

The week a blur for Mary Magdalene. An impromptu parade. Passover celebration, joyous procession down the crowded Jerusalem streets.

Confusing. Watching Jesus challenging the chief priest and the Pharisees. Chasing the temple money-changers. Chaos.

Thursday meal. Jesus, says "this bread is my body broken for you" and "this cup is the new covenant in my blood."

Jesus arrested. People excited. Some shaking with fear. Men who promised to stay run away, hide.

Hope vanishes. Pilate releases Barabbas: a terrorist, a murderer.

Waiting, Mary tries to catch a glimpse of Jesus.

A mob, moving, jeering, yelling, and striking.

A figure carries the weight of a Roman cross. Blood streaming, dripping down his back, into his eyes. A crown thrust into his forehead. A disfigured man.

Then she realized – this poor man was Jesus. She watched him struggling with the cross, stumbling, falling in the dirt, under the weight of a beam too heavy to bear.

Place of the Skull. Two men hoisted up, nailed to crosses, criminal signs above their heads.

Two soldiers drive nails in Jesus's hands and feet.

A foul mixture of soured vinegar and gall offered to him. Jesus turns his head. Time stands still.

Hours pass. Last Cry, last breath, a body slumps on the cross, lifeless. The sky darkens. The earth shook. People running and screaming — a centurion on his knees said: "Surely this was the son of God."

Running for safety while soldiers take a lifeless body down the other side of the hill, out of sight.

Joseph asks Pilate for Jesus's body, places the body in his own grave. A tomb blocked by a stone. Sabbath was coming. Huddled together, the women wept. Exhausted in silence, eyes burning with tears.

A realization. A hasty burial without proper ceremonial care. What to do? Leaving before sunrise, together, for strength, making their way in the darkness, before the first beams of sunlight broke the horizon, ending the Sabbath.

At the tomb is an unexpected scene. A stone rolled away, grave clothes neatly folded, the body is gone.

The women run back to the disciples: excitement, broken sentences, gestures, tears, and a tragedy — Jesus's body is gone.

Peter and John run to the tomb's opening, peering into the darkness. The body is gone. Running back telling others. Mary Magdalene stays behind, weeping.

Out of the corner of her eye, a figure. The angel speaks – “Woman, why are you crying?” Mary, “They have taken my Lord away.”

Then another figure, a man, a gardener, Mary thought.

“Sir, if you have carried him away, tell me where you have put him, and I will get him.”

Then, something happened. The gardener said, “Mary.”

Instantly Mary knew that voice, that gentle voice. That voice had greeted her many times, that voice had commanded demons to leave her and never return, that voice had blessed the broken bread in their homes, that voice had calmed swirling seas.

That voice belonged to Jesus.

“Rabboni,” Mary exclaimed. Grabbing him, holding him, weeping for joy this time. He is alive, and he is here.

“Mary,” Jesus says gently, “don't hold on to me now, for I am going back to my Father and your Father, to my God and your God. But, go tell my friends.”

Glancing back over her shoulder, Mary Magdalene runs toward the city with the news, “I have seen the Lord.” She had seen Jesus, again — for the first time.

Mary Magdalene the first to lay her eyes upon the risen Jesus. Her dismay turned to relief, her sorrow turned to joy, her fear turned to confidence.

What remark words. I have seen the Lord. Hear the good news! He has risen! Because of Good Friday, you can look back and not be afraid. Because of Easter, you can look ahead and know Christ is with you!