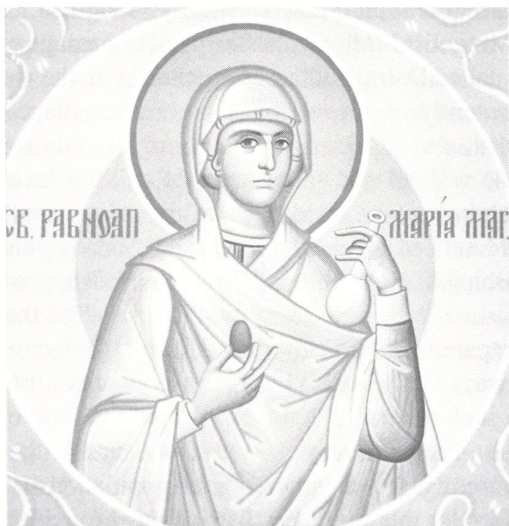


**On the 22nd of July, the holy Church commemorates
the holy Myrrh-bearer and Equal-to-the-apostles
MARY MAGDALENE.¹**

Mary, the glorious equal-to-the-apostles, was a living example of faith, hope, and love, which she bore toward the Christ. She is one of our Savior's most famous disciples, not to be confused with either the mystical Mary of Bethany, the sister of Lazarus and Martha, who anointed Jesus' feet and wiped them with her hair,² or the penitent woman whose sins Jesus pardoned for anointing Him with perfumed ointment in the house of the Pharisee.³ There is a widespread mistaken notion that has prevailed in western countries, saying that Mary Magdalene was a



Saint Mary Magdalene

woman of bad character. Now Mary, who had come to be known as the Magdalene, was named after the city from which she hailed. She was also

¹ The manuscript of the unabridged Life of the holy Myrrh-bearer and Equal-to-the-apostles, Mary the Magdalene, begins: "I love those who love Me." The text is extant in the Athonite Monastery of the Great Lavra. The English section herein, beginning with the Pentecost and Saint Mary's decision to go to Rome, was translated from that text. As another source used herein, we also used the encomium [*P. G.* 145], composed by Nikephoros Kallistos Xanthopoulos (d. 1335). It was rendered in simpler Greek and published by the hegumen of the Athonite Monastery of Simonopetra, Archimandrite Hieronymos (Athens, 1924). Note: The famous melodist, Xanthopoulos also composed the service of the Life-giving Fountain of the Theotokos that is chanted Friday of Bright Week. The account of Saint Mary Magdalene in Rome and Gaul was also taken from *The Life of Saint Mary Magdalene* (in Greek), ed. by Mother Magdalene (Athens/Kozane: Holy Convent of the Ascension, 1974), which text is based on the writings of Nikephoros Kallistos Xanthopoulos and Patriarch Modestos of Jerusalem (commemorated by the holy Church on the 16th of December, 614).

² Jn. 12:3-7.

³ Lk. 7:37-48.

given this appellation to identify her among the several other women named Mary in the Gospels.⁴

Magdala of the Galilee was situated on the Lake of Gennesaret. This body of water is also known as the Sea of Galilee or the Sea of Tiberias.⁵ The place of Saint Mary's nativity, Magdala, is mentioned only once by the Evangelist Matthew.⁶ In the parallel passage of the Evangelist Mark, this place is called Dalmanutha.⁷ Magdala was on the west shore of the Lake of Tiberias. Presently, it is probably the obscure village of el-Mejdel, about three miles northwest of Tiberias.⁸ Our Lord not only stood on the shore of this lake but also walked and sailed upon it, stilling its tempest. From among the many fishermen who plied their calling on its waters abounding in fish, Jesus chose two sets of brothers—Peter and Andrew, and Iakovos and John—to be His disciples. He sent them forth to be “fishers of men.”⁹

With regard to the lake, we find that “subterranean fires of nature prepared a lake basin, through which a river afterward ran, keeping its waters always fresh. In this basin a vast quantity of shellfish swarmed, and multiplied to such an extent that they formed the food of an extraordinary profusion of fish. The great variety and abundance of the fish in the lake attracted to its shores a larger and more varied population than existed elsewhere in Palestine, whereby this secluded district was brought into contact with all parts of the world. This large and varied population, with access to all nations and

⁴ Mt. 27:56, 61; 28:1, etc.

⁵ The Sea of Galilee [Mt. 4:18; 15:29] is called the “Sea of Chinnereth” in the Old Testament [Num. 34:11; Jos. 12:3; 13:27]. It is called the Lake of Gennesaret—once by Luke [Lk. 5:1]—from the flat district lying on its west coast. Saint John [Jn. 6:1; 21:1] calls it the Sea of Tiberias. The modern Arabs retain this name, Bahr Tabariyeh.

The sea lies in the deep trough of the Jordan valley, almost due east of the Bay of Acre. The surface is 680 feet below the level of the Mediterranean. It varies in depth from 130 feet to 148 feet. From the point where the Jordan enters in the north to its exit in the south is about 13 miles. The greatest breadth is in the north, from el-Mejdel to the mouth of Wadi Semak being over 7 miles. It gradually narrows toward the south, taking the shape of a gigantic pear, with a decided bulge to the west. The water of the lake is clear and sweet. The mountains on the east and on the west rise to about 2,000 feet. [*ISBE Bible Dictionary*, s.v. “Galilee, Sea of”]. It is 27 miles east of the Mediterranean, and about 60 miles northeast of Jerusalem.

⁶ Mt. 15:39.

⁷ Mk. 8:10.

⁸ It was to this town and region that our Lord came after feeding the 4,000. Magdala is probably a later form of *mīgdol*, “a tower.” In the Talmud, Magdala is called “the city of color,” and a particular district of it was called “the tower of dyers.” The indigo plant was much cultivated in this place.

⁹ Mt. 4:18, 22; Mk. 1:16-20; Lk. 5:1-11.

countries, was where the Lord had His public ministry"¹⁰ and where Mary of Magdala grew up.

During the time that Mary lived, Magdala, on the borders with Syria, was exceedingly wealthy with beautiful views. Mary's father's name was Syros. Her mother was Efharistia. They were respected and liberal with their wealth. The maiden Mary of Magdala was raised and thoroughly educated in the law and prophets by her parents, especially her father. Though such studies were not the custom for daughters, yet her enlightened father wished his only child, an exceptional little girl, to know her letters and her heritage. While the lass was orphaned of her parents at ten years of age, yet she continued to live an exemplary life before God. She was virtuous, prayed continually, and was like a bee collecting the honey of virtues. From her adolescence, she could be found either at home or in the synagogue. She never spoke to men. She did, however, have female companions of like mind, who would visit and minister to the infirm and sick. Her manner of life was ascetical. She never laughed in a disorderly manner, but would just smile modestly when the occasion demanded it.

"Was she the virgin that Esaias¹¹ spoke of?" wondered Satan. Believing her to be, she was assailed by seven evil spirits that they might cause her to fall into grievous sin and destroy her virginity. Therefore, her early life was one of fierce struggle and spiritual warfare. Seven demons assailed her: those of pride, fornication, judging others, lying, stealing, murder, and unbelief. But she valiantly withstood them and never opened the door to any of them that they might take her captive. She persevered in spiritual warfare until Christ came and expelled those wicked spirits.¹²

The Going Out of Evil Spirits

The Evangelist Luke records this about Jesus and the women who assisted the ministry by means of their substance: **"It came to pass, immediately afterwards, that He was traveling through, city by city and village by village, preaching and proclaiming the good tidings of the kingdom of God. And the twelve were with Him, and certain women who had been cured of diseases and scourges and evil spirits and infirmities—Mary who is called Magdalene, from whom seven demons had gone out, and Joanna the wife of Chuza, a steward of Herod, and Susanna, and many other women who were ministering to Him from their possessions [Lk. 8:1-3]."**¹³

¹⁰ *Easton's Bible Dictionary*, s.v. "Galilee, Sea of."

¹¹ "The Virgin shall conceive, and bear a Son, and shall call His name Emmanuel [Is. 7:14]."

¹² *The Life of Saint Mary Magdalene* (in Greek), Ch. 1, pp. 9-11.

¹³ Cf. Mk. 16:9.

Blessed Theophylact (765-840) observes: "See how these women, despite their great wealth, gave up everything and instead chose poverty with Christ and for Christ. To understand that they indeed were wealthy, listen to the words of the Gospel: they ministered to Him from their possessions, not with the substance of others, or with money of others, or with a fortune gained by wrongdoing, as is often the case. Many, in regard to Mary Magdalene, have understood the words 'from whom seven demons had gone out,' to mean 'out of whom went many demons.' For in Scripture the number seven often means 'many.' One might also say that just as there are seven spirits of virtue, so also there are seven spirits of wickedness. There is, for example, the spirit of the fear of God, and its opposite, the spirit of irreverence, which does not fear God. There is the spirit of understanding, and its opposite, the spirit of incomprehension, and so on. Therefore, unless these seven spirits of wickedness are cast out of the soul, one cannot follow Christ. First Satan must be cast out; only then can Christ dwell within."¹⁴ Elsewhere as well does Blessed Theophylact discuss these malignant spirits, writing: "The seven demons also may mean the seven spirits that are opposed to virtue, such as the spirit of irreverence, the spirit of thickheadedness, the spirit of ignorance, the spirit of falsehood, and whatever else is opposed to the gifts¹⁵ of the Holy Spirit."¹⁶

Therefore, the casting out of seven demons does not mean that Christ had rescued a social derelict. There is no evidence that Mary was promiscuous, much less a harlot for hire. But that she was a woman of means is evident from her ability to support Jesus from her property [Mt. 27:56]. Her obvious leadership and prominence among the women is seen in the fact that her name is mentioned more often than most, and usually first.

The Tribunal of Pilate

Now Jesus went forth with His disciples beyond the winter torrent of Kedron, where there was a garden into which He entered with His disciples. Now Judas, one of the Twelve, who was planning to deliver up the Lord, also knew the garden at Gethsemane; for Jesus many times gathered together there with His disciples. Judas then, having received the cohort and officers from the

¹⁴ *The Explanation by Blessed Theophylact of the Holy Gospel According to Saint Luke*, by Fr. Christopher Stade (House Springs, MO: Chrysostom Press, 1997), Ch. 8, pp. 82, 83.

¹⁵ In Esaias we read: "The Spirit of God shall rest upon Him, the Spirit of wisdom and understanding, the Spirit of counsel and strength, the Spirit of knowledge and godliness shall fill Him; the Spirit of the fear of God [Is. 11:2, 3]."

¹⁶ *The Explanation by Blessed Theophylact of the Holy Gospel According to Saint Luke*, Ch. 16, p. 142.

chief priests and Pharisees, went to Gethsemane with torches and lamps and weapons.¹⁷

Jesus was voluntarily taken that night. Early the following day, Jesus was lead from Caiaphas the high priest into the Praetorium.¹⁸ The Jews would not enter the Praetorium lest they should be defiled, for they intended to eat the passover.¹⁹ Pilate then went out to them, and said, "What accusation bring ye against this Man?" They answered and said to him, "If this One were not an evildoer, we would not have delivered Him up to thee." Then Pilate said to them, "Take Him yourselves and judge Him according to your law." The Jews therefore said to him, "It is not allowed for us to put anyone to death."²⁰

Pilate entered into the Praetorium again, and summoned Jesus, saying to Him, "Thou art the King of the Jews?" Jesus answered him, "Sayest thou this of thyself, or did others tell thee about Me?" Pilate answered, "I am not a Jew, am I? Thy nation and the chief priests delivered Thee up to me. What didst Thou?" Jesus answered, "My kingdom is not of this world. If My kingdom were of this world, My servants would be fighting, in order that I should not be delivered up to the Jews; but now My kingdom is not from this place." Pilate therefore said to Him, "Thou art then a king, art Thou not?" Jesus answered, "Thou sayest it, for I am King. For this cause have I been

¹⁷ Jn. 18:1-3.

¹⁸ This Greek word, in the KJV, is rendered "hall [Mk. 15:16]," or "common hall [Mt. 27:27]," or "hall of judgment [Jn. 18:28]," or "judgment hall [Jn. 18:33; 19:9]" or "Herod's judgment hall [Acts 23:35]," or "palace [Phil. 1:13]." Praetorium, however, is properly a military word. It denotes: (1) the general's tent or headquarters; (2) the governor's residence; and (3) the praetorian guard—its palace or the camp or quarters of the praetorian cohorts [cf. Act 28:16]. Some, however, regard the Praetorium as the barrack within the palace (the *palatium*) of the Caesars in Rome where a detachment of these praetorian guards was stationed, or as the camp of the guards placed outside the eastern walls of Rome. *Easton's Bible Dictionary*, s.v. "Praetorium" and "Palace."

¹⁹ There were two violations of Jewish legal procedure (holding the trial for a capital case at night and passing condemnation on the same day of the trial). A Roman court could meet anytime after sunrise. Saint John Chrysostom comments: "Observe the ridiculous conduct of the Jews. They who had seized the innocent, and had taken up arms, do not enter into the hall of judgment lest they should be polluted. And tell me, what kind of pollution was it to set foot in a judgment hall, where wrongdoers suffer justice? They who paid tithes of mint and anise, did not think they were polluted when bent on killing unjustly, but thought that they polluted themselves by even treading in a court of justice. 'And why did they not kill Him, instead of bringing Him to Pilate?' In the first place, the greater part of their rule and authority had been cut away, when their affairs were placed under the power of the Romans." "Hom. LXXXIII," *Gospel of Saint John*, The Nicene and Post Nicene Fathers, 1st Ser., Vol. XIV (Oak Harbor, WA: Logos Research Systems, Inc., 1997).

²⁰ Jn. 18:28-31.

born, and for this cause have I come into the world, that I should bear witness to the truth. Everyone who is of the truth heareth My voice." Pilate saith to Him, "What is truth?" And having said this, he went out again to the Jews, and said to them, "I do not find even one cause for accusation in Him."²¹

Now during the feast, the governor was accustomed to releasing to the crowd one prisoner of its choice.



Pilate Washing His Hands

There was in prison then a notorious prisoner called Barabbas. Therefore, when the people were gathered together, Pilate said to them, "Whom do ye wish that I release to you? Barabbas, or Jesus Who is called Christ?" For Pilate knew that by reason of envy they delivered up Jesus. But as Pilate sat on the tribunal, his wife sent word to him and said, "Let there be nothing between thee and that just One, for I suffered many things today in a dream because of Him." Meanwhile, the chief priests and the elders persuaded the crowds that

they should ask for themselves Barabbas, and utterly destroy Jesus. Governor Pilate then asked, "Which of the two do ye wish that I release to you?" And they said, "Barabbas." Pilate said to them, "What then shall I do with Jesus Who is called Christ?" They all said to him, "Let Him be crucified." And the governor said, "Why, what evil did He do?" But they kept on crying out the more, saying, "Let Him be crucified."²²

After Pilate saw that nothing was to be of use, but rather that an uproar was taking place, he took water and washed off his hands for himself before the crowd, saying, "I am innocent of the blood of this just One; ye shall see to it." And all the people answered and said, "His blood be on us and on our children." Then he released Barabbas to them; but after he scourged Jesus, he delivered Him up in order that He might be crucified.²³

Afterward, Pilate's soldiers plaited a crown of thorns, and put it on Jesus' head, and threw around Him a purple outer garment, and were saying,

²¹ Jn. 18:29-38.

²² Mt. 27:15-23.

²³ Mt. 27:24-26.

"Hail, King of the Jews!" And they kept on giving Him slaps on the face with the palms of their hands. Pilate then went out again, and said to them, "Behold, I bring Him out to you, in order that ye might know that I do not find even one cause for accusation in Him." Jesus, thereupon, went forth. He was wearing the thorny crown and the purple outer garment. Pilate turned to the crowd and announced: "Behold, the Man."²⁴

However, when the chief priests and the officers saw Jesus, they cried out vociferously, "Crucify, crucify Him!" Pilate said to the mob, "Ye take Him and crucify Him, for I find no cause for accusation in Him." The Jews retorted, "We have a law, and according to our law He ought to die, because He made Himself Son of God." Therefore, when Pilate heard this saying, he was the more afraid. Pilate entered into the Praetorium again, and asked Jesus, "From what place art Thou?" But Jesus did not give him an answer. Then Pilate remarked, "Speakest Thou not to me? Knowest Thou not that I have authority to crucify Thee, and authority to release Thee?" Jesus answered, "Thou wouldest have no authority at all against Me, except it were given to thee from above. Therefore, the one delivering Me up to thee hath the greater sin."²⁵

Now from this time on Pilate was seeking to release Jesus. As for the Jews, they continued crying out, "If thou shouldest release this One, thou art not a friend of the Caesar. Everyone who maketh himself a king speaketh against the Caesar." Therefore Pilate, having heard this saying, brought out Jesus, and took his seat upon the tribunal in a place which is called Lithostrotos, but in Hebrew, Gabbatha. Now it was the preparation of the passover, and about the sixth hour. And he said to the Jews, "Behold your King!" But they cried out, "Take Him away, take Him away, crucify Him!" Pilate answered them, "Your King shall I crucify?" The chief priests declared, "We have no king except Caesar." Therefore, Pilate then delivered Jesus up to them, in order that He might be crucified. Jesus was then taken and led away.²⁶

The Women at the Cross

The Lord Jesus Christ was made to carry the Cross. On the way to the crucifixion, the soldiers impressed Symeon the Cyrenian into service, in order that he might take up Jesus' Cross. The Cross was set up in a place called Golgotha, that is, Place of a Skull. Jesus was given vinegar to drink mingled with gall. His garments were taken by the soldiers, who sat down and watched over Him.²⁷

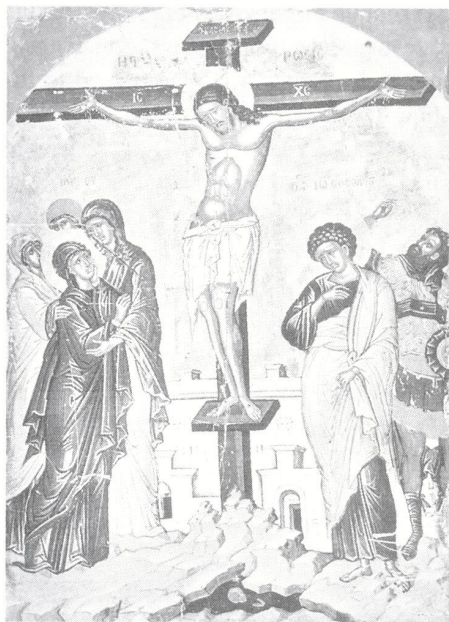
²⁴ Jn. 19:1-5.

²⁵ Jn. 19:6-11.

²⁶ Jn. 19:12-16.

²⁷ Mt. 27:32-36.

The soldiers then affixed the placard on the Cross, that which was written by Pilate: "Jesus the Nazaraean, the King of the Jews." Therefore



The Crucifixion

many of the Jews read this title, for the place where Jesus was crucified was near the city; and it was written in Hebrew, in Greek, and in Latin. Then the chief priests of the Jews were saying to Pilate, "Write not, 'The King of the Jews,' but that 'He said, 'I am King of the Jews.''" Pilate answered, "What I have written, I have written."²⁸

There were also two robbers crucified with Jesus. Those passing by kept blaspheming Jesus and shaking their heads, saying, "Thou Who destroyest the temple and buildest it in three days! Save Thyself; if Thou art God's Son, come down from the Cross." Together with them, there were also the chief priests, mocking Him in like manner with the scribes

and elders and Pharisees, saying, "Others He saved, Himself He is not able to save. If He is King of Israel, let Him come down now from the Cross, and let us believe on Him. He hath trusted in God; let Him deliver Him now, if He taketh pleasure in Him; for He said, 'I am God's Son.'"²⁹

From the sixth hour until the ninth hour there came to be a darkness over all the earth. At about the ninth hour Jesus cried out with a loud voice, "My God, My God, why didst Thou forsake Me?" And having cried again with a loud voice, He gave up the spirit. Following this, the veil of the temple was torn into two from top to bottom; and the earth was shaken, and the rocks were rent; and the sepulchres were opened, and many bodies of the saints who were asleep were raised, and came out of the sepulchres after His arising, and entered into the holy city and were manifested to many. Now after the centurion and the soldiers with him, who were watching over Jesus, experi-

²⁸ Jn. 19:19-22.

²⁹ Mt. 27:38-43.

enced the earthquake and the things which took place, they were exceedingly afraid, saying, "Truly, this was God's Son."³⁰

The Jews in order that the bodies should not remain upon the crosses on the sabbath asked Pilate that their legs might be broken, and that they might be taken away. Then the soldiers came and indeed broke the legs of the first and of the other who was crucified with Him. But when they came to Jesus and saw that He was already dead, they did not break His legs. But one of the soldiers pierced His side with a spear, and straightway blood and water came out.³¹

Now **"many women who followed Jesus from Galilee, ministering to Him, were there beholding from afar off, among whom was Mary Magdalene, and Mary the Mother of Iakovos and Joses, and the mother of the sons of Zebedee [Mt. 27:55, 56]."**

Blessed Jerome (347-420) affirms that the Mary mentioned in this verse as "'the Mother of Iakovos (James the less) and of Joses,' is the Lord's Mother. James [Iakovos] is called the 'less' to distinguish him from James [Iakovos] the 'greater,' who was the son of Zebedee."³²

Saint Gregory of Nyssa (ca.335-394) also remarks that "the Mother of Iakovos and Joses" was really the Theotokos, and that this device was used by the evangelists to conceal the virgin motherhood from the Jews. Saint Gregory felt that, at this time, had they known the mystery concerning her, they would have slain her too.³³

Saint John Chrysostom (354-407) praises the women who followed Jesus in His public ministry and who showed their quality, especially by fidelity in His Passion. Mary Magdalene ministered to Christ in His ministry and did not abandon Him when He died. "These things the women see done, they who were most inclined to feel for Him, who were most of all bewailing Him. And mark how great their assiduity. They had followed Him ministering to Him, and were present even unto the time of danger. Therefore they saw all: how He cried out; how He gave up the spirit; how the rocks were rent; and all the rest."³⁴ But who were they? His Mother, for she is called "Mother" of Iakovos (actually stepmother), and the rest.³⁵

³⁰ Mt. 27:45-54.

³¹ Jn. 19:31-34.

³² Saint Jerome, *The Perpetual Virginity of Blessed Mary*, The Nicene and Post-Nicene Fathers of the Christian Church, 2nd Ser., Vol. VI, p. 340.

³³ *De Resurrectione* 2, in *P.G.* 46:648A.

³⁴ Saint Chrysostom, "Homily LXXXVIII," *Matthew*, Nicene, 1st Ser., X:522.

³⁵ Great Friday in the "Triodion" Volume of *The Great Synaxaristes of the Orthodox Church* (in Greek), 4th ed., Vol. XIII (Athens, 1977), pp. 606, 607; Sunday of Pascha

Continuing, Saint John writes that “the Evangelist Luke [Lk. 23:48] says that many lamented over the things that were done, and smote their breasts, which above all shows the cruelty of the Jews, for that they gloried in things for which others were lamenting, and were neither moved by pity nor checked by fear.”³⁶

Saint John then remarks, “But the women stood by the Cross, and the weaker sex then appeared the manlier; so entirely henceforth were all things transformed.”³⁷

Standing by the Cross with many others who suffered and shed tears with the Mother of the Lord, Saint Mary Magdalene uttered, “What a strange wonder is this, that He Who sustains the whole creation is pleased to suffer. Glory to Thy power!”³⁸ And, “How is He, Who put death to death slain and dying, He Who by nature is life?”³⁹

Similarly, the Theotokos, on seeing His unjust slaughter, cried out in grief: “O most sweet child, how is it that Thou diest lawlessly? How is it that Thou Who hast suspended all the earth upon the floods of waters art now Thyself suspended from the Tree?”⁴⁰

“Now there had stood by the Cross of Jesus His Mother, and His Mother’s sister, Mary the wife of Cleopas, and Mary Magdalene [Jn. 19:25].”

Saint Ambrose (339-397) writes this about Mary Theotokos on Calvary: “Mary was to show in her wisdom she was not ignorant of the heavenly mystery.”⁴¹ She was to manifest fortitude of soul and, in his view, “The Mother stood before the Cross and, as the men fled, she stood fearless. Consider whether the Mother of Jesus could alter her chaste behavior when she did not alter her spirit. With loving eyes she gazed at the wounds of her Son, through Whom she knew would be the world’s salvation. The Mother stood—no unworthy sight—and did not fear the slayer. Perhaps she thought through her own death she would give herself for the common weal. But Jesus had no need of a helper in redeeming all, for He saved all without a helper. Therefore He says, ‘I am become as a man without help, free among the dead

³⁵(...continued)

in the “Pentecostarion” Volume of *The Great Synaxaristes of the Orthodox Church* (in Greek), 5th ed., Vol. XIV (Athens, 1979), p. 21.

³⁶ Saint Chrysostom, “Hom. LXXXVIII,” *Matthew*, loc. cit.

³⁷ Saint Chrysostom, “Hom. LXXXV,” *John*, Nicene, 1st Ser., XIV:318.

³⁸ July 22nd, Kontakion (Slav usage), Mode Three.

³⁹ July 22nd, Orthros Canon, Ode Eight, Mode Plagal Four.

⁴⁰ Theotokion from the *Parakletike* in Mode One.

⁴¹ In *Luc.* II, 61, cited in *Corpus Scriptorum Ecclesiasticorum Latinorum* (Vienna, 1866), 32(iv), 41.

