

PALM SUNDAY

Originally marking the start of Passover, now Palm Sunday begins Holy Week in traditional Christianity.

Passover, a day of high ritual, a day Jesus and the disciples honored and traveled into the city of Jerusalem to celebrate.

Yet according to the Gospel of John, Mary has already anointed Jesus with the costly nard. Before his triumphant entry into Jerusalem, he had spoken of his burial.

Only in John is the woman who holds the alabaster jar given a name, Mark and Matthew simply say a woman but describe the same scene, all set at the house of Simon the Leper.*

It is also in John, that the disciple who criticizes Mary’s action is identified as Judas the Iscariot, saying, “*Why was this oil not sold for three hundred days’ wages and given to the poor?*” John also tells us that Judas said this not because he cared about the poor but “*because he was a thief and held the money bag and used to steal the contributions.*”

Just as Judas was already plotting the betrayal of Jesus, Mary knew the day of Jesus’ death was imminent.

The next day, Jesus rides the donkey into Jerusalem, his entry met by crowds waving palm branches and shouting Hosanna, blessed is he who comes in the name of the Lord.

John tells us that *the large crowd of the Jews found out that he (Jesus) was there and came, not only because of Jesus, but also to see Lazarus, whom he had raised from the dead.*

Were there two different crowds in the masses? One filled with his followers, those who could testify to his raising of Lazarus from the tomb. The other, the masses who would become the mob, came curios to see the man once dead who had been given life by this itinerate teacher from Nazareth.

For the next days, Jesus performed many miracles, almost as if to defy the Pharisees and still there were those who could not, would not believe.

But the Magdalene believed. Did she see the dark shadow cross his face each time Jesus spoke of his coming death, of his burial, of being raised up and the three days to follow?

She would have known his time on earth was short. I see her watching him, memorizing every line of his face, his gestures, the sound of his voice. Watching him, perhaps from afar as he spoke, healed, taught, his back to her and remembering the strength of his shoulders.

Passover is celebrated following the first full moon after the spring equinox. This Passover would end in the first Easter, now only days away.

Did the Magdalene sit that night bathed in the light of the full moon? She knew Jesus would travel into Jerusalem the next day. If she prayed, what was she praying for?

Perhaps she was somehow comforted by that moon, for she knew that all would soon be taken away.

**Dorothy Gibbons
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*Luke tells of a story of anointing but that story veers into Jesus telling his host Simon the Pharisees the parable of which debtor will be forgiven the most, the one who owed or the one who owed little and chided Simon for not offering Jesus the common courtesies given any guests.