

## **An exploration of how many Marys (Miriams) are in the NT.**

**I don't suppose we will ever know for sure, but over the years I have found myself becoming more convinced that what we witness in New Testament scripture is confusion, if not deliberate obfuscation, about the role of Mary Magdalene. This has led to her importance being lessened by giving some of her words and deeds to others.**

Mary Magdalene is not the sole figure to suffer this indignity, but the others will need to wait for another time.

If true, this only adds to the suspicion that some of the gospels we "lost," may have been put aside because of the role of women in them. Together, they provide information which makes what I am suggesting feasible. I do not claim uniqueness in this belief - I have simply brought together, in one document, the research of people more skilled in Greek than I, but I hope I have been able to bring the key points of some amazing research into a more accessible document for those who, like me, have wondered about this for a long time.

This is the result of a careful reading and comparison of all 48 scriptures mentioning a Mary. Other ideas come from decades of reading books, essays and watching movies, ideas from which have entered my subconscious. I mention some of the books on Mary, which I own, below.

### **Scriptures that mention a Mary**

There are 48 NT scriptures mentioning a Mary, plus 2 with an unnamed person I believe to reference a Mary. 18 clearly reference Mary, the Mother of Jesus; 2 in the post-Gospel books appear to reference a different, not primary, Mary. 28 verses reference a Mary that is not the mother, or a later Mary (see immediately above.) Of these 28 verses some are clearly named as Mary Magdalene; some reference a Mary who lives in Bethany; and some have multiple Marys, including one reference to Mary's sister, who is also named Mary! In their original form, all these Marys would have been the Jewish name Miriam, and Miriam was a very common name at the time. All of which make any confusion easy and deliberate confusion easier.

**Mary, the mother of Jesus and the "mother of Jesus."** This is quite obviously one person.

**Mary Magdalene.** There is no reason to think any of those are not Mary Magdalene, as, in my hypothesis, Mary Magdalene's importance has been diminished if anything.

### **Marys who are designated by their husband or children**

Mary, the wife of Clopas

Mary, the mother of James

Mary, the mother of James the Younger

Mary, the mother of James and Joseph (and of Salome?)

Mary, the mother of Josés

However, from the list of Jesus' brothers in the Gospels, the last 4 appear to be referencing Jesus' mother, and there is a theory that even "wife of Clopas" refers to Jesus' stepfather (his mother's supposed second husband.)\*\* A reference to Mary's sister, also named Mary, seems to be an error: No sister is mentioned for Mary the Mother, at any other time.

**When 2 Marys are mentioned it is usually Mary Magdalene and "the other Mary". it is never, Mary Magdalene and one of the Marys or both Marys, or even all Marys. The Gospels carry the imprint of the ancient story that named only 2 Marys. if there are only two Marys , Mary the Mother and Mary Magdalene, then can we reconcile the other Marys to that viewpoint. I believe it is indeed possible...**

2 Marys appear at the key points of the death and resurrection narratives and they are clearly Jesus' mother and Mary Magdalene. That these women are so close - Mary Magdalene appears to be closer to both Mary the mother, and to Jesus, than Mary's daughters (Jesus' sisters) and that, should give us food for thought about the closeness of Jesus and Mary Magdalene. Whether theirs was a spiritual or physical relationship, it is close and strong, and is something that is corroborated in early Jesus community writings.

### **Mary of Bethany, sister of Martha and Lazarus**

The other Mary who appears in more than one Gospel, and is the "star" of a key narrative, is Mary of Bethany. What do we know about her?

She is the sister of Martha, whose home seems to have been a base for Jesus and his disciples when visiting Jerusalem. In one Gospel they also have a brother named Lazarus. Mary is described as a spiritual seeker, the one fixated on Jesus or Jesus' message, and spiritually sensitive but that comes by merging two different Marys into Mary of Bethany... or maybe Mary of Bethany was split in two to lessen her profile? John's gospel identifies this Mary, Mary of Bethany, as being the one who poured oil on Jesus' feet, pre-anointing him for his burial which would otherwise take place without anointing, as a crucified person. No husband is ever mentioned for this Mary, as none is mentioned for Mary Magdalene, but like her, she appears to be independently wealthy.

### **Add to that, Luke's Mary and Martha of Galilee**

In Luke, we have Jesus visiting two sisters at their home in Galilee. The event narrated is usually linked to Mary of Bethany, but is clearly, in this gospel, in Galilee, and in the earlier ministry of Jesus. There is no brother. But we do have two sisters with their own home - so again independently wealthy women. Of all the stories this one seems most out of place, as we shall see.