[Ps. 87:4]. ' Indeed He received the devotion of His parent, but He did not seek another's aid. "⁴²

The Theotokos' conduct was majestic and moving; she was peerless in her nobility. She had seen her place within God's plan for man's salvation; she had read of herself in the prophets; she had spoken with angels, God's heralds. Now she knew that all that came upon her was from God, and she never grumbled in her pain. She was able to endure the affliction by the grace given her by Christ, her Son and Lord. For Mary saw Him on the Cross and said, "Even though Thou sufferest crucifixion, yet Thou art My Son and God."⁴³

The Burial of Jesus

There came a rich man from Arimathea, named Joseph, who was a disciple of Jesus. This man went to Pilate and asked for the body of Jesus for himself. Then Pilate commanded that the body be given up.⁴⁴ But Pilate wondered if He were already dead. He, therefore, summoned the centurion. He questioned him if Jesus died not long ago. And having come to know it from the centurion, he granted the body to Joseph. And Joseph bought a linen cloth. There also came Nikodemus, bearing a mixture of myrrh and aloes, about a hundred pounds. Then Joseph and Nikodemus took the body of Jesus, and bound it in linen cloths with the aromatic spices, as is the custom with the Jews to prepare for burial.⁴⁵ Now there was a garden in the place where Jesus was crucified. Furthermore, in the same garden there was a new sepulcher in which no one as yet was laid. There



The Unnailing

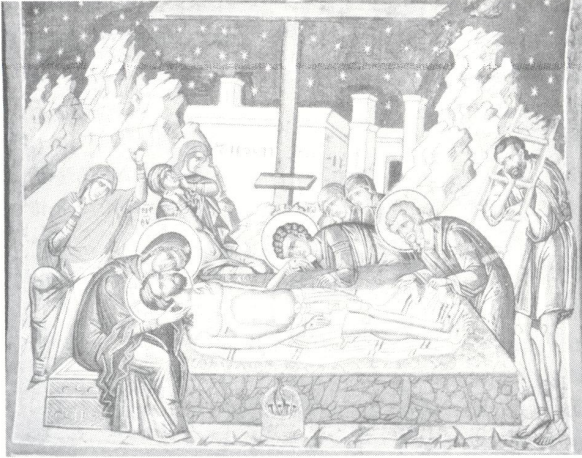
⁴² Saint Ambrose, "Letter 59, To the Church at Vercelli," dated 396, *The Fathers of the Church*, Vol. 26, p. 362; *De Inst. Virg.*, 49, P.L. 16:318C.

⁴³ Kontakion of Great and Holy Friday; also, a kontakion of Saint Romanos, cited in his work, entitled "On Mary at the Cross," *Kontakia of Romanos, Byzantine Melodist*, Vol. I, trans. by M. Carpenter (MO: University of Missouri Press, 1970), I:196.

⁴⁴ Mt. 27:57, 58.

⁴⁵ Jn. 19:39, 40.

then they laid Jesus, because of the preparation of the Jews, for the sepulcher was near.⁴⁶ They also rolled a stone against the door of the sepulcher.⁴⁷



Lamentations and Preparation for Burial

Each of the four evangelists contributes valuable details concerning the events of the resurrection of our Lord Jesus Christ. Not all these distinctive items of information are contained in all four Gospels. Each of the four writers contributed individual details from his own perspective and emphasis, yet inspired by the Holy Spirit. A careful examination of all four records in comparison with one another demonstrates that they are not in any way contradictory, despite the charges of some critics. It will be helpful to our study to consolidate the evidence given in all four accounts in order to arrive at a fuller picture of what took place that Sunday morning. If we knew all the circumstances, we would see that they are all harmonious.

Before the first day of the week, the women disciples determined to meet at the sepulcher. Coming from various points in the city, they proceeded in two or more groups. This explains why in icons of this scene the number of myrrh-bearers varies from one to six or more. It happened that there was an earthquake when an angel of the Lord descended and rolled back the stone [Mt. 28:2]. Saint Gregory Palamas (d. 1359), in his homily, entitled "On the Sunday of the Myrrh-bearing Women," believes that Mary Theotokos, together with Mary Magdalene, were first to arrive and witnessed the descent of the angel who rolled back the stone at the time of the earthquake. At that time it was still dark, but beginning to dawn [Mt. 28:1; Jn. 20:1]. The Myrrh-

"And it was the day of preparation, and the sabbath was dawning [Lk. 23:54]." (Now great was the day of that sabbath.⁴⁸) "And the women also, who had come with Him from Galilee, followed after, and beheld the sepulcher and how His body was laid [Lk. 23:55]."

The Theotokos and the Myrrh-bearers

⁴⁶ Jn. 19:41, 42.

⁴⁷ Mk. 15:46.

⁴⁸ Jn. 19:31.

bearer Mary Magdalene, seeing the stone taken away from the sepulcher [Jn. 20:1] and the soldiers [Mt. 28:4], ran immediately to notify Simon Peter and John [Jn. 20:2], leaving the Virgin at the sepulcher. It is at this time when the Virgin was alone at the sepulcher that her Son appeared to her first.

As the sun was rising [Mk. 16:2], Mary Theotokos was joined by Salome [Mk. 16:1] and Joanna [Lk. 24:10] who brought the sweet spices and ointments that they all

had purchased earlier [Mk. 16:1] and prepared before the sabbath [Lk. 23:56]. Certain other women were with them [Lk. 24:1] whom we know through holy Tradition were the Myrrh-bearers Mary (the wife of Cleopas), and Susanna, as well as Martha and Mary (the sisters of Lazarus). In all likelihood the latter two, *"Behold the place where they laid Him [Mk. 16:6]."* Mary and Martha, both



from Bethany, had been staying in Jerusalem. These other women, not realizing then that the angel had already rolled away the stone, said among themselves, "Who shall roll away the stone from the door of the sepulcher for us [Mk. 16:3]?" For it was exceedingly great [Mk. 16:4]. When the women looked, they saw that the stone was rolled away [Mk. 16:4].

Then the women beheld an angel sitting upon the stone that had been rolled back [Mt. 28:2]. And his countenance was as lightning, and his raiment white as snow [Mt. 28:3]. Meanwhile, the guards, for fear of the angel, became as dead men [Mt. 28:4]. The angel answered and said to the women, "Cease being afraid, for I know that ye seek Jesus Who hath been crucified. He is not here; for He was raised, even as He said. Come, see the place where the Lord was lying [Mt. 28:5, 6]."

The women entered into the sepulcher [Mk. 16:5; Lk. 24:4], but did not find the body of the Lord Jesus [Lk. 24:3]. The Evangelist Mark describes that they found an angel inside who was sitting on the right side, clothed in white raiment; the women were afraid [Mk. 16:5]. This angel then says to them, "Cease being amazed. Ye are seeking Jesus the Nazarene Who hath been crucified. He was raised, He is not here. Behold the place where they laid Him [Mk. 16:6]."

It came to pass, as the women were very perplexed [Lk. 24:4], that the angel from the outside also entered in. Now, two angels stood by the women in shining garments [Lk. 24:4]. The women now, still frightened, turned aside their faces to the ground. The angels said to them, "Why seek ye the living among the dead? He is not here, but was raised. Remember how He spoke to you when He was yet in Galilee, saying, 'It is necessary for the Son of Man to be delivered up into the hands of sinful men, and be crucified, and the third day to rise.' And they remembered His words [Lk. 24:5-8]."

The angel that had met the women outside, then says, "Go quickly and say to His disciples that He was raised from the dead [Mt. 28:7]." The angel whom they had found inside sitting on the right side also says, "But go and say to His disciples," also adding, "and to Peter [Mk. 16:7], that 'He goeth before you into Galilee; there shall ye see Him, even as He told you [Mt. 28:7; Mk.

16:7].'" The angel who had met them outside then closes the dialogue, saying, "Lo, I have told you [Mt. 28:7]."



The Myrrh-bearers Meet Two Angels

Then the myrrh-bearers quickly departed from the sepulcher with fear and great joy, and hastened to bring the men disciples word [Mt. 28:8]. The Evangelist Mark characterizes the women as fleeing from the sepulcher, saying that "trembling and ecstasy held them fast, and to no one did they say anything, for they were afraid [Mk. 16:8]." They did not pause to talk to anyone save the eleven, and to the rest of the disciples

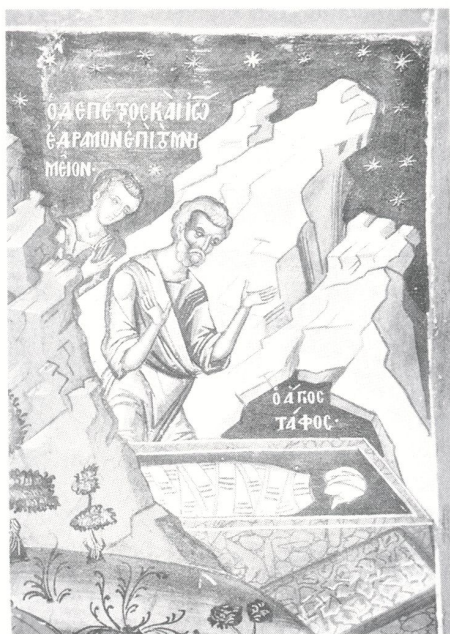
[Lk. 24:9]. Saint Gregory Palamas is of the opinion that only the Theotokos truly understood the import of the angels' words.⁴⁹

While the women departed to disclose what they had seen and heard, Mary Magdalene, who earlier had hastened from the sight of the rolled away stone [Jn. 20:2], told Simon Peter and John, "They have taken away the Lord out of the sepulcher, and we do not know where they laid Him [Jn. 20:2]." She said this because she had not heard the words of the angels, nor had she seen

⁴⁹ Saint Gregory Palamas, *P.G.* 151:244AB.

the Lord yet. Saint Gregory Palamas also brings forward this observation about Mary Magdalene.⁵⁰

Then arose Simon [Lk. 24: 12] and he went out [Jn. 20:3] together with the other disciple John, and they went to the sepulcher [Jn. 20:4]. Now the two men ran, but the youthful John outran Peter [Jn. 20:4]. Though John first reached the sepulcher and stooped down to look in, he did not enter [Jn. 20:5]. Simon Peter finally caught up and he entered the sepulcher. He noted the linen cloths lying, and the napkin which was upon Jesus' head, not lying with the linen cloths, but separate, having been wrapped up into one place [Jn. 20:6, 7]. Then John entered and saw and believed [Jn. 20:8]; "for as yet they knew not the Scripture, that it is necessary for Him to rise from the dead [Jn. 20:9]." Without ever mentioning



Peter and John Hasten to the Tomb

the disciple John at all, the Evangelist Luke records that Peter departed and wondered in himself at that which came to pass [Lk. 24:12]. However, John records in his Gospel that the disciples, that is, both Peter and the writer, went away again to their own home [Jn. 20:10].

Now after Mary Magdalene notified Simon Peter and John, she went along but at a slower pace. After Peter and John departed, she was still weeping. She stooped to look into the sepulcher. She beheld two angels in white sitting, one at the head and one at the feet, where the body of Jesus had been lying. They said to her, "Woman, why weepest thou?" She answered, "Because they took away my Lord, and I know not where they laid Him [Jn. 20:13]." Having spoken thus, she then turned herself back. She beheld Jesus standing, though knew not that it was Jesus. He said to her, "Woman, why weepest thou? Whom seekest thou?" She, supposing it was the gardener, said, "Sir, if Thou didst bear Him away, tell me where Thou didst lay Him, and I will take Him away [Jn. 20:15]." Jesus said to her, "Mary." She turned herself, and saith to Him, "Rabbouni," that is to say, Teacher. Jesus said to her, "Cease touching Me, for I have not yet ascended to My Father; but go to

⁵⁰ P.G. 151:244D.

My brethren and say to them, ‘I ascend to My Father and your Father, and to My God and your God [Jn. 20:16, 17].’” Mary then hastened to report to the



“Cease touching Me [Jn. 20:17].”

other disciples those things she had seen and heard from the Lord.

Now the other myrrh-bearers had already departed the tomb site to announce the glad tidings to the brethren. It is not improbable that the holy Mary Magdalene might have overtaken the other women and joined them before Jesus appeared to His Mother and to the other myrrh-bearers. He met them with the greeting, “Rejoice (*Hairete*) [Mt. 28:9].” They, too, at-

tempted like Mary Magdalene to take hold of Him [Jn. 20:17]. Yet, Saint Gregory Palamas believes that it was His pure Mother who actually held Him by the feet,⁵¹ but all worshipped Him [Mt. 28:9].

Jesus then encouraged His women disciples, saying, “Cease being frightened. Go and bring tidings to My brethren that they should go into Galilee, and there shall they see Me [Mt. 28:10].” The Theotokos, Mary Magdalene, Joanna, and the other women that were with them did in fact relate all these things to the apostles [Lk. 24:10]. But their words seemed to them as idle tales, and they believed them not [Lk. 24:11]. The Evangelist Mark also adds that Mary Magdalene, to whom Jesus appeared “first,” went and told the others as they mourned and wept [Mk. 16:9, 10]. But when they heard that He was alive and that she herself had seen Him, they did not believe her either [Mk. 16:11].

However, we learn that afterward that the Lord was “made manifest to the eleven themselves as they reclined at table; and He reproached their unbelief and hardness of heart, because they believed not those who saw Him after He was raised [Mk. 16:14].” We will now discuss, point by point, the events of that great and holy Friday, Saturday, and Sunday.

⁵¹ P.G. 151:237.

The Holy Sepulcher

From the Feast of the Sunday of the Myrrh-bearing Women, we learn, "Joseph asked for the body of Jesus and laid it in his new sepulcher; for it was meet that He should come forth from the grave, as from a bridal chamber. O Thou Who didst crush the might of death, and didst open the gates of Paradise unto man, glory be to Thee!"⁵²

We read: "And that day was the preparation, and the Sabbath drew on. And the women also, which came with Him from Galilee, followed after, and beheld the sepulcher, and how His body was laid [Lk. 23:54, 55]."

Evangelist Matthew writes: "**And Mary Magdalene was there, and the other Mary, sitting opposite the tomb** [Mt. 27:61]." Evangelist Mark writes: "**And Mary Magdalene and Mary the Mother of Joses were beholding where He was laid** [Mk. 15:47]."

A hymn in the Orthros service to Saint Mary Magdalene remarks, "Gazing at the tomb with expectation, she cried out, 'Thou hast been pleased to suffer: Glory to Thy power!'"⁵³

Saint Gregory Palamas identifies the myrrh-bearers as "all those women who followed with the Mother of the Lord, stayed with her during those hours of the salvific Passion, and with pathos anointed Christ with myrrh."⁵⁴ Saint John Chrysostom comments, "See thou the courage of the women? Dost thou behold their affection?"⁵⁵

Saint Gregory of Nyssa (ca.335-394) believed that the Theotokos was "the other Mary" who, according to Mt. 28:1, came to the tomb on Pascha morning with Mary Magdalene.⁵⁶ Saint Gregory Palamas also writes: "With the expression, 'and the other Mary,' the evangelist means, without a doubt, the Mother of Christ. She was also called the Mother of Iakovos and Joses, who were the children of Joseph her betrothed."⁵⁷ In the same spirit, Nikephoros Kallistos (d. ca. 1335) writes that the "other Mary" was the Theotokos, who burned with longing and melancholy as did Mary Magdalene; and so she accompanied her to the tomb.⁵⁸

Well does the blessed Jerome (347-420) comment to Helvidius, saying, "What a poor and impious view we take of Mary [the Mother of God], if we hold that when other women were concerned about the burial of Jesus,

⁵² *Pentecostarion*, Feast of the Myrrh-Bearing Women, the Third Sunday of Pascha, Doxastikon of the Lity, Mode Plagal Two.

⁵³ July 22nd, Orthros Oikos.

⁵⁴ Saint Gregory Palamas, *P.G.* 151:240A.

⁵⁵ Saint Chrysostom, "Hom. LXXXVIII," *Matthew*, Nicene, 1st Ser., X:522.

⁵⁶ *De Resurrectione*, 2, in *P.G.* 46:633B.

⁵⁷ Saint Gregory Palamas, *P.G.* 151:240A.

⁵⁸ Nikephoros Kallistos, *Eccl. His.*, Vol. 1, 23; *P.G.* 145:732, 733.

she, His mother, was absent; or if we invent some kind of a second Mary; and all the more because the Gospel of Saint John testifies that she was there present, when the Lord upon the Cross commended her, as His Mother and now widow, to the care of John."⁵⁹

In the Lamentations chanted on Great Friday, we see that the Theotokos was indeed at the sepulcher: "Thy pure Mother, weeping bitter tears over Thee, cried to Thee, 'O my Jesus, O my Savior, O my Son, how can I lay Thee in the grave?' And, 'Gone the Light the world knew! Gone the Light that was mine! O my Jesus, my beloved and desired One!' So the Virgin spake lamenting in her grief."⁶⁰

"And they [the myrrh-bearers] returned and prepared aromatic spices and perfumed ointments. And indeed they rested during the sabbath according to the commandment [Lk. 23:56]."

The names of seven of the myrrh-bearers that have come down to us are: Saint Mary Magdalene (commemorated by the holy Church on the 22nd of July and the 4th of May); Saint Salome, the mother of the sons of Zebedee (3rd of August); Saint Mary the wife of Cleopas (23rd of May); Saint Joanna, the wife of Chuza (27th of July); Saints Mary and Martha, the sisters of Saint Lazarus (4th of June); and Saint Susanna (Third Sunday after Pascha). Again, the identity of "Mary the mother of Iakovos [Mk. 16:1; Lk. 24:10]" and "Jones [Mt. 27:56]" is none other than the Theotokos. Blessed Theophylact also identifies Mary as the "stepmother" of Saint Joseph the Betrothed's sons.⁶¹ Thus, we commemorate those who loved longest when life and hope seemed gone.

The Myrrh-bearing Women Draw Nigh at Deep Dawn to the Tomb of the Giver of Life⁶²

The Evangelist Luke begins by saying: "Now on the first day of the week, at deep dawn, they came to the sepulcher, bringing aromatic spices which they prepared; and certain other women came with them [Lk. 24:1]."

Saint John Chrysostom lauds the women disciples, writing: "Dost thou see their noble spirit? For they had brought ointments, and were waiting at the tomb, so that if the madness of the Jews should relax, they might go and embrace the body. Dost thou see their noble spirit even unto death? Let us

⁵⁹ Saint Jerome, *The Perpetual Virginity of Blessed Mary*, Nicene, 2nd Ser., VI:340.

⁶⁰ *The Lamentations of Matins of Holy and Great Saturday*, First Stasis, Mode Plagal One, trans. by Holy Transfiguration Monastery (Boston, 1981).

⁶¹ Blessed Theophylact, *On Luke*, 24, 12, P.G. 123:1112.

⁶² Stichera of Pascha, Mode Plagal One.

imitate the women; let us not forsake Jesus in temptations. For Him, though dead, they spent so much and exposed their lives."⁶³

The sabbath then was past and the women decided to go back to the tomb of Joseph of Arimathea, where they had seen Christ's body laid away on Friday at sundown. They would bring with them sweet spices that they might anoint Jesus [Mk. 16:1], beyond those which Nikodemos and Joseph had already used on Friday. They prepared them [Lk. 24:1] and bought [Mk. 16:1] additional spices with their own means.

It is not unlikely that there were two or more parties of women disciples starting from different places; this would account for the slight differences in identifying which women were grouped together. Mary Theotokos and Mary Magdalene started their journey from Jerusalem, even though it was very early morning and still dark. By the time the others arrived, dawn was glimmering in the east that Sunday morning [Mt. 28:1; Mk. 16:2]. Saint Gregory Palamas remarks that "it seems that the evangelists disagree somewhat concerning both the time of the visits and the number of women that are involved. This is attributable to the fact that the myrrh-bearers were many; that they did not come to the sepulcher one time only, but two and three times—and not always in the same groups; that all the visits were at dawn but not at exactly the same hour. The venerable Mary Magdalene came not only as part of the group, but alone too. Each of the evangelists, therefore, relates one trip of some of the women and leaves off recounting the others visits."⁶⁴ Saint Gregory then discloses, "I conclude, consequently, that the Theotokos was the first who came to the grave of her Son and God, together with Mary Magdalene."⁶⁵

Evangelist Mark records that the myrrh-bearers were saying among themselves, "Who shall roll away the stone from the door of the sepulcher for us [Mk. 16:3]?" See how faith propels them, though the stone would require enormous strength to roll it upward through its track, they did not bring tools, ropes or levers with them, only their love and genuine care.

Continuing in the pious religious drama for which Saint Romanos is famous, he "eavesdrops" on the women hastening to the tomb when he writes: "To the Sun Who before the sun had sunk in the tomb, the young women bearing incense hastened toward the dawn as though seeking day. And they said to one another, 'O friends, come let us anoint with spices the body, life-bringing and buried, the flesh which resurrects fallen Adam which lies in the tomb. Let us go, let us hasten like the Magi, and let us kneel down and bring

⁶³ Saint Chrysostom, "Hom. LXXXVIII," *Matthew*, Nicene, 1st Ser., loc. cit.

⁶⁴ Saint Gregory Palamas, *P.G.* 151:242.

⁶⁵ *P.G.* 151:244.

with us the spices as gifts—not to Him in swaddling clothes but to Him wrapped in a shroud. Let us weep and cry out, “O Master, arise, Thou Who dost offer resurrection to the fallen.”⁶⁶



*The Theotokos and Mary Magdalene
at the Tomb*

Then the Evangelist Matthew records: “And behold, a great earthquake occurred; for an angel of the Lord descended out of heaven, and came and rolled away the stone from the door, and sat upon it. And his appearance was as lightning, and his garment white as snow. And those keeping guard, because of their fear of him, were shaken and became as dead men [Mt. 28:2-4].” The earthquake could not have been one in the ordinary sense, nor was it that extensive to have roused the sleeping inhabitants of the city. However, it was sufficient to break the seal

placed over the circular stone at the time of interment and roll the stone away from its settled position in the downward slanting groove along which it slid. The angel, thus, removed the stone from the entrance of the sepulcher, not to enable the risen Christ to exit, as had to be done in the case of Lazarus [Jn. 11:41], but to clearly exhibit that the sepulcher was empty.

Where Are the Watchmen and the Secure Sentry?⁶⁷

So blinding was the angel’s glorious appearance that the guards specially assigned to the tomb were completely terrified and swooned away, losing all consciousness. “Life lay in the grave, and a seal was placed over the stone. The soldiers guarded Christ as a sleeping King; but having smitten His enemies with blindness, the Lord hath risen.”⁶⁸

⁶⁶ Saint Romanos the Melodist, “Resurrection VI,” *Kontakia of Romanos, Byzantine Melodist*, Vol. I, Mode Plagal Four, strophe 1, p. 314.

⁶⁷ Friday Vespers of the Third Week after Pascha, Mode Two.

⁶⁸ Resurrection, Orthros Kathisma, Mode Plagal Two.

Saint Romanos chants, "Outside the tomb were soldiers; within was war between Christ and Death."⁶⁹

A hymn from the *Octoechos* identifies the principal angel at the burial site as the Archangel Gabriel: "Descending from the heights above, Gabriel came unto the stone wherein the Rock of Life lay; and arrayed in white, he cried out to the weeping women, 'Cease your tears and your wail of lament, O ye that ever possess loving compassion.'"⁷⁰

Saint Gregory Palamas also names the angel as Gabriel, saying, "It was after all, the same angel of the annunciation, Gabriel. He watched the Theotokos proceed rapidly toward the grave; and thus, he immediately descended. He who in the beginning had told her, 'Rejoice thou who hast been shown grace, the Lord is with thee.... Cease being afraid [Lk. 1:28, 30],' now addresses her with the same exhortation. It was to her, who had seedlessly borne Christ, that he came not only to announce Jesus' resurrection from the dead but also to roll the stone away, to reveal the empty tomb, and to show the grave clothes. In this manner would the good news be verified by her."⁷¹

There was a sublime irony in contrast between man's elaborate precautions by setting a watch at the tomb and the ease with which the divine hand can sweep them aside. We recall the prophetic declaration: "He that dwelleth in the heavens shall laugh them to scorn, and the Lord shall deride them [Ps. 2:4]."

Saint Romanos the Melodist chants, "Without the aid of human hands, the Stone cut from the mountain [Dan. 2:34] has risen—just as once from the womb of the Virgin, so now from the tomb has the Lord risen."⁷² The saint then realistically reports the reaction of the guards in the following poem: "As we were watching over the tomb and taking care lest something happen, suddenly we perceived fiery hands taking away the stone from the tomb, and a voice cried out, 'The Lord is risen.' By him (the angel) the stone was rolled away, and all our force was weakened and nothing was left for us by way of aid, no word, no thought, for we were all dead men—we who guarded the dead. And all our wisdom was consumed suddenly at what we beheld was accomplished. For the one that rolled the stone away looked sternly at us who did not cry, 'The Lord is risen.'"⁷³

⁶⁹ Saint Romanos the Melodist, "Resurrection I," *Kontakia of Romanos, Byzantine Melodist*, Mode One, strophe 13, I:257.

⁷⁰ Resurrection, Orthros Kathisma, Mode Four.

⁷¹ Saint Gregory Palamas, *P.G.* 151:241.

⁷² *Ibid.*, strophe 19, I:259.

⁷³ Saint Romanos the Melodist, "Resurrection II," Mode Plagal Two, strophes 16-17, I:268, 269.

