

# THE GREAT RECOGNITION: JESUS APPEARS TO MARY

## JOHN 20:11–18

### *Introduction*

This is one of the most precious events in history. It was our Lord's first appearance after His resurrection; it was an appearance to a woman who had been saved from the depths of human depravity. It was the appearance to Mary Magdalene, one who loved Jesus with the deepest of loves because of what He had done for her.

- I. Mary returned to the tomb (v. 11).
- II. The first startling sight: two angels (vv. 12-13).
- III. The second startling sight: Jesus Himself (vv. 14-16).
- IV. The third startling sight: a vision of the new commission from Jesus (vv. 17-18).

### **I. *John 20:11 Mary Magdalene at the Tomb of Jesus***

Mary returned to the tomb. Just when is not known, but she probably followed immediately behind Peter and John as they ran to the tomb. When they left, she remained behind. She was weeping convulsively. Seeing Peter and John enter the tomb gave her courage to finally stoop down and look in. What Mary began to experience would revolutionize her life. She could not ask for more.

***Thought 1.*** Two things can revolutionize a man's life.

- 1) Lingering at the empty tomb of Jesus. Too many rush by His tomb, never thinking, never giving any thought to its meaning.
- 2) Seeking the truth of the empty tomb, what it means to life and to the world in all its corruption and need.

### **II. *John 20:12–13 Mary in the Presence of Angels***

Mary's first startling sight — she saw two angels. Note two points. (See *Angels*, Heb. 1:4-14.)

1. The two angels were sitting right where Jesus' body had been lying. Angels are messengers of God; they are the ministering spirits of God, servants sent from heaven to carry out His will. On this particular occasion, they were sent to add to the spectacular significance of the resurrection and to comfort Mary in her grief. They had been sent to her in particular, for they had not been in the tomb when Peter and John looked in. They were clothed in white. Mathew added...
    - like "lightning" (visible, quick, startling, striking, frightening, brilliant)
    - like "snow" (white, pure, glistening) (Mt. 28:3)
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The fact that they were dressed in white apparently symbolizes the holiness and purity of God from whose presence they had come.

**Psa 99:9** *Exalt the LORD our God and worship at his holy mountain, for the LORD our God is holy.*

**Isa 6:3** *And they were calling to one another: "Holy, holy, holy is the LORD Almighty; the whole earth is full of his glory."*

**Hab 1:13** *Your eyes are too pure to look on evil; you cannot tolerate wrong. Why then do you tolerate the treacherous? Why are you silent while the wicked swallow up those more righteous than themselves?*

**2 Cor 7:1** *Since we have these promises, dear friends, let us purify ourselves from everything that contaminates body and spirit, perfecting holiness out of reverence for God.*

**Heb 12:14** *Make every effort to live in peace with all men and to be holy; without holiness no one will see the Lord.*

**1 Pet 1:16** *For it is written: "Be holy, because I am holy."*

**2 Pet 3:11** *Since everything will be destroyed in this way, what kind of people ought you to be? You ought to live holy and godly lives.*

2. Mary's loving devotion and confession should touch the heart and life of every believer. Mary revealed an unquestioning love: "They have taken the Lord out of the tomb!" (Jn. 20:02). Mary is a supreme example of one who loves and believes, although she did not understand. She was one of the last to leave Jesus at the cross (see Mk. 15:40, 47); one of the first to attend the tomb; and one who still called Him "Lord." Her belief was a belief of love — not a belief based upon intellect or understanding. She knew what Jesus had done for her, and she loved Him for it. Jesus was her Lord, dead or alive (Jn. 20:13f).