### So how many? It's all about the woman who anoints Jesus...

The key to this problem seems to be that story of the woman who anoints Jesus. Such a story appears in all 4 Gospels, though Matthew's version seems to be copied from Mark, as it offers no additional information. When we compare the stories, we see this:

Gospel	Name	Location	When	Anoint	Body part	comment
Matthew 26: 6-13	None	House of Simon the Leper, Bethany	2 days before Passover	Yes. Alabaster jar	Head	Criticism by his disciples. Jesus says she "will be remembered" and it is prep for burial
Mark 14:3-9	None	House of Simon the Leper, Bethany	Just before Passover	Yes. Alabaster jar.	Head	"will be remembered" Criticism by "some" Jesus says it is prep for burial
Luke 7 : 36-50	None	House of Simon the Pharisee, Galilee	During Galilean ministry	Yes. Alabaster jar.	Feet - bathed them with tears, wiped with hair, kissed feet...	"sinner"
John 12:1-7	Mary	Home of Lazarus, Bethany	Just before Passover	Yes.	Feet - and wipes with hair	Criticism by Judas. Jesus says it is prep for burial

Notes on the table above:

1. John is not a synoptic Gospel and the author does not use Mark as a pattern for the 4th Gospel, but there is considerable similarity with Mark: timing, village of event, and Jesus' defense of the action - as preparation for burial. Evidence of a widely held memory, perhaps?
2. The named actor is a Mary in John's Gospel and it is the home of "Lazarus of Bethany" supposedly then, "Mary of Bethany". This family is seen as very close to Jesus and here she is prepping Jesus for his burial – and then does not go to the actual death or burial place of Jesus with the other women?
3. In Luke, the event is in the North and in the home of a Pharisee. Only Luke has Jesus eat in the home of a Pharisee, ever, and there he does so on 3 occasions. This certainly

could be a literary device for the author's message of radical inclusion. Only Luke tells the story of Zacchaeus for example - another tale of radical inclusion.

4. Luke also sets up the scene as he does elsewhere in the form of a Greco-Roman symposium meal, which further suggests this is a literary device.
5. In Luke the whole scene appears to be setting the scene for Jesus' parable about the relative gratitude to God by those who have sinned greatly.
6. Not only is Luke an outlier on location (Galilee) and in calling the woman a sinner, the scene is hard to imagine - she stands behind Jesus, but washes his feet with her tears. The scene is hard to picture, unless this was indeed a Greco-Roman symposium\*\* setting, where Jesus could be reclining on a couch with his feet off the end: then this scenario is imaginable. We have no way of knowing if that setup existed in the homes Jesus visited, but wealthier people may have been copying Roman styles by that date.
7. The term "sinner" is more likely at the time to refer to someone not keeping Jewish law. Although in later centuries, perhaps because of the intimacy of the actions, it was presumed this meant the woman was a sex worker, but this would not be the designated term for such, and is likely to refer to ritual uncleanness, of which there were many forms.
8. Mark does not name the woman - did he not know her name? Or did he choose not to mention it? It would be easier to "remember forever" a person with a name.
9. From earliest time the alabaster jar was taken as a symbol of Mary Magdalene.
10. Luke really goes above and beyond in his description of this event - she bathed his feet with her tears...she wipes his feet with her - obviously loose - hair, she even kisses his feet. Unrestrained hair in the Greco-Roman world could be a sign of a "loose" woman...and even though the other actions could be seen in an innocent context with the designation "sinner" the author of Luke really opened up this woman's deeds to appearing to be sexual, especially as time went on. Was that innocent on the part of the author?

**So how can we resolve these differences? Was there multiple times a woman burst in on Jesus, including in the homes of people she was not invited to enter, to anoint him with very costly perfumed oil?** On two of the three occasions did it happen in the home of someone named Simon, one in the North and one near Jerusalem? Did it happen twice right before Jesus was arrested and killed, in two different homes in the same village? And could it be that a devoted follower whose home Jesus uses as his southern base, a woman who anoints him with costly oil, sits at his feet learning and is commended as a faithful disciple, who has called on Jesus to help when her brother dies....then never goes to the Cross or the tomb?

The evidence leads me to believe there are only 2 women named Mary - Jesus' mother and the one called Magdalene. Is there a way this could be possible?

My defense references 2 different confusions, which may be completely innocent or may be manufactured: Mary Magdalene's name, and the role of women in the Gospel of Luke.