Saint Romanos continues to interview the guards who say: "You may marvel at this: He (the angel), the fiery one, was approachable by the women, but to us wretched men he was not approachable. He conversed with them; he threatened death to us. Them he strengthened; and humbled us with fear. And overtaking us, he buried us. To the women he was joyous; with us he became as one dreaded. He mortified us, but he enlivened them to cry, 'Fear not, the Lord is risen.'"⁷⁴

Saint Gregory Palamas gives his opinion: "The Virgin Mother was there when the earthquake took place, the stone was rolled away, the tomb opened, and the keepers—though shaken with fear—were still present. When they got to their feet after the earthquake they immediately took to flight, whereas the Mother of God delighted herself in the sight without fear. It seems to me that the life-bearing tomb opened first for her sake (because everything in heaven above and on earth below was opened first for her, and through her for us). It also seems to me that the angel shone like lightning on her account, so that even though it was still dark, by the angel's abundant light, she could see not only the empty tomb but also the graveclothes lying in good order and bearing witness in many ways to the fact that He Who had been buried there had risen."⁷⁵



The soldiers sleep while the angel shows the women disciples of the Lord the empty sepulcher.

⁷⁴ Ibid., strophe 18, I:269; Saint Romanos the Melodist, "The Passion of the Lord and the Lamentations of the Theotokos," *Romanos the Melodist, Kontakia* [in Greek], ed. by P.A. Sinopoulos (Athens: Apostolike Diakonias, 1974), 129, 130.

⁷⁵ Saint Gregory Palamas, "Hom. 18, On the Sunday of the Myrrhbearers," § 8, *The Homilies of Saint Gregory Palamas*, ed. by Christopher Veniamin, Vol. One (South Canaan, PA: Saint Tikhon's Seminary Press, 2002), p. 229; P.G. 151:241.

The Angel Speaks to the Women Disciples

After the earthquake and the arrival of the other women, the Evangelist Matthew continues: "The angel answered and said to the women, 'Cease being afraid, for I know that ye seek Jesus Who hath been crucified. He is not here; for He was raised, even as He said. Come, see the place where the Lord was lying. And go quickly and say to His disciples that He was raised from the dead. And behold, He goeth before you into Galilee; there shall ye see Him. Behold, I have told you [Mt. 28:5-8].'"

Saint Romanos, speaking through the guards of the tomb, writes: "When the women stood still, and wisely looked inside the vault, the incorporeal one spoke to them and said, 'The One Whom you seek is risen. But if you do not believe and consider me a phantom, follow me and behold the place where the Lord was lying.' And they went within. At that time we (the guards) fled, and said thus, 'If the servant (the angel) has come and has jolted the earth, what, then, happens now that the Lord is risen?'"⁷⁶

The Evangelist Matthew then records that "some of the guard came into the city and reported to the chief priests all the things that came to pass. And after they were gathered together with the elders and took counsel, they gave a considerable amount of money to the soldiers, saying, 'Say, "His disciples came by night and stole Him while we were sleeping." And if this should be heard before the governor, we will persuade him and make you free from care.' And they took the money and did as they were taught. And this report was spread abroad by the Jews until today [Mt. 28:11-15]." One may well wonder how the guards could see anyone while they slept! However, "They took the money, and did as they were taught [Mt. 28:15]."⁷⁷

Let us now return to the sepulcher. Saint John Chrysostom speaks of the fact that the angel came after the resurrection. "Why did the angel come and take away the stone? Because the women had seen Christ when He was in the sepulcher for burial. Therefore, that they might believe that Christ was risen, they see the sepulcher void of the body. For this cause, the angel removed the stone; for this cause, also an earthquake took place, that they

⁷⁶ Saint Romanos, "Resurrection II," *Kontakia of Romanos, Byzantine Melodist*, strophe 19, I:269, 270.

⁷⁷ Longinos the centurion, who was on duty as the officer in charge, both at the crucifixion and in the watch outside the tomb, refused to accept the bribe, together with two fellow soldiers. When the Jews conspired to kill Longinos, by slandering him to Pilate, he resigned from the military and removed his army belt. He, subsequently, received Baptism and left secretly for Cappadocia. He was still pursued by Pilate's soldiers, and was beheaded by them. He is commemorated by the holy Church on the 16th of October.

might be thoroughly roused and awakened. For they came by night to pour oil on Christ, and it was likely that they had become drowsy.

"Why does the angel say, 'Cease being afraid [Mt. 28:5]?' First he delivers them from dread, and then tells them of the resurrection. And his comment to them 'for I know that ye seek Jesus Who hath been crucified [Mt. 28:5]' is of one showing them great honor, and indicating, that extreme



The Myrrh-bearers

punishment awaits them that had dared to crucify Christ...except they repent. For to be afraid is not for you, the angel means, but for them that crucified Him....The angel, moreover, is not ashamed to call Him 'crucified'; for this is the source of blessings. The angel then notifies the women, saying, 'He is not here; for He was raised, even as He said [Mt. 28:6].' The angel asserts that

Jesus Himself had said it. Hence, 'If ye refuse to believe me (the angel), remember His words, and neither will ye disbelieve me.'⁷⁸

"Then also another proof: 'Come, see the place where the Lord was lying [Mt. 28:6].' For this reason the angel lifted up the stone, in order that from this too they might receive proof. 'And go quickly and say to His disciples that He was raised from the dead. And behold, He goeth before you into Galilee; there shall ye see Him. Behold, I have told you [Mt. 28:7].' The angel prepares them to bear good tidings to others. Well did Christ utter, 'into Galilee,' thereby freeing them from troubles and dangers (existent then in Judaea), so that fear might not hinder their faith.'⁷⁹

The Evangelist Luke notes that the women "entered and did not find the body of the Lord Jesus [Lk. 24:3]." Sidestepping the unconscious soldiers, the women enter the tomb. Once inside, they behold another angel, appearing as a young man with blazing white garments [Mk. 16:5]. Soon after, this angel was joined by the Archangel Gabriel who had been sitting outside the tomb. The angels then spoke to the women disciples words of encouragement. "Why

⁷⁸ Mk. 8:31.

⁷⁹ Saint Chrysostom, "Hom. LXXXIX," *Matthew*, Nicene, 1st Ser., X:527.

seek ye the living among the dead? He is not here, but was raised. Remember how He spoke to you when He was yet in Galilee, saying, 'It is necessary for the Son of Man to be delivered up into the hands of sinful men, and be crucified, and the third day to rise [Lk. 24:5-8].'"

Saint Kyril of Alexandria (d. 444) comments that "for their love's sake unto Christ, and their earnest zeal thereunto, they were counted worthy of seeing holy angels, who even told them the joyful tidings, and became the heralds of the resurrection.... And more firmly to settle the faith of the women in these things, the angels recall to their minds what Christ had said."⁸⁰

Saint Romanos then dramatically describes the scene between the incorporeal and the women. He portrays the God-loving women advancing, like in a procession, saying, "The words of thy divine mouth, like drops of moisture will now refresh us, so that we may not die from terror." Then the angel who was sitting on the stone spoke, "Be ye not afraid; but the men who guard the tomb tremble, cower in fear, and are deadened from fear of me, in order that they may learn that He is Lord of the angels, He Whom they now guard but Whom they do not control. For the Lord is risen, and they do not know how He has roused Himself."⁸¹

The drama continues for Saint Romanos when the angel says, "Henceforth be immortal, O women; do not be subject to death. Ye seek to behold the Creator of angels, then why do ye fear the sight of one angel? I am the servant of the One Who inhabited the tomb; I have the rank and nature of a slave. As I have been commanded, I am here to announce to you, 'The Lord is risen.'⁸²

"The women then, taking a commendable courage from the voice of the angel, respond wisely, "'The Lord was raised indeed [Lk. 24:34]," as thou dost say. Thou hast proved to us by thy words and attitude that the merciful One has risen; for if He had not risen and departed from the tomb, thou wouldest not be seated. For when would a soldier of the king be seated and conversing if the king were present? Indeed such things are not done on high where there is the invisible throne and the ineffable One seated thereon."⁸³

Why Mourn Ye the Incorruptible Amid Corruption?⁸⁴

Saint Gregory Palamas writes that "the evangelists record that the women both prepared [Lk. 23:56] and bought [Mk. 16:1] spices and fragrant

⁸⁰ Saint Cyril of Alexandria, "Hom. 24," *Commentary on the Gospel of Saint Luke*, trans. by R. Payne Smith (NY: Studion Publishers, Inc., 1983), p. 615.

⁸¹ Saint Romanos the Melodist, "Resurrection VI," *Kontakia of Romanos, Byzantine Melodist*, Mode Plagal Four, strophe 19, I:322.

⁸² Ibid., strophe 20, I:322, 323.

⁸³ Ibid., strophe 21, I:323.

⁸⁴ Pascha, Sticheron, Mode Plagal One.

oils. They did not yet clearly know that He is truly the 'Perfume' of life for them that approach Him with faith; just as He is the 'odour' of death for them that remain unbelievers.⁸⁵ The myrrh-bearers did not yet clearly know that the fragrance of His clothes and His own body is greater than all perfumes and that His name is like myrrh that is poured out to cover the world with divine fragrance. For them that desired to remain close by the body, they contrived an antidote of perfumes that they might anoint it for the supposed stench of decomposition."⁸⁶

The hymnographer, Saint Theophanes the "Branded" (1381), writes elsewhere: "Thy flesh beheld not corruption in the sepulcher, O Master. But as it was composed without seed, it received not corruption in conformity with nature; for in a transcendent manner it was not subservient thereto."⁸⁷

On the Sunday of the Holy Myrrh-bearers, the Church chants: "Unto the myrrh-bearing women did the angel cry out as he stood by the grave: 'Myrrh-oils are meet for the dead, but Christ hath proved to be a stranger to corruption. But cry out, "The Lord is risen, granting great mercy to the world."'"⁸⁸ Indeed, another hymn of the same feast mentions that though myrrh oils were not needed, yet, their compassionate purpose was pleasing unto God.⁸⁹

Saint Gregory Palamas continues to write that "they prepared the myrrh and spices and rested on the sabbath according to the commandment. They had not yet experienced the true Sabbath, nor did they yet understand that exceedingly blessed Sabbath that transports us from the confines of Hades to the perfection of the bright and divine heights of heaven."⁹⁰

Go, Proclaim the Resurrection unto the Apostles!

The women disciples "went out quickly from the sepulcher with fear and great joy, and ran to bring tidings to His disciples [Mt. 28:8]." Having heard the words of holy joy from the angels sitting upon the stone at the grave of the Logos, those blessed women showed exceeding haste as they ran. Thus, they left behind their previous rank of myrrh-bearers and were seen to be proclaimers unto the initiates of Him Who became incarnate for our sakes of the most joyous and good tidings of His rising from the chambers of dark Hades.⁹¹ They exclaimed exultantly, "Why are you disheartened? Why do you hide your faces? Lift up your hearts, Christ is risen....Therefore, do not be

⁸⁵ Cf. 2 Cor. 2:15, 16.

⁸⁶ Saint Gregory Palamas, *P.G.* 151:240BC.

⁸⁷ Wednesday of Mid-Pentecost, Orthros Canon, Ode One, Mode Four.

⁸⁸ Dismissal Hymn, Theotokion of the Feast, Mode Two.

⁸⁹ Sessional Hymn after Second Orthros Kathisma, Mode Two.

⁹⁰ Saint Gregory Palamas, *P.G.* 151:240C.

⁹¹ Wednesday of the Third Week after Pascha, Vespers, Mode Two.

downcast, but take courage.”⁹² For, “Death is despoiled and Christ God is risen, granting great mercy to the world!”⁹³

Saint John Chrysostom continues then to explain why they departed from the sepulcher with both fear and joy. “They had seen an amazing thing, and beyond expectation, an empty tomb, where they had before seen Him laid. Therefore, also he (the angel) had led them to the sight, that they might become witnesses of two things: Christ’s tomb and His resurrection. For the women considered that no man could have taken Christ, unless He raised up Himself. For this cause also they rejoice and wonder, and receive the reward of so much continuance with Him, that they should first see and gladly declare, not only what had been said but also what they had beheld.”⁹⁴



The Women Proclaim the Resurrection

However, the Evangelist Mark makes mention that the women “went out and fled from the sepulcher. And trembling and ecstasy held them fast, and to no one did they say anything, for they were afraid [Mk. 16:8].” There is no contradiction here. What this means is that they did not pause to inform anyone else as they hurried back.

Saint Gregory Palamas interjects at this point, saying, “I am of the opinion that Mary Magdalene and the other women who had come up to that point were still frightened. They did not yet understand the meaning of the angel’s powerful words, nor did they contain to the end the power of the light so as to see and understand with great exactitude. But I think that the Mother of God made this great joy her own, since she comprehended the words of the angel. Her whole person radiated from the light, for she was all-pure and full of divine grace. She firmly appropriated all these signs as the truth. She believed the Archangel Gabriel, since, previously, he showed himself worthy of trust. The Virgin was an eyewitness to these events; therefore, why should

⁹² Ibid.

⁹³ Resurrection Troparion, Mode Two.

⁹⁴ Saint Chrysostom, “Hom. LXXXIX,” *Matthew*, Nicene, 1st Ser., loc. cit.

she not comprehend what had occurred with divine wisdom? She beheld the earthquake and the great angel descending from the heights like lightning. She



*The Myrrh-bearers Hear
"Rejoice ye [Mt. 28:9]!"*

beheld the guards fall as dead men, the rolling away of the huge stone and the empty tomb. She also was an eyewitness to the great miracle concerning her Son's burial garments in that they were kept in place by myrrh and aloes, though they contained no body. Together with all these signs, she beheld the joyous countenance of the angel and heard his joyful message."⁹⁵ On the other hand, "some of the women left the tomb frightened and ecstatic without saying anything." At this juncture, Saint Gregory then says, "Other women followed the Mother of the Lord and because they happened to be with her they saw and heard the Lord too. Now

Mary Magdalene had earlier parted their company, hastening to Peter...but then she re-united with the women."⁹⁶

The Women Disciples Cast off the Ancestral Condemnation⁹⁷

But as the women disciples were going to bring tidings to the Lord's disciples, then "behold, Jesus met them, saying, 'Rejoice ye.' And they approached and laid hold of His feet, and made obeisance to Him. Then Jesus saith to them, 'Cease being frightened. Go and bring tidings to My brethren that they should go into Galilee, and there shall they see Me [Mt. 28:9, 10].'"

Saint Gregory Palamas maintain that "when the Theotokos, together with Mary Magdalene, heard the good news of the resurrection from the angel, only the Theotokos understood the meaning of the words. In the same way now when, in the company of the other women, she met her Son and God, she was the first of them all to see and recognize the risen Lord, and falling down before Him she grasped His feet and became His apostle to the apostles. It is from John that we learn that Mary Magdalene was not with the Mother of God

⁹⁵ Saint Gregory Palamas, *P.G.* 151:244AB.

⁹⁶ *P.G.* 151:241, 244C.

⁹⁷ Resurrection Tropic, Mode Four.

at the time when the Lord met her as she was returning from the tomb. For Mary ran to speak to Simon Peter, and to the other disciple, whom Jesus loved (namely John).⁹⁸

Saint John Chrysostom comments that the women “first see Jesus; and the sex that was most condemned, this first enjoys the sight of the blessings, this most shows its courage. And when the disciples had fled, they were present.”⁹⁹ Saint John Chrysostom then says that they departed with emotions high from the sepulcher: “With exceeding joy and gladness they ran unto Him, and received by the touch also, an infallible proof, and full assurance of the resurrection. And they worshipped Him. And what then does He say to them? ‘Cease being frightened.’ Again, He casts out their fear, making way for faith, ‘Go and bring tidings to My brethren that they should go into Galilee, and there shall they see Me.’ Note how He Himself sends good tidings to His disciples by these women, bringing to honor—as I have often said, that sex, which was most dishonored—and to good hopes; and healing that which was diseased.”¹⁰⁰

Saint Kyril of Alexandria writes that when they departed the sepulcher, after “having been taught the mystery by the voice of angels, the women ran to tell these things to the disciples. Indeed it was fitting that this grace—though so splendid—should be granted unto women. For she who of old was the ‘minister of death’ is now freed from her guilt by ministering unto the voice of the holy angels, and by being the first both to learn and tell the adorable mystery of the resurrection. The female sex, therefore, gained both acquittal from their reproach and the reversal of their curse. For He Who of old had said unto them, ‘In pains thou shalt bear children [Gen. 3:16],’ gave them deliverance from their misfortune, by having met them in the garden, as another evangelist mentions,¹⁰¹ and said, ‘Rejoice.’ To the holy apostles, however, the account of the resurrection seemed to be absolutely but an idle tale and a falsehood; for even they did not know the inspired Scripture, and so they were incredulous. Thus, they mocked the news and rejected it.”¹⁰²

Eve had hearkened to the word of the serpent and went astray; the women disciples hearkened to the word of the angel and did well. Eve instructed Adam and he hearkened. The women disciples proclaimed the news to the men disciples, but they considered their words as false. Adam and Eve

⁹⁸ Saint Gregory Palamas, “Hom. 18, On the Sunday of the Myrrhbearers,” § 11, *The Homilies of Saint Gregory Palamas*, p. 231.

⁹⁹ Saint Chrysostom, “Hom. LXXXVIII,” *Matthew*, Nicene, 1st Ser., loc. cit.

¹⁰⁰ Idem. “Hom. LXXXIX,” loc. cit.

¹⁰¹ Mt. 28:9.

¹⁰² Saint Cyril of Alexandria, “Hom. 24,” *Commentary on the Gospel of Saint Luke*, loc. cit.

hid in the garden from our Savior, but in another garden, He greets the women with “Rejoice!”—but to His disciples He upbraids them for their unbelief.



*The Myrrh-bearers meet the risen Lord.
The women declare to the disciples that Christ is risen.*

The Evangelist Luke records that, after leaving the sepulcher, the women disciples **“related all these things to the eleven and to all the rest [Lk. 24:9]. And there were Mary Magdalene, and Joanna, and Mary the Mother of Iakovos, and the rest of the women with them, who were telling these things to the apostles [Lk. 24:10]. And their words seemed as nonsense before them, and they kept on disbelieving them [Lk. 24:11].”**

Saint Gregory of Nyssa adds to his Eve-Mary theme that since Mary “is the root of joy” it is fitting that she should spread the joyous news of the resurrection. Thus we chant, “Most glorified art thou, O Virgin Theotokos. We praise thee, for through the Cross of Thy Son, Hades was cast down and death was slain. Having been put to death, we were raised up and were deemed worthy of life. We received Paradise, the ancient bliss. Therefore, in thanksgiving, we glorify Christ our God, since He is mighty and alone abundant in mercy.”¹⁰³

Christ First Appears to His Mother

The Evangelist Mark, citing Saint Mary Magdalene as first to behold the risen Lord, does not mention the Theotokos when he writes: **“Now after**

¹⁰³ Sessional Hymn, Theotokion, Orthros, Mode Two.

He rose early the first day of the week, He appeared first to Mary Magdalene, from whom He had cast out seven demons. She went and brought tidings to those who had been with Him, who were mourning and weeping [Mk. 16:9, 10]." It is evident that the testimony of Christ's Mother as the first to behold Him might be construed as suspicious or, at best, the hysterical longings of a bereaved mother.¹⁰⁴ Therefore, the Evangelist Mark left it for the Evangelists Matthew and John to narrate how the Theotokos and Saint Mary Magdalene met the risen Lord, albeit not at the same moment. Thus, the Evangelist Mark writes that He had first appeared to Saint Mary Magdalene [Mk. 16:9].¹⁰⁵

It is not unusual to find Orthodox hymnographers of different centuries concurring that Christ first met His Mother. Thus, the resurrectional hymn notes that "Mary stood by the grave seeking Thine immaculate body. Thou didst despoil Hades and was not tried thereby. Thou didst meet the Virgin, and didst grant us life."¹⁰⁶

In Saint Romanos' poem, "Mary at the Cross," he writes about Christ consoling His Mother from the Cross: "Be reassured, O Mother, thou wilt be the first to see Me leave the tomb."¹⁰⁷

One of the hymnographers composing hymns for the Feast of the Myrrh-bearers, Saint Theophanes the Poet, chants, "As thou beholdest thy Son and God arisen, thou rejoicest with the apostles, O pure one, graced of God, and wast the first to hear the greeting, 'Rejoice,' as thou art the cause of the joy of all, O all-blameless Mother of God."¹⁰⁸

Saint Hesychios of Jerusalem (d. ca. 451) speaks of Mary Theotokos since she "who introduced virginity, contained God in her womb, gave birth in the flesh to the Creator, first welcomed Jesus coming back from the dead, and began to proclaim the resurrection, thus revealing joy to the disciples."¹⁰⁹

Saint George of Nikomedia (ca. 880) devotes a homily to the Virgin at the sepulcher of the dead Christ, in which he adheres to a tradition already established in the east, that Christ appeared first after the resurrection to Mary,

¹⁰⁴ Sunday of Pascha, in the "Pentecostarion" Volume, *The Great Synaxaristes of the Orthodox Church* (in Greek), op. cit., XIV:34-36; Thursday of the Ascension of the Lord in the "Pentecostarion" Volume, *The Great Synaxaristes*, XIV:270.

¹⁰⁵ Sunday of Pascha in the "Pentecostarion" Volume, *The Great Synaxaristes*, XIV:21, 22.

¹⁰⁶ Resurrection Dismissal Hymn, Mode Plagal Two.

¹⁰⁷ *Presentation*, 12, cited in *Sources Chretiennes* (Lyons), 128, 176.

¹⁰⁸ Canon of the Theotokos for the Sunday of the Myrrh-bearers, Ode One, Mode One.

¹⁰⁹ Saint Hesychios of Jerusalem, "Hom. 1, in Praesent.," 2, in Michel Aubineau ed., Cf. M. Aubineau, S.J., *Les Homelies festales d'Hesychius de Jerusalem* (Brussels, 1979), 13-15.

His Mother. "Thus accordingly...upon her the clear light and joy of the resurrection shone."¹¹⁰

Sharing this idea also, Saint Gregory Palamas writes: "Before all others, the good news of the resurrection of Christ was received by the Theotokos from the Lord Himself. This, verily, is meet and right. She was the first to see Him after the resurrection and she had the joy of hearing His voice first. Moreover, she not only beheld Him and heard Him, but with her hands she was the first to touch His immaculate feet. The evangelists do not mention these points clearly. They do not want to present the Mother's witness, for it might promote suspicion among nonbelievers."¹¹¹

Saint Gregory Palamas also makes the following comparison: "The resurrection of the Lord was the regeneration of human nature...and re-creation of the first Adam, whom sin led to death. The resurrection is the return to immortal life. Whereas, no one saw the first man Adam when he was created and given life.... Woman was the first person to see him after he had received the breath of life by divine in-breathing.... Likewise, no one saw the second Adam, that is, the Lord, rise from the dead.... Following the resurrection, however, it was a woman (the new Eve) who saw Him first."¹¹²

Archbishop Nikon of Vologda and Totma (d. 1917), in a sermon, comments: "Sacred tradition says that immediately upon His arising from the tomb, the resurrected Lord hastened to comfort His beloved and most-blameless Mother. He had appeared to her before appearing to anyone else. Indeed, prior to greeting anyone else, He greeted His Mother with His all-joyful, 'Rejoice.' Only because of her ineffable humility did the most holy Virgin desire that this event, the appearance of her Son to her upon His resurrection, an event which concerned her personally, should not be added to the account of the holy evangelist."¹¹³

The Men Disciples at the Tomb with Saint Mary

The Evangelist John, writing from his own perspective, gives a greatly abridged version of Saint Mary Magdalene at the tomb, specifically, not mentioning her companion myrrh-bearers. Writing exclusively about her, he records that, leaving at dark and coming to the tomb, she finds the stone taken

¹¹⁰ Saint George of Nikomedia, *SS. Mariam assistentem in sepulchro*, in *P.G.* 100:1497A.

¹¹¹ Saint Gregory Palamas, *P.G.* 151:237AB-241BC; also *In Dorm.*, in *P.G.* 151:468A; "Hom. 20," col. 269C, cited in John Meyendorff, *A Study of Gregory Palamas*, trans. from French by George Lawrence (London: Faith Press, 1964), p. 233.

¹¹² Saint Gregory Palamas, *P.G.* 151:236, 237.

¹¹³ "A Day of Paradisiacal Joy," *Orthodox Life* 39, No. 2 (March-April, 1989): 2; trans. by Rassaphor-monk Michael from *Priavlenia k Tserkovnim Vedomostic* (Supplement to Church Reports), Nos. 12-13, 22 Mar. 1915, pp. 395-397.

away. Among the myrrh-bearers, it is she alone who runs to inform both him (the author John) and Peter that the body is missing; and, therefore, he writes solely about her.

Saint Romanos warmly writes about this Mary saying, "It was dark, but love lighted the way for her."¹¹⁴ "Then she runneth and cometh to Simon Peter, and to the other disciple, whom Jesus was regarding with affection, and saith to them, 'They took away the Lord out of the sepulcher, and we know not where they laid Him [Jn. 20:2].'" After this declaration, "we know not where," it is evident that she went not alone, nevertheless, she was absent when the angels told her other companions that the Lord was alive and had risen. Having seen the stone rolled away, in her amazement she could not understand what had become of the body; where could that body now be? It was for this reason that she wanted the preminent disciple Peter to go back there and see what he could find out.