**John 16:27** *"No, the Father himself loves you because you have loved me and have believed that I came from God."*

**Eph 6:24** *Grace to all who love our Lord Jesus Christ with an undying love.*

**1 Pet 1:8** *Though you have not seen him, you love him; and even though you do not see him now, you believe in him and are filled with an inexpressible and glorious joy.*

**Jude 1:21** *Keep yourselves in God's love as you wait for the mercy of our Lord Jesus Christ to bring you to eternal life.*

**Deu 6:5** *Love the LORD your God with all your heart and with all your soul and with all your strength.*

**Mat 10:32** *"Whoever acknowledges me before men, I will also acknowledge him before my Father in heaven."*

**1 John 4:15** *If anyone acknowledges that Jesus is the Son of God, God lives in him and he in God.*

## HEBREWS 01:4–14 ANGELS (ANGELOS)

The word angel simply means *messenger*. The word is used at least five different ways in Scripture.

=> It is used of men (Lk. 7:24; Jas. 2:25; Rev. 1:20; 2:1, 8, 12, 18; 3:1, 7, 14).

=> It is used of Christ (Rev. 8:3-5).

=> It is used of the “angel of the Lord” or the “angel of God,” meaning the presence of deity in angelic form (Gen. 16:1-13; 21:17-19; 22:11-16; 31:11-13; Exo. 3:2-4; Judg. 2:1; 6:12-16; 13:3-22).

=> It is used of prophets (Hag. 1:13).

=> It is used of spiritual beings who serve God (Psa. 104:4; Heb. 1:14; 2:2, 5).

1. The important facts about angels seem to be as follows:

- a. Angels are created beings, superior to men (Psa. 104:4; cp. Heb. 1:14; Col. 1:16).
- b. Angels are numerous (Psa. 68:17; Mt. 26:53; Heb. 12:22; Rev. 5:11).
- c. Angels are extremely superior to men in intelligence and knowledge (2 Sam. 14:20; Psa. 103:20; 104:4).
- d. Angels have great power (2 Kng. 19:35; Mt. 28:3; 2 Pet. 2:11; Rev. 20:1-2).
- e. Angels observe men (Eccl. 5:6; 1 Cor. 4:9; Eph. 3:10).
- f. Some angels have fallen with Satan from their original state (2 Pet. 2:4; Jude 6; Rev. 20:10.)

2. Apparently, angels were created in various ranks and for specific functions to be performed *before God Himself*.

- a. There is the archangel Michael who stands above all the other angels. He is the prime administrator of God (Dan. 10:21; 12:1, 7-12; 1 Th. 4:16; Jude 9). Some believe Satan was an archangel, superior even to Michael, before his fall (Rev. 12:7).
- b. There is the angel Gabriel who is God’s very special messenger of mercy (Dan. 8:15-16; 9:21; Lk. 1:19-33). He is never called an archangel.
- c. The Scripture gives the titles of other angelic orders.

=> There are the seraphim, whose function seems to be to praise God (Isa. 6:1-6, the only reference to them).

=> There are the cherubim, whose function seems to be to proclaim the glory of God (Gen. 3:24; Exo. 25:18; Psa. 80:1; 99:2).

d. Other angels are said to have various functions...

- to worship God (Neh. 9:6; Lk. 2:13-14).
- to rejoice in the repentance of a single sinner (Lk. 15:10).

- to accompany Christ at His second coming (Mt. 24:31; 25:31; Mk. 8:38; 1 Th. 4:16).
  - to execute the judgments of God (Gen. 3:24; 19:1; Judg. 5:23; 2 Sam. 24:16; 1 Chr. 2:15; 2 Chr. 32:32; Acts 12:23; 2 Pet. 2:4; Jude 6; Rev. 12:9).
3. Angels have a very important function in God's dealings with believers. Note what Scripture says: They are "all ministering spirits sent to serve those who will inherit salvation" (Heb. 1:14).
- a. They protect and deliver believers either through or from trials (Psa. 34:7; Psa. 91:11; Isa. 63:9; Dan. 3:28; 6:22; Acts 12:7-11).
  - b. They guide and lead believers in their ministry (1 Kng. 19:5; Mt. 2:13, 19-20; Acts 5:19; 8:26).
  - c. They escort believers into heaven (Lk. 16:22).
  - d. They encourage believers (Acts 27:23-25). Note: this assistance seems to begin at childhood and to continue on throughout life (Heb. 1:14; cp. Mt. 18:10; Psa. 91:11). □

**JOHN 20:12**  
**RESURRECTION OF JESUS CHRIST — STRIPS OF LINEN**

The two angels were sitting, one where the head of Jesus had lain and the other where his feet had lain. Now note a question. How did Mary know where the feet and head had lain? There were two possible ways.

