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Mary Stayed

The Adoration and Tenacity of Mary of Magdala


An imaginative Interpretation based on Scripture (references are noted at the end)

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Preface

Singer, songwriter, and author Michael Card said, “The best way to love someone is to listen to them. The best way to love God is to listen to Him. Your imagination integrates your heart and your mind. The Bible is aimed at your imagination.”

I have been scrutinizing the Scriptures for the timeline of Yeshua’s (Jesus) last days and Mary of Magdala’s part in them for many years. The reason it is often difficult to find chronologies in the New Testament is because the writings were collections of gathered writings. In their authenticity, much detail was not included, and other detail was included. For instance, Mary was alone for a while at the tomb, and the Lord spoke with her there when others were not present. But other verses mention she was there with the other women as well as with Peter and John. So, I worked on the storyline as best as I could to understand how these events may have happened. My goal was to somehow capture Mary’s emotion during her experience at the cross and the tomb. It has produced in me deep gratitude to my Savior. My prayer echoes the hymn by Fanny Crosby *Jesus, keep me near the cross*.¹

The Lord Yahweh,²  the Creator of the heavens and the earth, appointed times for His people to observe to remember His faithfulness and their covenant with Him.³ One of these times is *Shabbat*, the weekly day of complete rest. The other seven times are annual. They begin with *Passover* at sundown on the first full moon of spring – a meal that celebrates the Israelites deliverance from slavery in Egypt. The evening is immediately followed by *The Feast of Unleavened Bread* that lasts for one week; it represents the haste in which they fled from their enemy, since their bread had no time to rise. On the Sunday within that week, *First Fruits* is observed; the Israelite farmers take the first sheaf of their barley harvests to the priest who waves it before the Lord to accept and dedicate the farmer’s entire harvest to the Lord. It is a day of praise for the reviving of the earth after the winter’s repose.

This story was written from the perspective of Mary of Magdala. It takes place in about AD 30 during the week of *Passover* and *Unleavened Bread*. Yeshua shared His last Passover meal with His disciples in Jerusalem on Thursday evening just before being tried and crucified on Friday morning. The lamb of atonement was being sacrificed at the same hour.⁴ *Shabbat* began at sundown that Friday and ended at sundown on Saturday ushering in the observance of *First Fruits* on Sunday.

The Story

My name is Mary and I was born in Magdala. From the early morning until the afternoon on that Friday, I watched at a distance⁵ as my Lord died cruelly on the wooden Roman execution pole – this One Who had delivered me from demons and redeemed my life!⁶ I clung to the unbelievable scene. The most selfless, compassionate man I had ever known – crushed and beaten.⁷ I couldn’t leave Him even though the horrific display was crushing *me*. Time seemed to stand still as I retraced the events in my mind in the light of that morning. The atmosphere was hazy and confusing...

I remembered how He had delivered me with just a word. His kind eyes. And called me to follow Him... a few years ago. He had taught all of us of His kingdom of love, and He lived every word, always talking of His Father in heaven. And now this week, I had followed Him from my home in Galilee to celebrate Passover and the week of Unleavened Bread in Jerusalem with the rest of His disciples.

Last evening, the Passover gathering in the guest room had been sweet although sobering as He spoke words that seemed to usher us into a new time, a new covenant, He said. So many words I needed to ponder... the comforting Spirit He would send, which meant that He was leaving. This was unsettling to me but then He also had spoken of our oneness with Him, branches in Him, the Vine... like He would always be with us.

Eventually, after that Passover meal, I had returned to the guest home where I was staying with His mother for the week of the Feast in the home of a relative. At the end of the week, we had planned to make our way back to Galilee. The men had walked on from the Passover meal to sleep in the olive groves on the mount with Yeshua just outside the eastern gate.

Friday morning had come and the City was restless. We looked for Peter, John, and the rest, but there was so much chaos and chatter on the streets. I strained to see the object of the commotion... and there He was... emerging from the council chamber of the elders and priests of my people, bloody and beaten, unrecognizable... except for His eyes, this One Who had completely restored *me*, restored the leper, the lame man, the blind boy, the women with the ostracizing issue of blood – the Messiah, my Healer, now ostracized – the One Who had included, embraced, affirmed, accepted, and deeply loved everyone. Was that a crown of thorns on His head? I could barely look. Was the entourage of Roman soldiers really taking Him to the Place of the Skull?⁸ How unbelievable! How could this be happening?