Saint Gregory Palamas writes about Saint Mary Magdalene, saying, "In responding to the announcement of the angel, Mary acted as though she did not hear at all. The angel had not, in fact, spoken directly to her. After running to Peter and to the other disciple, as Saint John says, she testifies only to the empty tomb and says nothing about the grave clothes. The Mother of God went to the sepulcher where she met the other women....Just as the Theotokos alone understood the power of the angelic words—even if she heard the good news of the resurrection together with Saint Mary Magdalene—when she met her Son and God with the other women, she saw and recognized the risen One before all the other women. Falling down, she touched His feet and became His apostle to His apostles."¹¹⁵

Saint Romanos relates the following about Mary Magdalene: "And so she saw the great stone rolled away from the entrance of the tomb, and she returned and said, 'Disciples, learn what I saw, and do not keep secret what you understand. The stone no longer covers the tomb. Would they have taken away my Lord?...Would He not have risen, He Who offers resurrection to the fallen?'"¹¹⁶

The younger and faster disciple John outran Peter, which Saint Romanos describes thus: "When Cephas and the son of Zebedee heard this, immediately they ran as though in a race with one another."¹¹⁷ John was first, but gave place, due to seniority, to Peter who went inside the chamber and found it indeed empty. He then noticed the linen clothes (*othonia*), because

¹¹⁴ Saint Romanos, "Resurrection VI," strophe 3, I:315.

¹¹⁵ Saint Gregory Palamas, *P.G.* 151:244CD, 245.

¹¹⁶ Saint Romanos, "Resurrection VI," loc. cit.

¹¹⁷ *Ibid.*, strophe 4, I:316.

they were lying in a remarkable position. Instead of being spread out in a long, jumbled strip, it was still all wrapped together in one spot (*entetyligmenon ees ena topon*). Moreover, the handkerchief (*soudarion*) that had been wound around the head of Jesus was not unwound and tossed on the shroud, but was still wrapped together. Jesus' body passed through the cocoon of spice-impregnated bandages; they had retained the form they had when covering the entombed body, that is, wrapped together.

Saint John Chrysostom comments, "They drew near. They saw the linen clothes lying, which was a sign of the resurrection. If any persons had either removed or stolen the body, they would not have taken the trouble either to strip it or to fold the napkin and roll it...and lay it in a place by itself. But how would they have executed it? They would have taken the body as it was. On this account, the Evangelist John tells us by anticipation that it was buried with much myrrh, which glues linen to the body not less firmly than lead. He speaks of these details in order that when thou hearest that the napkins lay apart, thou mayest not endure those who say that He was stolen. For a thief would not have been so foolish as to spend so much trouble on a superfluous matter. For why should he undo the clothes? And how could he have escaped detection if he had done so? For it would have required much time in so doing, and he would have been caught delaying and loitering. But why do the clothes lie apart, while the napkin was wrapped together by itself? That thou mayest learn that it was not the action of men in confusion or haste, the placing some in one place, some in another, and the wrapping them together. Now to separate, and to place one thing by itself, and another, after rolling it up, by itself, was the act of someone doing things carefully, and not in a chance way, as if disturbed."¹¹⁸

"Therefore the other disciple, who came first to the sepulcher, then also entered, and saw and believed [Jn. 20:8]." Saint Romanos concludes: "Behold the disciples hastening to the tomb, how they surmised His resurrection from the funeral shrouds and the napkin that had lain upon His face; and they remembered the Scriptures concerning Him."¹¹⁹

In other words, no one had removed the grave clothes from the corpse in the usual way; it was as if the body had simply passed right out of the head cloth and shroud and left them empty. John then believed that no one had removed the body from that tomb. The body had simply left the tomb and left the grave clothes on its own power, passing through all those layers of cloth without unwrapping them at all. Jesus had not been removed by other hands; He had raised Himself from the dead.

¹¹⁸ Saint Chrysostom, "Hom. LXXXV," *John*, Nicene, 1st Ser., XIV:321.

¹¹⁹ Resurrection, Orthros Eothionon (Doxastikon), Grave Mode.

Saint Romanos then joyfully exclaims, "Even if Thou didst descend into the tomb, O immortal One, still Thou hast overthrown the power of Hades and Thou hast risen victor, O Christ God; to the women bearing incense Thou hast said, 'Rejoice ye [Mt. 28:9],' and on Thine apostles Thou hast bestowed peace [Jn. 20:19], Thou who dost offer resurrection to the fallen."¹²⁰ O modest myrrh-bearers, beseech Christ that we might attain to the splendor of the saints. Request of Him that He grant us that glory without end, since you, O blessed O God, have great boldness with Him.¹²¹

Saint Mary Magdalene Returns Alone to the Tomb

Mary Magdalene came along at a slower pace, after the runners Peter and John. In fact, she had gotten back to the tomb only when Peter and John had already departed. She arrived alone, but did not immediately enter until she had paused to weep for a little while outside.

Saint John Chrysostom remarks, "Full of feeling somehow is the female sex, and more than men inclined to pity. Mary weeps bitterly at the tomb, while Peter was in no way so affected. Mary did not know yet accurately the account of the resurrection; whereas the two disciples having seen the linen clothes and believed, departed to their own homes in astonishment. However, the Evangelist John himself comments that both Peter and he had not known 'the Scripture, that it is necessary for Him to rise from the dead [Jn. 20:9].'"¹²²

Our rhythmical poet, Saint Romanos, believes that what has happened is in accordance with the divine plan: that women, who were first to fall, would be the first to see the resurrected One. He also writes that Christ's greeting of "Rejoice," would be a sign to them (womankind) that mourn.

Saint Romanos conceives of Mary Magdalene's words and tears [Jn. 20:11] to mean that she indeed understood—though not perfectly—that He resurrected, and says this about her as she remained at the tomb: "She truly believed that the body had been raised up. And so she cried out, not with words but with tears, 'Woe is me, my Jesus, where have they taken Thee? How didst Thou endure, immortal One, to be lifted up by dishonored hands. The six-winged ones...cry, "Holy, Holy, Holy [Is. 6:3]"; and their shoulders can scarcely carry Thee, yet did the hands of deceivers lift Thee up?'"¹²³

Saint John Chrysostom continues: "Mary stood at the place, for even the sight of the tomb tended greatly to comfort her. And she received no small

¹²⁰ Saint Romanos, "Resurrection VI, Prooimion," p. 314.

¹²¹ *Pentecostarion*, Thursday Vespers of the Third Week of the Myrrh-bearers, Mode Plagal Four.

¹²² Saint Chrysostom, "Hom. LXXXVI," *John*, Nicene, 1st Ser., XIV (Oak Harbor, WA: Logos Research Systems, Inc., 1997).

¹²³ Saint Romanos, strophe 7, I:317.

reward for her zeal. For what the disciples saw not, this woman saw: angels sitting, the one at the feet, the other at the head, in white; even the appearance was full of much radiance and joy.”¹²⁴

For the resurrection, we chant: “O Lord, Mary Magdalene was present at Thy tomb and thinking Thee to be a gardener. She wept, crying aloud and saying, ‘Where hast thou concealed Him that is eternal life? Where hast thou placed Him that sitteth on a cherubic throne? For they that guarded Him became as dead for fear. Either give me back my Lord, or cry out with me, “O Thou that wast among the dead and hast raised up the dead, glory be to Thee!”’”¹²⁵



*Saint Mary Magdalene
Meets the Lord*

Saint Romanos then continues her soliloquy: “Arise, stand up, and be revealed to them that seek Thee, Thou Who dost offer resurrection to the fallen.” Then, He Who sees all, conquered by her weeping and touched by her suffering, was at once moved to pity.¹²⁶ The Savior then appears and speaks to her. “Knowing that Mary would recognize His voice, like a shepherd, calling His crying lamb, He says, ‘Mary.’ And she at once recognized Him.”¹²⁷ Mary heard her name in those well-remembered accents that had first unbound her from

seven-fold demoniac power and called her into a new life. This was another unbinding, into a new life.

From the sequel, Mary Magdalene’s actions and responses reveal that she left the tomb before the other women. She did not yet have the benefit of the angels’ explanation and exhortation, nor had she as yet seen the neatly arranged burial clothes.

Saint Gregory Palamas affirms this making the following observation of Saint Mary Magdalene when he remarks that “she had not yet seen Him nor

¹²⁴ Saint Chrysostom, “Hom. LXXXVI,” *John*, Nicene, 1st Ser., XIV:323.

¹²⁵ Resurrection, Orthros Kathisma, Mode Plagal Two.

¹²⁶ Saint Romanos, “Resurrection VI,” strophe 9, I:318.

¹²⁷ *Ibid.*, strophe 10, loc. cit.

had been informed of the resurrection." The saint continues, saying, "When the angels appeared and addressed her—'Woman, why weepest thou [Jn. 20:13]?'—she answers as if she thought He were dead by asking where He is lain. If she has seen and touched Him with her hands and heard Him speak, how could she say to the 'supposed gardener' the words, 'Sir, if Thou didst bear Him away, tell me where Thou didst lay Him, and I will take Him away [Jn. 20:15]?'...She had not yet come to understanding until Christ called her by name and showed her that He was the Same."¹²⁸

"Cease Touching Me"

Hence, Saint Mary fell down before Jesus and attempts to embrace His feet in greeting. The Lord bids her not.¹²⁹ "From this," comments Saint Gregory Palamas, "we learn that when the Lord appeared earlier to His Mother and the women with her, it was only His Mother whom He allowed to touch His feet—even though Matthew attributes this action to the other women too, being unwilling to put forward the Lord's Mother as a witness to such events for the reason we stated in the beginning."¹³⁰

But let us return to the story in the Gospel of John by listening to a hymn of Saint Romanos. "Then, Mary carried away by the warmth of her affection and by her fervent love, the maiden hastened and wished to touch Him, the One Who fills all creation without being confined by boundaries. The Creator did not find fault with her eagerness; but lifted her to the divine when He said, 'Cease touching Me [Jn. 20:17]; or dost thou consider Me merely human? I am God, do not touch Me. O holy woman, lift up thine eyes and consider the heavenly spheres. Seek Me there, for I ascend to My Father, Whom I have not left. For I share His throne, and with Him I am without time and beginning, I Who offer resurrection to the fallen.'¹³¹

Saint Leo the Great (d. 461) comments that when Christ said to Mary Magdalene not to touch Him, "'for I have not yet ascended to My Father [Jn. 20:17],' it was to say, 'I would not have thee come to Me as to a human body, nor yet recognize Me by fleshly perceptions. I put thee off for higher things. I prepare greater things for thee. When I have ascended to My Father, then thou shalt handle Me more perfectly and truly: for thou shalt grasp what thou canst not touch; and thou shalt believe what thou canst not see.'¹³²

The Savior then commissions her: "Hasten Mary, and gather together My disciples. I use thee as a trumpet with a powerful voice. Sound forth peace

¹²⁸ Saint Gregory Palamas, *P.G.* 151:244D, 245.

¹²⁹ Jn. 20:15-17.

¹³⁰ Saint Gregory Palamas, "Hom. 18, On the Sunday of the Myrrhbearers," § 12, *The Homilies of Saint Gregory Palamas*, p. 232.

¹³¹ Saint Romanos, "Resurrection VI," strophe 11, I:319.

¹³² Saint Leo the Great, "Sermon 84," Nicene, 2nd Ser., XII:189.

to the fearful ears of My concealed friends. Arouse them all as from sleep...saying, 'The Bridegroom has arisen from the tomb, and nothing has been left in the tomb.'"¹³³

Saint Mary Magdalene then went and spoke exultantly to the disciples and to the women of their group. When the grave had been opened, and Hades was lamenting, Mary cried unto the hidden apostles: "Come forth, ye workers of the vineyard. Preach the word of the resurrection. The Lord is risen, granting great mercy to the world."¹³⁴

Saint Mary Magdalene,

Counted in the Ranks of the Apostles¹³⁵

After the ascension of the Lord, Mary Magdalene's life again became quiet and peaceful. She lived with the Theotokos in the home of the Evangelist John in Sion. Mary Magdalene was about seven years younger than the Theotokos. She esteemed and attended the Theotokos as a sister dearly beloved.

On the day of Pentecost, fifty days after the resurrection, Saint Mary Magdalene, too, received the Holy Spirit. The strong desire then entered her heart to expose them that unjustly condemned and slew the Christ. She resolved to go to Rome and present her case before Emperor Tiberius (A.D. 14-A.D. 37) against Governor Pilate and High Priests Annas and Caiaphas.

Greatly moved in her heart to accomplish this feat, she went before the holy Virgin with tears in her eyes and said: "My Lady and Mother of the King of All, Christ our God: Grant to thine unworthy handmaid thy blessing to depart. I desire to make a long journey for two reasons: The first is to lodge a complaint with Tiberius Caesar Augustus of the unlawful tribunal where they unjustly condemned thy righteous Son; the other reason is that I might preach to whomever I meet concerning the Faith of the risen Jesus. I will tell them that the resurrection is not a fable, but an indisputable event that is both true and sublime, which I myself witnessed."

The Theotokos then looked upon Mary with loving eyes. Mary Magdalene then continued saying to the Virgin, "How shall I be separated from the affection and friendship of such a beloved soul? How much will I be deprived of thy company and our many spiritual bonds? How can I not behold thy blessed eyes which were vouchsafed to gaze upon thy risen Son and which have rendered me tender consolation?"

After this, the Theotokos gave Mary her blessing to depart. Then as a genuine mother, the Virgin-Mother helped Mary prepare and pack for the

¹³³ Saint Romanos, "Resurrection VI," strophe 13, I:319.

¹³⁴ Resurrection, Orthros Kathisma, Mode Plagal Two.

¹³⁵ July 22nd, Orthros Canon, Ode Nine, Mode Plagal Four.

voyage, for she understood that it was God's will that Mary depart. Mary had no fear of traveling such a long distance with all its attendant dangers and perils. She was secure in her belief that the unsleeping God would navigate her little sailing vessel across the waves to Rome.¹³⁶

A hymn taken from the service of Saint Mary Magdalene lauds her in these words: "Nothing on earth hast thou preferred to the love of Christ our God. Smitten by His excellencies alone and by the flashes of light sent down on thee directly, O honored saint, thou hast trodden in His footsteps, crying aloud, 'I magnify Thee of many mercies.'"¹³⁷

Saint Mary Magdalene in Rome

In *The Great Synaxaristes* (in Greek)¹³⁸ we learn that, at great personal risk but with exceeding love, Mary went to Rome. When she took ship from Antioch, there was an elderly gentleman on board. When the ship put in at Syracuse, then the chief port of Sicily, he met with his wife. The aged couple, having been moved by God to help Mary, did not wish to leave her unescorted and unassisted in the empire's bustling capital. The gray-haired elder, named Onesimos, together with his Hebrew wife, Galatia, acted as protectors and guides. They brought her to the Forum in Rome. Despite the trouble that lay ahead, Mary was not disheartened. She had already spoken to Onesimos on the ship about her mission and about Jesus' teachings, for which he came to believe in Him as true God. He, too, therefore, received holy Baptism and preached the Gospel. Both his wife and granddaughter Lucy would also become Christians. Since they offered hospitality to Mary, the occasion came when Onesimos and Galatia brought her to the Palatine Hill, the site of fabulous palaces as well as notorious prisons.¹³⁹

On another occasion, when Mary Magdalene and Galatia were alone, Galatia pointed out the Senate. At that moment, Mary's mind flew to Sion. She then prophesied to Galatia how Rome would come to embrace Christ. Galatia then asked Mary if it were true that her husband understood correctly that Jesus healed lepers in Palestine. Mary affirmed this as an eyewitness. Galatia, needing to rest and sit down, then showed Mary her swollen and blackened legs with protruding veins that were hidden under her long tunic. Mary made the sign of the Cross over the afflicted limbs, saying, "In the name of our Lord and God and Savior, my Jesus Christ, be healed." Following this utterance, Galatia rose up energetically. She found that her disease was completely taken

¹³⁶ *The Life of Saint Mary Magdalene* (in Greek), Mother Magdalene, ed., Chaps. 7 and 8, pp. 38-42.

¹³⁷ July 22nd, Orthros Canon, Ode Nine, Mode Plagal Four.

¹³⁸ *The Great Synaxaristes* (in Greek), Vol. VII, 5th ed., s.v. "July 22nd."

¹³⁹ *The Life of Saint Mary Magdalene* (in Greek), Mother Magdalene, ed., Ch. 9, pp. 43-49; *The Great Synaxaristes* (in Greek), VII:429.

away. As they walked to the marble palace, Galatia asked the equal-to-the-apostles her opinion about the idols, for the statue of Diana (Artemis) was before them. Mary said the images are deaf and senseless. Galatia blushed at this answer, and saw her error in giving them any consequence. She then confessed to Mary, "I left my home in Jericho, some forty years ago when marrying Onesimos. I have been so long away from home and living among idolaters that I sometimes do not remember God and the law of Moses."

By this time, they arrived outside the gate of the palace. The centurion, a dusky man of barbaric Roman stock, cast a fierce eye at the women. "What is your business here?" he bellowed. Galatia said boldly, "To see Caesar. It is Caesar whom we wish." The centurion then changed his stance. He smiled and chuckled at the women, saying, "What say you? You wish to see Caesar?" Galatia, flattering him, said, "Yes, excellency, it is Caesar whom we would see. It is necessary that this foreign lady converse with him. She has to inform him upon a very important and serious matter. If his Majesty condescends to hear her, then I promise you, my young man, that Caesar shall receive a great boon to his flagging health which I have heard circulating it not very good. Trust me, excellency, this lady here is able to benefit Caesar and the souls of this empire by her salutary petitions on behalf of all." The centurion then raised his war-club that was shod with metal, saying, "Do you see this? I am going to bring it down upon your heads." Galatia, feeling a shiver down her spine, pulled at Mary's tunic and said in Hebrew: "Let us move back. These Romans are as senseless as beasts. This fellow in no wise is going to let us pass. But let me try again in another way." Galatia then spoke sweetly to the guard, saying, "My son, pardon me if I distressed thee. Thou seemest to be a fine and valiant officer, one in whom, I am sure, thy mother is quite proud. May thou thrive, O centurion, and become a commander of a thousand (*chiliarch*). If thou wilt admit this foreign lady into the presence of Caesar, thou shalt not be without a reward from me. My husband, Onesimos, only yesterday, returned from the mercantile center. I promise that he will give thee whatsoever thou wilt ask and even extra, as long as thou wilt act as a go-between and let this lady through to see Caesar." The centurion, the former lion, now became a fox. He stooped and whispered into Galatia's ear, "If thou wilt provide me with what I ask, I shall present her to Caesar. I have a brother, the eminent Fulvius, the second officer in rank of the Senate. Unless he provides his signature, no one indeed, not even General Postumus, can gaze upon the countenance of the autocrat. In order for my brother to lend his signature, thou must..." He then broke off speaking and spread wide his one hand, with the palm up. He then pointed to it with his other hand, in a gesture telling Galatia to start counting the coins. Galatia took out a purse with money valued at five thousand gold coins. Galatia then turned to Mary and said in

Hebrew, "Here, milady, in this country, only by means of money or wine does one get what he wants." The amount was formidable, a medium-sized fortune. He wished to take advantage of the two women. He asked for more or threatened to crush their heads into pieces with his mace. Before the women could respond to his extortion, a booming male voice was heard behind them. They, startled, turned and beheld a man of probity and command who spoke in a stern tone: "I heard everything."

In the midst of the burgeoning and luxuriant ivy by the gate, there stood an imposing man. The guard now turned pale as a lemon. The unknown man walked toward the gate. He approached the gate, removing his keys. In the Greek dialect, he addressed the ladies with an ease of manner commenting upon the nice weather they were having. He was urbane but not arrogant. He then said to them courteously, "You wish to speak to Caesar?" Mary answered quickly, "Yes, sir, we shall be much obliged to thee if thou wilt help us gain an audience with him." The man asked, "Art thou a Greek woman?" She answered, "Nay, I am a Jewess." The man appeared surprised and said, "A Jewess? But thy physiognomy gives thee the appearance of a Greek woman. In any event, how didst thou come here? For what issue dost thou wish to bring before his Majesty, the Caesar? Perhaps thou canst make manifest to me the nature of thy matter? I am in a position to help thee. Moreover, I love very much the land of Judea, the air of which I breathed ten whole years." Mary felt a cool and dewy breeze in her soul, which impelled her to answer with ease and readiness, "I thank thee, sir. I thank thee. May God recompense thy soul with everlasting joy! If thou shouldst like it, sir, I shall recount to thine honorable self the cause and purpose that I have taken up this toil and labor of coming from the east to the west." He interrupted her, appearing very ready and saying, "I should like to hear thee." She began by saying, "Well then, very briefly, sir, I am known as Magdalene. I am a disciple of a great Teacher, Whose teachings surpass all those of the Greek philosophers: whether those writings of Socrates, or Plato, or Aristotle, or any of the others. Their words are vain and of the earth. The message of my Teacher contains all the words of life, perfection, eternity, and virtue." The imperial dignitary then interposed, "Virtue? Not very long ago I authored a book, entitled *Concerning Virtue*. I wrote it during my tour of duty in Palestine. It was by reason of that work that I received an epistle from Caesar to return to Rome, that I might give a reading of my book before the Senate. Not to make a labor of it, it was on this account that I received this lofty office in the palace. For this reason I am in a position to assist thee. But do tell me the name of thy teacher. Speak to me of his teaching. Has he, perhaps, ever been to Rome and all-renowned Athens, where undoubtedly he received wisdom?" Mary replied, "My Teacher, sir, never wrote a book. He has traveled neither to Rome nor to all-

renowned Athens. In fact, He never left Palestine. It was there that the divine Teacher taught, wrought miracles, died, and resurrected." The imperial dignitary's eyes widened at this description. He then said, "Perhaps thy Teacher was the so-called Messiah, the Christ, Jesus the Nazaraean?" Hearing him speak the Master's name, moved Mary Magdalene. With much restraint, she said sweetly, "Perhaps, sir, thou once knewest my Teacher, the Son of the Virgin?" He answered, "Personally, no. But I had heard of Him. I have written about the man in such a way that if thou wert to hear those words thou wouldest think that the speaker was Peter of Bethsaida or Nathanael of Cana of the Galilee." Tears welled in Mary's eyes as she heard him speak thus. She continued, "Then, thou art acquainted with the chief of the apostles, Peter, and his fellow disciple, Nathanael?"

The dignitary, suddenly aware that the other lady spoke not a word, then cast a quick glance at Galatia and asked, "Does this lady here understand Greek?" Mary answered that she did not. She explained that Galatia was a Hebrew with Roman citizenship. He said, "O well, come with me. Thou wilt explain everything to her after thou hearest my story." The dignitary then looked directly at Mary and said, "Are thou Mary of Magdala? Art thou the one who went to the tomb in Gethsemane?" Astounded that he should have heard of her, she thought inwardly, "My God, Thou hast heard my prayer and those of thy holy Mother that I might succeed in my much-desired goal!" She then said to the dignitary, "Sir, since thou knowest my name, do not hesitate to inform me of thy name. Shouldest thou wish to remain unknown to me, it does not matter. It suffices me that my God has enlisted thee as a patron in this sacred matter. Thou wilt have a great reward both now and in the future age." She paused and then said, "I have, sir, here with me, a message with which I wish to address Caesar in regard to the murderers of my Teacher, Jesus Christ. He was unjustly slain by the unjust. The murderers included chief priests, scribes, Pharisees, and teachers of the Law—many of whom did not know that the Messiah would come forth from Bethlehem. The chief offenders in this affair were the High Priests Annas and Caiaphas, as well as the Roman governor at Judaea, Pilate. He is more guilty than the executioners. I myself heard him say to the mob, 'Ye take Him and crucify Him, for I find no cause for accusation in Him.' Therefore, sir, unless those who willingly participated repent, they shall not find pardon in the day of retribution. As for those who unwittingly took part, they too can find mercy." Hearing her speak these last words, the dignitary suddenly turned pale. He hung his head low, with his eyes bent on his sandals. He then uttered, "Lady, I was one of those unjust judges. What I did, I did in ignorance. But on this point it will be as well to be silent. But shall I, O lady, have pardon?" With this last question, his lips trembled. Mary, hearing his admission, turned white but the presence of her mind never

varied. She responded: "We, sir, have the redemption through His blood, the forgiveness of offenses, according to the riches of His grace."¹⁴⁰ As others who were pricked in their heart for crucifying Jesus, Peter advised them to repent, and to be baptized in the name of Jesus Christ for remission of sins, for which they shall receive the gift of the Holy Spirit."¹⁴¹ With his heart full at the hearing of these unequivocal statements, he invited her inside and said, "I have tired thee sufficiently. Come inside and I shall better describe my extreme ignorance at the time." He then escorted both Mary Magdalene and Galatia to the large hall in the palace.¹⁴²

The three entered a beautifully appointed chamber, fitted out actually as a dining-room with three couches (*triclinium*). There were large windows overlooking the prospect of the park about the palace. It was evident that the dignitary was most enthusiastic about meeting the two Hebrew ladies. He confessed that he was one of the evil public advocates in the case against Mary's Teacher. He also informed them that after the death by crucifixion, he issued an epistle to the autocrat Tiberius—which the latter had requested in order to learn the facts. The dignitary disclosed his sentiments with regard to the coming of the Messiah, hopes which remained ever sanguine. He made the women aware that he developed these anticipations of the coming of the Messiah when he was governor at Judaea, a post to which Pontius Pilate had succeeded. Pilate, in fact, was his immediate successor.¹⁴³ The dignitary also affirmed that Pilate had much pressure placed upon him by the chief priests of the synagogue. Despite this, the dignitary confessed that after those events that he immediately had a change of heart. He divulged how he himself wept when he learned that the Teacher was consigned to mount the Cross, but that Jesus also had uttered, "Father, forgive them, for they know not what they do [Lk. 23:34]." When those final words of Jesus were reported to him, he said in sober sadness that it gave him some relief. He added that he heard accounts that the man Jesus had risen from the grave. "Naturally," he said, "I did not believe it. But then I summoned the soldiers who kept the watch, who testified that it was so. Well, how can I describe to thee the pain I felt in my soul? More than a month after the crucifixion, testimony was bruited about from all different kinds of people praising this Jesus as God. Some touted Him as a prophet or wonder-worker, while others declared that He was the long-awaited Messiah. Reports flowed in that He was seen by the Sea of Tiberius. Are these accounts true or false? I have no idea. I only know that Caesar desired to learn

¹⁴⁰ Eph. 1:7.

