

# Transformed by knowing Jesus: Mary Magdalene

Message for Easter Sunday, April 16, 2017  
by Bruce Fraser

**Scripture:** Luke 24:1-12; Matthew 28:1-10;  
Luke 8:1-3

## Children's Message:

What happened at Easter? *I expect they know and can describe it in their own words.* I'm going to do a little demonstration of Easter. These three candles represent the three crosses, with Jesus on the cross in the middle.

*I light the middle candle.* With the children's help, review the story of how Jesus was arrested, sentenced to die, and crucified with two other criminals. *I light the other two candles.*

All three of them died. *Blow out all three candles.* Talk about how sad Jesus' friends were. Some of them had been with him for three years, had seen some amazing miracles: like healing someone with leprosy, walking on water, turning water into wine, telling the storm to be still and it obeyed, the time he hea—*What happened?!!*

*The middle candle burst back into flame, with no one touching it!* [It's one of those trick candles ]

That's what Jesus did. Like that candle, Jesus came back to life. He is like a light that shines in the darkness, and the darkness cannot put it out. He is the life that is greater even than death.

Idea for this message from Bucky Dann, *Creating Children's Sermons.*

## Introduction to the series "Transformed by knowing Jesus"

If you got a letter in the mail from a law firm, written on that heavy ivory-coloured paper they use for official mail, and it said that some distant relative whom you didn't know, had never even heard about, had died and left you fifty million dollars, you'd likely be skeptical. Some days I get three or four emails from complete strangers offering me something similar. There are so many scams going around, we have learned to be suspicious. Now this was an official-looking letter, not an email, not something on social media. You'd be skeptical, sure... but you'd look into it. You wouldn't just toss it in the recycling box.

Why? Because the offer is too great to just throw it away. You'd at least check it out. Well, the resurrection of Jesus Christ is just like that. You can be really skeptical about it, but the offer is so good... well, it's worth checking out.

What Jesus offers us is much, much more than just eternal life, although that's pretty good just by itself. He offers us himself:

- to be our Lord, who will guide us through life;
- to be our Saviour, who will forgive all the wrong things we've done in life;
- to be our friend, who will stay with us through all of life;
- to be our joy, a joy that nothing can steal away from us, not sickness or death or suffering or anything.

Starting today, and for the next five weeks, we'll meet people who met Jesus, and whose lives were transformed by knowing him. Our guest today was one of the first to see Jesus alive again on Easter morning.

**Message:** "Transformed by knowing Jesus: Mary Magdalene"

It was dark. Very dark. Not because it was midnight. No, it was noon on a bright sunny day. But my soul lived in darkness, because of the demons that had moved in and taken over my life.

My name is Mary Magdalene. As a little girl, I had been happy. I loved flowers, I loved puppies, and I loved my family. Then people did things to me, and one thing led to another, and—it's a long story, but let's just say my life was completely messed up. I had forgotten what it was like to be happy, it was so long since I had had that feeling. The only things I knew were sadness and shame.

I knew that I was a bad person. I knew that God hated me, that no one could love me. I was worthless. The demons told me that every day: "You're no good. Nobody wants you. Nobody cares about you. You're just garbage."

Like I said, it was dark that day, despite the blazing sun. Then this man talked to me. Not like other men who only wanted something from me. He wanted to give me something. He was gentle in the way he talked. He asked if I would like to be healed, to be

free. I didn't even know what that meant, but it sounded good. So I said, "Yes, please. Help me."

His voice changed, no longer gentle. He spoke with authority and power: "All you demons who inhabit this woman, I command you to come out and never come back again." They resisted, they fought, but they had no choice. When they were gone, I collapsed on the ground, exhausted. The man gently took my hand, and I felt strength flow into my body. He helped me to my feet, and smiled at me. His eyes twinkled, like he had just enjoyed his favourite thing in life. [See Luke 8:2]

Without thinking, I smiled back. It just felt... natural. It had been years since I had any feelings at all. But now, I felt normal. No, more than that: as I realized what had just happened, I was overwhelmed by feelings of joy, ecstasy, and gratitude. Joy and ecstasy because I was indeed free and alive once again. But especially gratitude for this man who had redeemed my life.

Over the next days and weeks, I experienced more of this love. I discovered that Jesus was the root, the source of it all. He told me that God loved me—yes, even after all the bad things I had done. He told me God's love erases all the guilt and shame, and that I was free of that burden. He told me that I wasn't garbage; in fact, that I was precious to God, one of God's children, cherished by God. It was amazing. I felt alive; not just existing, but bursting with life!

