

**2024 MARY MAGDALENE CELEBRATION:**  
**WOMEN WITNESSING TO THE DIVINE IN OUR MIDST**  
*A Liturgy of the Word for the Feast of St. Mary Magdalene*

**INTRODUCTORY RITES**

**Gathering Song Options:**

*Songs that emphasize themes of church, inclusion/welcome, and women are appropriate.*

*Suggestions include:*

- A PLACE AT THE TABLE music by Lori True, text by Shirley Erena Murray © 1998, Hope Publishing Co., Carol Stream, Il, 60188; 2001, GIA Publications, Inc.
- ALL ARE WELCOME by Marty Haugen © 1994, GIA Publications, Inc.
- WOMEN OF THE CHURCH by Carey Landry © 2005, Carey Landry. Published by OCP.

**Sign of the Cross:**

Leader: We gather together in the name of  
*(making Sign of the Cross)*  
God, our loving Creator,  
Jesus, our Redeemer.  
And the Holy Spirit, our Sanctifier...

**All:** AMEN.

**Introduction: “I Have Seen the Risen Christ”: Women Witnessing to the Divine in their Midst**

Leader: This year as we mark the Feast of St. Mary Magdalene, we remember the way in which Mary boldly proclaimed the Risen Christ. No societal barriers stopped her from embracing her truth and sharing the Good News of Jesus. The reality of the Resurrection was so monumental, so impactful, and so important that Mary Magdalene proclaimed it bravely and unapologetically.

So today, in honor and remembrance of the Apostle to the Apostles, we pray in gratitude for the ways in which we have all encountered the Risen Christ. We lift up stories from women witnesses of today who, just like Mary Magdalene, have experienced the Risen Christ and boldly proclaim and share the Love of Christ they have found.

## **Opening Prayer: Inviting the Presence and Intercession of Mary Magdalene**

Leader: Let us pray for Mary's intercession:

You Mary, Proclaimer of the Truth,  
Watch over us as we attend to the voices of women,  
who, like you, bear a truthful witness to Christ's resurrection.

Be with us now as we summon your faithfulness, your tenacity, your authenticity.  
Help us to courageously live our truths  
and boldly proclaim the grace we receive.  
Help us journey in a spirit of friendship and synodality  
toward the likeness of a Church of the Risen Christ-  
A church where all voices, all stories, and all perspectives matter.  
Help us become fully adopted to the Holy Spirit,  
abiding always in the will of God with softened hearts and open minds.

We make our prayers through Jesus, our brother.

All: AMEN.

### **LITURGY OF THE WORD**

Leader: Just as Mary Magdalene was the first to witness to the Risen Christ, women witnesses today encounter the Divine in and their ministry. Let us be attentive to three women in ministry who have encountered the Risen Christ in and through their vocations.

#### **Woman Witness #1:**

*The witnesses can be those who have seen the Risen Christ in their ministry/work. Each woman should introduce themselves, explain their ministerial context, and share an event or experience when they encountered Christ in their midst. Consider inviting women in education, healthcare, immigration justice, criminal justice reform, environmental justice, etc. in addition to women engaged in pastoral, spiritual ministry. These witnesses should each be around 5-7 minutes.*

### **Sung Response:**

*After each witness shares, it would be appropriate to sing a response together. These of discipleship, encounter, witness, evangelization would all be appropriate. Alternatively, you may allow for a moment of silence so that those gathered can reflect on what has been shared.*

*Will you let me be your servant?  
Let me be as Christ to you?  
Pray that I may have the grace to  
Let you be my servant too.*

SERVANT SONG by Richard Gillard. © 1977, Universal Music - Brentwood  
Benson Publishing

### **Woman Witness #2:**

#### **Sung Response:**

### **Woman Witness #3:**

#### **Sung Response:**

**Gospel:**      **John 20:11-18** (from the Inclusive Bible)

READER:      Let us now share the Gospel of Mary's encounter with the Risen Christ.

God is with you.

**All:**            **And also with you.**

READER:      A reading from the Gospel according to John

**All:**            **Praise to you, O Christ.**

READER:      On the first day of the week,  
Mary of Magdala came to the tomb early in the morning,  
while it was still dark,  
and saw the stone removed from the tomb.

So she ran and went to Simon Peter  
and to the other disciple and told them,  
“They have taken the Rabbi from the tomb,  
and we don't know where they put him.”

So Peter and the other disciple went out toward to the tomb.  
They both ran, but the other disciple ran faster than Peter  
and arrived at the tomb first; bent down and saw the burial cloths there,  
but did not go in.