¹⁴¹ Acts 2:36-38.

¹⁴² *The Life of Saint Mary Magdalene*, Ch. 10, pp. 50-60; *The Great Synaxaristes* (in Greek), VII:430.

¹⁴³ The rule of Pontius Pilate, fifth procurator of Judaea, began in 26 and ended in 36.

of the events in Palestine. The epistle I wrote to Tiberius was in the Greek—as he is quite fluent in Greek and even composes poetry. As for me, I am Greek on my mother's side. My father was a Roman. My name is Puplius Lentoulos.¹⁴⁴ As I mentioned earlier, I was governor at Judaea. Now I serve as prefect of the Praetorium of the Roman Empire. My mother hailed from Alexandria. She now lives in Pella of Macedonia.”

He then paused a moment, as if in deep reverie, and then said, “But there is something else I remember. When I was in Judaea, some fellow Greek countrymen came to visit me. They were coming from Edessa. They were excited about having just met with Christ. They marvelled at His perfection and wisdom.” Mary, after short consideration, asserted, “Yes, I remember the occasion well. Certain Greeks from among those going to do reverence at the feast had come to Philip, expressing to him their desire to see Jesus. Philip went and told Andrew, who related it to Jesus. My Teacher answered them and said: ‘The hour hath come that the Son of Man should be glorified [Jn. 12:23].’ Those Greeks appeared to be men of understanding, solemnity, good breeding, and education.” Her recollection of the visitation gave Puplius pleasure to hear it recounted.

Puplius then removed a papyrus. He said it was his letter regarding Christ, in his capacity as former governor at Judea, addressed to Tiberius Caesar, autocrat of the Romans. It was signed and dated in Jerusalem, indiction 7, Moon 11. He then began to read it to Mary: “I have been informed, O Caesar, that thou desirest to learn in writing the matter concerning a certain virtuous man named Jesus the Christ. He is deemed by many of the people to be a prophet. His disciples believe that he is a god or a son of the one God. They state that this Jesus fashioned the heaven and earth and all that is within. The truth be told, there are some astonishing things concerning this Christ. Miracles abound: He raises the dead and heals the sick with but a word. He is a man of average height, handsome of countenance with an air of majesty. Those that encounter him are enjoined either to love him or fear him. His hair is the color of walnut, which extends to his shoulders and glistens. He belongs to the group known as Nazarenes. His forehead is smooth and calm. His face is without wrinkles or blemishes. His nose and lips are regular. His

¹⁴⁴ According to Josephus [*Antiq.* xviii. 6. § 5], Valerius Gratus was Roman Prefect or procurator of Judaea under Tiberius (A.D. 15-26). He succeeded Annius Rufus and was replaced by Pontius Pilate. The government of Gratus is conspicuously known for his remarkable frequency in changing the appointee of the high-priesthood. He had appointed Caiaphas as high priest. The system of Roman names was unique and distinctive in the ancient world. They often had several names. When a foreigner became a Roman citizen, he took a new Roman name as a mark of citizenship. This is possibly the case with Puplius.

beard is dense and the same color as his hair. It is not long, but it separates in two at the middle. He has a serious look that can excite fear. He possesses power like a ray of the sun. On the one hand when he rebukes, one is moved to fear and weep. On the other hand, there is also a grace and loveliness about his gravity. It is said that no one has ever seen him laugh. But he has been seen to weep on a number of occasions. He has well-fashioned hands and arms. His manner of address is pleasing. His mother is also a beautiful woman, the most beautiful I might add, so that some say she looks like a goddess. If thou dost wish to question the man for thyself, inform me and I shall forthwith dispatch him to thee. All of those in Jerusalem marvel at him, especially his wisdom, though he has never studied at the customary schools. He often walks barefooted and without a head covering. Some laugh at him, while others tremble in his presence from their astonishment. He never preaches anything to promote himself in this world. But again some of the Jews here believe that he is the one



Jesus Christ

God come in the flesh. Others, O Caesar, allege that he is an enemy of Your Majesty. Ofttimes, these tiresome Jews trouble me. But this Christ has never urged anyone to do anything displeasing, but rather he exhorts the people to perform good deeds. All those who have come into contact with him claim that they have received nothing but benefit from him. However, Your Majesty, I am ready to obey the imperial command. Whatsoever, Caesar, thou wilt order, I will carry out."

By this time Mary was weeping streams of tears. She asked him, "Tell me, O prefect, did Caesar receive this epistle?" Puplius answered, "Certainly, he did. He also preserved it in the imperial archive, for the name of Jesus was circulating around the palace at that time. I am able to say that even the Caesar respected Jesus." Mary then said, "I note, sir, the questioning manner in which thou didst characterize my Teacher as Son of God. Indeed, sir, He is the Son of God! He is! He was born of a virgin by the energy of the Holy Spirit. He wrought miracles by granting sight to the blind and raising the dead. He blessed only five loaves of bread with which He filled a hungry crowd of five

thousand. I was present when they counted the twelve baskets filled with leftovers.¹⁴⁵ Nevertheless, that which surpassed every mind was the infinite forbearance and long-suffering which He possessed even when they crucified Him upon the Cross." Puplius crimsoned at this point, when he managed to say, "Do not remind me, milady, of my old sin. I promise from henceforth to assist thee in every way possible to bring the guilty offenders to justice, that is, those who abide unrepentant. This very night I shall implore the Caesar to issue a summons, calling back to Rome these three: Pilate, Annas, and Caiaphas. I swear by...." He hesitated for a moment and continued, "I was going to say 'by the gods,' but I have recanted. I, therefore, swear by my Greek lineage that I shall labor even to death that they might be punished. Moreover, milady, there is one in particular upon whom I should like to see vengeance taken: Judas. For he of his own will murdered thy Teacher. I shall let the whole world know of his traitorous deed. But I thank thee for giving me a patient hearing." Mary said, "May God reward thy kindness and account thee worthy of eternal salvation!"

Prefect Puplius then made ready to return the papyrus with his epistle to the imperial archive. He then bid farewell to Mary and Galatia, adding, "I shall no longer weary you. For the moment, you may go. Give me two months to have recalled those who are liable to be tried. Once the trireme has conveyed the three of them, and they are brought to trial, I shall maintain sanguine hopes that Caesar shall render a just and good decision. But do allow me to escort you to the gate." Upon arriving at the silver bars of the door, Mary Magdalene again thanked him for his courtesy. The prefect wished the two ladies well. He then flashed a stern look at the centurion, the one who previously barred the way of the two women. The centurion lowered his head, trembling at the thought of the reprimand he would receive.¹⁴⁶

From the time that Mary Magdalene had the interview with the Praetorium Prefect Puplius Lentoulos, three months had passed. Finally the warship from Palestine arrived in the harbor of Ostia.¹⁴⁷ Pilate, Annas, and Caiaphas were to be kept in state custody. During this period of time, Magdalene was vibrant with apostolic activity, helping to build and establish the first Christian house-church. There was nearly every night, in the home of Onesimos and Galatia, a sacred gathering. The believers kept vigil, prayed,

¹⁴⁵ Mt. 14:17.

¹⁴⁶ *The Life of Saint Mary Magdalene*, Ch. 11, pp. 61-67.

¹⁴⁷ Ostia is modern Ostia Antica. The ancient Roman town, originally, was situated at the mouth of the Tiber River. It is now about 4 miles (6 kilometers) upstream. It was a naval station and grain port of republican Rome and a commercial center under the empire (after 27 B.C.). It was a thriving community with baths, temples, and warehouses. In the early 2nd C., after Christ, the population was approximately 50,000.

and heard discourses. Three hundred souls were nourished on the unadulterated milk of the Faith, until the coming of the Apostle Peter that he might ordain clergy. In the meantime, rumors were buzzing abroad in all the neighborhoods, as well as inside the schools, marketplaces, shops, and hippodrome. On the 3rd day of the month of January, Caesar was scheduled to examine one of the biggest cases before the Roman judicial system. The summoned defendants were supposed to be two chief priests of the Jews, Annas and Caiaphas, and the Roman Governor Pilate. It was also heard that Caesar was incensed with them because they killed a man, but not just a simple man, but one wonderful and believed by the people to be as a god. Others said that Caesar was going to bring to trial a Hebrew woman, who had come from Jerusalem; for she had upset the entire Roman populace. It was rumored that she was proclaiming some new religion in which the adherents relinquished the joys of this world, family life, and the gods.

Such was the talk from mouth to mouth, so that all were anxious to see and hear the Hebrew woman and the three liable to judicial action. The 3rd of January finally arrived. The case was to be heard in the great hall of the court. The dignitaries and functionaries among the Romans took their seats, including all the members of the Senate and the priests of the idols. There appeared the greatest to the least of those with titles among the Roman nobility. The autocrat, Tiberius Caesar, sat on a lofty platform. Prefect Puplius was present, occupied with reading the penal codices before him. He was visibly uneasy and in deep thought. The court was called into session. Everyone present came to a profound hush. All then made way for a woman who advanced. Mary appeared marvellous as she walked in the midst of the court toward the autocrat. She was clad in a brown tunic, with a leather belt. She wore a long orange-colored veil. The inner kerchief was a deep orange. Her whole appearance created a marvellous impression. All eyes were upon her. She glanced at Prefect Puplius. He bowed to her and then whispered something in the ear of Caesar. Puplius then made the following announcement: "O most noble lady, his Majesty, Caesar of east and west, grants thee audience. He is ready to hear thy petition in the matter of Jesus. Caesar considers this case a matter for his review."

Orthodox tradition and iconography also maintain that when Saint Mary appeared before Tiberius Caesar Augustus, she presented him with an egg dyed red, greeting him with the words: "Christ is risen!"¹⁴⁸ The simplicity

¹⁴⁸ The custom inaugurated by Saint Mary Magdalene spread among Christians throughout the world. In one ancient Greek parchment, extant in the monastery library of Saint Athanasios near Thessalonike, there is a prayer read on the day of holy Pascha for the blessing of eggs and cheese. As the hegumen presents each with a blessed egg,

(continued...)

of her gift did not offend the emperor. He was cognizant of the ancient eastern custom to present a token of respect with some special or symbolic meaning.



Saint Mary Magdalene

It was not unusual for poorer people to present a fruit basket from their region or the eggs of birds. The red egg and the exclamation, however, stirred his curiosity.

Mary, the equal-to-the-apostles then unfurled a papyrus that she was holding in her hand. Silently, she invoked the help of God. Then she boldly and courageously read the following: "Pilate, who was appointed as governor at Jerusalem, dispensed a wrongful judgment against Jesus the son of Mariam. Je-

sus performed great signs and prodigies among the people. He granted the blind the recovery of sight, He raised the dead, He cleansed lepers, He expelled demons with a word. Simply put, He cured every disease. The chief priests, Annas and Caiaphas, out of jealousy and malice, delivered Him up to Pilate. The governor made many inquiries. Though Pilate found nothing worthy of death, he still crucified Him. It was then that creation shook at the injustice. The sun was darkened, the rays having failed, and the moon was changed to darkness.¹⁴⁹ The earth shook. The rocks were rent, the veil of the temple was torn into two from top to bottom,¹⁵⁰ and the sepulchres were opened, and many of the dead arose and entered into the city."¹⁵¹

Now after she completed reading her opening speech, she submitted the papyrus to Caesar. All eyes followed her every movement. Caesar, hearing this testimony, specifically that the sun failed that same hour of the crucifixion, which occurred not only over Jerusalem but the entire earth, had recorded the time of its occurrence. He keenly remembered the darkness of that day,

¹⁴⁸(...continued)

he repeats, "Thus have we received from the holy fathers, who preserved this custom from the very time of the holy apostles; therefore the holy Equal-to-the-apostles Mary Magdalene first showed believers the example of this joyful offering."

¹⁴⁹ Mt. 27:45; Mk. 15:33; Lk. 23:44.

¹⁵⁰ Mt. 27:51; Lk. 23:45.

¹⁵¹ Mt. 27:52, 53. *The Life of Saint Mary Magdalene*, Ch. 12, pp. 69-72.

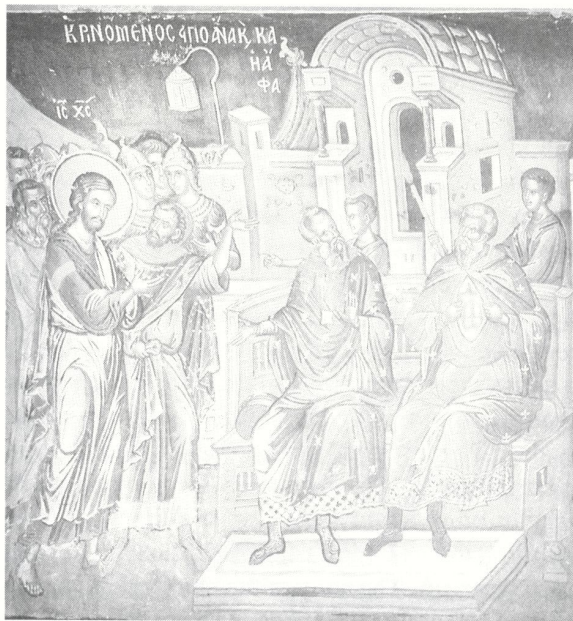
thinking for a moment that he had gone blind, and so he perceived she was speaking the truth. He said to her, "I hear what thou art saying, young woman, and I believe it to be entirely the truth. I recorded the year, the day, and even the hour that the sun was darkened. I also have not forgotten the violent rumblings in the earth, so that the trees in the garden in which I was walking were uprooted during that mighty earthquake. Although I have already heard of the miracles made by Jesus, I should like clearer information. Tell me, what was the teaching of this Jesus and what wonders had he wrought?"

The holy Mary Magdalene then spoke of Jesus' most holy manner of life, as He is the Son and Logos of the living God. She spoke of how He took flesh and became man of the most holy Virgin Mariam who conceived by the Holy Spirit. Magdalene declared her Teacher to be the Messiah, the Christ, the One Who fashioned the heaven, the earth, the sea, and all that is living. He also made Paradise. She said that there shall be a judgment, after which the righteous would rejoice forever while sinners would suffer everlasting punishment. She informed all present the importance of loving God and one's neighbor. Wealth and riches should be shared with the less fortunate, lest attachment to possessions should prevent one from entering the kingdom of the heavens. If Caesar wished to see Jesus, this was possible. Christ comes to those who possess faith, feed the hungry, give drink to the thirsty, clothe the naked, help the sick, and assist the stranger. She described some of the miracles that involved those suffering from blindness, paralysis, and leprosy. She mentioned the four-day dead Lazarus and how he was summoned forth from the grave still in the burial cloths. She recounted the miracle of the multiplication of the loaves. "In brief," said she, "Jesus is the fountain of goodness, wisdom, and perfection. For as I said earlier, He is not a mere man. He is the God of heaven and of the earth. The envy of the chief priests among the Jews, especially provoked by Annas and Caiaphas, was not found among the people who hastened like thirsty harts after Jesus. It was they, chiefly, who falsely accused Jesus to Pilate, thy governor in Judaea."

Mary then explained briefly how Pilate conducted the trial. She also told Caesar how Pilate had Jesus scourged mercilessly, so that from the furrows in His skin, His blood spilled onto the marble pavement. She described how Pilate presented the crowd with amnesty for either Jesus or Barabbas. Caesar, hearing her narrate what took place, bit into his lip as his soul was boiling over. He then asked her, "Why, young woman, didst thou not appear earlier and appeal directly to me for my intervention? I could have prevented this lawlessness. Unfortunately, this travesty of justice will weigh upon the Roman soul forever. I understand what thou art saying: that an innocent man was judged unjustly. But I am still in a position to prevent further injustices from being perpetrated. Those who are guilty will be punished

accordingly, whether one is a political appointee or one of your high priests. Why then was I not consulted earlier?"

Mary responded, "O excellent Caesar, time did not allow for us to appeal to Caesar. These events transpired inside of three days. On a Thursday was Jesus judged by Pilate. The following day, Friday, Jesus was put to death. He arose from the dead which is attested to by many witnesses. Pilate moved with indecent haste through the questioning, without summoning even one witness for the defense. But as to the false testimony of the chief priests, he listened to that readily." At this juncture, Mary's eyes were welling with tears.



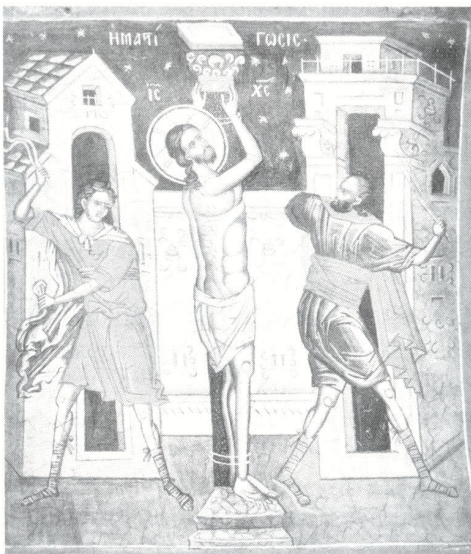
Christ Being Judged by Annas and Caiaphas

in an irregular manner but even unlawfully by condemning to death this man whom he found no reason in our penal code that deserved death. Our laws, based and supported on the loftiest ethics of the ancient Greeks, are at the foundation of Roman justice, which Pilate was careless to observe." Caesar then turned to Mary Magdalene and asked, "Noble lady, dost thou wish to add anything to thy testimony?" She answered, "Yes, sire, I wish to testify briefly to the manner of torture afflicted upon my Teacher by His unjust judges. Have I permission to proceed?" Caesar gave his affirmation willingly.

She began: "When they arrested my Teacher in the garden on the Mount of Olives, they brought him bound to Annas, and then to Caiaphas, the father-in-law of the high priest. They thrashed Jesus pitilessly and inhumanely throughout His holy body. They brought him to the Praetorium, to the Roman

Caesar then drew a deep breath, and gestured to Prefect Puplius to draw nigh. Tiberius said to him, "Prefect, bid the Consul Claudius to attend us." Once the consul appeared before him, Caesar said, "Consul Claudius: that which was committed by Pilate in Judaea was it a miscarriage of justice, yea or nay? Does Roman law acquit what took place?" The consul answered, "Nay, O divine Caesar. Pilate had the supervision and administration of Judaea. He acted not only

Governor Pilate. It is true that at the beginning Pilate showed some understanding and sympathy. The governor had acknowledged and announced openly that he did not find the least guilt in my Teacher. All along those who incited the people were the chief priests and the Pharisees. Pilate then washed his hands with water, saying, 'I am innocent of the blood of this just One; ye shall see to it.' Pilate then commanded that my Teacher's tender and thin body be subjected to flogging. The instruments of torture, O Caesar, that they used to scourge my Teacher were a bullwhip, rods with knots, and ropes with iron stars and hooks positioned at a short distance from each other. These lacerated His flesh to the bones. Sixty soldiers struck Him in turn, two by two, so that the same wounds were struck again and again. The virginal and noble flesh of the God-Man was shred to pieces.



The Scourging of Jesus Christ

"O Caesar, the callous hearts of those God-slayers must be of stone when they saw His bones and blood running like a river from His veins. Instead, they were rejoicing and laughing among themselves with inexpressible satisfaction. The Mother of Jesus and I were standing in a corner of the courtyard, lamenting inconsolably. O mighty Caesar, the executioners were as dogs, and bulls, and tigers, and wild animals. I beseech thee to avenge the wrong for the sake of justice. Do thou judge those unjust murderers of One innocent, of One Who is the Savior of the cosmos, of One Who as Judge will come a second time upon the earth—not as a humble man but as the almighty God—and judge the living and the dead. Even upon the Cross, He suffered mocking, blows, a crown of thorns, and a lance to His immaculate side." Thus she spoke, uttering other things as well, until the torrent of her tears quelled her voice. Suddenly, the crowd shouted aloud like a violent wind that rocked the building of the courthouse with one resounding cry: "Death! Death to the God-slayers! Death!"¹⁵²

Tiberius became overheated and agitated. His countenance, for a moment, flushed to a deep red. He motioned to Puplius Lentoulos to approach.

¹⁵² *The Life of Saint Mary Magdalene*, Ch. 12, pp. 73-78.

The prefect was also visibly moved by the tremendous deposition given by Magdalene, for which he held her in admiration. He rose up from his seat and went before Caesar, bowing first and waiting to receive his orders. Caesar said to him, "Call to the court the Judge Logodote. Have him bring here the two high priests, Annas and Caiaphas." Not much time passed before the Logodote appeared before the throne of Caesar with only one of the high priests who was blindfolded. Before the whole assembly, Logodote introduced him and said, "O divine Caesar, this is High Priest Annas." Caesar asked, "Where is the other dog to be found?" Logodote answered, "Joseph Caiaphas died, O Caesar, inside the ship, as we arrived just outside of Crete. He suddenly felt a sharp pang in his abdomen, and then his bowels split open on the deck. Before his soul left him, he groaned like a wild pig. His tongue jutted out of his mouth the length of a span. After he expired, we cast his body to the waves."

Caesar then asked, "So what didst thou say? That this fellow is Annas?" Logodote answered, "Annas, indeed, O sovereign." Caesar, glaring at the high priest with hatred, shouted, "Dog!" Caesar quietly observed him with a critical eye. Annas was so obese that his belly appeared as though he had a massive tumor. Annas' eyes were also covered tightly with a leather belt that he might not see. This was done lest Annas lift up his eyes and meet those of Caesar, since the Romans had a prevailing custom that a condemned man could escape death if his eyes met those of Caesar. Caesar raised his voice again, saying, "Dog!" Caesar then deftly swung about his throne and abruptly gave this order: "Write down, O Prefect Puplius, what I am about to say." The prefect quickly dipped his pen in the ink as the autocrat began dictating the following: "I, Tiberius Augustus, Caesar of the Roman world power, condemn to death Annas the high priest of the synagogue of the Jews, on account of his participation in the unjust murder of Jesus, son of Mariam. In accordance with my pleasure, the hide of an antelope is to be skinned. The freshly excoriated skin is to be wrapped around Annas, after which he is to be set out in the sun. He is to remain in that painful position until he casts off his miserable and merciless soul. Prior to executing this, he is to receive one thousand and one hundred lashes." The executioners came forward and immediately escorted away Annas, as his entire body was shaking with tremors, to the place of punishment. The prescribed treatment took place as Caesar commanded. Annas was bound fast inside, being gradually straitened and squeezed until he surrendered his pitiful soul.¹⁵³

¹⁵³ *The Life of Saint Mary Magdalene*, Ch. 13, pp. 79, 80; *The Great Synaxaristes* (in Greek), VII:429, 430.

Pontius Pilate, Governor of Judaea, Before Tiberius Caesar in Rome

Caesar then ordered Puplius to bring forward Pontius Pilate. Undoubtedly, Caesar was enraged with Pilate whom he thought to be a terrible and fierce man. Caesar was most anxious to question Pilate's part in the wrongful death of the Maker of such wonders and signs among the people in Palestine. Tiberius was certain that if his eyes met those of Pilate, he would in no wise set him free but sentence him accordingly. Therefore, Caesar dispensed with setting a leather belt about Pilate's eyes. Caesar remarked, "I want to see the fear and trembling in Pilate's eyes. Even if our eyes should meet, he will receive neither a release nor a favor from me."

Pontius Pilate was escorted by a *chiliarch* into the presence of Caesar. When Caesar beheld Pilate, he suddenly felt the urge to lay aside all his anger. He found it impossible to speak harshly or roughly to Pilate, finding Pilate somehow mild and his whole bodily presence bright with a sweet light. Caesar, somewhat trembling, saluted him. He even rose up from his throne, showing esteem at the appearance of Pilate in his court. Caesar then spoke in a low tone into the ear of Puplius, remarking, "Puplius, I am afraid." He then stuttered, but continued and said, "I shall not condemn Pilate, because I see something..." Caesar could not finish the thought. In his confused state, he involuntarily fell back on his throne nearly in a faint.

Mary Magdalene, who was present, with a soft and steady glance, addressed the prefect and said, "Milord prefect, may I speak to the Caesar?" Now Puplius, who was also strangely effected by the appearance of Pilate, without asking the autocrat's permission first, just nodded at her to proceed. She spoke openly and with a raised voice to elicit the attention of the swooning emperor, saying, "O milord Caesar, cease being astonished at the executioner—I mean Pilate—of my Teacher. Thou shouldest know that the governor is clad in the garment of that righteous One Who was unjustly crucified by him. This excellent skill displayed in the weave is the work from the very hands of the Virgin, Mariam. The sacred garment, full of grace, is what stuns thine eyes. It is for this reason solely that Pilate is enjoying such deference from thee." (Indeed, what she meant here is that Caesar ought to condemn Pilate standing upright in the presence of the Master Christ's garment.)

