perceived that through His death, there was now neither male nor female, but a new kind of family (Jn. 20:14,15).

Jesus' Response To Mary

Mk. 14:9 could mean that when the Gospel message is proclaimed in all the world at Messiah's return, then what Mary had done would be told [before God] that He may mercifully remember her for good at the judgment. This may sound a forced interpretation to Western ears and eyes, but we must remember that the idea of 'for a memorial' denoted being spoken of for good before someone, in this case, the judge of all. What follows from this is that there will be a direct link between our deeds today, and the judgment process of tomorrow [or later today]. What we have done will be told before God, and He will remember us for good. On one hand, works are irrelevant. We are saved by grace. On the other hand, there will be a certain 'going through' of our deeds before Him. Quite simply, there is a direct link between our behaviour and our future judgment. Nothing will in that sense be forgotten.

Jn. 11:6 records that "therefore"- because Jesus loved Martha & Mary, therefore He cured Lazarus. Spirituality can affect third parties; in this case, Lazarus was raised because of Martha and Mary's faith. And so it can be that our prayers and intercessions for others can bring about some degree of salvation for them which otherwise wouldn't happen.

The Lord makes a clear allusion to Ps. 23 in saying that *Mary* had anointed His head with oil, and His feet with ointment (Lk. 7:46). There, it is *God* who is said to have anointed David's head, and prepared a feast in the presence of his enemies (Ps. 23:5). The historical background for this Psalm is when David fled from Absalom, and God manifested in Barzillai prepared an unexpected feast for him, just the other side of the valley from where his enemies were. Perhaps Barzillai also anointed David's head with oil at the time. It seems the Lord saw God as now manifest in Mary-He, through her, anointed His head with oil. And she did it at a time when the Lord was sitting at a great feast. It could logically follow that it was likewise Mary who had prepared the feast for Him. And if, as we have suggested, Simon the Pharisee was her brother or father or relative, then this would make sense. The whole thing surely has the ring of truth about it. Thus the Lord saw God as personally manifested through ex-hooker Mary. This should quieten all our doubts as to whether God really could be manifested through such as us. And note that Mary would have been the one who did the cooking.

Martha later complained that Mary didn't pull her weight in this department. But the Lord replied that Mary had chosen between two 'parts' or options, the cooking and hearing His word. It was a conscious choice. It wasn't simply that she was a day dreamer or not domestically inclined. She could and had prepared a meal. But she consciously chose to not max out on doing work for the Lord, but on sitting still and hearing His words. We all have the Martha tendency to focus on works; and the point is, Mary *could* cook. It wasn't that she was incapable. But, she chose not to, to resign her possibility to justify herself by works in order to listen. "Stand still and see the mighty works of God" was Moses' appeal to Israel, and God's to Job. We like them need to suffer the same word of exhortation.

18-5 Mary Magdalene And The Cross

It is emphasized that Mary Magdalene beheld the cross of Jesus (Mk. 15:40)- the same word is used about how she came *to see* the sepulchre (Mt. 28:1); she *saw* Jesus standing (Jn. 20:14). People beheld the spectacle of the crucifixion (Lk. 23:48) and repented, smiting their breasts in recognition of their sinfulness. She was representative of us all. John's Gospel is full of references to the crucifixion, and especially the idea of 'seeing' / perceiving its' real meaning. Jn. 1 "we beheld his glory"; the word was made flesh on the cross specifically.

“This is the will of him that sent me, that every one which seeth the Son, and believeth on him, may have everlasting life” (Jn. 6:40) connects with the idea of looking unto the bronze snake (which represented Christ on the cross) and receiving life.

“And he that seeth [on the cross] seeth him that sent me. I am come a light into the world, that whosoever believeth on me should not abide in darkness” (Jn. 12:45,46). Note again the linkage between seeing and believing; which Jn. 3 applies to belief in the crucified Jesus, as Israel had to believe in the bronze snake on the pole. The light of the world was defined in Jn. 3 as the light of the cross. In seeing / perceiving Christ on the cross, we perceive the essence of God- for the Father was so intensely manifested in the Son. There, God was in Christ, reconciling the world unto Himself.

“Father, I will that they also, whom thou hast given me, be with me where I am; that they may behold my glory [a reference to His desire that they would perceive the crucifixion as the manifestation of glory, after the pattern of the theophany of Exodus 34], which thou hast given me: for thou lovedst me before the foundation of the world [the lamb was slain “from the foundation of the world”]. O righteous Father, the world hath not known thee: but I have known thee, and these have known that thou hast sent me. And I have declared unto them thy name, and will declare *it* [on the cross]: that the love wherewith thou hast loved me may be in them, and I in them” (Jn. 17:24-26).

The emphasis on Mary Magdalene being the one who beheld the cross, the one who perceived the things of the Lord’s death and resurrection, is surely to set her up as our example. For we can look at the cross without perceiving the glory and wonder it all, neither perceiving the urgency of the imperative in the things which were so uniquely crystallized there.