When Simon Peter arrived after,  
he went into the tomb and saw the burial cloths there,  
and the cloth that had covered Jesus' head,  
not with the burial cloths but rolled up in a separate place.  
Then the other disciple also went in,  
the one who had arrived at the tomb first,  
and saw and believed.  
For they did not yet understand the scripture  
that Jesus had to rise from the dead.  
Then the disciples returned home.

But Mary stayed outside the tomb weeping.  
And as she wept, she bent over into the tomb  
and saw two angels in white sitting there,  
one at the head and one at the feet where the body of Jesus had been.  
And they said to her, "Why are you weeping?"  
She said to them, "They have taken my Rabbi,  
and I don't know where they laid him."  
When she had said this, she turned around and saw Jesus there,  
but did not know it was Jesus.

Jesus said to her, "Why are you weeping? Whom are you looking for?"

She thought it was the gardener and said, "Please, if you carried Jesus away,  
tell me where you laid him, and I will take him."  
Jesus said to her, "Mary!"

She turned and said in Hebrew, "Rabbouni!," which means my Teacher.  
Jesus said to her, "Stop holding on to me, for I have not yet ascended to God.  
But go to the sisters and brothers and tell them,  
'I am going to my Abba God and your Abba God.'"

Mary of Magdala went and announced to the disciples,  
"I have seen the Teacher," and what the savior told her.

The Good News of Our Salvation

### **Individual Reflection/Offertory:**

*Depending on the size of the group, this can be an opportunity for a shared reflection.  
Individuals are welcome to share events or experiences through which they encountered the  
Risen Christ in their midst. In the context of a zoom call, participants may be invited to share  
their responses in the chat.*

**Leader:** In honor of our foremother who boldly proclaimed her witness to the Risen Christ, let us take a moment now to consider where we have encountered Christ in our midst and in our ministry. Where have you encountered the Risen Christ? Let us offer these moments in gratitude.

**Song:** SERVANT SONG (full)

**Prayers of the People:        RESPONSE: HEAR US, O GOD**

**Leader:** Inspired by these moments of encounter, we know and trust that God is with us. Let us pray now to the God who makes Godself known to us, and responds to us when we call:

For the Body of Christ in our midst, especially represented in the vulnerable and in the marginalized. May we recognize and honor Christ in one another, and work to dismantle all structures, systems, customs, forces and manifestations of human oppression and exploitation, we pray:

For the Christian community, that we may come to know God and ourselves more deeply through spirituality, language, and imagery that is more fully representative of our inclusive God, we pray:

For leaders of the institutional Church, that they may recognize that all people are created in God's image and strike down every oppressive practice, teaching, and law that assigns women and girls to a subordinate status. We pray:

For those who work for justice for women in the world, that the Church may stand with them to build structures that support and sustain the basic needs of all including access to clean water, clean air, adequate housing, food, security, education, the workforce, political and social engagement, and freedom of movement, we pray:

For those in our communities who are marginalized by the institutional church because they are LGBTQ, belong to diverse families, have divorced, or follow their conscience on reproductive health; and for those whose voices have been silenced because they support women's equality in the Church including ordination. That they may come to know the Church as a place of radical inclusion that defers to the primacy of conscience; affirms the spirit of the divine in their identity, gifts, needs and dreams; and welcomes them to every table including the Eucharistic and decision-making tables, we pray:

For those who have died and particularly our foremothers in faith --those in Scripture, those in our tradition, and those who have walked with us in our time. That they're stories and witness may always be remembered, celebrated and honored and that they may know the peace of complete unity and wholeness with God, we pray:

For all of us gathered here, that our vocations and ministries, expertise and experience, and contributions of mind, body, and spirit may be welcomed and celebrated for the benefit of all God's children, we pray:

**All:** AMEN.

### CONCLUDING RITES

**Action Item:** Mary Magdalene Open Letter

**Leader:** In the spirit of sharing our stories of the Risen Christ, it's time that we tell the whole story of Easter, including Christ's appearance to and commissioning of Mary Magdalene on Easter Sunday. FutureChurch is hosting an open letter to the Synod as well as the Dicastery for Divine Worship to include all of John 20:1-18 on Easter Sunday. Join the call at <https://futurechurch.org/open-letter>.

*(We have also included the text of the letter and a signature page for you to collect signatures at your event if you would like)*

This letter is part of the "Mary Magdalene Goes to the Synod" project to expand the lectionary to include the stories of women of the Bible. Learn more at <https://futurechurch.org/the-missing-women/>

### **Closing Prayer:**

**Leader:** And now, let us pray:

Loving God,

We gathered here to remember and celebrate  
Saint Mary Magdalene, the first to witness the risen Jesus  
and share the good news of his Resurrection.  
Her courage and dedication inspire us to honor all  
the women who share their faith stories  
and serve boldly in our Church and world.

