

# *Celebrating Hidden Women of the Lectionary*

## in honor of the Feast of St. Mary of Magdala

**Gathering Song:** *Daughter of God* (Sarah Hart, Nellie Cruz and Jessica Alles-Smith c. 2001. Published by OCP Publications.) *or other song you select*

### **Opening Prayer:**

Presider:

Let us begin. In the name of God, our Creator and Light, in the name of Jesus, the Way, the Truth and the Life, in the name of the Spirit who dwells among us and within us.

*All: Amen.*

Presider:

For the Women of the Hebrew Scriptures and the Women of Christian Scriptures, for mystics and saints, for leaders and theologians, for workers and ministers, for mothers and daughters, for all the holy women and men before us, we give thanks.

For the holy women gathered here.... *ALL: We give thanks.*

For the holy men gathered here.....*ALL: We give thanks.*

For our mothers, sisters, daughters, aunts, granddaughters..... *ALL: We give thanks.*

For the women we call our dearest friends, and those who have taught us and called us to strength and faith....*ALL: We give thanks.*

For Mary of Magdala who recognized Christ in the sound of her name, who did not shrink from hardship, pain or fear. Who inspires us to step out in faith, to hold our heads high and to know we are loved beyond measure by our loving and gracious God.

*ALL: Jesus, grant that the spirit of Mary of Magdala, our sister, be here with us today. AMEN.*

(Please be seated)

### **Reading 1:** Exodus 1: 15-21

The king of Egypt gave orders to the Hebrew midwives, whose names were Shiprah and Puah, "When you help the Hebrew women in childbirth and observe them on the delivery stool, if it is a boy, kill him; but if it is a girl, let her live." The midwives, however, feared God and did not do what the king of Egypt had told them to do: they let the boys live. Then the king of Egypt summoned the midwives and asked them, "Why have you done this? Why have you let the boys live?" The midwives answered Pharaoh, "Hebrew women are not like Egyptian women; they are vigorous and give birth before the midwives arrive." So God was kind to the midwives and the people increased and became even more numerous. And because the midwives feared God, he gave them families of their own."

*All: Shiprah and Puah, let us learn from your story of courageous resistance. Teach us wisdom, compassion and fidelity to the sacredness of life.*

## Reading 2: Romans 16: 1-16 or 1-2

I recommend to you our sister Phoebe, a deacon of the church in Cenchreae. I ask you to receive her in the Lord in a way worthy of the saints and to give her any help she may need from you, for she has been a great help to many people, including me. Greet Priscilla and Aquila, my fellow workers in Christ Jesus. They risked their lives for me. Not only I but all the churches of the Gentiles are grateful to them. Greet also the church that meets at their house...Greet Mary, who worked very hard for you. Greet Andronicus and Junia, my relatives who have been in prison with me. They are outstanding among the apostles, and they were in Christ before I was...Greet Tryphena and Tryphos, those women who work hard in the Lord. Greet my dear friend Persis, another woman who has worked very hard in the Lord. Greet Rufus, chosen in the Lord, and his mother, who has been a mother to me, too. Greet Philologus, Julia, Nereus and his sister, and Olympas and all the saints with them. Greet one another with a holy kiss. All the churches of Christ send greetings.

*All: Phoebe, woman deacon, Junia, woman apostle, and all the women named by Paul as disciples of Jesus, help our church today to grow in valuing women's ministry.*

## Reading 3: John 20: 11-23

...but Mary stood outside the tomb crying. As she wept, she bent over to look into the tomb and saw two angels in white, seated where Jesus' body had been, one at the head and the other at the foot. They asked her, "Woman, why are you crying?" "They have taken my Lord away," she said, "and I don't know where they have put him." At this, she turned around and saw Jesus standing there but she did not recognize that it was Jesus. "Woman," he said, "Why are you crying? Who is it you are looking for?" Thinking he was the gardener, she said, "Sir, if you have carried him away, tell me where you have put him, and I will get him." Jesus said to her, "Mary." She turned toward him and cried out in Aramaic, "Rabboni!" (which means beloved teacher.) Jesus said, "Do not hold on to me, for I have not yet returned to the Father. Go instead to my brothers and tell them, 'I am returning to my Father and your Father, to my God and your God.'" Mary of Magdala went to the disciples with the news: "I have seen the Lord!" And she told them that he had said these things to her.

*All: Mary of Magdala, woman whom Jesus loved much, woman entrusted with the Gospel, you were chosen as first to witness and to announce the Resurrection. Guide us in our pursuit of truth, service and equality in Christ, the Risen One.*

**Reflection** *This would be a good time for a woman or lay ecclesial minister to preach. See sample op-ed piece in the FutureChurch Mary Magdala organizing kit, the article Women in the Bible and the Lectionary by Ruth Fox, OSB (available on the FutureChurch website) or Women Officeholders in the Early Church monograph for examples of women in Church leadership whose stories have not been told.*

## Chorus of Biblical Women Whose Stories We Do Not Hear:

*ALL: (Sung Refrain) We come to tell our stories, for too long been left unsaid, we come to share our rising from the dead. (repeat) (Words adapted from David Haas' Song of the Body of Christ c. 1989. Published by G.I.A.)*

### Reader 1:

Miriam, who saved Moses from the water, who convinced Pharaoh's daughter to take a wet nurse for him who in reality was his own mother. Miriam, who was prophetess and led the people in prayer, let us follow your faithful and joyful example. When Pharaoh's horses, chariots and horsemen went into the sea, the Lord brought the waters of the sea back over them, but the Israelites walked through the sea on dry ground. Then Miriam the prophetess, Aaron's sister, took a tambourine in her hand, and all the women followed her, with tambourines

and dancing. Miriam sang to them: “Sing to the Lord, for he is highly exalted. The horse and its rider, he hurled into the sea.” (*Exodus 15:1*) You were loved so well that God caused there to be wells that appeared to sustain your people in the desert. And they remain in your name to this day.