I had swayed with the suffocating mourning and wailing of those who loved Him. As He passed near us, I heard His voice, the voice that had called me by name to be His.⁹ With deep breaths, he cried, “Daughters of Jerusalem, stop weeping for Me, but weep for yourselves and for your children.” He said that days were coming when they would say, “Blessed are those who cannot bear and the wombs that have not given birth and the breasts that have not nursed,” and to the mountains, “Fall on us,” and to the hills, “Cover us.” He said, “For if they do these things when the tree is green, what will happen when it is dry?”¹⁰ I could barely swallow or think, I just followed as I had done since I met Him.

And now, after an infinite wait, huddling with the other women at a distance from the form on the ominous wooden stake, I could see the sun bright and high above me in the sky. An unusual cool breeze passed over my weary tears and tiredness as a profound darkness fell suddenly, sharply on the land. I reached for the other women. We held each other in the black thickness that magnified the appalling groans and smells. I was glad I could no longer see, but the moans were louder as if the entire weight of all the pain and evil of the world was hurled against Him.

After what seemed like several hours of moving in and out of consciousness, I saw the sun dispersing the clouds, hanging in the afternoon sky.¹¹ I squinted to see Yeshua speaking to the man on the stake next to Him.¹² Then, He looked down and spoke to... John, I think.¹³ A soldier lifted a reed to His mouth to give Him something to drink. He looked up and said something to Heaven.¹⁴ I stared numbly... my Lord... His chest heaved. He took His last breath. And it was over. A soldier looked over Him mockingly and then pierced His side with his spear.

After a time, a Roman soldier lowered the stake. Other guards and soldiers looked bewildered. One was on his knees, bowed to the ground weeping.¹⁵ A Jewish religious ruler, Joseph of Arimathea, came to care for His body. He would have needed permission from Pilate. I don't know why Pilate would have been so accommodating? ¹⁶ Joseph didn't have much time; Shabbat began in just a few hours.

We followed Joseph as he procured the transfer of Yeshua's body to a new tomb that had been hewn out of a rock in a nearby garden¹⁷ just outside the City walls. Joseph anointed and wrapped the body in new linen cloths and laid Him in the tomb.¹⁸ Nicodemus, a ruler of the Jews, also came with a large amount of myrrh and aloe.¹⁹ Salome, James and John's mother, and Mary, Yeshua's mother, and I watched from a distance. I wanted to stay. I would have slept there, but Shabbat was approaching, and so we walked back to the guest home. I was thankful our resting place was so close to the gate; I was so tired.

Before the evening meal, we prepared more spices in hope we could complete the anointing of His body after Shabbat,²⁰ since Joseph had been in a hurry. We ate and rested... according to the commandment.

I remembered Shabbat eve as a little girl, warm times reclining around the table with my family. But then life happened differently than I had dreamed... and *then* I met Yeshua... warm times of family began again after He delivered me, gatherings with my new family, His followers. We had all been miraculously touched by Him. And now on this Shabbat... just a heart-wrenching sadness. I stared at the meal.

Sleep eluded me that night as Scripture flowed like living water into my mind – the declaration John had told us about... made by Yeshua's cousin's at His immersion into the water, "Behold, the Lamb of God Who takes away the sin of the world!" Hmm. The Lamb slain. I could see my own father and myself as a little girl looking up to his strong shoulders. I could hear his voice repeating the words... bits and pieces of words he would vocalize in the mornings... "You shall sacrifice the Passover lamb to the Lord...",²¹ and "Take the lamb into your dwelling on the tenth day and kill it on the fourteenth day... put its blood on the outside doorposts and lintel of your dwelling... *eat the flesh of the lamb*... Yahweh will pass over us when He judges our enemy..."²² Hadn't Yeshua said, "The bread that I give for the life of the world is my flesh..."?²³ His life given, pierced for our transgressions, crushed and bruised for our guilt, scourged for our deliverance... *my* healing... like a lamb to the slaughter..."²⁴ swashes of blood on the doors, swashes of His blood covering my life. Was this horrific death the offer of redeeming blood?! My mind finally fell into sleep for a few hours.

The light of Shabbat morning filtered through the herbs hanging in the room where I lay. I tried to rest. I thought... how does one *try to rest*? It sounded unrestful. I concentrated on how He had healed my restless soul with His peace. I decided to speak words of gratitude into the room, and they somehow diffused the tossing of the night.

