

# Mary Magdalene: Meeting Jesus at the Empty Tomb

## Art Workshop

### Summary of Activities

Students will construct a "Dish Garden Tomb" to celebrate Jesus' resurrection and appearance to Mary Magdalene. They will create and place figures of Jesus, Mary Magdalene, and their self at the Empty Tomb.

#### Scripture

**Bible Story:** [John 20:1-18](#)

**Key/Memory Verse:** "Mary Magdalene went and announced to the disciples, 'I have seen the Lord', and she told them that he had said these things to her." John 20:18 (NRSV)

#### Lesson Objectives

See the [Bible Background at rotation.org](#) for this set's complete list of objectives.

#### Preparation and Materials

- Read the [Bible Background](#) and scripture.
- Print the attached [photo of tombs](#) at the time of Jesus.
- Gather supplies:
  - Permanent markers.
  - A clay pot dish (saucer), approximately 12"-14" in diameter, for each student.
  - A small clay pot to form the empty tomb for each student. Mini 1 3/4" to 2" clay pots recommended.
  - Bag of topsoil to form around the clay pot tomb and cover with moss and rocks.
  - Scoops or shovels for the soil.
  - Bag of small rocks (polished hobby rocks easily found on Amazon or craft stores).
  - Bag of larger flat rocks to cover the tomb opening.
  - "Sheet" Moss found in hobby stores or on Amazon.
  - Water.
  - Paper towels.
  - Sticks of various sizes for the crosses and for Jesus, Mary Magdalene, and student figures. See the alternate idea for "peg people" below if you choose to use that.
  - Pruning shears to cut sticks.
  - Yarn to wrap around sticks to form Jesus, Mary M., the student, and the cross(es).
  - Scissors to cut the yarn.
  - White glue to secure the end of the yarn.
  - Plastic wrap to wrap up completed gardens for safe transport home.

#### Supply Tips:

The clay dishes/saucers, pots, polished rocks, larger rock, and sheet moss can all be **purchased online in quantity at very reasonable prices** --typically \$1 for the pot, \$1 for the dish, and so on. Think of this as a family devotion like a creche, and not a disposable craft.

It is important to get the sizes of the dish, pots, and rocks that are proportionate to each other. You don't want a pot that's too big or a dish that's too small. If you will be making smaller dish gardens, get smaller rocks, too. Use topsoil, as potting mix won't compact to hold the garden elements in place.

Note that alternative supplies may be needed instead of sticks and yarn for making people by younger students or if time is short; see the adaptation suggestions at the end of this lesson.

## Making a Resurrection Garden

### Lesson Plan

#### Opening

**Welcome your students and explain what they'll be learning and doing today.** Show them some of the dish garden materials, and walk them through the following explanation as you show them a picture of a tomb ([attached](#) at the bottom of this lesson page) and/or quickly assemble a dish and pot.

**Say:** Back in the time of Jesus, around Jerusalem wealthy people were often buried in family "caves" cut into the rocky hillside. The cave might have a carved entrance, and often a large square or round stone would be used to seal the tomb entrance. Inside the tomb there was a stone bench upon which they would lay the dead body, which was wrapped in cloth and covered with myrrh and other things to cover the odor. Jesus was not wealthy enough to own such a tomb; but Joseph of Arimathea, a wealthy Pharisee and friend of Jesus, asked Governor Pilate if he could take Jesus' body off the cross and place it in his family's tomb where the bones of his family rested. That was on Friday. The next day was Saturday, the Sabbath. Then early on Sunday morning -- the third day since Jesus had been crucified -- Mary Magdalene went to mourn at the tomb. That's where our scripture story picks up.

Let's take turns reading it to one another, and as we do, I want you to think about the answers to these four questions. [Teacher: you might want to assign these questions to students ahead of time so they know they're going to be called upon to answer.]

- (1) How did Mary Magdalene, Peter, and John each respond differently to finding the tomb empty?
- (2) If you had been there that morning, which of the three disciples would you have most likely responded like?
- (3) What changed Mary's grief into belief?
- (4) When you believe that Jesus is alive, what are you supposed to do?

**Read [John 20:1-18](#).** For younger children, you may use a Bible storybook.

Option: As you read the scripture, you or an assistant can lay out and move the clay pot, stones, and 'people' to mimic the action in the story.

### Make the Resurrection Garden

#### Dish Garden Steps

1. Begin by writing the key verse around the outside of the clay dish: *"Mary Magdalene went and announced to the disciples, 'I have seen the Lord.'" John 20:18*

2. Put a thin layer of soil in the dish and set the clay pot in it to form the tomb.
3. Add soil and compact it around the clay pot and in the dish.
4. Add small rocks and a large rock.
5. Place sheet moss on top of the soil and clay pot. Lightly water and press the moss into the soil. Trim excess with a pair of scissors or tuck into the dish.
6. Create a cross using sticks and yarn and sink it in the deepest part of the soil next to the clay pot. (Create just one to save time.)
7. Clean the edge of the dish with a wet paper towel.
8. Quickly make and place stick figures representing Jesus and Mary M. at the tomb. The "student" figure will be made and placed during the Reflection.
9. If there is time, add a few stones inside the "tomb" on top of some soil to form the "bench" where Jesus' body would have been laid, and where the grave clothes were found. Comment on this part of the story, such as, "What would you have thought if you had looked in and didn't see his body?"