When we read that “someone” offered him a sponge with wine mixed with myrrh (Mk. 15:36; Mt. 27:48), we recall the use of myrrh in preparing bodies for burial (Mk. 14:3; Lk. 23:56; Jn. 12:3; 19:39). Pliny (*Natural History* 14.15.92,107) records: “The finest wine in early days was that spiced with the scent of myrrh... I also find that aromatic wine is constantly made from almost the same ingredient as perfumes, from myrrh”. This alerts me to the real possibility that the unnamed bystander who did this was Mary Magdalene. Earlier she had anointed the Lord’s body with myrrh “to the burial”. And now she has prepared the most expensive form of wine as some sort of pain killer. Perhaps the Lord was so touched by this that He accepted it, but didn’t drink it. His doing this is otherwise very hard to understand. Her love was on one hand inappropriate, and yet the Lord still accepted it, even though He couldn’t use it. He could have felt angry with her for tempting Him to the easier way. But He didn’t. And in so doing He showed her that the essence of the cross is that there is no easy way. The principles of all this are to be reflected in our cross carrying.

When Mary Magdalene touched Jesus in Lk. 7:39, people reasoned that Jesus wasn’t Messiah because He appeared not to know that He was being touched by a sinner. Yet this incident prepared the Lord for the time when He would be smitten and demanded to prophesy who smote Him, if He was the Christ (Lk. 22:64). At that moment, perhaps He thought back to Mary. He would have realized that that incident with her had been a living out of the spirit of the cross, and it prepared Him for the final agony.

Mt. 28:9 speaks of Mary Magdalene falling down at the Lord’s feet. Is this to be connected with how Mt. 18:29 describes casting oneself down at another’s feet implying a desperate

request for mercy? Or at least, a desperate request (Mk. 5:22; 7:25; Lk. 8:41), as Mary had made herself earlier (Jn. 11:32). Their experience of the death and resurrection of the Lord elicited within them a sense of their unworthiness.

18-6 Mary Magdalene's Understanding

Mary Magdalene's understanding of the Lord went far beyond that of anyone else at the time. The record of Mary after the crucifixion has many links back to the woman of Luke 7. She *came to the sepulchre*, to wash the dead body with her tears, for she *went to the grave, to weep there*, and to *anoint it with the ointment* she had prepared. It's as if in her anointing of the Lord she really did see forward to His death and burial. And yet her initial motivation in doing it all was gratitude for what He had done for her through enabling her forgiveness. The Lord's power to forgive was ultimately due to His death, resurrection and ascension (Acts 5:31; Lk. 24:46,47). Yet Mary believed there and then that all this would happen, and thus she believed in His forgiveness. Her second anointing of the Lord has within it the implication that she somehow perceived that her adoration was motivated on account of the death that He was to die. "It was right for her to save this perfume for today, the day for me to be prepared for burial" (Jn. 12:7 New Century Version). The RV of Jn. 12:7 gives another suggestion: "Jesus therefore said [in response to Judas' suggestion she sell the ointment and give him the money to distribute to the poor], Suffer her to keep it against the day of my burying". Mary Magdalene had kept the precious ointment to anoint Jesus with when He died; and yet Judas was pressurizing her to sell it. And yet she used at least some of it then. This would indicate that she perceived Him as good as dead; she alone it seems perceived the frequent implications in His teaching that He was living out an ongoing death [see *The Death Of The Cross* for illustration of this]. She fully intended to pour the ointment on His dead body, but she did it ahead of time because she wanted Him to know right then that she understood, and that she loved Him. The argument of Judas for efficiency, central administration etc. is contrasted most unfavourably with her personal, simple and deeply felt emotional response to the Lord's death. She did it at supper time (Jn. 12:2). In Jewish culture of the time, a meal together had religious significance. It could be that she so dwelt upon the Lord's teaching in Jn. 6 that she perceived the broken bread of the meal to be symbolic and prophetic of His upcoming death. Her generosity and totality of response to His death was therefore inspired by what we would call a breaking of bread, which made real to her yet once again the endless implications of His self-sacrifice. The Lord stated that she had "worked a good work" on Him by anointing Him (Mt. 26:10), and this phrase was commonly referred to doing a good deed of charity to the poor- hence the Lord's comment that they had the poor always with them, but He [as *the poor man*] was with them right there and then. Mary perceived the Lord as *poor*, and we learn that on the cross, the Lord who was rich became poor for us (2 Cor. 8:9). This was true only in a spiritual sense, as Jesus was never materially wealthy in His mortal life. We can therefore conclude that Mary perceived this 'making poor' of the Lord in spiritual terms, far ahead of the other disciples.

Perhaps Mary Magdalene alone perceived [from Ps. 110?] that the Lord must ascend after His resurrection- for surely this was why she kept clinging on to Him after He rose, fearful He would there and then disappear Heavenwards. And therefore the Lord comforted her, that there was no need to cling on to Him so, for He was not just then going to ascend to the Father (Jn. 20:17). But another reading of this incident is possible, once it is realized that the OT associates clinging to another's feet with making a request of them (2 Kings 4:27).