1. For 20 years commentators have been pointing out the way women in Luke's Gospel have had their authority diminished to the point they rarely get a mention in the Book of Acts, his second book. Mary, the mother, has a huge role at the beginning, and like Anna "prophesies," but after that point, stories which appear in Mark and Matthew, which include the role of women, have their speaking roles (though not their presence) lessened. As with later additions to Paul's letters that lessen the role of women in the early Jesus movement, these can be explained by the normalization and Romanization of the Jesus message in the proto-church community. There are a number of studies on this - I reference one that specifically addresses how this may have happened to "Mary of Bethany," below.
2. Added to that the possible disambiguation around the name of Mary Magdalene. Even many women theologians and scholars continue to call her Mary of Magdala but there is another explanation. Obviously if she is Mary of Magdala it would be hard for her to be Mary of Bethany - though not impossible if she moved South from her birth city. However, given confusion over the identification of the city before, during and after Jesus' time, and Jesus' fondness for nicknames (Peter "the Rock, James & John "the Sons of Thunder") there is the possibility that Mary's nickname is Mary Migdal, Mary the Tower...was she tall? Was she Mary the Great? Was she Mary Jesus' tower of strength...? Other early church stories fit that designation and show her as a leader and teacher. And one resurrection story has caused to be named "apostle to the apostles" as Jesus sends her to tell the others he has been raised.

### **Magdala/ Magdalene notes**

The majority of books, even by recent female theologians, still accept that Mary was from Magdala in Galilee. Her designation as "Mary of Magdala" is unusual and suggests like "Mary of Bethany" she is independent of husband and father. For a woman to be independent she would have most likely had to have been married and widowed or legally divorced, and therefore, independently wealthy. Marriages were arranged by the father usually by the age of 12 years, and the girl would have stayed with her father until moving in with her spouse. At that point she would be known by her husband's name: such as "Mary, wife of " or "Mary, mother of..."

For Mary of Bethany and Mary Magdalene to be the same person, the alternative and less popular explanation for the Magdalene name - that it reflects Jesus' nickname for her rather than her place of origin - would need to be acceptable.

**Magdala.** Magdala exists today on the side of Lake Kinnaret (the Sea of Galilee also known in Roman times as Lake Tiberius) and is a site of archeological research. Archeologists recently found the second synagogue from the first century CE, though both are probably from a few decades after Jesus' time. While Nazareth was so small as to not get a mention in contemporary documents, Magdala was known as a "city" and thought to be the city known by its Greek name of Tarichae. Both that Greek name and its previous Hebrew and current Jewish name appear to refer to its role as a place where fish from the lake was landed and processed. And its full name suggested Tower of Fish: *migdal* in Hebrew means 'tower'. See 'Magdala' on Wikipedia for a history and discussion of the site and names and archeological digs: <https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Magdala>

It was one of several larger population centers around the lake at that time, and, interestingly, Jesus and his disciples seemed to deliberately avoid them all according to the writers of the Gospel.

### **Historical views of Mary Magdalene - a prostitute? Demon-possessed?**

Interestingly the reason Mary Magdalene was labeled as a prostitute was precisely because the 3 texts in the chart above were combined into one woman and one incident. In the 591CE Pope Gregory declared they were all Mary Magdalene and, not understanding how Jewish law would use the term "sinner" - and even her "7 demons" - decided this was all about sexual sin. In fact what we know about the contemporary theory on "demon possession" suggests 7 simply refers to the severity of her condition (7 is extreme!) and demons were blamed for any kind of severe physical illness but more especially for emotional or mental health issues: anxiety, depression, despair and all the variations we know today. Having lost the Jewish context of the narrative, the Roman Catholic Church took this comment and the "sinner" comment as being about sexual misbehavior. ( I would posit this was an obsession at the time - indeed women seem to be on the road to becoming symbols of extreme purity - the Virgin Mother - or whores, and nothing much in between. Subsequent theologians then went on to change a female early church leaders to a male one ( Junia to the otherwise unknown male name, Junias, for example) and further disassociate women from any leadership role within the church. The Eastern Orthodox Church never put these three gospel incidents together, and Protestantism at the Reformation originally kept them as 3 people too. That I am now suggesting 2 of these are the same incident and one is deliberate obfuscation might seem I am corroborating the error, except we now know there is no suggestion here of sexual misdeeds.

The Roman Catholic Church separated the 2 Marys in 1969, giving each their own Feast Day for the first time, and recently apologized for this mischaracterization of Mary as a whore.