Your Dish Garden should now be complete with tomb, moss, cross, stones, and Jesus and Mary figures.

## Reflection: Me at the Empty Tomb

Have students make a stick figure that represents THEM, then before having them place it in their garden, ask these questions:

(1) Where are you standing at the Resurrection right now? Are you looking in the Empty Tomb and wondering what happened? Do you think it's just a strange story and are you planning to walk away and not think about it once Easter is over? Or have you felt like Jesus has been calling your name and trying to get your attention? (How does he try to get our attention?)

(2) Now place your stick figure next to Jesus and Mary. As you do, answer this question: What does the risen Jesus want you to do with your life?

(3) Finally, observe that they have created a garden, and that "gardens are meant to grow things." **Ask:** When you take this garden home and put it in a prominent place so that friends and family see it, what might grow in your home?

**Last Step:** Wrap the dish gardens in plastic wrap for safe transport home.

**Stick figure notes:** You probably won't have much time to create the Jesus, Mary Magdalene, and "my" stick figures, this is why we have kept their design simple. To hasten the creating of the stick figures, you can pre-tie the stick figure pieces together and then let students wrap the sticks with a bit of yarn. Tying-off the yarn requires some manual dexterity. Use a simple half-hitch and then smooth in a dab of white glue to secure it. Do not wrap the last 1" of the stick as that will go into the soil.

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## Lesson Set Objectives and Bible Background

### Scripture

Bible Story: [John 20:1-18](#)

### Key/Memory Verse

"Mary Magdalene went and announced to the disciples, 'I have seen the Lord', and she told them that he had said these things to her." John 20:18 (NRSV)

### Lesson Objectives

- Teach John's version of the Empty Tomb story into memory, helping students understand how John's version differs from other Gospel stories of the empty tomb.
- Place ourselves at the Empty Tomb and understand how Mary's encounter with the risen Christ is similar to our own --that it can be unexpected, personal, and life-changing.
- Consider ways we are called to respond to the good news that "He is risen."
- Rescue Mary Magdalene's reputation from the misrepresentations that evolved over the centuries in the Church and media, and restore her to her rightful place as a dear disciple of Jesus who was honored to be the first person to whom Jesus appeared at his resurrection.

# Bible Background

## What does Mary Magdalene's story mean?

**John's version of the Empty Tomb story is unique**, and like so many other things in John, it points to a deeper meaning and reality which younger children may find hard to grasp. Thus, **our first task is to teach the story so that it can unfold its meaning as they grow.**

**Mary went to the Tomb in grief and returned with faith. How did that happen?** It happened because Jesus speaks his resurrected presence to us. Like every single one of us, at first Mary Magdalene didn't recognize Jesus, and even when she did *according to John*, she wasn't allowed to physically touch him (for a reason beyond our comprehension). And yet the encounter was so real that it changed her life and compelled her to share the amazing news with others. This is the life-changing presence we too hope to experience *or have already experienced*. And yes, to some extent we can prepare to encounter the Risen Jesus, and all the confirming encounters to come.

- Mary was acquainted with his voice; are you?
- Mary went to the cross and tomb; have you?
- Mary turned when she heard him call and reached out to embrace him; how are you doing that?
- And Mary taught others to look for him, believe, and continue his mission. How can you do that?

## Who was Mary from Magdala?

- Most significantly, she was a beloved friend and faithful follower of Jesus,
- She is the only person mentioned at the Empty Tomb in all four Gospels.
- According to John, she was the first person to whom Jesus appeared after the resurrection.
- According to John, she was the first to share the Good News of Jesus' resurrection —earning her the title, “Apostle to the Apostles.”

The word “Magdalene” tells us that Mary was from the village of Magdala, a community on the western shore of the Sea of Galilee, near Capernaum. The fact that she is named in this way, instead of referencing a husband's name, may indicate that she had never married or perhaps her husband had died. This village is not far from Capernaum, so it is also possible that she had family ties to one of the male disciples, or perhaps Jesus himself.

Both Luke and Mark tell us that Mary was healed, presumably by Jesus, of seven demons --which we today understand may reference a host of medical conditions. The Gospels tell us that she was part of the group of women who followed Jesus from Galilee and that they “provided for” Jesus and the disciples “out of their resources” (Matthew 27:55-56, Mark 15:41, Luke 8:2-3). These other women included Jesus' mother, Mary the wife of Cleopas, Joanna, and perhaps others. Though often portrayed as a younger woman, we simply don't know how old she was, and she may have been an older woman given that it did not raise eyebrows that she was in the company of men.