Mary Magdalene was the first believer to call Jesus “the Lord” (Jn. 20:2)- despite His repeated teaching that this was his true position. They had called Him “Lord and Master” but not *the* Lord. Her example soon spread to her less perceptive brethren- for they likewise soon were speaking of Him as “the Lord” (Jn. 20:25; 21:7). She would have meditated upon the incidents recorded below, and perceived that although the resurrection made Him Lord and Christ (Acts 2:36), yet to her, it was as if He was risen and glorified already. This is an indication to me that she did really believe He would rise, but her humanity, her grief, the intensity of the moment, led her to act and speak as if this wasn’t the case. Consider all the descriptions of Jesus as “the Lord” even during His ministry; so certain was He that He would indeed be made Lord and Christ- and realize, how the fact Mary Magdalene too called Him “Lord” before seeing the proof of His resurrection indicates that she shared this perception:

“For this is he that was spoken of by the prophet Esaias, saying, The voice of one crying in the wilderness, Prepare ye the way of the Lord, make his paths straight” (Mt. 3:3)

“And thou, child, shalt be called the prophet of the Highest: for thou shalt go before the face of the Lord to prepare his ways” (Lk. 1:76)

“For unto you is born this day in the city of David a Saviour, which is Christ the Lord” (Lk. 2:11)

“Then the lord of that servant was moved with compassion, and loosed him, and forgave him the debt” (Mt. 18:27)

“Blessed *are* those servants, whom the lord when he cometh shall find watching” (Lk. 12:37)

“And if any *man* say ought unto you, ye shall say, The Lord hath need of them; and straightway he will send them” (Mt. 21:3)

“When the lord therefore of the vineyard cometh, what will he do unto those husbandmen?” (Mt. 21:40)

“The LORD said unto my Lord, Sit thou on my right hand, till I make thine enemies thy footstool?” (Mt. 22:44)

“The lord of that servant shall come in a day when he looketh not for *him*, and in an hour that he is not aware of” (Mt. 24:50)

“After a long time the lord of those servants cometh, and reckoneth with them” (Mt. 25:19)

The lesson for us is surely that we must realize that both in our brethren and in ourselves, we can act and speak in ways which mask our real faith and comprehension. The sheer humanity of the moment overtakes us. And yet the essence of faith and true understanding is still there, masked behind it. We can afford *in some ways* to be less hard on both ourselves and our brethren.

And yet it has to be observed that her response to ‘the gardener’ reveals that despite it being the third day after the crucifixion, Mary Magdalene wasn’t apparently open to the possibility that the Lord had risen. Yet surely she had heard Him specifically, categorically predict His

death and resurrection. One can only conclude that she was so consumed by the feelings of the moment that she like us failed to make that crucial translation of knowledge into felt and real faith. In gratitude for the resurrection of Lazarus, "Mary therefore" anointed the Lord 'for his burial' (Jn. 12:3 RV). It was as if she perceived that the resurrection of Lazarus was only possible on account of the resurrection of Jesus which was soon to come. Yet as with us as we sit through Bible studies and revel in our own perception of Scripture, her so fine and correct understanding was suddenly without power when reality called.

Mary's devotion to the Lord, based on the understanding she had, is truly inspirational. The original word translated "nard" is a foreign [non Greek] word, and appears to have originated far away from Palestine. The suggestion has been made that this bottle of nard belonged to some foreign royalty. The price of "more than three hundred pence" (Mk. 14:53) must be understood in terms of a penny-a-day employment rate for labourers (Mt. 20:2). This bottle would typically only be used at the burial of a king. Yet Mary dearly loved her brother Lazarus, and had only recently buried him. But she hadn't used the nard for *him*; hence perhaps the information is added that his body would be stinking after four days- implying such expensive nard had not been used in embalming *his* body (Jn. 11:39- the fact it's Martha who observes this may suggest she resented Mary for not using her nard for Lazarus, just as she resented how Mary didn't help her in the kitchen but instead sat at the Lord's feet). And the Lord Jesus perceived all this; for He commented to the disciples that Mary had "kept the nard for *my* burial" (Jn. 12:7). The Lord's reference to her 'keeping' the nard can be powerfully understood in the context of Mary not using it for her brother's burial, but rather deciding to keep it for His burial. This not only shows the clarity of Mary's understanding of the Lord's upcoming death. It also reflects how she would give her most treasured possession in an apparently senseless act of devotion to Him. She anointed Him because she understood Him to be Christ, the anointed one. But this is what we expect of a woman who won the accolade from the Lord that she sought after the "one thing" that really matters- which is Him and His word (Lk. 10:42). Our eyes have been opened to that same "one thing", and we too claim to have accepted Jesus of Nazareth as Christ; and so to place devotion to Christ above family, above retention of personal wealth and value... is the intended issue of all this for us too.

18-7 Mary Magdalene And The Risen Jesus

The Chronology Of The Resurrection Of Christ

Not without some hesitation do I add to the various chronologies that have been worked out. I only do so because some important- in my view- devotional lessons arise from reflection upon what actually happened. And further, there are some simple Biblical facts which I find stubbornly refuse to fit into the existing chronologies which have been suggested:

- Mary Magdalene was the first person to see the risen Jesus (Mk. 16:9)
- Mary Magdalene went to the tomb, didn't find the body of Jesus, went to tell Peter, and then returned to the tomb and saw Jesus (Jn. 21)

Without wishing to expose the further difficulties of other chronologies, here is what I suggest:

The Women

Bought spices to annoint the body of Jesus (Mk. 16:1)

1. There is an earthquake and the Lord resurrects

2. Mary Magdalene is alerted by the earthquake and goes to the tomb alone “when it was yet dark” (Jn. 20:1), and finds the stone rolled away and the body missing.

3. The women go to the grave as the day breaks; they find there is no body there (Lk. 24:3)

4. They are confused (Lk. 24:4)

5. Love’s intuition leads them to go and have another look in the sepulchre; they then see Angels (Mt. 28:5; Mk. 16:5; Lk. 24:4)

6. The Angels tell them that Jesus has risen, and they are told to quickly go away and tell the disciples (Mt. 28:7)

7. They run away, very fearful

8. They leave, in obedience to the Angelic command to go and tell others. But they do not, initially, go and tell the disciples; they say nothing to anybody (Mk. 16:8). Presumably they stood or sat down somewhere along the way, overcome with fear.