I could tell you much, much more about Jesus—there's so much to tell about him! But I'm going to jump ahead a couple of years, all the way to the day when Jesus was crucified.

Most of the men in our group ran away into hiding. It was only us women who stayed with Jesus at the cross, and just one of the men: John. Jesus' mother, Mary, was in the group. It was horrible, especially for her. When it was over, we got the soldiers to give us Jesus' dead body, so we could give him a proper burial (rather than just throwing all the bodies in a common grave).

It was too late in the day to get everything ready. So we just wrapped his body in the burial cloth, and laid him in the tomb. Then the men rolled a huge

stone across the entrance, so no wild animals could get inside.

That was Friday. The next day was the Sabbath, so we couldn't do anything then. But first thing the next morning, Sunday, we went to the tomb. We brought with us the creams and spices which we use in our culture to give someone a proper burial.

I guess our minds were still in a state of shock, over losing Jesus. We were almost at the tomb when we suddenly realized, "The huge stone blocking the entrance to the tomb! How are we ever going to move that?" We thought about turning back and getting some of the men to help us, but instead we kept on going. Like I said, we were in kind of a daze.

When we got there, we found the stone had already been rolled away. The tomb was empty. While we were still shaking our heads in confusion, an angel appeared. He told us, "Why do you look for the living among the dead? He is not here; he has risen! Remember how he told you, while he was still with you in Galilee: 'The Son of Man must be delivered into the hands of sinful men, be crucified and on the third day be raised again.' "

The angel told us to go and tell all the others that Jesus was alive again. Still confused, but now excited, we went back to the place where we were staying. But while we were leaving, Jesus himself was there! It was wonderful, to be with him again. He told us the same as the angel, to go and tell the others the good news.

So we did. The men didn't believe us, of course. They had to go and see the empty tomb for themselves. But once they had seen it, they also believed.

Jesus is alive again! He really is the Messiah! Oh, I'm so excited for what Jesus is going to do from now on!

... *back to Bruce now...*

I want to go back to one thing: "The men didn't believe us, of course." Of course, you'd be skeptical of something as incredible as that yourself. But there's more to it than that.

In that culture, women were second-class. A girl was a piece of the father's property, like a chair or a cow. When she grew old enough, the father could give her to another man in marriage, and she would become the property of her husband. When the husband grew dissatisfied with their relationship, he could divorce her just by writing a note on a piece of paper, and send her away.

Josephus, the Jewish historian in the same time period as Jesus, described society's attitude about women:

**A woman is inferior to a man in all respects... Let not the testimony of women be admitted, on account of the levity and boldness of their sex.**

In other words, women cannot be reliable witnesses because they are so emotional.

This attitude wasn't just in Jewish culture. Celsus was a Greek philosopher about a hundred years after Jesus. He thought Christianity was a pile of rubbish, and wrote a number of works showing how ridiculous it was. One of his key arguments went like this:

**Christianity can't be true, because the written accounts of the resurrection are based on the testimony of women—and we all know women are hysterical.**

While there are some discrepancies among the four Gospels as to exactly what happened on Sunday morning—which is not really surprising, given the confusion among everyone—the four of them are unanimous in this: the first witnesses of the empty tomb and the risen Jesus were all women.

Now remember what I just said about the status of women back then. If you were creating some new religion, and you wanted the legend of Jesus' resurrection to be part of it, you wouldn't put women as your main characters. You would have someone important, someone respectable, someone *male* as the lead witness, someone like Joseph of Arimathea or Nicodemus, both honourable members of the Jewish ruling class.

The only plausible explanation for why women are recorded as the first witnesses of the resurrection of Jesus is that they actually were.

What I'm trying to say right now is that you can be an intelligent person and still believe in Jesus. It is reasonable. The evidence is compelling.

Over the next few weeks, we're going to meet several more people who knew Jesus, and hear their stories about how they were transformed by knowing Jesus.

### Next Steps:

- Trust Jesus. You may have questions, doubts—and you always will. But put your faith in Jesus rather than your doubts!
- Surrender your life to him, so that you will follow wherever he may lead you. Life is exciting!
- Enjoy Jesus! Spend time together each day, get to know each other. Read about him in the Bible, and pray.