Interestingly, Mary Magdalene is not mentioned in the Book of Acts, but then neither are several other Disciples. Did she pass away? Travel to spread the word? Or was she just a victim of the male-centric tendencies of Early Church writings? Writing some 40 years later in the Book of Acts, Luke does write about another woman, Lydia, but does not relate the fate of Jesus' mother or the women so prominently

described in his gospel. We are left to assume, that like Paul and many others mentioned in scripture, we simply do not know what happened to them.

### **What was her role?**

Mary was one of the earliest followers of Jesus, and one of several women who often traveled with the disciples, learning from him, and likely taking care of the group's daily needs and acting as an extension of Jesus' care for others. Mary was there in Jerusalem for the last days, and thus it is likely that she helped prepare, serve, and clean up the Last Supper, and perhaps participate in it. Only Mary Magdalene is present at the Empty Tomb in all four Gospels, which is surely a confirmation of her importance among the group, her faith in Jesus, and Jesus' faith in her.

**In John, the male Disciples did not see Jesus at the Empty Tomb.** That honor was reserved for Mary Magdalene. The significance of Jesus bestowing such an honor on a woman in that day and age cannot be understated and is in keeping with Jesus' vision of a new Kingdom where the old attitudes and ideas of worth no longer apply.

### **The Story in brief according to John**

1. Mary Magdalene goes to the tomb, sees the stone rolled away, and then runs to tell Peter and John.
2. Mary returns with Peter and John who see the rolled up linens and then leave.
3. In her grief, Mary stays behind, and then suddenly sees two angels sitting inside the tomb.
4. The angels ask her why she is crying, and she replies that they have "taken her master."
5. She turns around and Jesus asks her why she is crying -but she thinks he's the gardener!
6. Mary asks the gardener where they have taken him.
7. Jesus says to her, "Mary!" and she replies, "Teacher!"
8. Jesus immediately tells her do not touch me, go and tell the others.
9. Mary returns to the disciples and says, "I have seen the Lord."

Note that John is the only Empty Tomb account that includes male disciples at the tomb, but they do not encounter Jesus until the upper room.

### **The Other Gospels**

#### **Matthew 28:1-10**

Two women: Mary Magdalene and *the "other" Mary*. No men. There's an earthquake, an angel sitting on the rolled-away stone, and terrified guards. The angel says, "Do not be afraid, for I know that you are looking for Jesus, who was crucified. He is not here; he has risen, just as he said. Come and see the place where he lay. Then go quickly and tell his disciples." Jesus speaks to the women as they are leaving.

#### **Mark 16:1-8**

Three women: Mary Magdalene, and Mary the mother of James, and Salome (who actually may be the same person as Mary the mother of James). No men. The stone is rolled away. A young man wearing white is in the tomb. He says, "He has risen; He is not here; behold, here is the place where they laid Him. Go tell his disciples."

#### **Luke 24:1-10**

Three women: Mary Magdalene, Mary the mother of James, and Joanna. No men. The stone is rolled away when they arrive. They enter the tomb and suddenly two angels appear. "Why do you seek the living among the dead? He is risen." The women leave to report to the male disciples.

It's a common misconception that Mary the Mother of Jesus was one of the Mary's at the empty tomb. Three of the Gospels mention "Mary the mother of James" ...also known as "the other Mary." This is James the disciple, the "Son of Zebedee," and not Jesus' brother James of later prominence. This other Mary may be the wife of Clopas (Cleopas) of Emmaus Road fame. Interestingly, in John 20:2, Mary says "**we** do not know where they have laid him," though the rest of the story emphasizes it was just Mary M. present.

### **Why are the accounts so different?**

People have been debating this question since the 1st Century. Time, distance and memory can do strange things to verbal accounts, especially in a pre-technological age. It is likely that Matthew, Luke, and John were not acquainted with each other's gospels. But they all agree on these things: Mary Magdalene was there, messenger(s) from God were present, the tomb was empty, and the good news had to be shared.

### **What does it matter to us as teachers?**

Students will eventually hear the different gospel accounts and may be confused. It's not helpful to homogenize what God has preserved as unique accounts. Each tells us something different about the nature of the Resurrection and how we might experience Christ, and they remind us that the Gospels are not histories in the conventional sense, but a joyful truth to be pondered.

### **What does it matter to us as students?**

The risen Jesus appeared many times after the Empty Tomb was discovered, and he still "appears" to be alive to many today. Furthermore, the empty tomb was not proof to Mary or to Peter. It was the presence of the Risen Christ which rekindled their faith. Thus the question can be asked:

1. Has he appeared to you? And How does he "appear"?
2. Do you believe it?
3. What does it mean that Jesus is alive? ...to you, to the world?
4. And what are you going to do about this wonderful news?

*(See more discussion questions below.)*

### **If the Bible accounts don't agree on the "facts" does this mean these are just "stories"?**

A dead body rising from the grave is beyond the idea of "facts" and history as we commonly think of them. And the empty tomb itself was not the "fact" which engendered faith in anyone. Mary saw the emptiness and still thought they had stolen his body. The reality and message of the empty tomb only becomes a "fact" when we experience the Risen Christ and choose to believe.