9. Jesus meets them (Mt. 28:9)

10. They tell everything to the eleven “and all the rest” (Lk. 24:9)

Mary Magdalene

Bought spices to annoint the body of Jesus (Mk. 16:1)

3. Mary then goes to tell Peter and John (Jn. 20:2)

4. Mary, Peter and John rush to the tomb (Jn. 20:3)

Peter and John go into the tomb but see only the empty tomb; they return home (Jn. 20:10)

Mary remains, meets two Angels, and then meets Jesus (Jn. 20:11-17)

Mary returns to Jerusalem and tells the apostles what had happened (Lk. 24:10; Jn. 20:18)

The only ‘problem’ with this chronology of the resurrection is that whilst it satisfactorily solves all the problems which the other chronologies leave outstanding, the resurrection records are introduced by passages which appear to state that all the women, including Mary Magdalene, came to the tomb and had their experiences *together*. I submit that this ‘problem’ arises because we are not reading the records with Semitic eyes, nor with consideration as to how God’s word records and presents facts and chronologies. The European linear view of time is simply not something which we find in Scripture. We expect to be given a clear timeline, with it made clear as to who did what. In both sciences and the written arts, this is how we Europeans (and our diaspora) have been trained to think, read literature and perceive life. But it’s just not there in Scripture. Many of the difficulties Europeans face in interpreting the Biblical record are rooted in this fact. This is why, e.g., the Old Testament prophecies appear to ‘jump around all over the place’; one moment they are speaking of events just before the Lord’s return, then back to their own contemporary situation, then on to events after His return. And likewise, characters aren’t clearly defined and introduced to us at the start of a narrative, in the way that we are accustomed to. The problem is we read in a linear fashion and process in a logical fashion, whereas the inspired authors tend to write in a chiasmic fashion, with the main point in the middle or X / ‘chi’. The Gospel records in Matthew, Mark and John each speak as if only certain women were involved- John implies only Mary Magdalene, Matthew speaks of “Mary Magdalene and the other Mary”, Mark speaks of Mary Magdalene, Mary the mother of James and Salome. But Luke tells us that “the women” were those “which came with him from Galilee”. There’s no absolute reason to think that “the women” all had their experience at the same time. Indeed, John’s Gospel, written after the other three, appears to be perhaps correcting this impression by explaining in detail the unique experience of Mary Magdalene.

When you read some of the records, it would appear that the risen Lord appeared first to Peter (Lk. 24:34; 1 Cor. 15:5). Indeed, the record in 1 Corinthians 15 doesn’t even mention the crucial appearances to the women. The appearances are listed there as firstly to Peter, then to the “twelve” [although there were only eleven- another example of a different use of language], then to 500 brethren, then James, then “the apostles”, and finally to Paul (1 Cor. 15:5-8). Quite simply, we have to put all the records together, and realize that each of them gives only an aspect of the historical picture. But we believe that the records don’t contradict each other, they were all inspired and are infallible. The structure of the Gospel accounts of the resurrection are similar, in that they all begin with some definition of the women involved, upon whom the writer wishes to place the spotlight. But there is no *ipse facto* reason to think that all the women had the same experiences together, at the same time- even though this is how a Western reader might read the records.

Practical Insights

If the above chronology is in fact correct, we find a number of inspirational insights arising from what happened. Firstly, after a “great earthquake”, most people are distraught, frightened, worried, fixated on the immediacy of what’s happened, and tend to remain where they are or with others whom they know. But love of the Lord Jesus and an incipient belief and hope, however tiny, in His resurrection, led Mary to do what was counter-instinctive. In the night, in the darkest hours before Dawn, she ran through the rubble of houses and cracked streets to a tomb guarded by aggressive soldiers. This is what love of the Lord Jesus, even when we have such little understanding of Him, inspires us to do. No wonder she was rewarded with the priceless honour of being the first human being to see the risen Lord. The woman who sought the Lord early, at night, picking her way through the rubble of an

earthquake, breaking the Sabbath, casting away all her legalism, the worldview with which she'd grown up...found Him.

Of course she was scared. But note the contrast with the soldiers guarding the tomb. They were *so* scared by the sight of the Angel that they lost consciousness (Mt. 28:4). The women saw the same Angel, were scared, but not to the same extent. They looked at His face- for it was presumably they who told Matthew what the Angel's face looked like: "like lightning, and his raiment white as snow" (Mt. 28:3). Their love for their Lord, their searching for Him, the very deep, unarticulated, vague hope they had in Him... drove away the worst part of their fear, whereas the unbelieving soldiers simply passed out from fright. Indeed, it appears that Mary was so distracted by the deep grief that only comes from love, that she perhaps didn't even notice the Angel's glory, or at least, didn't pay too much attention to the two Angels sitting where the head and feet of the Lord had been. They ask her why she's crying, and she simply turns away from them, muttering 'Because they've taken away my Lord, and I don't know where they've put Him'. That was how deep her grief and distraction was; for that was how deeply she loved Him. Again and again one salutes the decision of the Father, in choosing Mary to be the first one of us to see His risen Son.