- 1. She was possibly one of the women who had followed Joseph of Arimathea and Nicodemus when they buried Jesus (Lk. 23:55).
- 2. She could see the strips of linen lying still folded up just as they had been when they were wrapped around Jesus. The Greek word *folded up* (entetulig-menon) is the verb which is used for actually the winding of linens around a body for burial. The Greek word is saying that the linens were still folded up, wrapped just like they would be wrapped around a body — as if the body had just evaporated. They were not disheveled or disarranged. □

**III. *John 20:14–16 Mary Encountered Jesus Himself***

The second startling sight. Mary saw Jesus Himself. Note four significant events.

- 1. There was a startling sense. While Mary was still speaking to the angels, she sensed another presence behind her. She immediately turned around and saw Jesus standing there, but she did not know that it was Jesus.
- 2. There was a startling question: "Why are you crying? Who is it you are looking for?" Now note: a graveyard is where one weeps and seeks for a grave.

The point is this: Mary was seeking a dead Saviour, a Saviour who was as all other men are, frail and powerless to do anything about life and death, eternity and heaven. Her whole being was focused upon a grave where her dead Saviour was lying. Mary was living as the world lives, as a “foreigner[s] to the covenants of the promise, without hope, and without God in the world” (Eph. 2:12).

*1 Th 4:13 Brothers, we do not want you to be ignorant about those who fall asleep, or to grieve like the rest of men, who have no hope.*

*Psa 42:6 My God, my soul is downcast within me; therefore I will remember you from the land of the Jordan, the heights of Hermon — from Mount Mizar.*

*Psa 69:2 I sink in the miry depths, where there is no foothold. I have come into the deep waters; the floods engulf me.*

*Psa 73:16 When I tried to understand all this, it was oppressive to me.*

*Eccl 11:5 As you do not know the path of the wind, or how the body is formed in a mother's womb, so you cannot understand the work of God, the Maker of all things.*

3. There was the false identity. Mary thought the man was the gardener and that perhaps he had removed the body for some reason. Note why she had not yet recognized Jesus.
- ⇒ Mary's eyes were full of tears and her head was bowed low in the normal shyness that arises in such scenes.
- ⇒ Mary was facing in the wrong direction — into the grave. She had turned back around to face where the body had been lying (v. 14, see v. 16).

**Thought 1.** There is a message here for everyone. We need to fix our eyes upon Jesus in confronting death. Too often, we see the dead and become so wrapped up in grief that we forget the risen Lord and the great hope He gives us (Jn. 3:16; 5:24; 14:2-3). There is no question about Jesus' emphasis here. This is the message He was wishing to convey to Mary. There was no need for such convulsive weeping. Weep and grieve, yes, but there is a limit. Mary could have and should have seen Him sooner.

*Isa 25:8 He will swallow up death forever. The Sovereign LORD will wipe away the tears from all faces; he will remove the disgrace of his people from all the earth. The LORD has spoken.*

*John 5:24 “I tell you the truth, whoever hears my word and believes him who sent me has eternal life and will not be condemned; he has crossed over from death to life.”*

*1 Cor 15:54 When the perishable has been clothed with the imperishable, and the mortal with immortality, then the saying that is written will come true: “Death has been swallowed up in victory.”*

*Rev 21:4 He will wipe every tear from their eyes. There will be no more death or mourning or crying or pain, for the old order of things has passed away.*

**2 Tim 1:10** *But it has now been revealed through the appearing of our Saviour, Christ Jesus, who has destroyed death and has brought life and immortality to light through the gospel.*

4. There was the great recognition. This was one of those dramatic moments which exceeds the ability of words to express. Only two words were spoken:

=> “Mary”

=> “Rabboni”

Note three points.