Finally, when Shabbat ended at sundown that Saturday, my first opportunity came. I quietly took my cloak and slipped out of my room into the dusk. With a mixture of trepidation and determination, I made my way through the gate to the tomb. The moon was full, casting sharp shadows on the large rocks.²⁵ As I came near to the tomb I saw the huge round stone in front of its entrance highlighted in the moonlight. An awe mixed with longing gripped me. I halted, arrested by the reality of what had happened. My Master... lifeless behind the coldness. But being near the tomb brought comfort and so I lay down in my cloak and slept deeply.

I opened my eyes to a faint hue in the sky and the absence of anxiety in my body. I sat up and looked toward the tomb. The details were still indefinable since the sun had not yet risen. But I could faintly see that the stone was no longer in front of the tomb, and so I approached it nervously, stooping to look inside. I was shocked! The tomb was empty!

I faltered as I ran back into the City to find Peter and John. I knocked rapidly on the door of the home where I knew they were staying. Finally, Peter opened the door, and I cried, "Peter, they have taken the Master from the tomb!" John appeared behind Peter, and we all ran to the tomb together. John ran ahead of us, but when he came to the tomb, he stopped abruptly and slowly stooped to peer inside. When Peter caught up to John, he bolted into the tomb! We all saw the linen wrappings that had been wound around Him just lying there. The facecloth was folded by itself apart from the other linen wrappings. If someone had stolen the body, they surely wouldn't have taken the wrappings off, let alone folded the headcloth! Would they have? We froze in amazement! Peter and John ran back into the City.

I stayed and wept uncontrollably. Suddenly a light flashed, and two radiant figures appeared in front of me. I was stunned at the sight of them sitting, one at the head and one at the feet, where the body had been lying.²⁶ They asked me why I was weeping, and I told them that someone had taken away my Master, and I didn't know where they had put Him.

A gentle voice behind me asked, "Why are you weeping? For Whom are you seeking?"²⁷ I thought He was the gardener, but I was transfixed on the tomb, and so I didn't turn around. I just asked Him, "Sir, if you have carried Him away, tell me where you put Him, and I will take Him away." ... and then He said my name. The sound of His voice pierced me softly. He was *my* Gardener Who had tended my soul!²⁸ I reached out for Him, but with His kind, familiar smile, He told me to go tell the others that He had risen and also that He would ascend to the Father! And then He was gone. I slid to the ground and embraced the stillness and wonder momentarily. All the trauma, sadness, and exhaustion released their hold on me.

O, praise Adonai! How grateful and elated I was that I had lingered at the tomb! I sang and swirled in circles of laughter as I ran back into the City to tell the other women! By this time, the dawn was appearing on the horizon when I entered our guest home to look for Mary. I told her as much as I could as we rushed back to the garden together. The sunrise sent rays upward as if the whole of creation was rejoicing with us! All the mystery of the empty tomb in the dimness of night was suddenly clear. Yeshua's mother could see – He was not in the tomb! Soon, Salome and Joanna came carrying spices. These women were always so tender and protective of me.²⁹ How kind of our Father to give us each other at this moment!

As we drew near to the tomb, the earth rumbled. We reached for the ground, and as we knelt there, a bright form appeared, sitting on top of the massive stone that had been in front of the tomb. This heavenly messenger was similar to the ones I had seen in the night with an appearance like white lightning.

I hadn't noticed the many guards until now... a distance from the tomb. They were frightened and fell to the ground like dead men. The messenger's voice was joyful, "Do not be afraid. I know you are looking for Yeshua who was crucified. He is not here for He has risen just as He said. Come, see the place where He was lying." The other women moved closer. I stood back with my eyes on the ground away from the brilliance and peered once more inside to see the place where His body had been.

I'll never forget that moment! Pure, crystal clear silence and awe. Mary was wide-eyed and motionless. The lilting voice of the messenger broke our trance, "Go quickly and tell His disciples and Peter that He has risen from the dead and is going ahead of them to Galilee. There you will see Him!" And so we ran away from the tomb and back through the City gate to find the others!³⁰

This was the Sunday after Passover – the appointed day of First Fruits. The streets were crowded with eager farmers streaming toward the Temple with the first sheaves of their barley harvest. On our way, we ran into Yeshua – Oh! The warm compassion in His face and the embrace of His eyes and stature once again! We bowed, trembling to the ground while He repeated the messenger's words, "Don't be afraid, go and tell my brothers to meet me in Galilee at the mountain."