Mary comes over as not being anywhere near as fearful as the other women. Not once do we read of fear being her dominant emotion. Instead, we read of her love, her weeping, her eager, desperate clinging hold of the risen Lord. The other women and the disciples are characterized by fear; fear of the Angelic appearance, fear at the appearance of Jesus, fear stifling their sharing the good news with others. And it is fear, in all its multiple forms, which is the very antithesis of faith and love; it is fear which stifles our love for the Lord, the expression of joyful, uninhibited service. Fear of our own unworthiness, fear He may not accept us, fear we might say and do the wrong thing, fear we may look foolish or get ourselves in trouble in the eyes of others... But let Mary be our heroine, an example of how love in its maturity, in its ultimate end, casts out fear. For we, with all our fears, misunderstandings, doubts, uncertainties, confusions... have been given the very same commission to go tell others which those early men and women were. For the great witnessing commission given to us all follows on seamlessly from the command of both Angels and the Lord Himself to those early witnesses of the resurrection to spread the news to others. And it can only be fear that holds us back, locks us up within the complexes which are so easily part of our personhood, and stifles our witness to others.

We've given reasons elsewhere for thinking that Mark's Gospel record was actually the words of Peter transcribed by Mark. Significantly, it is Peter who makes the point that the Lord appeared *first* to Mary (Mk. 16:9). And yet according to Lk. 24:34 and 1 Cor. 15:5, Peter is framed as the first to see the Lord. Yet with characteristic humility, his version of the Gospel makes the point that actually, it was Mary. And he goes straight on in Mk. 16:14 to record how the Lord "upbraided" [a strong Greek word] the male disciples for not believing the women. The Lord was mad about this. They had failed to believe the women, probably because they were in the first century mindset of not accepting the legal testimony of a woman. And so Peter tries to make that good by pointing out *en passant* that it was actually Mary, not him, who first saw the risen Lord. Like John in his Gospel, Peter is drawing out the supremacy of Mary over himself. And we should likewise respect her. And it is apparent from the chronology presented above that the other women didn't immediately fulfil the commission to go tell others about the Lord's resurrection. They initially don't tell anyone (Mk. 16:8); even though they were told to go and inform others "quickly". Indeed, the above chronology of events means that in order for Mary to have met the Lord alone, the women

can't have stayed long at the grave. They went away quickly, but they delayed in telling others what had happened. In contrast, Mary doesn't delay. She goes straight away, according to John's account, and tells the others. And Mary is very convinced as to what she had witnessed; she goes and tells the others that she has actually seen the Lord in person, and that He spoke words to her which she was now telling them (Jn. 20:18). By contrast, the other women spoke in more abstract terms of having seen "a vision of Angels" (Lk. 24:23), rather than saying how they actually met Angels; and likewise the disciples understood the Lord's appearance to them as them having "seen a spirit" (Lk. 24:37). But Mary is far more concrete; she was immediately convinced of the actual, personal, bodily resurrection of the Lord. To 'spiritualize' is so often really an excuse for lack of faith. And so many, from ivory tower theologians to JW's, have fallen into this error. Faith in the end is about concrete, actual things which defy all the 'laws' of our worldviews. And it was this faith which Mary showed.

CHAPTER 19: Joanna: A Character Study

The teaching of Jesus for today is a radical call to live and think and feel in a way that is counter-cultural; i.e., that radically contradicts the prevailing culture within which we live. The lives we are to live are, however, a continuation of the spirit of those men and women who followed Him around Palestine 2000 years ago. They, too, were counter-cultural in their following of Him; they too walked out against the wind of prevailing wisdom and the expectations of those around them.

An Inversion Of Values

When we turn to study Joanna, we find ourselves right up against an example of this. Lk. 8:3 implies that the women who followed Jesus, and Joanna is named as one of these, basically supplied the funds and material backing for His mission. Male disciples had left their homes and families to manage economically without them, whilst they followed the Lord around Palestine. They evidently were generally poor. Yet their expenses were being met by a few wealthy women. Generally, the man was seen as the economic supporter of the woman, and this situation turned all that on its head. It must have been hard for those men to accept the ministrations of Joanna for them. It was almost a sociological impossibility that wealthy women should support illiterate men in such an itinerant lifestyle. But this was just the kind of inversion of values which Jesus sought to inculcate in the new community which He forged. Further, the wealthy simply didn't mix with the lower classes; it was unthinkable for a woman to go travelling around with a group of lower class men ⁽¹⁾, and women such as former prostitutes. It could only have been the compelling personality of Jesus which led Joanna to do something as scandalous as she did.

Joanna is introduced as "the wife of Herod's steward Chuza" (Lk. 8:3). Yet as a married woman the right to dispose of her goods lay not with her but with her husband; and it's unlikely that a man of such great social rank as Chuza would have allowed his wife to use his wealth like this. Thus if Joanna was married at this time, she "braved public condemnation by leaving [her] husband to follow Jesus"⁽²⁾. The call of Christ is no less radical in our day, even if the scandal of it is articulated differently. Younger women who had wealthy families were still under the authority of their families, especially their father or uncles, until such time as they married. It is hard to understand, therefore, how Joanna got the right to use wealth in the way that she did. Perhaps she simply left her husband and insisted on taking some of their wealth with her. Perhaps he was supportive; but at such an early stage in the Lord's ministry,

this seems to me unlikely. And it's equally unlikely that Herod's right hand man would have allowed his wife to go wandering around the country with a crowd of working men. And it would have been a most atypical 1st century marriage if the wife was allowed to spend the husband's money like this at her own initiative. So I discount this possibility. Even if a woman made money from her own business, the money would be under the control of her husband. So we are left with the question, from where did Joanna get her money?