Presider: We did not know. We never hear your story as prophet and leader of prayer and praise. We hear only of the mighty deeds of your brother Moses.

*ALL: (Sung Refrain) We come to tell our stories, for too long been left unsaid, we come to share our rising from the dead. (repeat)*

**Reader 2:**

Judith, who risked her own life and saved her people, of whom was said, “Blessed are you among all women....Never will the people forget (you).” “All the women of Israel gathered to see her; and they blessed her and performed a dance in her honor.” She took branches in her hands and distributed them to women around her, and she and the other women crowned themselves with garlands of olive leaves. At the head of all the people, she led the women in dance, while the men of Israel followed in their armor, wearing garlands and singing hymns.” (*Judith 15: 9-13*)

Presider: Judith, we did not know your story. We never hear your story as the courageous and clever woman who risked all, or about how you led the people in joyous prayer and thanksgiving in praise of God.

*ALL: (Sung Refrain) We come to tell our stories, for too long been left unsaid, we come to share our rising from the dead. (repeat)*

**Reader 3:** Mary of Bethany, Jesus was your guest for dinner and you anointed his feet with costly perfume and wiped them with your hair. (*Jn. 12:1-8*) Your gestures were extravagant, as extravagant as your love for Jesus. Teach us to love extravagantly. Teach us to show our love in the face of criticism and derision. Jesus said the story would forever be told, “in memory of her,” (*Mk. 14:3-9 and Mt. 26:6-13*) ....yet we do not hear your story.

Presider: We did not know your story. We never hear it proclaimed on Sunday. Instead we hear the story of the sinful woman in Luke who washed the Lord’s feet with her tears and dried them with her hair. (*Lk. 7:36-50*). Mary of Bethany, you anoint out of love, not penitence, but you are mistaken for the sinful woman.

*ALL: (Sung Refrain) We come to tell our stories, for too long been left unsaid, we come to share our rising from the dead. (repeat)*

**Reader 4:**

Mary, Mother of Jesus, God Bearer, Mother of God. Your YES changed forever the face of humanity. You proclaimed the Magnificat like Hannah, your foremother in faith. Though one of the most beautiful and powerful hymns in Scripture, it is never read or preached on Sundays.

Presider: We do not hear this powerful part of your story, Mary. We need your strength and your commitment. We add our YES to yours.

*ALL: (Sung Refrain) We come to tell our stories, for too long been left unsaid, we come to share our rising from the dead. (repeat)*

**Reader 5:**

Lois and Eunice, mother and grandmother to Timothy, women of sincere faith. Twelve verses of Paul's letter surround you. But you have been neatly sliced out of the lectionary readings. This powerful story of how women have passed on the faith from mother to child is never heard in church.

Presider: We give thanks for the faithfulness of mothers and grandmothers who teach, encourage and share faith with their sons and daughters in every generation.

*ALL: (Sung Refrain) We come to tell our stories, for too long been left unsaid, we come to share our rising from the dead. (repeat)*

**Reader 6:**

The powerful story of the woman with a hemorrhage....the story of the woman crippled and bent over for eighteen years....the story of our dear Mary of Magdala.....none of these stories are shared on Sundays as lessons for faith....

Presider: The faithful women who followed Jesus are omitted from lectionary passages read in church. We did not know, but our eyes are now opened. We follow in your footsteps as you followed Jesus. May we tell your stories again and again in homes and churches and in our hearts.

*ALL: (Sung Refrain) We come to tell our stories, for too long been left unsaid, we come to share our rising from the dead. (repeat)*

**Ritual of being called by name and blessing each other** *Invite participants to bless one another with water or oil and pray, "N., You are called by name. Go forth and proclaim, I have seen the Lord."*

**Banner (optional)** *If you have chosen to make a Women and the Word banner, now would be a good time to place the faces on the 2 women, symbolizing their return to our lives, faith communities, and scripture proclamation.*

**Closing Prayer:**

Presider:

God of All Hopefulness, help us not to be discouraged but rather use the fire of the Holy Spirit to build equality and respect in our Church and in our world. We trust that your resurrection Love, first proclaimed by Mary of Magdala, is able to do more than we ask or imagine.

*All: Amen.*

**Closing Song:** *We Are Called* (David Haas, c. 1988, GIA Publications, Inc.) *or other song you select*

Prayer service created by Maggie Albo with modest contributions by FutureChurch executive director Chris Schenk for the 2007 and 2008 celebrations of the Feast of St. Mary of Magdala. Maggie is a member of the FutureChurch Women in Church Leadership Advisory Committee, a Chaplain for Hospice of Spokane, and has been presenting the Mary of Magdala celebrations for women in Eastern Washington since 2000.

**Developed by FutureChurch**

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