

Lesson Plans that Work
Mary Magdalene
Lesson Plans for Older and Younger Children
Feast Day, July 22

Mary Magdalene
First century CE

The saints are “the lights of the world in every generation,” people whose lives and deeds have shone brightly and helped others more closely follow God. There are saints who lived long ago and there are saints living and working in the world today, saints who are known by the church and saints who are known only to God. We say that the church—we—are part of the Communion of Saints, the company of all faithful people, connected through our baptism to those Christians who have died, those who are alive now, and those who haven’t yet been born. The word “saint” means holy.

In the Episcopal Church we have a Calendar of Saints, holy men and women we remember in prayer and with readings from the Bible on their feast day.

Supplies needed: white cloth for prayer table, a candle. For older children: a Bible, paper and pencils. For younger children: wooden craft sticks, marking pens, scraps of fabric or felt or construction paper, pipe cleaners, yarn, scissors and glue.

Prepare: Prepare your prayer/gathering space with a small table, or space with a piece of cloth. On this cloth place a white candle. If you like, you might place a printed image of Mary Magdalene on the table and a red egg.

Welcoming the children: Gather the children around the prayer space and ask some wondering questions: I wonder what kind of person is called a saint? I wonder what the work of a saint might be? (You may wish to share the introduction above.) Today we will hear the story of Saint Mary Magdalene.

Light the candle.

Opening prayer: Jesus, your saints are the lights of the world in every generation. Help us to shine as they do, letting your light glow in us that through us others might see you. Amen.

Tell the story:

Mary Magdalene, a companion (friend) of Jesus, was from Magdala, a town on the shore of the Sea of Galilee. We learn about her first as a woman whom Jesus heals. She traveled with Jesus and the disciples, helping to support them in their ministry. When Jesus died on the cross, the men except for John ran away, but Mary Magdalene stayed with Jesus until the end. She went to his tomb to help prepare his body for burial, and she was present when he rose again. Two of the gospels (the books that tell the stories of Jesus’s life) record that Jesus appeared to Mary alone. It was Mary who took the news of his resurrection to the other disciples—the men. For that reason, she is called “the apostle to the apostles.” In a time and place when women belonged to their

fathers or their husbands, could not own property, could not go out alone in public, could not talk to strangers, could not read or study the Hebrew scriptures (the part of the Bible we call the Old Testament), Jesus treated women as equals and Mary Magdalene was one of his most trusted and loved disciples. She was strong, brave, and faithful. Most of what we know about her comes from the New Testament, but there are writings not included in the Bible that tell of her being a powerful leader in the early church and the one who teaches Jesus's followers to better understand him and his message of life-changing love. One legend that is told of Mary Magdalene is that she was invited to a banquet given by the Roman Emperor Tiberius. She held an egg in her hand and told the emperor, "Christ is risen!" The Emperor laughed, and said that Jesus rising from the dead was as likely as that plain white egg she held turning red. Before he finished speaking, the egg in her hand turned deep red. Mary Magdalene then shared the news of the resurrection with the entire court. She is honored on her feast day, July 22.

Reflection Questions:

I wonder what part of Mary's story you like best?

I wonder what part of Mary's story you think is the most important?

I wonder what part of Mary's story is also about you?

You may move to another space with tables for the activity time.

Activity for Older Children: One of the readings appointed for Mary Magdalene is the resurrection account from the Gospel of John, Chapter 20:11-18. Have the children read it aloud:

11 But Mary stood weeping outside the tomb. As she wept, she bent over to look* into the tomb;¹² and she saw two angels in white, sitting where the body of Jesus had been lying, one at the head and the other at the feet. ¹³They said to her, 'Woman, why are you weeping?' She said to them, 'They have taken away my Lord, and I do not know where they have laid him.' ¹⁴When she had said this, she turned round and saw Jesus standing there, but she did not know that it was Jesus. ¹⁵Jesus said to her, 'Woman, why are you weeping? For whom are you looking?' Supposing him to be the gardener, she said to him, 'Sir, if you have carried him away, tell me where you have laid him, and I will take him away.' ¹⁶Jesus said to her, 'Mary!' She turned and said to him in Hebrew,* 'Rabbouni!' (which means Teacher). ¹⁷Jesus said to her, 'Do not hold on to me, because I have not yet ascended to the Father. But go to my brothers and say to them, "I am ascending to my Father and your Father, to my God and your God."' ¹⁸Mary Magdalene went and announced to the disciples, 'I have seen the Lord'; and she told them that he had said these things to her.

Look at a different resurrection account and compare the two. Ask the children to choose a different bible story they know well, and interview each other imagining that they are giving an eye-witness account. Talk about the differences in how the stories are received.

Activity for Younger Children: Make spoon puppets with the group of the two angels, Mary and Jesus to tell a simplified resurrection story from John's Gospel. A face is drawn on the back of the spoon's bowl and clothes can be fashioned out of fabric, felt or paper. Pipe cleaners may be used for arms twisted around the stem of the spoon and yarn may be used for hair. Doilies or coffee filters folded make great angels' wings.

To tell the story, use these words: After Jesus died on the cross, his friends laid his body in a tomb, a cave cut into the rock in a garden. A large round stone was rolled over the opening to the tomb to seal it shut. It was the beginning of the Jewish Sabbath, and there was no time to prepare Jesus' body for burial. Slowly and sadly, the people who loved Jesus left the tomb. When the Sabbath had ended and it was still dark, Mary Magdalene went to the tomb with precious spices to prepare Jesus's body for burial. When she got there, she saw that the tomb was opened and two angels sat inside.

Angels: Why are you crying?

Mary: they have taken Jesus away and I don't know where to find him!

Jesus: Woman, why are you crying? Who are you looking for?

Mary: Are you the gardener? If you have carried Jesus' body away, tell me where he is and I will go to him.

Jesus: Mary!

Mary: Teacher!

Jesus: Don't hold onto me, but go and tell my friends that you have seen me and that I am going to be with God in heaven.

Mary (running with joy): I have seen the Lord. I have seen the Lord!

Gather/Ending: Return to your prayer space and gather in a circle to pray.

Prayer for Mary Magdalene: Almighty God, whose blessed Son restored Mary Magdalene to health of body and mind, and called her to be a witness of his resurrection: Mercifully grant that by your grace we may be healed of all our infirmities and know you in the power of his endless life; who lives and reigns with you and the Holy Spirit, one God, now and for ever. Amen.

Prayer for Younger Children:

Dear God, (Dear God),
may we with your help (may we with your help)
follow Mary Magdalene (follow Mary Magdalene)
who served Jesus (who served Jesus)
and was the first to tell (and was the first to tell)
the good news that Jesus rose again (the good news that Jesus rose again)
to new life with you. (to new life with you.)
Amen. (Amen.)

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