Joanna's Marriage

The more likely option comes from an awareness of the practice of *ketubba*. This was a sum of money promised by the husband to the wife in case of divorce; it was part of the marriage contract⁽³⁾. With this money she could attract a second partner if the husband divorced her⁽⁴⁾. And this, I submit, is what happened with Joanna. Perhaps for the cause of Christ, her husband divorced her; and instead of using her money to attract a second partner, she instead spent it on the true passion of her life- the cause of Jesus and His men. There is evidence that if her husband died, she still was not free to use the money that might come to her independently; his family and her male relatives had a major say in the matter⁽⁵⁾. The Mishnah says that a wife cannot inherit anything from her husband, since otherwise his 'property' in any sense might be alienated from the man's family (*B. Bat.* 8.1). So it would seem that the only way a woman had large funds at her disposal would be if she were married to a wealthy man, who divorced her and gave her the *ketubbah*. Hence the significance of the way Lk. 8:3 introduces her as having been the wife of a wealthy man, and yet also in a position to financially support the ministry of Jesus.

Joanna had once been married to Herod's "steward". She would have lived with her husband in Herod's court in Tiberias, not far from Nazareth. She would have heard of Jesus right at the start of His ministry; Lk. 8:2 comments how the Lord healed women of 'demons', and the possibility is that Joanna was one of those people, and perhaps her illness was another reason why Chuza divorced her. When Herod invited his "courtiers and officers and chief men of Galilee" to the birthday party at which he beheaded John (Mk. 6:21), this would almost certainly have included Chuza. Manaen was a *suntrofes* of Herod- a courtier (Acts 13:1), and he later became a disciple too. And one wonders about the 'Herodion' of Rom. 16:11- was he another of Herod's courtiers, also from the palace in Tiberias? We can only speculate as to whether Joanna converted these two. And then there was the "royal official" of Capernaum who was converted by the Lord's healing (Jn. 4:46-53); he too would have been one of Herod's courtiers. There, in the heart of the despised court at Tiberias, an ecclesia developed! This was the very group known as the "Herodians" who so persecuted the Lord (Mk. 3:6; 12:13; Mt. 22:16). It's rather like a Christian church developing in the drug dens of New York or cities controlled by Moslem fanatics such as Mecca or Kandahar. The point is, all things are possible. The personality of Jesus as portrayed in the Gospel can penetrate anything. And further, one marvels at the wide range of people welded together by allegiance to the Lord. Their differences were significant and major. Only the power of His personality and the Truth that is in Him overcame them.

The Bond Of Fellowship

Being associated with Chuza and Herod's court would have placed Joanna in a category of people that were very unpopular to ordinary Jews- for she would have been allied to the ruling class who so cruelly taxed and impoverished the ordinary people. Herod's "steward" was basically the chief thug who made sure that the heavy taxations were paid by the

populace. The disciples were thus being supported by a woman from the class they had naturally hated. It must also be recognized that Tiberias was a new city, built by Herod on a Jewish cemetery despite their protests. It had only been built about 10 years at the time of Jesus' ministry. Tiberias was one of the "aggressive acts of Romanization by Antipas"⁽⁶⁾; the result was that the people of Galilee hated those who lived there, especially the courtiers. Yet one of those women courtiers was to travel with those Galilean fishermen and give up her financial security to support them! The city had been built from funds raised by years of excessive taxation of the people who lived around it. "The décor on the Herodian palace in Tiberias [which included depictions of animals despite the Torah's prohibitions] symbolized the alien culture that had suddenly intruded upon the Galilean landscape along with the "in-your-face" city built so visibly from revenues regularly taken from the threshing floors and olive presses of Galilean villages by officers [e.g. Chuza- D.H.] who lived lavishly near the palace"⁽⁷⁾.

Worse still, Joanna is a strong Jewish name; she had as it were betrayed her people by siding with the Gentile conquerors, and had perhaps married one of them. The band of people around Jesus were thus as diverse as could possibly be. They had every possible tension and background difference and resentment between them, just as the present ecclesia does. Men like Simon the Zealot had been fighting this very class, probably trying to assassinate Joanna's [former?] husband. And we pause to reflect upon the composition of our ecclesias and community. Our extreme diversity matches the diversity of those whom Jesus gathered around Him when He first began to build His ecclesia. The Lord came to save all [types of] people; and hence there is this strange and compelling diversity and unity, so extraordinary, so unusual, that the Lord said that it alone had the power to convert the world.

Reversal Of Status

And so Joanna stepped out from Herod's court, over to the ranks of the Galilean poor. For her, conversion was radical. Not only did she give up her financial security, she gave up her social standing, and walked out so totally against the wind, like Moses walking out of Pharaoh's court to suffer affliction with God's people. Like him, she likely had to do it alone. In this, she is our pattern. Not only for those who feel they are all too caught up in the courts of Herod, but for those who find a true unity with their brethren almost impossible. She would have eagerly memorized the Lord's parables, and have perhaps nervously joined in the Lord's display of solidarity with the poorest of the poor in village after village which He visited. And there is no reason to think that the 70 who were sent out in pairs were all male; Luke's account of this in Lk. 10 has been prefaced by the explanation in Lk. 8:2,3 that the Lord had many female disciples too. In any case, Joanna would have spoken to the women they met at wells, retold the parables of the Lord to groups of women in the villages in which they stayed. And she would have known the pain of rejection, the hurt of being rejected for who you once were rather than being accepted for who you now are.