In fact, Pilate had purchased the raiment of Jesus, which was seamless and of a superior weave. Pilate, having admired the garment, bought it from the soldiers. After they crucified Jesus, the soldiers "took His garments and made four parts, to each soldier a part, and also the tunic; but the tunic was seamless, woven from the top throughout. They said therefore to one another, 'Let us not tear it, but let us obtain it by lot for whom it shall be,' that the Scripture might be fulfilled, which saith, 'They parted My garments among themselves, and upon My clothing they cast a lot [Ps. 21(22):18].' These

things therefore the soldiers did [Jn. 19:23, 24].”¹⁵⁴ It was this seamless tunic that Pilate obtained. He clad himself in it, under his outer garment as a kind of phylactery and help. Mary Magdalene recognized the garment straightway, making its presence known unto Caesar. Caesar was then roused from his fear. He opened his eyes wide, fixing his gaze on Pilate. He then ordered the *chiliarch* who was standing by, saying, “Strip him of that garment, and bring it to me that I might examine it.”

The Lord’s tunic was removed from Pilate. Caesar with much curiosity felt the fabric. On close inspection, he noticed the thick red linen thread. He then looked up at Magdalene and asked, “It this the garment?” He then descended the two steps of his throne. The garment was now in Mary Magdalene’s trembling hands. With eyes full of tears, she answered in the affirmative. Caesar returned to his throne and looked down upon Pilate.

Pilate now donned his own clothing, leaving him bereft of his former honor. He was standing between two *chiliarchs* with his hands fettered. He now appeared dark, loathsome, and revolting. He also emitted a stench, so that those present removed their handkerchiefs and put them to their nostrils. Caesar then bid the prefect to take Jesus’ raiment. Caesar, thereafter, commenced questioning him: “Why hast thou abused the authority bestowed upon thee by Roman justice? Why didst thou not follow the prescribed order given in the constitution? Our just laws are tempered with mercy. Did Jesus violate the laws of the Romans, yea or nay? Tell me, quickly, before this whole company of senators and all the world that shall judge thee from generation to generation.”

Pilate then answered Caesar, saying, “O god of the gods, O divine Caesar, renowned and wonderful autocrat of Rome: my life is in thy hands. Judge me in kindness as I give my defense.” Caesar immediately interposed, “Hast thou any witnesses?” Pilate answered, “The chief priests of the synagogue.” Caesar remarked, “Thou dost lie. The stench from thy mouth is a frightful bother to me.” He then told the guards to lock Pilate in prison that he might be eaten by the mice. Pilate, seeing how hopeless his case had become, cast caution to the wind and blurted out, “Caesar, thou shouldest know that the chief priests and the scribes of the Jews delivered Him up to me. They were saying and crying aloud that He did not observe the sabbath, that He transgressed the law of Moses, that He withheld the custom duty and tax of thee, O Caesar, and that He incited the crowd. When I heard such accusations, I many times besought them, saying, ‘Take Him yourselves and judge Him according to your law [Jn. 18:31].’ But they cried out vehemently, ‘Put Him to death, because this fellow is worthy of death. We have a law, and

¹⁵⁴ Cf. Mt. 27:35, 36.

according to our law He ought to die, because He made Himself Son of God [Jn. 19:7].’ I attempted to seek His release, but the Jews were shouting, ‘If thou shouldest release this One, thou art not a friend of the Caesar. Everyone who maketh himself a king speaketh against the Caesar [Jn. 19:12].’ Even when hearing these utterances and the like concerning thy dominion and thine authority, I knew that by reason of envy they delivered up Jesus to me.¹⁵⁵ I still strived to have Him released. But when I saw that nothing was to be of use, but rather that an uproar was taking place in the crowd,¹⁵⁶ I judged it expedient to hand over Jesus to death. I did these things out of my fear of thee, sire.” Such was the sop that Pilate thought would be swallowed by the gullible. Then Pilate, with ill-timed flippancy, added, “Besides, what was the man? He was some poor Nazarite. No one seemed to protest His death.” So spoke Pilate, though the Evangelist Mark reports that “Pilate, willing to do that which was satisfactory to the crowd, released Barabbas to them; and he delivered up Jesus, after he scourged Him, in order that He might be crucified [Mk. 15:15].”

Caesar responded in this manner to Pilate: “No one, sayest thou, protested?” Pilate returned with emphasis, “No one.” Caesar then invited the noble Magdalene to counter his allegation. The comely equal-to-the-apostles elegantly drew near and asked Pilate: “Knowest thou me, O executioner of Jesus?” Pilate stood there speechless, trying to evade her piercing glance. She continued, “Why dost thou not give answer? I repeat the question. Dost thou not recollect that I entreated thee not to remand the case of my Teacher to the jurisdiction of Herod the tetrarch¹⁵⁷ of Galilee? Did I not say that Herod is not just, but rather he is an unjust king who disposes judgment according to his own views on the Messiah? Thou wast not moved by either my supplications nor my tears. On the contrary, thou wast bent on slaying an innocent Man. Indeed, Pilate, thou didst inquire whether Jesus was a Galilaean. When it was discovered that Jesus was from the jurisdiction of Herod, thou didst send Jesus to Herod, who himself also was in Jerusalem during those days. And Herod, having seen Jesus, was gladdened exceedingly; for he was wishing for a considerable time to see Jesus, because he had heard many things concerning Him, and he was hoping to see some sign done by Him. So Herod kept on questioning Jesus with many words, but my Teacher answered nothing. Meanwhile, the chief priests and the scribes were standing by, vigorously accusing Jesus. Herod with his troops, also treated Jesus with contempt. After they mocked Him, they threw around Him bright raiment, and sent Him back

¹⁵⁵ Mt. 27:18.

¹⁵⁶ Mt. 27:24.

¹⁵⁷ Lk. 3:1.

to thee, O Pilate. Indeed, on that same day Herod and thee became friends with one another; for, before, you were at enmity between yourselves. Thou didst then call together the chief priests and the rulers and the people, saying to them, 'Ye brought to me this Man, as one who turneth away the people. And behold, having examined Him before your face, I did not find even one charge



Christ Before Pilate

in this Man of which ye bring as an accusation against Him. No, not even did Herod, for I sent you up to him; and behold, nothing worthy of death hath been done by Him. Therefore, after I chastise Him, I will release Him.'"¹⁵⁸

Magdalene continued, asking embarrassing questions that exposed Pilate's duplicity and deficiency. "So Pilate, even when Herod supported Jesus' innocence, didst thou treat my Teacher any better? I doubt if Caesar knows of thy secret crimes. I remember the time that the Jews were invited to the hippodrome by thee in order to air their grievances. What didst thou do? Thou didst order thy soldiers to pummel and cudgel hundreds for the sake of thine ironic amusement. Many died that day. But the greatest murder was that

committed against the God-Man Christ. This took place at the time of a feast when thou wast wont to release one prisoner. Instead of releasing my Teacher, Whom thou knewest to be innocent, thou didst release Barabbas, accused with fellow insurrectionists who had committed murder in the sedition against Caesar.¹⁵⁹ Didst thou serve Caesar by releasing Barabbas? Hast thou considered the evil thou hast wrought by slaying One Who was meek, peaceful, humble, and a benefactor of Judaea? Instead of releasing Him, thou didst consign Him to death on the Cross. He, indeed, is risen from the dead. But again, thou didst at first labor to stifle the truth of that event. So I ask of thee, nay I demand of thee, O Pilate, an answer before the autocrat, the Senate, and this crowded audience. Speak then. Dost thou or dost thou not

¹⁵⁸ Lk. 23:7-16.

¹⁵⁹ Mk. 15:6, 7.

recognize the innocence of Jesus? Wast thou or wast thou not notified by the guards detailed to watch the tomb that my Teacher had risen?"

Pilate, showing his obvious discomfort, twisted his lip, as she exposed his hypocrisy and absurdity. Caesar then intervened with a voice that boomed like thunder, asking Pilate: "Give an answer to the lady and to me. Didst thou acknowledge the innocence of Jesus? Didst thou receive reports from the guards that Jesus had risen from the grave?" Pilate, trembling, responded, "Yes, O divine Caesar! I acknowledge that I did find Jesus innocent and that I did receive such reports from the guard on duty at the tomb. As for hushing up the resurrection of Jesus, I was strictly charged to do so by the chief priests who did not want it bruited about." Caesar then asked forcefully, "Perhaps thou didst receive some remuneration from them?" Pilate hesitated and said slowly with a stifled voice, "Yes." Caesar yelled, "O miserable and wretched man! Since thou didst possess authority to release Jesus, on what account didst thou not set Him free? Thou art an unconscionable dog! Didst thou not consider that one day I would find out all these dealings? Did it ever occur to thee that thine appointment was to govern justly all subjects and not to trample them underfoot? How didst thou dare to execute the unjust murder of Jesus? Didst thou not hear of the marvels, all wondrous and glorious, He performed throughout Jerusalem and the borders thereof? Didst thou not know that in thine own jurisdiction that the blind were given sight, the lepers were cleansed, the four-day-dead Lazarus was raised, and other portents and prodigies were being wrought that surpass the hearing? Are these the kind of charges thou didst find against Him that brought thee to transgress justice and the law?"

Caesar then turned to Puplius Lentoulos, and said, "Write down what I shall now dictate. 'I, Tiberius Caesar, Augustus of the Romans, condemn to death the remorseless and relentless manslayer, the legate of Judaea of Palestine, Pontius Pilate.'" Puplius happily and speedily wrote the decision of Caesar on the papyrus, which received the imperial bulla. The prefect then rose up and said to Caesar, "O most glorious one, in what manner has Your Majesty decided to put to death Governor Pilate?" Caesar, deep in thought, put his hand to his forehead. He then gave this directive: "For the present, Pilate is to be detained in the prison on the Hill, until I can give the matter more thought. In the meantime, have this noble lady escorted by six chiliarchs to her dwelling place." Caesar then closed the session and descended from his throne, while the crowd cried out at the top of their voices: "Long live Caesar! Long live the empire! Long live Roman justice!"¹⁶⁰

¹⁶⁰ *The Life of Saint Mary Magdalene* (in Greek), Ch. 13, pp. 79-89; *The Great Synaxaristes* (in Greek), VII:430, 431.

The Imprisonment and Death of Pilate

Consequently, Pilate was to be put into prison, until Caesar could think of what fitting manner of bitter death should be administered. Caesar wished to have Pilate executed on account of the injustice of the case against Jesus, Whom Caesar deemed to be righteous and without sin. The officers of Caesar took hold of Pilate and led him to the outer prison. Indeed, Pilate was left to languish in that doleful and dank dungeon. Two years passed. Mary Magdalene tarried in Rome until the execution of Caesar's command in regard to Pilate was carried out. In the meantime, she drew thousands of souls to the Christian Faith.

During the protracted time that Pilate was in prison, his acquaintances and loyal friends diligently attempted to secure his deliverance from that rayless and gloomy cell. None of Pilate's friends or connections, however, dared to approach Caesar directly concerning the matter. One sympathizer, nevertheless, gained access into the prison by bribing the guards with a considerable amount. When he was allowed entry into Pilate's cell for a limited time, Pilate asked, "Who art thou? How didst thou manage to enter this death chamber?" The man answered, "I am an uncle of thy wife Prokla.¹⁶¹ I have two things to relate to thee: one displeasing and one pleasing." Pilate, with a hoarse voice and bulging eyes, answered, "I am listening." The uncle said, "The unhappy tidings deal with Prokla; for she has abandoned thee, her husband. She now goes about from city to city in Judaea. She proclaims Jesus, the very fellow that thou didst crucify, as God." Pilate answered, "O my misery! Has my wife given any thought that I am confined to a dreary and dark cell, persecuted by the whole world?" The uncle replied, "No, she does not think of thee. Quite the opposite, she denounces thee as the greatest criminal of the inhabited world." Pilate sighed, "Very well. I suppose then that I shall not meet with her. It has not been the same between us from the time that Jesus was delivered bound before me. Even as I sat on the tribunal, she sent word to me not to have anything to do with Jesus. She believed Him to have been a just man; for she had suffered many things that day in a dream because of Him.¹⁶² Her conduct now, therefore, cannot take me by surprise." Then in a fit of impotent anger, he said, "I should crucify her even as I crucified that wanderer, on Whose account I now spit up blood in this clammy cell. But tell me quickly, what are the good tidings?" The man answered, "The good tidings involve a plan to have thee released by Caesar." The man then divulged that

¹⁶¹ Prokla Claudia, after the Passion, came to believe in Jesus Christ and lived a holy life. After suffering greatly for the Lord's sake, she reposed peacefully. She is commemorated by the holy Church on the 27th of October.

¹⁶² Mt. 27:19.

a royal hunting party was being organized outside of Rome but nearby the prison holding Pilate. As the hunting party was to include Caesar, Pilate's connections bade him to stoop by the outer prison door and watch for Caesar. Whensoever Caesar should pass by, they urged Pilate to beg and supplicate for mercy. Pilate was told to use his most pitiful voice when imploring mercy, which they were confident would mellow Caesar. The uncle assured Pilate that the guard was handsomely paid, who would leave open his cell door. Pilate answered, "I thank thee and the others. May the gods grant health and youth to you! I shall blindly follow all that thou hast suggested." The uncle then left. The unrepentant Pilate believed all would go well. He then uttered, "Wrath on thee, O wretched Prokla! Shall I not meet thee again? Indeed, I shall not meet either thee or the treacherous Hebrew woman who accused me to Caesar. But I shall again see the light of the sun. Just you wait till then!"¹⁶³

The hunt commenced. The animals were rounded up in the vicinity by the prison. There were rabbits, deers, and other species indigenous to that plain. Now there was one deer, more beautiful than the others, that appeared in the midst of the animals that were ensnared. With all her might, she took flight and escaped out of the hands of her captors. She came to the walls of the prison and halted with her young. Caesar, atop his red horse, observed from afar her movements. He decided to pursue her, leaving behind his ten mounted retainers. One of them shouted after Caesar, expressing his well wishes and saying, "The great goddess Diana will not disappoint thee." Caesar quickly pursued the deer and sought with all his might to lay hold of her. Meanwhile, Pilate was stooping by the door that he might entreat Caesar as he passed by. That very same moment that Caesar approached the deer, ready to shoot his arrow, he took aim. The arrow fell to the ground. That strange doe made eye contact with Caesar and seemed to whistle through her teeth. Caesar readied a second arrow, watching the mother and child leap down a path. Impatient, he dismounted and gave chase on foot. He thought that even if his one arrow did not bring her down, he would wound her. His ten retainers followed closely on horseback. At one point, the doe drew nigh to the window of the prison. Pilate was waiting behind the bars. Caesar, meanwhile, fixed his bow, took aim, and shot. Mother and child suddenly leaped out of the way. The arrow hit its mark. It smote the heart of the God-slayer Pilate. Hence, Pilate ended his days by a bitter death.¹⁶⁴

¹⁶³ *The Life of Saint Mary Magdalene* (in Greek), Ch. 14, pp. 90-92.

¹⁶⁴ *The Life of Saint Mary Magdalene* (in Greek), Ch. 15, pp. 93-95; *The Great Synaxaristes* (in Greek), VII:430-432.

Church History of Eusebius

Eusebius, in his *Church History*,¹⁶⁵ comments upon how Tiberius was affected when informed by Pilate concerning Christ. "And when both the wonderful resurrection and ascension of our Savior were already noised abroad, in accordance with an ancient custom which prevailed among the rulers of the provinces, of reporting to the emperor the novel occurrences which took place in them, in order that nothing might escape him, Pontius Pilate eventually informed Tiberius¹⁶⁶ of the reports which were noised abroad through all Palestine concerning the resurrection of our Savior Jesus from the dead.

"He gave an account also of other wonders which he had learned of Him, and how, after His death, having risen from the dead, He was now believed by many to be God.¹⁶⁷ They say that Tiberius referred the matter to the Senate, but that they rejected it, ostensibly because they had not first examined into the matter (for an ancient law prevailed that no one should be made a god by the Romans except by a vote and decree of the Senate). But verily, the rejection occurred because the saving teaching of the divine Gospel did not need the confirmation and recommendation of men. But although the Senate of the Romans rejected the proposition made in regard to our Savior, Tiberius still retained the opinion which he had held at first, and contrived no hostile measures against Christ.¹⁶⁸

¹⁶⁵ *The Church History of Eusebius*, Bk. II, Ch. II, Nicene, 2nd Ser., I:105, 106.

¹⁶⁶ That Pilate made an official report to Tiberius is stated also by Tertullian [*Apol.* 21]. Justin Martyr [*Apol.* I. 35] mentions certain *Acts of Pilate* as well known in his day, but the so-called *Acts of Pilate* which are still extant in various forms are spurious, and belong to a much later period. The most important of these *Acts* is that which is commonly known under the title of the *Gospel of Nikodemus*. There are also extant numerous spurious epistles of Pilate addressed to Herod, to Tiberius, to Claudius, and others. The extant *Acts* and *Epistles* are collected in Tischendorf's *Evang. Apoc.*, and most of them are translated by Cowper in his *Apocryphal Gospels*. See also the Ante-Nicene Fathers, Am. ed., VIII. p. 416 sqq., Roberts, Alexander and Donaldson; James, Nicene and Post-Nicene Fathers, 2nd Ser., Vol. I (Oak Harbor, WA: Logos Research Systems, Inc., 1997).

¹⁶⁷ The existing *Report of Pilate* (translated in the Ante-Nicene Fathers, Vol. VIII, pp. p. 460, 461) answers well to Eusebius' description, containing as it does a detailed account of Christ's miracles and of His resurrection. According to Tischendorf, however, it is in its present form of a much later date.

¹⁶⁸ That Tiberius did not persecute the Christians is a fact.

"These things are recorded by Tertullian,¹⁶⁹ a man well versed in the laws of the Romans, and in other respects of high repute, and one of those especially distinguished in Rome. In his apology for the Christians, which was written by him in the Latin language, and has been translated into Greek, he writes as follows: 'But in order that we may give an account of these laws from their origin, it was an ancient decree¹⁷⁰ that no one should be consecrated a god by the emperor until the Senate had expressed its approval. Marcus Aurelius did thus concerning a certain idol, Alburnus. And this is a point in favor of our doctrine, that among you divine dignity is conferred by human decree. If a god does not please a man he is not made a god. Thus, according to this custom, it is necessary for man to be gracious to god.'¹⁷¹

"Tiberius, therefore, under whom the name of Christ made its entry into the world, when this doctrine was reported to him from Palestine, where it first began, communicated with the Senate, making it clear to them that he was pleased with the doctrine. As we said earlier, despite the fact that the Senate rejected the proposal, Tiberius maintained his own opinion, and even threatened death to the accusers of the Christians.' Heavenly providence had wisely instilled this into his mind in order that the doctrine of the Gospel, unhindered at its beginning, might spread in all directions throughout the world."

Other Sources Regarding the Demise of Pilate

Saint Nikodemos the Hagiorite (b. 1749-1809), in his *Synaxaristes*, notes the following under the day for Saint Mary Magdalene: "This was written by George Kedrenos¹⁷² concerning Mary of Magdala: that she went to Rome, which resulted in the summoning of Pilate before Tiberius. Kedrenos goes on to say that Tiberius had Pilate placed inside the skin of a live animal, that is to say, skin stripped off, together with a viper, an ape, and a bird. I say (writes Nikodemos) that this account is not generally accepted. Zonaras, in his

¹⁶⁹ Tertullian was born in Carthage about the middle of the 2nd C., probably ca. 160, but some scholars push this year back ten and even twenty years. Tertullian's father was a Roman centurion, and he himself became a lawyer and rhetorician in Rome. He was converted to Christianity probably between 180 and 190. According to Saint Jerome [*de vir. ill.* 53], he became a presbyter and continued as such until middle life. He spent the later years of his life, while he was a Montanist heretic, in Carthage. He wrote a great number of works—apologetic, polemic, and practical—a few in Greek, but most of them in Latin—and many of the Latin ones are still extant. An English translation of his works is given in the Ante-Nicene Fathers, Vols. III. and IV.

¹⁷⁰ Cicero's *De Legibus*.

¹⁷¹ Tertullian's *Apology*, Ch. 5.

¹⁷² George Kedrenos, a 12th-C. historian penned a chronicle known as *Synopsis Historion*, which encompasses history from the creation of the world to the year 1057 after Christ. See also *Georgius Cedrenus*, ed. I. Bekker, 2 vols. (Bonn, 1838-1839).

Chronology,¹⁷³ says that Pilate was called to Rome by Tiberius. Zonaras, however, notes that Pilate did not find Tiberius (14-37) alive. Instead, he found his successor, Caligula (March of 37-41). Zonaras (continues Nikodemus) banished Pilate to Vienne of Gaul. Vienne is also mentioned by Adon in his *Chronicle*, age vii, to be where Pilate suicided; that he took his own life is also recorded by Eusebius."

In his *Church History*,¹⁷⁴ Eusebius writes: "It is worthy of note that Pilate himself, who was governor in the time of our Savior, is reported to have fallen into such misfortunes under Gaius (Caligula), whose times we are recording, that he was forced to become his own murderer and executioner; and thus divine vengeance, as it seems, was not long in overtaking him. This is stated by those Greek historians who have recorded the Olympiads, together with the respective events which have taken place in each period."

Legends abound regarding the demise of Pontius Pilate. When Pilate learned that Caesar was going to condemn him to a most disgraceful death, Pilate, hearing this, slew himself with his own knife. When Caesar learned of the suicide, he remarked, "Truly he has died by a most disgraceful death, whom his own hand has not spared." Pilate was then bound to a great mass, and sunk into the river Tiber. But malignant spirits created thunder and lightning and tempests and hailstorms, so that all men were kept in horrible fear. Therefore the Romans, drawing Pilate's remains out of the Tiber, in derision conveyed the corpse to Vienne,¹⁷⁵ where it was again committed to the waters but in the river Rhone. For Vienne is called, as it were, Via Gehennae, the way of Gehenna, because it was then a place of cursing. Evil spirits pervaded that place as well, so that the same adverse weather conditions occurred. The corpse was again removed and sunk in the lake at Lausanne. There are many other legends about Pilate in the folklore of Germany, but none of them have the slightest authority.

Presently, according to a local story in Vienne, the monument "la pyramide," was the site of the tomb of Pontius Pilate. This is but a legend, but the confusion is understandable: the Emperor Augustus ordered Herod Arche-

¹⁷³ Bk. VI.

¹⁷⁴ Eusebius, *Church History*, Bk. II, Ch. VII, Nicene, 2nd Ser., I:110.

¹⁷⁵ Vienne is situated on the confluence of the rivers Rhone and Gere. It was founded by the Gallic tribe of the Allobrogians but conquered by the Romans. In 61 B.C., the natives expelled the Romans who founded Lyon. A couple of years later Julius Caesar decided to pacify the area for good, which action eventually led to the conquest of all of Gaul. Vienne remained an important town and its territory stretched toward Geneva.

laus, the ruler of Judaea about a generation before Pilate, to settle in Vienne.¹⁷⁶ Let us now return to the Life of Saint Mary.

Saint Mary Magdalene Returns to Jerusalem

The Great Synaxaristes (in Greek) continues its narration regarding Mary Magdalene's return to Jerusalem, a voyage which she had not made for several years. She was in good cheer for having vindicated the Lord. Tidings of her great triumph also reached the Christian community in Jerusalem. As a disciple of Christ, at Jerusalem she found and followed the Apostle Peter. Fourteen years had passed since Christ's ascension, during which time the apostles preached His incarnation and resurrection. Peter, one day, visited with the Apostle Maximos who was one of the Seventy at that time.¹⁷⁷ He had

¹⁷⁶ In conjunction with Saint Mary's complaint, other reasons for Pilate's appearance in Rome are also given in other sources. A leader of the Samaritans had promised to disclose the sacred treasures which Moses was reported to have concealed upon Mount Gerizim, and the Samaritans came together in great numbers from all quarters. Pilate, supposing the gathering to be with rebellious purpose, sent troops against them and defeated them with great slaughter. The Samaritans complained to Vitellius, governor of Syria, who sent Pilate to Rome in A.D. 36, to answer the charges brought against him. Upon reaching Rome he found Tiberius dead and Gaius Caligula upon the throne. He was unsuccessful in his attempt to defend himself, and, according to tradition, was banished to Vienne in Gaul, where a monument is still shown as Pilate's tomb. According to another tradition he committed suicide upon the mountain near Lake Lucerne, which bears his name. Text taken from the explanatory note 1 of Philip Schaff and Henry Wace in Eusebius' *Church History*, Bk. II, Ch. VII, of the Nicene and Post-Nicene Fathers, 2nd Ser., I:110.

See also *December Synaxaristes* (in English), s.v. "December 25th," the Feast of the Nativity of our Lord, under the section entitled "Augustus Taxes All the Roman Empire," which discusses the reckoning of years by the Romans before the establishment of Christianity. An error occurred in the calculation of Dionysios the Younger (A.D. 526), who introduced the present method of dating. He made the birth of Christ coincide with the Roman year 754. However, further studies since have ascertained that Christ was actually born in 747 or 748 according to the Roman era, that is, six or seven years earlier than Dionysios has supposed. Furthermore, according to all historical accounts, Herod the Great, the slayer of the children of Bethlehem, died in 4 B.C. Thus it is evident that the Christ Child could not have been born after 4 B.C.