Sadly a lot of classical art continues to show Mary as a harlot and so that image is hard to avoid. Even some contemporary writings continue, however sympathetically, to cast her as the "fallen woman" restored to community by Jesus. It is, after all, a great tale of redemption and the power of Jesus to forgive, but at what cost to this woman's reputation? And at what cost to the long-term reputations and contributions of 51% of the world's population?

### **Mary & Martha, with or without Lazarus: 2 households with a Mary and Martha?**

It is hard to not believe the writer of Luke's Gospel was not doing this intentionally! He repeats the story of the woman with the jar of oil, right around the time he introduces Mary Magdalene by name, and makes the unnamed woman a "sinner" unlike other versions, moving the event from Bethany to Galilee. He also takes two woman who share a home, admittedly with common names: Mary and Martha, and recreates a scene very much like the one in Bethany but places it in Galilee too - maybe he just heard it all wrong...Either way, the result is we conflate the 2 stories in our minds and makes them both Mary of Bethany - maybe the memories were all just her, and her devotion is reduced by sharing it with another Mary?

Mary and Martha in Bethany have a brother, Lazarus. It is in his home Mary of Bethany anoints Jesus. When Lazarus dies, it is Martha who summons and goes out to greet Jesus. Jesus has to call for Mary to come to him.

If we make a comparison chart again, it looks like this:

Gospel	Home of	Who else there	Location	Mary doing	Martha doing	Jesus' comment
John 11	Lazarus	His sisters, Martha and Mary	Bethany	Stayed at home	Went to meet Jesus	Called for Mary to come
Luke 10: 38-42	Martha	Her sister, Mary	Anon. village in Galilee	Sitting at the Lord's feet	"Busy with many tasks"	Martha: "distracted" Mary: "chosen the better part"

**Evidence of deliberate confusion around the names of women important in the Jesus story: The recently found fragment of the Gospel of John and the overwriting of the name Martha over that of Maria seems to show evidence of the elevation of Martha, at the cost of Mary.**

Recent research shows a deliberate attempt to minimize Mary in a recently found fragment from the Gospel of John - it is in the oldest fragment of this text that has ever been discovered and was discovered in Egypt in the mid-20th century.

As a PhD student at Yale, Elizabeth Schrader discovered that this - and indeed other early manuscripts - show evidence of tampering with the script in the same way. In a significant proportion of them, the name Maria (Greek name of Mary) has, by the addition of one small letter, been changed into the name Martha. In one case, the name Martha was clearly inserted where only the name Mary had been written, and the single tense changed into plural. Below are links to several YouTube video pieces where Elizabeth Schrader speaks of her research and shows the actual pieces of manuscript with the scribal alterations.

Short version:

<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=PThZ6XEp4qw> Was Martha added to the Gospel of John?

One of the longer ones with more research and images

[https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=rfy6oiB\\_U-A](https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=rfy6oiB_U-A) Was the Gospel of John changed to suppress Mary Magdalene?

**I find her work compelling, and when considered alongside the confusion we see by Luke adding the woman - a "sinner" - anointing Jesus, a history of removing women from the storyline, as at the resurrection, the insertion of a different Martha and Mary but in the North, all of these make me more convinced that Mary Magdalene/ Mary of Bethany was deliberately being gaslighted to use current verbology.**

**If we then look at the Gospels that were not only *not allowed* into the received text of the Christian Bible but actually *banned* in the Christian world - including gospels which features Mary Magdalene as a teacher of the other apostles, as a leader, as companion and confidante**

**to Jesus (a veritable tower of a figure?) then the evidence of the normalization/ Romanization of the Jesus story, into something much less radical and far more acceptable in Greco-Roman society becomes overwhelming. At least to me.**

All this at the cost of the spiritual leadership of women. If this is, indeed, the case, what should such information demand we do, now it has been brought to light?!

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\*\*It has been suggested that Clopas was Mary's second husband - that Joseph was elderly when he married Mary and died when Jesus was young. While some suggest Jesus' siblings were Joseph's from an earlier marriage, they could just as easily be younger siblings born to Mary and Joseph or to Mary and a second husband. This is conjecture but there is some research around it. We do hear about a Cleopas on the road to Emmaus along with his, supposedly female as that person is unnamed, companion. It could be one of the Marys we know about, but as both have featured in the story there would be no reason not to mention them at this point.

Janet Douglass, April 2022.