We read that Joanna "provided for them out of [her] own resources" (Lk. 8:3). 'Provided' translates the Greek *diakoneo*. It has been commented that the word "refers almost exclusively to the menial labour of women and slaves, performed for the people of higher rank on whom they were economically dependent"⁽⁸⁾. And now you see the wonder of it all. The others were economically dependent upon Joanna; but she served them as if she was the one dependent upon them. She would've been used to Galileans serving her; but now she served them. She perhaps more than most had heard and learnt and obeyed in hard, concrete reality the Lord's teaching: "The kings of the Gentiles have lordship over them; and they that

have authority over them are called Benefactors. But ye shall not be so: but he that is the greater among you, let him become as the younger; and he that is chief, as he that doth serve. For which is greater, he that sitteth at meat, or he that serveth? is not he that sitteth at meat? But I am in the midst of you as he that serveth” (Lk. 22:25-27). The radicality of the Lord’s teaching about the utter reversal of status for those in Him had been mastered and practiced by this extraordinary woman. When Jesus washed the disciples’ feet, He made the very actions which were understood as the duty of women and slaves to be emblematic of the leaders in His community. It was through this utter reversal of status that the Lord removed the distinctions between slaves and free, male and female, rich and poor within His community. And if we are truly His people, we will seriously and practically aspire to this spirit. Joanna crossed the huge gulf between aristocratic lady and humble serving woman, inspired surely by the example of the Lord with whom she walked. Her example leaves us a piercing challenge to follow.

Joanna In Later Life

But Joanna’s story doesn’t end here. Her name occurs again in the form of ‘Junia’ in Rom. 16:7: “Greet Andronicus and Junia, my relatives [i.e. fellow Jews] and fellow prisoners, who are prominent among the apostles and were in Christ before me”. The AV’s “Junias” seems to be rooted in a desire not to have a woman seen as an apostle. Junia was a common Roman woman’s name, the equivalent of the Hebrew ‘Joanna’. The Latin pronunciation of ‘Junia’ and the Hebrew ‘Yohannah’ would have been very close indeed. It would seem, therefore, that Joanna moved to Rome, changed her name to a Latin form, and married Andronicus, a Jewish apostle, who like her was an early convert- “in Christ” before Paul’s conversion⁽⁹⁾. Given her background in the Roman court at Tiberias, Joanna would have been an ideal missionary to Rome; and thus she went, and was imprisoned. It could well be that ‘Junia’ was the Latin name by which she would have been known even in Tiberias. Note how there were other missionaries who changed their Hebrew names into the Latin forms when they went on mission work into the Roman world: Silas became Silvanus, Saul became Paulus, Joseph Barsabbas became Justus (Acts 1:23); and hence we read of “John, whose other [Latin] name was Mark” (Acts 12:12,25).

The Prominence Of Joanna

The Greek translated “prominent” means ‘marked out, distinguished, outstanding, prominent’. She was all of those words; there really was something exceptional about this sister. And we need not be phased by her being called an “apostle”, for Paul uses the word in a nontechnical sense to refer simply to a messenger of the ecclesias (2 Cor. 8:23; Phil. 2:25). The prominence of Joanna is perhaps reflected in the chiasmic structure of Lk. 24:9,10. Notice how the first three lines each have a parallel in the last three lines- e.g. a) = a1). But the centerpiece is Joanna. Why, unless she was worthy of special mention? Work it out for yourself:

“a) They *told* all *these things* to the eleven [*‘the apostles’*],

b) and to all the rest [*‘others’*].

c) Now they were *Mary Magdalene*,

d) and Joanna,

c1) and *Mary* the mother of James:

b1) and the *other* women with them

a1) *told these things unto the apostles*".

Note that the great commission to preach is given to "the eleven and those with him" (Lk. 24:33) ⁽¹⁰⁾, i.e. the women, including Joanna. Acts 1:13,14 speaks of "the eleven and the women"- the same two groups. She would have known that she as a woman had no credibility as a witness in her society; and yet she was bidden go witness. And she did, it seems, as far as Rome- to the ends of her world. This surely is an inspiring challenge to all who feel hopelessly unqualified to witness; it is our very lack of qualification which seems to make the Lord chose us. To have accompanied the eleven throughout the Lord's ministry was a qualification to be His authoritative witness (Acts 1:21,22); and Joanna fulfilled that requirement, having been with the Lord from the beginning (Lk. 8:3) right up to the crucifixion (Lk. 24:9,10). Note how Paul argues that he is an apostle because he has seen Jesus the Lord; yet his words clearly allude to the way Mary simply said: "I have seen the Lord" (1 Cor. 9:1; Jn. 20:18). It is worth putting together two passages, both from Luke: "The women also, which came with him from Galilee, followed after..." (Lk. 23:55); and Acts 13:30,31: "God raised him from the dead and for many days he appeared to those who came up with him from Galilee to Jerusalem, and they are now his witnesses". Surely Paul and Luke have in mind here the ministering women. They had followed from Galilee to Jerusalem, the risen Lord had appeared to a woman first of all, and now those women were witnessing to the people. Perhaps 1 Cor. 15:3-7 is relevant here, where we read that the Lord appeared after His resurrection to the twelve, and yet on another occasion to "all the apostles"- perhaps referring to the group that included the women.

