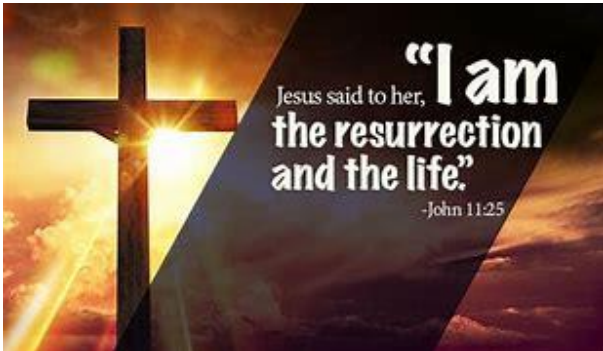


Guided by a cloud 52 (Exodus 13:21-22)

This week we continue looking at characters around the Easter story. A lot of what we read often focuses on the male disciples but Mary of Bethany, Mary of Nazareth and Mary Magdalene were strong influential women who played an important part in Jesus' ministry.



Worship time

[I raise a hallelujah](#)

[King of kings majesty](#)

[All I once held dear](#)

Mary of Bethany was the sister of Martha, and her brother Lazarus was raised from the dead. Mary's first appearance is in the home of her sister Martha (*Luke*

10:38-42). Martha, annoyed that her sister wasn't helping, accused Jesus of not caring that Mary sat at His feet while she did all the work. Jesus' response was to commend Mary for "choosing the better". Mary's desire to be near her Lord, listening to every word, was more beneficial. Her priority in life was Christ, knowing Him and being near to Him.

We also see Mary just days before Christ's crucifixion, (*John 12:1-8*). A meal had been prepared at the home of Simon the leper. At some point, Mary broke open an alabaster jar, poured a pint of very expensive perfume on Jesus' head and feet, and wiped them with her hair. Despite criticism from the disciples about wasting money, Jesus defends her, saying that she did it to prepare him for his burial and this act of service would be remembered through the ages. Mary showed her great love for Jesus and we can learn from her connection to Jesus in those key moments.

Mary of Nazareth, Jesus' mother, remained by his side from birth to death, her loyalty unwavering. Mary seems to be an ordinary Jewish woman whose life was similar to many others. She cooked, sewed and cleaned. She prayed, conversed and served the needs of her family. Yet, in the stories of Jesus' birth we see that Mary's life was extraordinary. God the Father chose her to be the mother of Christ his son. By His mercy, God filled her soul with His grace and His presence.

I wonder if she remembered Simeon's prediction after Jesus' birth as she watched her son's crucifixion. "This child is destined for the falling and the rising of many in Israel, and to be a sign that will be opposed so that the inner thoughts of many will be revealed – and a sword will pierce your own soul too." (*Luke 2:34-35*). As Jesus hung on the cross her soul was being pierced by the sword of grief. Simeon's words meant that God knew Jesus would be crucified and had a plan to use Jesus' suffering. Even though she didn't completely understand His call, she remained by her sons side because of her unconditional love for Him.

Mary Magdalene was the most important female disciple of Jesus having being cured of evil spirits and diseases (*Luke 8:2*). Her miraculous healing made her dedicate her life to following Jesus. Mary's desperate longing to be close to Christ, to serve Him in any way she could, became the way she lived her life. She knew she would not have a life to live if not for Him. We're told that Mary Magdalene was one of the women who kept vigil at Jesus' tomb and was the first person to see the resurrected Jesus. This was the turning point for Christianity. When it changed from a small movement to a whole new religion and Mary was a key figure in this event.

As we remember these women who had very close relationships with Jesus, pray that our own encounters with Jesus will deepen our faith in God. A God who so loved the world that He gave His only Son.

"Cast all your anxiety on Him because he cares for you" 1Peter 5:7