¹⁷⁷ *The Great Synaxaristes* (in Greek) identifies this apostle as one of the Seventy. Western sources refer to a Saint Maximinus, the first confessor and first archbishop of Aix in Provence (commemorated in the *Roman Martyrology* on the 9th of June), who first preached at Marseilles. He is said by some moderns to have been one of the disciples of our Lord. Saint Sedonius was his successor and second Bishop of Arles, supposed by the people of the country to have been the man born blind whom our Savior healed. Their relics are shown at Saint Maximins, a town six leagues from Aix, built at the place where this saint was buried. Maurolycus (1494-1575), astronomer,

(continued...)

a home near the waters of the pool of Siloam. Peter went to his house and knocked at the door. There answered a little girl, named Rhoda, who was Maximos' granddaughter. She ran to fetch her grandfather, crying out, "Grandfather, it is the holy teacher!" All the members of the family, hearing this announcement, were on their feet to greet Saint Peter. Peter spoke privately with Maximos, foretelling the coming persecution upon the Church. Peter disclosed that several persons in the Church were being targeted by the Christ-slayers. Maximos, with sincerity and spontaneity, pledged his allegiance to the Christ and His Church to the very end. Peter said that the Praetorium issued two death sentences in writing: one for Mary Magdalene and one for Maximos. Peter told him that the God-slayers took a vow not to eat bread unless they blotted out of Jerusalem all those who proclaimed the resurrection of Jesus. Peter then told Maximos that he was leaving for Rome. For all the time that Mary Magdalene had spent in Rome she increased the Church community significantly, for which it was needful that he go and serve there. Maximos then rose up and extended his arms in prayer, thanking our Lord Jesus Christ for countenancing His unworthy slave Maximos. He promised to follow after Christ, despite the most terrible martyrdom. Death for the sake of Christ was sweeter to him than honey. Maximos then affirmed to

¹⁷⁷(...continued)

mathematician, and Benedictine abbot, seems to have been the first who called Saint Maximinus a disciple of our Lord. Alban Butler in his *Lives of Saints* informs us that "Saint Maximinus figures largely in the Provencal legend of the coming of the Three Maries and their companions—a tradition which was regarded as genuine in the later middle ages, but which appears to have been unknown in Provence before the 11th C. According to local histories, Maximinus was one of our Lord's seventy-two disciples. He left Palestine after the ascension with Saint Mary Magdalen, Saint Martha, Saint Lazarus, Saint Mary Cleopas, Saint Mary Salome, and other holy persons, and they all came to evangelize Provence. Maximinus made his headquarters at Aix, of which he became the first bishop. When Saint Mary Magdalen was dying she was carried from the cave at the Sainte-Baume, high up among the Maritime Alps, in which she had lived, to a spot now called Le Saint Pilon, where she received Communion from Saint Maximinus. At a short distance from Le Saint Pilon stands the church of Saint-Maximin, which was built to replace an older church with the same dedication and to enshrine the reputed relics of these two saints. The body of Saint Maximinus was translated in 1820 to Aix, of which city he is the principal patron. The head (relic) of Saint Mary Magdalen is still supposed to be preserved in the ancient crypt of Saint-Maximin." *The Lives of Saints*, s.v. "June 8th."

Butler continues to make known that the earliest reference of the Palestinians in France is from the 11th C. Elaborations spread during the 13th C. Research shows that the account of Saint Mary Magdalene's relics cannot be relied upon as authentic. *The Lives of the Saints*, s.v. "July 22nd." Orthodox Tradition places her burial in Ephesus and later translation to Constantinople.

Peter that he did not fear the tormentors or death. He did say, however, that he was grieved for Magdalene, Christ's lamb, who will be saddened a second time to leave the side of the Virgin Theotokos. Maximos then asked if Magdalene knew of the coming danger. Peter answered, "Neither Magdalene, nor our Lady, nor any of the brethren have been apprised. For the decision was issued only one hour ago, signed by the Proconsul Zoilos and the kinsmen of Herod Antipas. I was informed of this by Quartus, who knows well the chief secretary of the Praetorium." Peter then said, "The stadium has now opened for thee and Magdalene. I hope for a brilliant crown of victory and everlasting triumph. Rejoice, Maximos, my elect fellow laborer, for thou hast labored much for the Gospel of peace! Pray that I arrive in Rome before they arrest me as well. But let us go first and bid farewell to our Mother, Mariam. She will give us her holy blessing and her God-enlightened counsels, which are a spiritual treasure of affection and salvation." The two men then departed. Grandfather Maximos then whispered something in little Rhoda's ear as they left. They, thereafter, went and paid their respects to the Queen of heaven and earth, who was their only earthly consolation and hope since their worshipful Teacher, Jesus Christ, was taken up.¹⁷⁸

The Jews apprehended the holy Apostles Maximos and Mary Magdalene. The two were fettered with chains. The chief rabbi interrogated Magdalene first, saying, "Hast thou renounced that deceiver who profaned the sabbath?" She kept silence. The chief priest then approached and said to her, "Art thou deaf? Didst thou not hear what was asked of thee? Tell us, hast thou renounced that deceiver who profaned the sabbath?" Mary, looking at him calmly, answered, "When thou sayest 'deceiver,' art thou able to tell me his identity?" The chief priest answered, "I mean the son of Joseph, the one who divided the inheritance of God into two factions. I mean the one who said that God was His Father, making himself equal with God.¹⁷⁹ I speak of the one who profanes the sabbath and tramples upon the Law of Moses. So then, dost thou renounce him? Yea or nay? Reflect well, for thy life depends upon thine answer." Mary Magdalene, equal-to-the-apostles, answered, "What sayest thou? That I should renounce the God of all? I will never do that, even if I must forfeit my life. I ask thee, who purports himself to be a teacher of the Law—and yet thou findest thyself outside of the Law—why dost thou slander my Teacher?"

The chief priest then answered with a tone of irony, as his corpulent flesh fell back onto his throne, "Who is slandering thy teacher?" She

¹⁷⁸ *The Life of Saint Mary Magdalene* (in Greek), Ch. 16, pp. 96-101; *The Great Synaxaristes* (in Greek), VII:432.

¹⁷⁹ Jn. 5:18; Jn. 19:7.

answered, "Thou dost slander Him shamelessly. Furthermore, thou dost falsely accuse Him in four areas: first, that He is the son of Joseph; second, that He has divided the people; third, that He has presumed to make Himself equal with God; and fourth, that He profanes the sabbath. I counter what you have alleged in this wise. First, He was not the son of Joseph, but the Son of the Virgin, Mariam. This was foretold by the Prophet Esaias. What kind of teacher of the Law art thou? And yet thou art ignorant of the prophetic saying: 'Behold, the Virgin shall conceive in the womb, and shall bring forth a Son, and thou shalt call His name Emmanuel [Is. 7:14; Mt. 1:23].' Second, He did not divide the people but separated the wheat from the chaff. Again, what kind of teacher of the Law art thou? Hast thou not heard the prophetic voice of the Forerunner, the son of the High Priest Zacharias? He preached in the wilderness of Jordan of the coming of the Messiah 'Whose winnowing fan is in His hand, and He will thoroughly purge His threshing floor, and will gather His wheat into the storehouse, but the chaff He will burn completely with fire unquenchable [Mt. 3:12].'¹⁸⁰ What sayest thou to these utterances? Let us now expose the fallacy of the third accusation. How is He not God? In a manner befitting God was He not incarnate? As God did He not work wonders and miracles? As God did He not raise the dead? What other testimonies dost thou require to prove Him to be the Messiah? Now the fourth charge as a sabbath-breaker. Hast thou, O chief priest, remembered the letter and spirit of that law? How did Jesus profane the sabbath? Art thou worthy to answer? Yea or nay?" The chief priest answered her, "Of course, I am worthy. I can demonstrate how that deceiver violated the sabbath not once, but many sabbaths for three years in a row."

He then turned to the chief of the synagogue and asked, "Benjamin, dost thou remember the date when that deceiver profaned the sabbath by healing the man born blind?"¹⁸¹ Benjamin put his finger to his temple, trying to remember. He then said, "Chief rabbi, when the deceiver opened the eyes of the man born blind, it was the twelfth day of Nisan. That profaner did something most shameful when he stooped and made mud with his spittle, with which he anointed the eyes of that mindless blind fellow. The profanation was twofold: this is because Jesus urged the blind man to profane the sabbath as well. The deceiver in no wise chose to venerate what was written in Genesis: 'God blessed the seventh day and sanctified it [Gen. 2:3].'" Benjamin then said to Magdalene, "Dost thou hear me, O thou proud woman? I have provided thee with the time and place where thy teacher has profaned the sabbath. How

¹⁸⁰ Lk. 3:17.

¹⁸¹ Jn. 9:2 ff.

could he keep the sabbath holy? He was only a rustic Nazarene pretending to be the Messiah."

Mary countered, "Even the Prophet Esaias condemns your hypocritical keeping of the sabbath. Did he not say that God's soul hates your fasting and your rest from work? Did not God say that we ought to learn to do well, to diligently seek judgment, to deliver him that is suffering wrong, to plead for the orphan, and to obtain justice for the widow?¹⁸² But the Pharisees have multiplied burdensome sabbath restraints that violate the laws of mercy and necessity and moral duty, for which the sabbath was instituted." As Mary spoke, they seemed incapable of attending to the sense.

Benjamin then retorted fiercely, "Hold thy tongue. I am not obliged to answer thee. For first of all, the Messiah does not come from Nazareth, but from Bethlehem." Magdalene interrupted him and declared, "My Teacher was born in Bethlehem, but he was called a Nazarene; for He dwelt there. The Virgin, as well, Mariam, belongs to the tribe of Juda, from the root of Jesse, the father of King David. Jesus was a Bethlehemite. Indeed, even Herod, that fox, recognized Him as such."¹⁸³ At this juncture, the chief rabbi was foaming at the mouth. Mary was then told, "Muzzle it, woman. Thou art unworthy to put in thy mouth the name our king, Herod, who probably only thought that Jesus was the Messiah." Perceiving her firmness, they were now very incensed with Mary Magdalene. With her straightforward glance and outspokenness, they found her very disturbing as an uppity and insubordinate woman. The officers holding staffs were waiting to be summoned. "We ought to muzzle thy mouth with thirteen mighty slaps." Then some beastly-minded Hebrew approached. With his fat and heavy hand, he began to strike her face. He smote her with such maniacal fury that he cut her lip, causing an abundance of blood to flow. The senses of the equal-to-the-apostles did not become disordered. She did not cower in the least. She breathed Christ; she desired Christ; she loved Christ for Whose sake she suffered with the utmost joy.

The chief priest of the synagogue rose up from his throne. He gestured to the crowd that had gathered to keep silence. He then addressed them all, saying, "O people and inheritance of God, in the name of the long-awaited Messiah, I, at this time, sentence this audacious woman to death. She is condemned on two counts. First, she unsettled the people of Jerusalem, dividing them by having many follow the faction of that wandering Nazarene. Second, she is the cause of death for three very hallowed men. My uncle, Annas; the highly praised Caiaphas; and the most righteous judge, Pilate. The death that is preferred is drowning. I urge the execution to take place without

¹⁸² Is. 1:14, 17.

¹⁸³ Lk. 13:32.

delay. I, therefore, order that the two defendants should be bound with heavy iron chains upon their feet, and that they are to be submerged into the deepest part of the sea. Responsibility for carrying out this execution is entrusted to Rabbi Og and Priest Eli." The chief priest of the synagogue then looked with disdain upon Maximos and commented: "From thee I did not wish to hear a word. However, in order to have a clear conscience, I shall make one inquiry. What God dost thou revere?" The Apostle Maximos uttered: "I worship Father, Son, and Holy Spirit, Trinity one in essence and undivided. But thou oughtest to know, O false priest and offspring of the devil, that the Christ Whom thou dost fight shall speedily send thee away to the Gehenna of the fire." The chief priest of the synagogue sensed an invisible fear and trembling in his blackened soul.

The chief rabbi, pretending not to hear the apostle's response, cut off Maximos with a proposal: "Dost thou wish that I should make thee ruler of the synagogue?" Maximos answered, "Ruler of the ravenous synagogue? What communion does a wolf have with a sheep?" The chief priest, involuntarily, lowered his head. He did this not out remorse, but because he suddenly felt extremely unwell. A slight tremor seized his whole body. He was faint but still attempted to come down off the raised platform of the judgment seat. He felt as if an invisible hand delivered a mighty slap across his face, which led to spasms and strange grimaces. Divine wrath then overcame him, dispatching him from this life inside of ten minutes. Though the Apostle Maximos' righteous forewarning came to pass before the eyes of many, still the sentence against Magdalene and Maximos was to be carried out. The two apostles were sent away on a boat. They were provided neither sails, nor oars, nor victuals, so that they might sink and drown. The Christian community, learning of this, assembled. The most holy Virgin, together with the Apostle Peter and the rest of the Christians, went to their knees and offered up prayer. They entreated the Lord and fasted forty days that the ship might be kept safe.¹⁸⁴

Saint Mary Magdalene in Gaul

The Great Synaxaristes (in Greek) next narrates the exploits of the saint in the west, beginning by saying it was the will of our holy God—the Lord Jesus Christ, the true Pilot of the faithful—not to permit them to perish in the deep. He navigated them safely to Gaul, to the beach of Massalia (Marseilles).

They landed on the beach. Relieved to feel the sand under their feet, Magdalene and Maximos espied a wooden house. Maximos, with drenched clothes still dripping with seawater, knocked at the door. A woman opened and looked him over from crown to foot. She uttered something in an incompre-

¹⁸⁴ *The Life of Saint Mary Magdalene* (in Greek), Ch. 17, pp. 102-108.

hensible language to him and closed the door in his face. Maximos returned to Mary unsuccessful, saying he did not understand a word that the native woman sputtered at him. Mary, with the grace of the Spirit from Pentecost, understood languages. She went to the door, tapping gently. This time a man appeared in the doorway. He looked at Mary and said angrily through his nostrils, "Who art thou?" Mary answered, "We have been shipwrecked, sir. We are foreigners who are weary, worn, and shivering from the cold. Kindly offer us a bit of hospitality and God shall recompense thee one hundredfold." The man became like a wild beast. Incensed and raging, he seized an iron oar which was evidently hanging from the back of the door. He raised it up high over Mary's head, threatening to bring it down upon her. He began shouting aloud, "I am going to kill thee." At that moment, he brought down the iron implement over her head. But he missed her, even at that close range, and smote her right hand. The result was that he shattered all of her fingers. Blood flowed and sprayed about, falling on the stone stairway to the house. The man then slammed the door.

Mary's blood was streaming forth in a steady flow. From moment to moment she was becoming more pale and lightheaded. Though the physical pain was intolerable, she still collected her spiritual power and stood upright without collapsing. She uttered an entreaty to Christ, saying, "O my Jesus, Bridegroom of my soul, I thank thee for these bitter pains which I have received for love of Thy Church. Vouchsafe me to shed all of my blood for Thy sake." Maximos, standing at a distance, witnessed the incident. He came running to assist her. He tore off a strip from his tunic and quickly wrapped the wound. As they drew away from that inhospitable dwelling, Maximos spoke comfortingly to her: "My sister and lady, thou art blessed because as firstfruits of thine apostolic struggles in this idolatrous land, thou hast received one small reward of martyrdom. Rejoice, sister! But wilt thou not this minute supplicate our Teacher to hurl down fire from heaven and consume these hardhearted people?" The equal-to-the-apostles answered, "Never! We did not come forth to punish the unenlightened, but to lead them out of darkness to the light. Dost thou not recall, milord Maximos, that which was spoken by our Teacher? 'Whosoever shall seek to save his life shall lose it; and whosoever shall lose it shall preserve it alive [Lk. 17:33].' We are obliged to endure even to death, with the object of conducting ourselves as befits the cherished commandments of our Teacher. I, brother, should much prefer to extend to that man my other hand, in concert with the voice of my Lord Whom I heard to say regarding an enemy: 'Whosoever shall strike thee on the right cheek, turn to him the other

also [Mt. 5:39].¹⁸⁵ How shall we teach others if we do not first keep such commands?" Maximos understood his error and asked pardon. He still, however, preferred to remove Magdalene from that scene lest she should receive additional wounds. Thus, they departed.

Their steps were very labored, as they were feeling the effects of hunger and hardship. A warm wind blew that dried their wet garments. As they walked along, it was extremely quiet. Mary began to whisper a prayer very slowly, saying: "O my Lady Theotokos, my breath and the love of my heart, where art thou and what art thou doing at this moment? O, if thou knewest where I was now to be found by the grace of thine only-begotten Son and our Savior Jesus Christ! May thy blessed name be highly hymned! By thine intercessions were we delivered from certain death by drowning." She then looked over to Maximos and said, "O brother, blessed be unto the ages the God and Father of our Lord Jesus Christ, for I will sojourn in this city and labor for the Gospel. Lo, my hand has been restored! As for thee, shortly thou wilt go forth to Rome and meet our great Apostle Peter who has already departed from Palestine for Rome. Do send him my respects and salutations. Minister to him as much as thou art able. Do not forget, O brother Maximos, that he is great among the apostles and even the angels." Maximos happily received the command, answering: "May the will of the Lord come to pass now and ever and to the ages of the ages!"¹⁸⁶

Saint Mary Magdalene Enters Marseilles

It was about noon when the apostles entered the center of the city of Marseilles. Upon their arrival, moved by hunger, thirst, and the cold winter chill, they could find no one to offer them kind hospitality. They found themselves in a lovely public square, filled with people and much movement. Now all the people of that place were idolaters. On the day that Mary Magdalene and Maximos arrived, the heathen were engaged in preparations for a festival and entertainment after the sacrifice.

Mary Magdalene, observing their bustling activity, stood in their midst. With a bold but joyous countenance, she addressed them speaking sweetly. She proclaimed the Logos of God, saying with much calmness and serenity: "O excellent men, hearken that you might come to know the Creator of the heaven and of the earth, God, the mighty and powerful One, the true God. O people, renounce the mute and dumb idols. Believe in the pre-eternal Logos of God, Who is Jesus Christ the Savior of the cosmos. He delivered us from the deceit of graven images that are voiceless and deaf." The people,

¹⁸⁵ Lk. 6:29.

¹⁸⁶ *The Life of Saint Mary Magdalene* (in Greek), Ch. 18, pp. 109-113; *The Great Synaxaristes* (in Greek), loc. cit.

hearing blessed Mary's speech, wondered at her sweet words. They also were astonished at her exquisite loveliness. After she concluded her word of teaching, it came to pass that the governor of the province, together with his wife, arrived.

Dignitaries followed the chariot of the governor of that place, Hypatius, and his wife Claudia. They were bearing their sacrifice to the idol of their goddess. Their offering was made in conjunction with their petition to conceive a child, as they had none. Some forty African musicians were playing Egyptian music. Then all were commanded to keep silence at the blast of the trumpets. The ceremony was about to commence. Hypatius and Claudia mounted the steps leading to the idol of the goddess Frea (Freya). The statue was the height of about three persons. The governor and his wife kneeled and bowed their heads to the ground. After some ritual of crowning the statue, the festivities began when flowers of every color were cast into the air. The heavy scent was varied and nauseating. Hypatius and Claudia took their places on specially arranged thrones. Wild and shameless dancing then followed among people of every age and rank. Mary then whispered something to Maximos, and then made the sign of the Cross. She then mounted the stairs leading to the thrones of the governor and his wife.

Mary Magdalene addressed Hypatius: "Governor, may I speak to thine honorable person?" The governor, impressed with her dignity and beauty, asked, "Art thou a mortal?" Mary answered, "Certainly, milord, I am as mortal as thee, but immortal as one of the slaves of the immortal God, the King of all: Christ." The governor then gave orders for the music to cease that he might better concentrate. He then said with a tinge of irony, "Indeed, I have heard of thy Christ. He leads people to spiritual numbness, to intellectual death, to the wasting of the body and the soul. But tell me: art thou a Jewess?" Mary answered, "I am a Jewess. I assure thee that the information thou hast received concerning my Lord Jesus is in error. The true and life-giving God, Jesus, does not lead anyone to spiritual numbness. As the Wisdom of God He does not bring about intellectual death. As the Physician of souls and bodies, He does not wither them. On the contrary, He leads people to wisdom, to light, to joy. Dost thou wish me to assure thee of this?" He thought a moment, and said, "Indeed, I do!" Mary remarked, "Well, then, deny thy false belief of the idols. Come to believe in the Christ as the true God, the Maker of earth and heaven. Then will the eyes of thy soul be opened. Then wilt thou behold the true life, the true wisdom, and the true joy." The governor, not pleased with these words, put a look of indifference on his face and said, "Thou dost babble. I should renounce the immortal gods? Perhaps thou art not in thy right mind?"

The governor then wished to make a public confession. He rose up and addressed the crowd: "My people: to this great goddess Frea do I owe my life. She helped me to escape from the claws of the Germans in the battle on the Rhine. If she did not overshadow me with her robe, this moment I should be nothing but bones. I should not even exist. For this reason do I love her, and revere here, and make obeisance with all my soul." By speaking thus, Hypatius seemed to gratify his conscience. He turned to Magdalene and said, "Leave this place, for thou art rousing my anger when thou darest to speak evil against the great goddess." Mary, nevertheless, did not give place. She looked directly into his eyes and said sternly: "Milord governor, this idol has not the least power or strength. Within that statue there is hiding an evil demon, who is misleading thee and all the followers of that graven image. This wrongful reverence is only going to usher in for thee, and right soon, profound shame. So spoke my King David, who said, 'Let all be put to shame that worship graven things, that boast themselves of their idols [Ps. 96:7].' Now, if thou wilt receive everlasting blessing, believe in the Christ and venerate the symbol of His Faith, the honorable Cross. Wilt thou do this?" He raised his voice, saying, "Never, never, never!"

Mary then raised her mind and heart heavenward to God, offering up ardent prayer and saying, "My Lord Jesus, teach these people, by way of Thy wonderworking power, not to reverence the vain idols. Teach them to revere Thee as the only true God and Fashioner of the cosmos." Upon making this petition, even before Magdalene finished speaking, there was a loud thunder-clap and lightning. A thunderbolt shattered the statue of the goddess Frea. The people, seeing the destruction of their goddess, fell into a panic. In their haste to depart, some were trampled upon. Others wept, some cursed, some looked to the governor for guidance. Hypatius was beside himself with anger at the spectacle of Frea in pieces. He became faint as he tried to take hold of his sword. He shouted at Magdalene, saying, "I am going to slay thee, thou sorceress!" As he raised his sword and brandished it in front of Mary, suddenly his hand was benumbed, his body deadened. The sword fell uselessly to the ground. Hypatius collapsed in a dead faint.

By this time, the sun was moving behind the mountain. Instead of a festival there was general mourning throughout Marseilles for the misfortune that befell their goddess Frea. The inhabitants were stunned that one Jewish woman, by the power of her word alone, made debris of the exalted statue of their great goddess. The public square and the streets were bereft of people.

No one was about to provide any care or attention to Mary and Maximos. They, therefore, took shelter unto the portico of the shrine, which abutted on the luxurious home of Governor Hypatius and Claudia.¹⁸⁷

After that day passed, the venerable Mary appeared in a night vision to the governor's wife. Claudia heard with deep dread these words of Mary: "Hearken well, O Claudia, to my words! How is it that no one wishes to do a kindness to strangers? Is it right and reasonable that thou shouldest take thine ease upon thy soft bedding, with a full stomach, while we, the slaves of the one God, are hungering and thirsting and dying from the cold just outside the door of thy house? Rise up quickly. Stir thy husband and exhort him to have compassion upon the strangers. By so doing, you shall each receive a great reward in the heavens." The high born lady then was roused from her sleep in a state of agitation. But with a quick process of self-deception, she turned to her other side and fell asleep.

The holy Mary appeared for a second time to the governor's wife, commanding her to speak to her husband. Mary spoke more vehemently this time, enjoining Claudia to prevail upon her husband to show mercy by relieving their want: "Awake and notify thy husband to make haste and offer hospitality to the strangers, else thou shalt undergo a harsh punishment." Claudia remained disobedient. The woman was afraid not only of the vision but also of imparting it to her husband. The saint then appeared to the stubborn woman, bearing a fiery staff. Mary mightily struck the mouth of the governor's wife, which dislodged her lips toward the right side of her face by her ear. Thus disfigured, she looked upon Mary who was as radiant as the sun. By this time, the governor was stirred from his rest. He was temporarily blinded by the light of the holy woman which filled the bedchamber. He heard Mary say, "Wake up! The vision is real and not without meaning."

What, therefore, did the slave of God do next? She appeared, and not a little cross, for a third time—but to both the governor and his wife. Mary's countenance shone forth brilliantly like fire as though the governor's house were aflame. She addressed the governor, saying, "So dost thou slumber, O tyrant, offspring of thy father Satan and enemy of the Cross? I tell thee to rise up and gaze upon thy wife's countenance. Whilst thou art taking thine ease, eating and drinking to surfeit, indulging thy belly with all sorts of foods and wines, holy strangers of God are left to die tormented with hunger, thirst, and cold weather. Indeed, whilst thou art sleeping in thy palace, warmly and comfortably wrapped with costly coverings, the slaves of God abide homeless and tested with chilling temperatures. Why didst thou pass them by with an air

¹⁸⁷ *The Life of Saint Mary Magdalene* (in Greek), Ch. 19, pp. 114-120; *The Great Synaxaristes* (in Greek), VII:432, 433.

of indifference and incivility? Why art thou procrastinating to do them some good? Soon thou shalt draw down the wrath of God! If thou shouldst continue to ignore this warning, together with that viper of a wife who is at thy side, then I shall cast down this fiery staff which I am holding over both of you. By means of it your souls will be dispatched to gloomy punishment." Having spoken thus, Mary departed from him.