One evident reason for Joanna's prominence was that when the male disciples fled, it was Joanna and Mary who stood by the Lord during His crucifixion, knowing full well that they faced death by crucifixion for showing such solidarity with the victim. The importance of Joanna and the other women as witnesses lies in the fact that it was they who had seen Jesus buried, and therefore could vouch for the fact that the empty tomb was in fact the very tomb in which Jesus had been buried. This piece of evidence becomes more crucial the more one reflects upon it. An empty tomb was no proof that Jesus of Nazareth had risen- unless there were witnesses there present at that empty tomb who could testify also that it was in that very tomb that Jesus had been laid. And only women, not men, were witnesses of this. The Greek world placed great emphasis upon sight- "Eyes are surer witnesses than ears", Heraclitus said. They related to the past visually; for a group of people to be eyewitnesses was considered conclusive. Hence the enormous significance of the way in which the Gospels repeatedly make the women the subjects of verbs of seeing (Mt. 27:55; Mk. 15:40; Lk. 23:49,55). They were the eyewitnesses.

Compelling Witnesses

The choice of women as the witnesses was made of course by God Almighty. Yet at that time, women were considered to be gullible in religious matters and especially prone to superstitious fantasy in religious matters. Celsus, a pagan despiser of Christianity, commented in mockery: "After death he rose again...But who saw this? A hysterical female...deluded by the same sorcery"⁽¹¹⁾. Yet it was females who were chosen by God as the primary witnesses; for He wanted to confirm His Son's desire to turn human society upside

down through the body of His Son. The servant was to become the leader; the marginalized at the centre of things from God's perspective. And so it is today. A toothless old sister who doesn't know English converts hundreds in Kazakhstan; the divorced and remarried 'loser' is seen as great in God's eyes; the obscure old brother in isolation touches the mind of Christ as few have ever done. And of course, some men *didn't* believe the women. The disciples didn't; Peter has to go to the tomb to see for himself, after dismissing the women's testimony as madness. In doing so, he was running parallel with Manoah, who according to a widely known Jewish midrash on the Judges record, wouldn't believe his wife's relaying of the message from the Angel because it was from a woman. The parallel is so exact! Surely Peter later reflected upon it.

The travelers on the road to Emmaus reported to the Lord what the women had told them about the empty tomb. They basically told Him that the women were right about the empty tomb, but were wrong in thinking Jesus had risen- because *the men* hadn't seen Him. And what is the Lord's response? He could have said 'O foolish men for not believing *all* that the women told you!'. But instead He says: "O how foolish you are, and how slow of heart to believe *all* that *the prophets* have told you!" (Lk. 24:22-25). The Lord cleverly parallels the women with the revered male prophets of Israel. He is teaching that in His new community, the witness of the women, the disbelieved, the marginalized, the ignored, the insignificant... was going to be as earth shattering as the word of God Himself. In writing this, I am not a raving feminist. I am seeking to inspire all of us who struggle with our dysfunction and inadequacies, to realize that we too can rise up and witness as the Lord intended; and it is through *us* that the Lord delights to work! So, let us rise up...

Notes

(1) J.M. Arlandson, *Women, Class and Society in Early Christianity* (Peabody, Mass.: Hendrickson, 1997) p. 130.

(2) J.B. Green, *The Gospel of Luke* (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1997) pp. 318,319.

(3) Tal Ilan, *Mine and Yours Are Hers: Retrieving Women's History From Rabbinic Literature* (Leiden: Brill, 1997) pp. 144-146.

(4) S.J.D. Cohen, *The Jewish Family In Antiquity* (Atlanta: Scholar's Press, 1993) pp. 133-151.

(5) N. Lewis, *The Documents From The Bar Kochba Period In The Cave Of Letters* (Jerusalem: Israel Exploration Society, 1989) p.80.

(6) Sean Freyne, *Galilee, Jesus and the Gospels* (Philadelphia: Fortress, 1988) p. 147.

(7) R.A. Horsley, *Archaeology, History and Society in Galilee* (Valley Forge, PA: Trinity Press, 1996) p. 57.

(8) L. Schotroff, *Lydia's Impatient Sisters* (London: S.C.M., 1995) p. 205.

(9) This kind of speculation is foreign to some Bible readers. Yet the Biblical records are highly abbreviated, reduced to essentials, leaving the inessentials to be supplied by the reader / hearer. Ancient peoples were well used to doing this; modern readers are accustomed to novels or accounts which supply every detail, or to films whose visuality fills in such gaps. But, to me at least, the very nature of the Biblical narratives is different; they invite interpretation and 'filling in the gaps'.

(10) Note how these references to Joanna, and the central placement given to her in the passage in Lk. 24:9,10, all occur within Luke's writings. It would seem that Luke had an especial interest in chronicling the women who went with Jesus- his material accounts for two of the four parables that feature women (Lk. 15:8-10; 18:1-14), and he has seven passages / incidents where women are central (Lk. 7:11-17, 36-50; 8:1-3; 10:38-42; 11:27,28; 13:10-17; 23:27-31). And it is Luke alone who gives the impression that the Lord was not followed around Palestine by twelve men alone, but by a further group of ministering women.

(11) Quoted in H. Chadwick, *Origen: Contra Celsum* (Cambridge: C.U.P., 1965) p. 109.

