Illustrations created with Grok (AI) and reviewed by our team

Mary Magdalene Meets the Risen Jesus

John 20:1–18 · Bud · Ages 9–12

Mary Magdalene came from Magdala, a fishing town on the Sea of Galilee. Luke tells us Jesus had freed her from seven demons, and that she was one of the women who traveled with Jesus and supported his work from their own means (Lk 8:2–3). John places her at the foot of the cross with Jesus' mother (Jn 19:25). She stayed when most of the disciples ran.

John's account of Easter morning (Jn 20:1–18) is told from her point of view.

Early on the first day of the week, while it is still dark, she goes to the tomb and finds the stone moved. Her first thought is the obvious one: someone has taken the body. She runs to Peter and the beloved disciple. They race to the tomb and find the burial cloths lying there, the head cloth rolled up by itself. The beloved disciple sees and believes, though they do not yet understand the Scriptures. Then the two of them go home.

Mary stays. She stands weeping outside the tomb. When she looks in, two angels in white are sitting where the body had lain, one at the head and one at the feet. They ask why she is weeping, and she gives the same answer: her Lord is gone, and no one can tell her where.

Then she turns and sees Jesus, but doesn't recognize him. The risen Jesus is truly himself, with the same body, yet changed and glorified, and several times in the Gospels his friends don't know him at first (Lk 24:16; Jn 21:4; CCC 645). He asks the angels' question, and adds another: whom are you looking for? She takes him for the gardener and asks where he has put the body.

Jesus says one word: her name. And she knows him. Jesus once said that the good shepherd calls his own sheep by name, and they know his voice (Jn 10:3–4). Here it happens.

She calls him Rabbouni, Teacher, and seems to cling to him. Jesus tells her not to hold on to him, since he has not yet ascended to the Father. The point isn't that touching is wrong. It is that their relationship is going to be different now: he is returning to the Father, and she has work to do. He sends her to the brothers with a message: he is returning to the Father, and his Father is now their Father too.

She goes and announces to the disciples that she has seen the Lord. She is the first witness to the risen Christ and the first to proclaim the Resurrection (CCC 641).

Talk about it

1. Why do you think Mary stayed at the tomb when Peter and the other disciple went home?
2. Why might Mary not have recognized Jesus at first?
3. Why do you think Jesus told Mary not to hold on to him?

Key verse: Jn 20:16–18. Look it up in your Bible.