We stumbled as we ran to look for our brothers and sisters and found them congregated where we had shared the Master's Passover just days before. Some of the disciples did not believe us. They decided that we would all meet back in this room in the evening after they had investigated our words. Many of them went to the tomb and found our words to be true.

We gathered later in the evening and kept the doors shut. We feared the religious Jews; most of them had opposed Yeshua's teaching. Two men were there who had also seen the Master as they travelled to their home in Emmaus. As we all ate and wondered and rejoiced, there He was standing in our midst saying, "Shalom be with you." Then He showed us the piercings in His hands and side. We gasped in awe-filled joy! He said again, "Shalom be with you. As the Father has sent Me, I also send you." Then He breathed on us and said, "Receive the Holy Spirit. If you forgive the sins of any, their sins have been forgiven, and if you

retain the sins of any, they have been retained.”³¹ After eating with us, His disappeared. After much jubilation and sharing, the men went to their guest homes to prepare for travel back to Galilee according to the words of Yeshua and the messengers. They would journey to the mountain He had chosen.³²

Soon, I, along with the other women would journey back to Galilee as well. I pondered all these events deeply for the remainder of the week of Unleavened Bread. His rising on First Fruits. The newness of the earth. The newness in my spirit... forever forgiven, forever redeemed, a fragrance of His new life in me, forever loved, forever whole, forever His! No more striving to stay close to Him. He was in me, never to leave! O praise the Father, Yeshua His Only Begotten Son, and the Ruach... the Breath of His Spirit forever and ever! Receive Him, receive Eternal Life now!

¹ Hymn by Fanny Crosby

Jesus, keep me near the cross,
There a precious fountain;
Free to all, a healing stream,
Flows from Calv'ry's mountain.

Refrain:

*In the cross, in the cross
Be my glory ever,
Till my ransomed soul shall find
Rest beyond the river.*

Near the cross, a trembling soul,
Love and mercy found me;
There the Bright and Morning Star
Shed His beams around me.

Refrain

Near the cross! O Lamb of God,
Bring its scenes before me;
Help me walk from day to day
With its shadow o'er me.

Refrain

Near the cross! I'll watch and wait,
Hoping, trusting ever;
Till I reach the golden strand,
Just beyond the river.

Refrain

² Exodus 3:13-15

³ Leviticus 23

⁴ “The second series of sacrifices [Deuteronomy 16:2 and 2 Chronicles 35] came to be called Second Passover. The sacrifices of lambs became so numerous, they lasted two days. What began as one combined series of sacrifices from the time of Josiah onward was separated into sacrifices on two days. On Nisan 14, the sacrifice of the Passover lambs occurred; they were cleaned and given to the people to take home and eat. The next day, Nisan 15, was the second Passover for the sacrifice of all other bulls, lambs and goats, including the atonement sacrifice or sin offering [killed when Yeshua was killed].” (Dwight A. Pryor, *Misconceptions about the Passover*)

⁵ Matthew 27:55-56

⁶ Luke 8:2

⁷ Isaiah 53:4-5

⁸ Luke 23:26-27

⁹ Isaiah 43:1

¹⁰ Luke 23:28-31

¹¹ Mark 15:33

¹² Luke 23:43

¹³ John 19:26

¹⁴ Luke 23:46

¹⁵ From Matthew 27:54

¹⁶ Mark 15:43-45; Usually the executed bodies were left to rot on the poles as an embarrassment and a statement to the crowds, so Joseph's request was unusual; it was doubly unusual that Pilate would bother to grant Joseph his request.

¹⁷ Mark 15:46; Matthew 27:60

¹⁸ Mark 15:42-47

¹⁹ John 19:39

²⁰ Luke 23:56

²¹ Deuteronomy 16:2

²² Exodus 12:3-8

²³ John 6:51

²⁴ Isaiah 53:5-7

²⁵ John 20:1

²⁶ John 20:12

²⁷ John 20:15-18

²⁸ John 10:27

²⁹ Luke 24:10

³⁰ Matthew 28:3-8

³¹ John 20: 19-23

³² Matthew 28:16