The governor's wife, consumed with terror, tried to draw her impeded breath as best she could. The governor was on his feet. He glanced over at his wife who was indeed a frightful and pitiful spectacle, but he could not speak outrightly lest he should inflict more pain. She still dared not speak to her husband regarding the visitation that she too received. The governor then said to her, "Dost thou know, O wife, the vision which I was vouchsafed?" She nodded and spoke with difficulty, "Indeed, but excessive timidity and trembling checked me." He remarked, "What ought we to do about this affair?" She replied, "It is best to do as the handmaiden of God has bidden us, that we might appease the Deity lest by disobeying we should bring down upon ourselves an unbearable vengeance." He then hastened to open the outside door. He saw two shadows, kneeling down with arms crossed over their chests. He was horrified. He ran over to them and kneeled before them. They were the two apostles in prayer. With tears in his eyes he begged their forgiveness. It was already early dawn when the governor collected the strangers and brought them inside where it is was warm. They were dealt with proper and generous hospitality. All the needs of Mary and Maximos were abundantly addressed. Mary also performed a miracle by correcting the disfigurement on Claudia's face.¹⁸⁸

The first Christian church, like an evergreen tree, bloomed slowly as it put down deep roots in the soil of that barbarian nation of Gaul. Mary was treated with respect and dignity as she preached the Gospel. Maximos had already left for Rome. Mary sojourned in the home of Hypatius, teaching daily with great wisdom and patience. Some, initially, came to visit out of curiosity. Many were intrigued with the doctrine and mysteries of the Faith. Little by little, the inhabitants came to sincere belief. They yearned to be baptized as soon as possible. They did not wish to wait any longer for either Peter or Maximos from Rome.

Mary Magdalene continued preaching the Lord Jesus. One day, however, the governor asked her, "Milady, I believe that Christ is the true God and the Creator of the creation. I believe in everlasting life. I also believe in the Holy Trinity. I should like to ask one favor of thee. Art thou able to

¹⁸⁸ *The Life of Saint Mary Magdalene* (in Greek), Ch. 20, pp. 121-123; *The Great Synaxaristes* (in Greek), VII:433, 434.

prove thy Faith by means of deeds? Canst thou demonstrate openly to me the power of the Faith which thou dost teach?" The holy woman responded: "With our holy God helping me, I can make manifest the power of my Faith."

The governor, together with his wife, taking her up on this statement, asked, "Art thou able to request from thy God that we might have a child? And if thou shouldest work this wonder, we, with all of our house, shall be persuaded in all thou hast taught and preached." The woman of God promised to entreat God that they might succeed in obtaining their much-desired offspring. With the passage of just a few days, the governor's wife did conceive. When the governor saw that his wife verily was with child, he conceived the desire to go to Rome and take counsel with the Apostle Peter whom Mary Magdalene had lauded. He wished to pay his respects to the chief of the apostles, Simon Peter, who declared: "Thou art the Christ, the Son of God, the living One [Mt. 16:16]." He wished to view the land of Galilee. Above all, he wish to receive holy Baptism that he might become a partaker of life everlasting. His wife then interposed, saying with tears, "I, too, wish to accompany thee to Rome that I might make the acquaintance of Peter." The governor answered her, "I do not give thee leave to make this journey lest thou shouldest suffer evil on the high seas during thy confinement." But the governor's wife persisted in weeping and wailing bitterly. She threw herself at his feet, pleading to be taken along on the voyage to Rome and to Peter. Mary, for her part, advised him to agree with her wishes. Mary Magdalene then blessed them saying, "May the power of God be with you both!" The governor and his wife kissed her hand, after which she sealed them with the sign of the honorable and life-giving Cross that they encounter no stumbling blocks in the way.¹⁸⁹

Governor Hypatius Departs for Rome to See the Apostle Peter

The ship was fitted out. Supplies and provisions were placed on board. The governor and his expectant wife set sail, after leaving all things in the hands of the holy woman. The voyage required four days to reach the harbor of Ostia. They began their trip with both fair winds and good weather. The couple were excited with the prospect of meeting with the Apostle Peter. They past their time speaking of spiritual matters. They joyfully discussed what they learned from their teacher, Mary Magdalene. As they sailed in comfort, suddenly, the unpredictable sea began throwing up rough seas and swells. The violence to the vessel induced labor in the governor's wife that night, who was already big with child and near her time. She was delivered of a male child, but died as she brought him forth. The child, not only bereft of his mother but

¹⁸⁹ *The Life of Saint Mary Magdalene* (in Greek), Ch. 21, pp. 124-126; *The Great Synaxaristes* (in Greek), VII:434.

also of any nourishment, died. Hypatius fell into a deep melancholy. He cried, he lamented, and he mourned. He would not be consoled. The sailors took counsel together, deciding to cast overboard the corpses into the sea the following morning. The governor, in the midst of his affliction as he knelt over the bodies, overheard their plans. He was in a quandary how to proceed concerning the burial of his wife and child. He pleaded with the mariners, and even bribed them, not to consign the bodies to the deep. He told them that he wished to bury them on land when they put in at Ostia. In his heart, however, he was hoping to bring the two bodies and lay them at the feet of Peter, whom he believed through Mary that he could resurrect them. The following morning, he knelt before the captain of the ship, saying, "O captain, sir, I am an unhappy man, though I have the first office as governor at Marseilles. Thou art able to curb my misery somewhat, if thou wilt only agree to keep the bodies of my wife and child in the hold of the ship. I shall pay thee handsomely. Once we come into the harbor, I shall commit the bodies to a proper burial." The captain was nervous at hearing his proposal. Then suddenly, a mountain was observed looming on the horizon. The captain, pointing at the mountain, said to him, "I shall direct the ship to the shore. Once there thou canst commit the bodies to a cave. It will not trouble thee to bury them according to the custom of the Hebrews, will it?" The governor could do nought but agree, seeing the captain was fixed in carrying out what he intended. The governor thought inwardly, "At least the bodies will not be devoured by sea monsters."

Hence, the ship was piloted in the direction of the mountain. The governor disembarked and found a small cave, dark and damp. The father wept bitterly. The ground was so hard that he could not dig a proper grave. He buried them as well as he could, covering the face of both mother and infant with his handkerchief. As tears streamed down his face, he cried out in a moment of weakness, "O Mary of Magdala, thy coming to Marseilles has brought ruin upon me! Is this the result of thy prayers? My wife has died in childbirth and the infant has perished having no one to nurse him. After I commended all to thee, didst thou not commend me to thy God? However, if it is in thy power, be mindful of the souls of my wife and child." He gave one last glance to his son and departed. He, thereupon, returned to the ship. The sailors attempted to console him, but mourning of the acutest kind remained his constant companion as they went toward Ostia.¹⁹⁰

The historian Nikephoros Kallistos continues his account of the Massalian Hypatius. Hypatius entered Rome where, after a number of

¹⁹⁰ *The Life of Saint Mary Magdalene* (in Greek), Ch. 22, pp. 127-130; *The Great Synaxaristes* (in Greek), VII:434, 435.

adventures, he finally located the apostle. He narrated to Peter all that occurred since he met Mary of Magdala. He also described why and how both his wife and his son died, after which he committed them to a cave. Apostle Peter, hearing his account, instructed him on patience and not to judge amiss what had befallen him. He advised him to cease sorrowing. He urged him to persevere and to abide without doubt. "For the Lord," he said, "may give and may take away His gifts."¹⁹¹ He may restore what was taken, and He may turn thy grief into gladness. All that Mary Magdalene had spoken to thee shall come to pass indeed; and thou shalt not be deprived of any good thing. If thy wife and child have died, then the Lord has taken them. But belief in God is effective and is able to bring about everything." Peter, also a widower who knew what it was to lose a child, consoled the bereaved husband and father with many such words of comfort. Little by little, the pain in Hypatius' heart was lessened by his growing desire for holy Baptism.

Governor Hypatius Goes to the Holy Land with the Apostle Peter

Then one day, Peter called him to himself and said, "It is the will of the Lord that I go to Jerusalem. If thou art able, do come along with me." Hypatius received the invitation gladly. Before long they set sail together on a merchant ship bound for the holy land. Walking upon the ground which the God-Man tread proved a very moving experience for Hypatius. The governor then desired to go up to Jerusalem that he might venerate the tomb of our Lord Jesus Christ. He went in the company of the Apostle Peter, who brought Hypatius to all the places where Christ walked, preached, and worked wonders in Jerusalem. The apostle showed him the sites of the crucifixion and burial, as well as the spot upon which Jesus was taken up into the heavens. He also paid his respects to our Lady the Theotokos. He received her blessing with much reverence. After Golgotha, Hypatius visited Bethlehem. He also went northward, to the well where Jesus encountered the Samaritan woman. He saw the small brick house of Joseph in Nazareth, where the Virgin received the gladsome tidings from the Archangel Gabriel. He entered inside and saw two chambers with earthen floors and one small courtyard. The desire for holy illumination in the waters of regeneration of holy Baptism became his goal.

The governor sojourned in the holy land for five months. Peter called him to himself and said, "O child of obedience, the hour is come for thee to depart from Jerusalem and return to thy homeland, near thy teacher and our sister, Magdalene, whose hands touched the risen Lord."¹⁹² This epistle which I am entrusting to thee is to be given to her. It contains my command and that of all of the Church of Jerusalem that the equal-to-the-apostles is to undertake

¹⁹¹ Job 1:21.

¹⁹² Jn. 20:17.

the Baptism of thy house. Place thy hope in the Mother of God and her slave, Magdalene. For I am certain that thou shalt be blessed not only in life eternal but also in this present life thou wilt enjoy the benefactions of the munificent Christ with regard to thy bereavement. I have nothing else to add, brother. Take my blessing and that of all the saints, and proceed on the path of peace." The governor, hearing these touching and heartfelt words, was deeply affected. Peter, reflecting further, then said, "Hypatius, child of holy obedience, do not forget on thy return home to pass by the little island where thou didst entomb thy loved ones. Enter the cave, where thou didst cover their faces with thy handkerchief. There, my goodly son, thou shalt come face to face with the greatness of the Faith, the Faith of the King of all, Jesus Christ, and His elect disciple Magdalene. Thou hast my blessing to go in peace."¹⁹³

Governor Hypatius Returns to the Island

The great Peter also sent with the governor two spiritual brothers, Proklos and Tertius, to help Mary Magdalene in her ministry. As the governor entered the ship, he brought to mind how previously he entered another sailing vessel happy and rejoicing with his spouse. But now he was again flooded with sorrow and distress upon losing both wife and child. As he meditated on all that transpired during those two years, he determined to go to the place where he left the remains of his wife and child. He believed that this would be a source of solace that he might bear up in the future. This notion, nevertheless, was inspired by the most compassionate Lord—not only to set him at ease but also to glorify Saint Mary Magdalene. As the ship approached the beach before the mountain containing the cave, the governor observed a child toddling and frolicking by the water and collecting pebbles. He was not a little astonished at the sight, since he believed it was a deserted island. He then viewed the child, who appeared to be a little more than two years of age running toward the cave, the very one that the governor entered two years earlier to commit the bodies of the dead to the earth rather than the sea and the sea monsters. The governor disembarked and directed his gaze more closely at the child. He then went toward him, taking him up in his arms and hugging him. He asked his name, but the child gave no answer.

The governor disembarked from a skiff attached to the main vessel, together with Proklos and Tertius, and made straight for the cave. In very dim light, they espied a woman huddled in the corner with her eyes closed as though she were asleep. Hypatius put down the child that he might stoop and take a better look at the woman. Suddenly, the woman opened her eyes and became agitated. Filled with fear and trembling, she cried out, "O Saint

¹⁹³ *The Life of Saint Mary Magdalene* (in Greek), Ch. 23, pp. 131-133; *The Great Synaxaristes* (in Greek), VII:435.

Magdalene, help me!" Hypatius, recognizing his most beloved wife's voice, found her not only intact and whole but even alive. As he wept at the sight of her, she suddenly was filled with fear and trembling. The rapturous governor, in tears, shouted loudly, "Claudia! Claudia!" He then whispered tenderly, "It is I, my sweet. It is thy beloved Hypatius. Cease fearing." He then raised her to her feet. Upon recognizing him, she began sobbing brokenheartedly. Then all the men wept along with her. The hard and cold cave became the scene of warm embraces and joy. "How didst thou return to life and how didst thou pass so much time?" asked the governor who was so amazed that he fancied he was seeing a vision. But then he quickly added, "We had better leave. The sailing master and the crew allowed us only a limited time. We cannot afford any delay getting on board. Let us be off!"

The smiling couple sat in a little corner of the ship, as the vessel cut across a calm sea under clear skies. Their contented little boy sat on Hypatius' lap. Some of the men were fishing for the next meal. Proklos and Tertius were standing close by, listening to Claudia recount her miraculous resurrection. She also spoke of the patronage and protection that she received from the holy Magdalene. With mouths wide open, they hung on every word that came forth from Claudia's mouth. She praised the sacred maiden Magdalene, giving this description at one point: "I found myself with the infant in a vast darkness, where there were other souls. These were the souls of those who desired holy Baptism but did not receive it before their departure. While I abided inconsolable and weeping in that immense darkness, I suddenly saw a blinding light that flashed by me like lightning. It forced me to drop down on the ground from my terror. I then heard a voice, a most sweet one, which I had heard in the land of the living. It was the voice of our teacher, Magdalene, which said to me, 'Claudia, rise up and cease fearing. It is I, Magdalene, the slave of God. I am come at the command of my Lord Fashioner in order to deliver thee from this punishment. Take the child and follow me. Thy desire for the Mystery of holy Baptism shall be fulfilled by the prayer of the Apostle Peter. Come that I might return thee to life, where thou shalt receive by me that much-desired Mystery to the glory of Christ.'" So spoke the noblewoman Claudia, though her sobbing caused her voice to falter. She paused a moment to compose herself. They listened round-eyed to her descriptions which continued: "Suddenly, then, I awakened and saw that the child and I were found in this cave where we had been lying dead. It is inside this very cave that I spent more than two years. I was never deprived of food and clothing, as you see. This is due to the goodly foresight and provision of our saint who did not forsake me. But hearken to how she arranged everything for me. She was coming here thrice weekly, bearing food and water. Was she coming here bodily? Was she come here bodilessly? This I never managed to learn. Then

again, I did not dare to ask her. She, consequently, brought me nourishment and all that was necessary. She uttered only the following to me throughout my sojourn here: 'Sister, Claudia, rejoice in the risen Christ!' Then she would vanish from my sight." After repeating Magdalene's familiar expression, Claudia broke down into a new wave of tears. After she composed herself somewhat, she continued, "The savior of my life and that of my child is the holy Magdalene. Magdalene with those very sweet eyes, inside of which is mirrored the heavenly good things of Paradise." Claudia then concluded her account here, so that all that could be heard was the snapping of the sails in the wind. The sails were then taken into the mast. Darkness fell and they all retired for the night.¹⁹⁴

Return to Marseille and Saint Mary Magdalene

Replete with joy, they came to their country and the port at Marseilles. They were vouchsafed to see the holy Mary, for which they gave thanks to the Lord Who wrought such wonders. They conversed, therefore, at great length. The governor in no wise forgot the last command of the Apostle Peter, that is to say, that he should receive holy Baptism in the name of the life-creating and undivided Trinity. The Baptism was performed by the equal-to-the-apostles Magdalene, in accordance with the command of the great Apostle Peter. The child of Hypatius and Claudia was named Peter in holy Baptism. Indeed, divine illumination was not confined only to Hypatius' house, but all the people in his jurisdiction converted. This city, populated with thousands upon thousands of people, were drawn to Christianity. With one mouth, they all confessed Jesus of Nazareth as the God of all Who is the Fashioner and Creator of the visible and invisible cosmos. Thus, that city, converted by Mary Magdalene preaching the risen Lord, now shone forth brilliantly. Heaven and earth rejoiced that the ranks of the Church were swelling.

All together the people of Marseille destroyed the temples of the idols. They built sacred churches and beautified them. Mary helped in all the works, managing and teaching, as she was filled with true knowledge and much wisdom. She discoursed on the Redeemer's sufferings and condescension. After nourishing the new flock with her life-giving instructions, commending them to the true God, our Lord Jesus Christ, in Whom they believed, that wondrous and great lady departed in the midst of a weeping city. Giving no consequence to the difficulties of the road or to womanly fragility, she did not cower in the least in making for Ephesus via Jerusalem.

¹⁹⁴ *The Life of Saint Mary Magdalene* (in Greek), Ch. 24, pp. 134-139; *The Great Synaxaristes* (in Greek), VII:435, 436.

Saint Mary Magdalene in Ephesus

Saint Mary visited Sion, wishing to visit again the places of Jesus' earthly sojourn. She tarried with the Theotokos until the Virgin's dormition. Following this pivotal event in her life, her soul's sorrow could not be consoled at the loss of the Mother of the Lord, from whom she received such extraordinary spiritual wealth. What was one of the tangible riches? There was a red stone upon which was set the life-giving body of Christ after He was taken down from the wood of the Cross and wrapped in linen clothes by the noble Joseph and Nikodemos. The account of the red stone bearing the marks of the Passion is also attested to by our holy father, Patriarch Dositheos of Jerusalem. The stone, moreover, bears the stains of the tears of the Mother of God.¹⁹⁵

Mary, thereupon, understood that, in accordance with the Lord's will, it was time to repair to Ephesus and Saint John the Theologian, in order to continue her ministry of spreading the Gospel. Saint Mary arrived in the important city of Ephesus of Ionian Asia Minor. She conveyed with her this precious artifact, that is, the red stone which she gave into the hands of the Evangelist John,¹⁹⁶ the son of thunder,¹⁹⁷ who "leaned on the breast of Jesus [Jn. 13:25]" during the Mystical Supper. She partook in his preaching ministry, which incurred for her afflictions, bonds, imprisonments, and all other kinds of scourges, griefs, pangs, troubles, and annoyances for the sake of the Gospel.¹⁹⁸

¹⁹⁵ Patriarch Dositheos, *Dodekavivlos*, Bk. 1, Ch. 1.

¹⁹⁶ Saint John the Theologian is commemorated by the holy Church on the 26th of September and the 8th of May.

¹⁹⁷ Mk. 3:17.

¹⁹⁸ The apostolic work of the blessed Mary Magdalene is more fully treated in other works. *The Great Synaxaristes* (in Greek) presents only her missionary labors in Gaul and Italy, but she also preached in Egypt, Phoenicia, Syria, Pamphylia, and other lands. Nikephoros Kallistos Xanthopoulos, in his work, entitled "Encomium to the Holy Myrrh-bearer and Equal-to-the-apostles Mary the Magdalene," provides us the following information from an ancient text: "Who is able to describe the difficulties which she encountered in her journeys? And who can count the multitudes that she attracted to the Faith by the net of the Gospel? These things may be surmised somewhat for those who study the Chronicles of Italy, which are preserved to this present writing, by which one may perceive how the blessed lady was glorified by God. It was only she who gave a stirring presentation before Tiberius Caesar, which led to the depositions of Annas, Caiaphas, and Pilate for their parts in bringing about the crucifixion of Christ. After she departed Rome, she went forth preaching the Gospel. She passed through all of Italy, as well as Gaul. She traveled to Egypt where, like the river Nile, she watered the inhabitants with the springs of the Gospel. Following this tour, she went

(continued...)

The majority of sources record that she reposed in peace.¹⁹⁹ Since she was mortal, the time came to fulfill the common law of nature. Mary succumbed to a short illness and peacefully commended her holy soul into the hands of God.²⁰⁰ Upon her repose, certain Christ-lovers interred her most precious body fittingly and honorably by the entrance of the cave where the Seven Sleepers²⁰¹ of Ephesus had come to rest. From the moment that her relics were laid to rest, they were shown to be a wellspring of miracles. She

¹⁹⁸(...continued)

to Phoenicia and Syria, as well as Pamphylia, spreading the words of the Gospel of the Faith. After a time, she returned to Palestine, tarrying some time with the Virgin Theotokos. Following this visit, she heard that the virginal disciple who rested on the breast of the Master, John, was proclaiming the word of God in Asia, to which she repaired.

“She carried a certain rich treasure to him. The red stone, it is said, upon which the life-creating body of Christ was set when He was taken down from the Cross and wrapped with the linen cloths by the noble Joseph. Now upon this stone, it could clearly be discerned some of the miraculous marks of the clotted blood of Christ and the indelible tears of the Mother of God. These were tears which she shed while anointing her Son with myrrh. Her tears had changed the color of the stone to grey. This stone was later transferred to Constantinople, which was carried by pious emperors upon their shoulders.”

This material was taken from pages 193 and 194 in a book published by the ever-memorable hegumen of the Athonite Monastery of Simonopetra, Archimandrite Hieronymos (1924), which contains the biographies and divine offices of Saint Simon the Myrrh-gusher (commemorated the 28th of December) and Saint Mary Magdalene. The same Athonite monastery also treasures the precious relic of Saint Mary’s sacred left hand. Taken from note 1, pp. 436, 437, of *The Great Synaxaristes* (in Greek), s.v. “July 22nd.”

¹⁹⁹ The only exception is the 7th-C. Archbishop of Jerusalem, Patriarch Modestos, who wrote that “one day, she was apprehended by certain God-slaying Hebrews of the diaspora. They administered terrible tortures. Her dreadful martyrdom ended with her death. The Equal-to-the-apostles Mary Magdalene received a triple crown from the Prize-bestower Christ: the crown of virginity, the crown of confession, and the crown of the contest. *The Life of Saint Mary Magdalene* (in Greek), “Epilogue,” p. 143. In the divine office for her today, the hymnographer Saint Theophanes—who composed a canon in her honor—does not mention that she suffered a martyric death. *The Prologue* of Bishop Nikolai Velimirović also records that she died peacefully in Ephesus.

²⁰⁰ *The Great Synaxaristes* (in Greek), VII:437.

²⁰¹ The Seven Sleepers are commemorated by the holy Church on the 4th of August. They lived during the reign of Emperor Decius (249-251). The seven youths fell asleep for almost two centuries at Mount Ochlou, where neither their bodies nor their raiment decayed. When the young men awoke, Emperor Theodosios II (408-450) was reigning. The latter learned of the incident, which he accepted as evidence or a prefiguration of the resurrection—a subject at that time being discussed in the churches.

still performs miracles to this day in many places. Let us now make mention of the recovery of her honorable relic, together with that of Saint Lazarus (the friend of the Christ), which event is commemorated by the holy Church on the 4th of May.

The recovery of these relics took place during the reign of the autocrat Leo the Wise (r. 886-912). The synaxis of these saints is celebrated in the magnificent Monastery of Saint Lazarus, which was founded by Leo from its foundations. The consecration of the holy church of this same monastery is also celebrated on this day. The church was wonderfully and skillfully adorned. Since the emperor desired that the monastery should be established and esteemed, he recovered the incorrupt relics of Saint Mary from Ephesus in a highly honorable and reverent operation.²⁰² The translation of the relics to the monastery took place in the year 890, which event was faithfully celebrated yearly in a splendid manner.²⁰³

With Saint Theophanes, we chant: "Succeeding to God-given divinization, thou delightest in the torrent of grace, receiving the rewards of thy pangs at God's command, being among the ranks of the apostles, O Magdalene, disciple of the Logos. Do thou, by thine entreaties, preserve those who with longing honor thee."²⁰⁴

**On the 22nd of July, the holy Church commemorates
the holy Virgin-martyr MARKELLA.²⁰⁵**

²⁰² Much has been written in the west on the subject of her repose in Provence or Sante Baume, which it is impossible to allow any sort of probability—even according to Roman Catholic scholars of the highest name. The Bollandists have expressed themselves in the most unequivocal terms. A fuller discussion on this issue may be examined in *Butler's Lives of the Saints*, s.v. "July 22," note on page 163.

It cannot be said, without some reservation, that the relics have definitely remained at Constantinople. It is not impossible that some portions were taken to the west, during the conquests of the Crusaders or the Moslems. Rome contends that she has some of Saint Mary's relics housed in the major basilica of Saint John Lateran, under the altar which Pope Honorius III (1216-1227) consecrated with Saint Mary's relics. Portions of her relics are also said to be in the Roman Catholic church in Provance near Marseilles.

²⁰³ *The Great Synaxaristes* (in Greek), loc. cit.

²⁰⁴ July 22nd, Orthros Canon, Ode Nine, Mode Plagal Four, by Saint Theophanes.

²⁰⁵ The following Greek sources were compiled and incorporated into this English version—in addition to *The Great Synaxaristes* (in Greek):

Tis Chio To Kleos [*The Boast of Chios*] (Athens, GR: Rt. Rev. Bp. Petros of Saint Markella, Astoria, NY, 1968); Joseph D. Agapetos, *Μαρκέλλα, Ὁ Ματωμένος Κρίνος* [*Markella, The Bloodstained Lily*] (Saint Stephanos, Attike, GR: Holy Convent (continued...)