We thank you for the gift of Mary Magdalene  
and the amazing women who enrich our lives

with their wisdom, compassion, and strength.  
Their voices and actions bring us closer to you and remind us  
of your constant presence and gracious love in our lives.

Bless these women who work tirelessly in their ministries.  
Give them the strength to keep going, the support they need,  
and the courage to keep fighting for their liberation.  
May their efforts bear much fruit and help many others grow in faith.

Inspire all of us to serve others with love and dedication.  
Help us to create a Church where everyone's  
gifts are recognized and celebrated.  
Let the spirit of Mary Magdalene guide us to  
live our faith with boldness,  
and the courage to proclaim  
"I have seen the Risen Christ."

**All:** AMEN.

**Final Blessing:**

Leader: May the love of our God bless you and keep you, AMEN  
May the spirit of Mary Magdalene inspire you in courage and strength, AMEN  
May the stories and wisdom of all women fill your hearts and minds, AMEN  
May you always recognize and celebrate the divine gifts within yourself and  
each person you encounter, AMEN.

**Dismissal:**

Leader: Go forth with the peace of Christ, empowered to make a difference,  
uplift others, and spread love in our world.

**ALL:** Thanks be to God.

**Closing Song Options:**

*Songs that emphasize Church, unity in diversity, equality, and mission are all appropriate. Some suggestions include:*

- YOU SHALL BE MY WITNESSES by Miriam Therese Winter, WomanSong, 1987.
- WE ARE MANY PARTS by Mary Haugen.© 1980, 1986, GIA Publications, Inc.

## Open Letter: Tell the Whole Story About Mary Magdalene on Easter Sunday

<https://futurechurch.org/open-letter>

### What Are We Asking For?

We, the undersigned, urge that John 20:1-18, the full Resurrection account – including the Risen Christ’s appearance to Mary Magdalene and commissioning of her to proclaim the Resurrection to the other disciples – be proclaimed on Easter Sunday. It is time to tell the story of Mary Magdalene’s apostolic witness to the Resurrection every Easter so that all Catholics can be inspired her faith, courage, and ministry.

### Why Is This Necessary?

Telling the true story of Mary Magdalene can not only vindicate her memory, but also help reclaim the rightful role for women in the Church.

For centuries, Mary Magdalene has been misrepresented as a contrite prostitute who, after encountering Jesus, repented and spent the rest of her life in private prayer and penance. This inaccurate portrayal damaged and diminished her true role as the "Apostle to the Apostles", the first to announce the Good News of the Resurrection.

This centuries-long slander has been harmful to women and to the Church. According to distinguished theologian, Elizabeth Johnson, CSJ, "Making her a prostitute has allowed her leadership role among the disciples to be generally forgotten." Sr. Johnson adds that even now, "for those who prefer a Church with an exclusively male hierarchy, it is easier to deal with her as a repentant sinner than as an apostolic woman who had a voice and used it."

The truth is, there is no biblical or historical evidence Mary Magdalene was a prostitute. Rather, as New Testament Scholar, Sr. Sandra Schneiders, IHM points out, she is presented in scripture as "the premiere woman disciple of Jesus." All four Gospels explicitly point out that Mary Magdalene was present at the tomb on Easter morning and in John’s account she alone is the first to encounter, be commissioned by, and proclaim the Risen Christ. For the earliest Christians, it was impossible to tell the Easter story without including the witness of Mary Magdalene, prompting early church Fathers to name her "the Apostle of the Apostles."

### Compare the Texts

Easter is the most sacred and important of all Sundays in the Church year. Yet, when Catholics gather for Mass on Easter Sunday, they do not hear the full story of the Resurrection. They do not hear the inspiring story of Mary Magdalene’s witness of the Risen Christ or Christ’s commission to Mary Magdalene to proclaim the Resurrection to the other disciples. Only John 20: 1 – 9 is proclaimed. The rest of the story, John 20: 11 - 18 is proclaimed on the Tuesday after Easter when very few Catholics will hear it. John 20:10, which is omitted on both Easter Sunday and Easter Tuesday, makes it clear that Mary Magdalene alone remained at the empty tomb.

### Who will receive the signatures?

We will deliver the written request and signatures to The Dicastery for Divine Worship and the Discipline of the Sacraments at the Vatican and The United States Conference of Catholic Bishops Committee on Divine Worship.



## Mary Magdalene Open Letter Signatures

Name of Mary Magdalene Celebration/Event: \_\_\_\_\_

Hosting Community and Location: \_\_\_\_\_

First Name	Last Name	City, State/Province, Country	Email (optional)

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Or mail paper copies to:  
FutureChurch  
3909 Rocky River Drive  
Cleveland, OH 44111