- a. Mary recognized Jesus not by sight, but by His voice and the word spoken by Him. So it is with us today: we know the Lord by His Word and His Spirit.

**John 18:37** *“You are a king, then!” said Pilate. Jesus answered, “You are right in saying I am a king. In fact, for this reason I was born, and for this I came into the world, to testify to the truth. Everyone on the side of truth listens to me.”* (see Jn. 17:17)

**Rev 3:20** *Here I am! I stand at the door and knock. If anyone hears my voice and opens the door, I will come in and eat with him, and he with me.*

**1 Cor 6:17** *But he who unites himself with the Lord is one with him in spirit.*

**2 Cor 1:22** *Set his seal of ownership on us, and put his Spirit in our hearts as a deposit, guaranteeing what is to come.* (see 2 Cor 5:5)

**Eph 2:18** *For through him we both have access to the Father by one Spirit.* (see Eph 1:13-14)

**1 John 4:13** *We know that we live in him and he in us, because he has given us of his Spirit.*

- b. Jesus called Mary by name; she was one of His sheep. He knows His sheep by name and His sheep know the sound of His voice (His Word).

**John 10:4** *“When he has brought out all his own, he goes on ahead of them, and his sheep follow him because they know his voice.”*

**John 10:14** *“I am the good shepherd; I know my sheep and my sheep know me.”*

**John 10:16** *“I have other sheep that are not of this sheep pen. I must bring them also. They too will listen to my voice, and there shall be one flock and one shepherd.”*

**John 10:27** *“My sheep listen to my voice; I know them, and they follow me.”*

**Rev 3:20** *Here I am! I stand at the door and knock. If anyone hears my voice and opens the door, I will come in and eat with him, and he with me.*

- c. Mary called Jesus “Rabboni,” *My Teacher*, not “Rabbi” (Master). Rabboni (Rabbou-nei), *My Teacher*, was a title of more respect and honour than just Rabbi. She was acknowledging Him to be her supreme Teacher, the One who was due all her honour

and respect, loyalty and allegiance. She was acknowledging that He was her Teacher and she was His humble follower (disciple).

*Acts 2:36* “Therefore let all Israel be assured of this: God has made this Jesus, whom you crucified, both Lord and Christ.”

*Acts 5:31* God exalted him to his own right hand as Prince and Saviour that he might give repentance and forgiveness of sins to Israel.

*1 Cor 1:9* God, who has called you into fellowship with his Son Jesus Christ our Lord, is faithful.

*1 Cor 8:6* Yet for us there is but one God, the Father, from whom all things came and for whom we live; and there is but one Lord, Jesus Christ, through whom all things came and through whom we live.

#### **IV. John 20:17–18 Vision of the New Commission**

The third startling sight was Mary’s vision of the new commission given to her by Jesus. Apparently, Mary was so full of joy and excitement that she reached out to embrace Jesus. Immediately, Jesus fired the command: “Do not hold on to me” (me mou haptou).

The words used are present action: *do not hold on to me*. Mary wanted to revel in her love for the Lord and in the fellowship that that love brought her. She was reaching out to clutch Christ’s body (physically), but in doing so, she was missing the point: His cross and resurrection had created a totally new relationship. He was no longer just her Rabboni, her Teacher. He was her Lord and God (see Jn. 20:28). He was soon to ascend back to the Father, so she must not waste time clinging to Him. She must run and tell her great discovery. The Teacher was now her Lord and God, for He had created a new spiritual relationship with men.

*2 Cor 5:16-17* So from now on we regard no one from a worldly point of view. Though we once regarded Christ in this way, we do so no longer. Therefore, if anyone is in Christ, he is a new creation; the old has gone, the new has come!

*2 Cor 5:19-21* That God was reconciling the world to himself in Christ, not counting men’s sins against them. And he has committed to us the message of reconciliation. We are therefore Christ’s ambassadors, as though God were making his appeal through us. We implore you on Christ’s behalf: Be reconciled to God. God made him who had no sin to be sin for us, so that in him we might become the righteousness of God. ■