

Mary Magdalene— Tower of Strength

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One of the Savior's most devoted disciples showed an enduring example of faithfulness.

On the western shore of the Sea of Galilee was the city of Magdala, an important fishing settlement and the hometown of Mary Magdalene. In Hebrew, the word *Magdala* means “tower,” and indeed, Mary Magdalene became a tower of strength, both to her fellow disciples and to us today as well.

Mark and Luke report that Mary was possessed of seven devils and that Jesus cast them out of her (see Mark 16:9; Luke 8:2). We don't know when Mary's discipleship began, but it's safe to assume that this miracle performed by the Savior had a profound effect on her life. It freed her of an unthinkable burden and left her with a deeply personal and unforgettable witness of the Savior's divine power, mercy, and kindness.

Later, Mary was among several women who witnessed the Crucifixion of Jesus. Matthew, Mark, and Luke say that the women watched from afar (see Matthew 27:55; Mark 15:40; Luke

23:49). But in the Gospel of John, we learn that Mary Magdalene stood near the cross, along with Mary, the Savior's mother (see John 19:25). Whether near or far, what's clear is that Mary felt compelled to be with the Savior as He endured immense agony and suffering. Even in—and perhaps *especially* in—the dark hour, her devotion to and love for the Savior were manifest. She would remain His disciple to the end.

Following the Savior's death, Mary's insistence to remain at His side continued. She was there among those at the tomb as His body was laid to rest and the stone was rolled in front of the sepulchre (see Matthew 27:61; Mark 15:47), even though Jewish Sabbath law dictated that she and the other disciples return home to rest.

But even the finality of a great, heavy stone could not break Mary's devotion or keep her from her Lord. She returned to the tomb with other

devoted women on Sunday morning (see Matthew 28:1; Mark 16:1–4; Luke 23:55). How distressing and confusing it must have been to see the tomb empty.

Mary, believing that the Savior's body had been taken, wept openly. Behind her, the resurrected Savior asked, “Woman, why weepest thou?” (John 20:15). Today, some may think it strange that when Jesus first spoke to her, He called her “woman” instead of by her name, even though He clearly knew her well from their long association. But in Mary's time, “woman,” as a form of address, was a term of great respect. The Lord used this form of address on various occasions in speaking to different women, and it was always with concern, kindness, respect, and tenderness (see John 2:4; 19:26; 20:15).

Mary, “supposing him to be the gardener,” asked where Christ's body had been taken (see John 20:15). Jesus



Magdala was a fishing community on the shore of the Sea of Galilee. *Magdala* means “tower” in Hebrew.

then tenderly called her by name, and Mary turned to Him, recognizing Him instantly and showing Him great respect in return by saying, “Rabboni; which is to say, Master” (John 20:16).

The honor of being the first person to see the Savior as a glorified and resurrected being can’t be overstated. His victory over death is the greatest event in human history, and it was Mary, humble and devoted to the very end, who was the first to see the truth of it.

In part because of Mary Magdalene’s faithfulness and friendship with the Savior, she has become the subject of much speculation and elaborations.

Camille Fronk Olson writes, “The dearth of further details about Mary from the Gospels only stirred imaginations of later Christians to elaborate on history and morph her into whatever image fit their purposes.” Regardless of these speculations, however, says Sister Olson, “both history and scripture agree that she was a faithful disciple, teacher, and leader among the early Christians.”¹

May each of us follow her example and turn our hearts to the Savior, and may we always be found at His feet. ■

NOTE

1. Camille Fronk Olson, *Women of the New Testament* (2014), 211.