### **Bibliography and Videography**

In addition to the YouTube videos above (Mary's name being changed to Martha in the Gospel of John), you may want to look into the work of the following people on this subject, many of whom take differing views from my own, especially on the Mary Magdalene and Mary of Bethany being one person and the reference to Mary Magdalene as Mary the Tower rather than her being from Magdala. I have made my peace with the information I present above, until I learn otherwise, I invite you to find an explanation that is comfortable for you, for now, too.

Firstly, an essay that supports some of the points I make:

Rev Jeffrey Bütz M.Div. STM: *"Mary Magdalene = Mary of Bethany: the Case for Equivalency."*

And I have read so many books, including:

*The Resurrection of Mary Magdalene* by Jane Schaberg

*Mary Magdalen: Myth and Metaphor* by Susan Haskins

*Secrets of Mary Magdalene* edited by Dan Burstein & Arne J. De Keijzer, intro. By Elaine Pagels

*Mary Magdalene: The Image of a Woman through the Centuries* by Ingrid Maisch

*The Meaning of Mary Magdalene: Discovering the Woman at the Heart of Christianity* by Cynthia Bourgeault

*Mary Magdalene, the First Woman Apostle: the Struggle for Authority* by Anne Graham Brock

Also both Karen King and Marvin Meyer (with Esther A de Boer) have commentaries on the Gospel of Mary if you want to read what we have of this ancient text, and how it is interpreted.

### **Other Relevant Alternative Gospels and Scriptures not included in the Biblical Canon**

Secret Gospel of Mark

Gospel of Philip

Gospel of Thomas

Letter of Clement



**The complete list of texts which reference a Mary, sorted in the way I have understood them.**

You can view all of these for yourself, in multiple translations, at the website:  
[www.BibleGateway.com](http://www.BibleGateway.com)

**A) Birth Narratives: Mary the Mother**

Matthew 1:16; Matthew 1:18; Matthew 1:20; Matthew 2:11; Luke 1:27; Luke 1:30; Luke 1:38; Luke 1:39; Luke 1:41; Luke 1:46; Luke 1:56; Luke 2:5; Luke 2:16; Luke 2:19; Luke 2:34

**B) Mary the Mother: post birth narratives**

Matthew 13:55; Matthew 27:56; Acts 1:14; Mark 6:3

In the story of the Wedding at Cana in John chapter 2, the “**mother of Jesus**” is mentioned twice, without her name, but is obviously Jesus’ mother, Mary.

At this point the story becomes rather more interesting....because one Mary is identified, in 2 gospels, as coming from Bethany, a place Jesus seems to use as a base when he is in the Jerusalem area. Mary has a sister Martha - and in one gospel, she has a brother, Lazarus, too.

**C) Mary and Martha - one Mary is in Bethany and one Mary in Galilee**

Two pairs of women with the names Mary and Martha are mentioned. In Luke’s Gospel they are in the North (in Galilee) and closer to Magdala. Bethany is not in Galilee but on the edge of Jerusalem and close to the Mount of Olives. It is obviously not the same as Magdala.

**i) Jesus Visits Martha and Mary in Galilee**

Luke 10:38 10:42

**ii) Jesus Visits Mary and Martha in Bethany**

John 11:1-2; John 11:20; John 11:28; John 11:31-2; John 12:1; John 12:3

**D) Multiple Marys**

Mark 15:47 (and) Matthew 27:56; Mark 15:40; Matthew 27:61; Matthew 28:1; Mark 16:1

All of these Marys are in fact Mary, Jesus’ mother, and Mary Magdalene, as we see from Mark and Matthew. Moreover it suggest that one of Jesus’ sisters is named Salome; and we can see his brothers are named James, Joseph or Joses (like Joey), Judas (Judas Thomas the “twin-twin” maybe?); and Simon.

**E) Mary Magdalene**

Mark 16:9 (The “Longer Ending” of Mark); Luke 8:2; Luke 24:10.; John 19:25; John 20:1; John 20:11; John 20:16; John 20:18

**F) Unidentified single Mary - mother or Magdalene?**

John 11:45

**G) Unidentifiable Mary in the church of Rome.**

Romans 16:6

I suggest this Mary is someone we do not know from the Gospel stories.

**H) Mary, the mother of John Mark**

Acts 12:12

I suggest this is also a Mary we do not know from the Gospel narratives but who could be the same as the one in Rome.

**I) Unnamed women who are part of this study**

Mark 14: 3-9 ; Luke 7: 36 ff