



Candlewood Church



Jesus Elevated Women – Part Two

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BIG IDEA – Jesus doesn't define us by our origin story or what broke us. He calls us by name, sets us free and sends us out with purpose!

Scripture Focus – Soon afterward Jesus began a tour of the nearby towns and villages, preaching and announcing the Good News about the Kingdom of God. He took his twelve disciples with him, **along with some women who had been cured of evil spirits and diseases. Among them were Mary Magdalene, from whom he had cast out seven demons;** Joanna, the wife of Chuza, Herod's business manager; Susanna; and many others who were contributing from their own resources to support Jesus and his disciples. **Luke 8:1-3**

Mary Magdalene's story had all the makings of a scandal; wealth, spiritual torment, cultural assumptions, and a past people could easily whisper about. And for 1,400 years, Church officials definitely whispered, **"but she was a prostitute,"** even though **the Bible never said that.** Her wealth, her influence and her demons certainly fed the fake news about her reputation. But Jesus did not define her by what had broken her. He healed her, dignified her, and entrusted her with good news that would change the world. He chose Mary to deliver the news of his resurrection. Jesus still turns our wounded stories into a witness of his grace and power to change a life.

We are continuing our series on WOMANHOOD. **Here's the thing; our focus is how Jesus elevated the perceptions and positions of women in a time where the political and religious cultures did not hold women in high regard.** Especially when concerning legal or social engagements. **But the truth is – Jesus elevated both men and women, healed or hurt, reputable or not. Because Jesus came to seek and save the lost (Luke 19:10)! And the lost are lost for a reason.**

Jesus sees you, completely

Here's our aim when we gather here at Candlewood.



Did you know that our moto is “we live, love and coach like Christ” – what does that mean?

It's this, God gives us a community of people who are experiencing their own journey of submitting, loving and trusting Jesus with their whole lives. God fills them with His Holy Spirit and they, out of how they live and talk, they touch your life and mine.

- **Have you ever had someone else call out your name in prayer?**
- **Have you asked someone a question about something that's baffling you in the scripture?**
- **Have you suffered, been angry, confused or broken and had another believer care for you?**

Then you have been “coached” like Christ. That is the people we want to be.

In Acts a couple guys were tagged as *untrained, uneducated and ordinary men*, so what made them agents of God? It was one thing – “they had been with Jesus.” Acts 4:13.

There was someone else among the apostles who had also spent enormous amounts of time with Jesus. It was a certain woman from Magdala, Mary.



What do you think when you hear the name “Mary Magdalene?”



What is the first image that comes to mind?

Where did that image come from — Scripture, art, film, or assumption?

Where do you see yourself?

Jesus elevated the people others stepped around: men and women; Jews, Gentiles, and Samaritans; the sick, the shamed, the demonized, the poor, the foreigner, the morally compromised, the grieving, the disabled, and the dismissed.

But the Gospels do something especially striking with women: they do not just show Jesus being kind to them; they show Jesus receiving them as disciples, defending them in public, honoring their faith, accepting their support, and commissioning them as witnesses.

That is not a cultural accident. That is kingdom theology.

When you look at **who Jesus chose to make *theologically significant statements* through** —

- the **greatest faith** in Israel is a **Roman soldier**,
- the **first evangelist** of the resurrection is a **Jewish woman**,
- the **first person** Jesus openly declares himself Messiah to is a **Samaritan woman**.

There's a clear, intentional pattern of Jesus using **the unexpected, the overlooked, and the culturally disqualified to make his most important points**.



READ THE STORY:

We see Mary Magdalene in the gospels, let's turn to Luke 8:1-3:

Luke 8:1-3 NLT

Soon afterward Jesus began a tour of the nearby towns and villages, preaching and announcing the Good News about the Kingdom of God. He took his twelve disciples with him, along with some women who had been cured of evil spirits and diseases. **Among them were Mary Magdalene, from whom he had cast out seven demons;** Joanna, the wife of Chuzai, Herod's business manager; Susanna; and many others who were contributing from their own resources to support Jesus and his disciples.

Luke mentions, not one **but three powerful women, Mary Magdalene, Joanna, and Susanna**—were all **Jewish**. [Junia Project](#) & [Wisdomwords](#).

Who was Mary Magdalene?

And... why was she so critical in the gospels?

Sounds like an interesting group of gals, women with a story for sure, and Mary Magdalene has gone down in history and culture as a famously bad girl.

Having seven demons as your roommates will do that to you, but don't believe everything you may have heard about the woman. You see, cancel culture is not relegated to the modern social media culture.

Mary Magdalene, like John and Peter, had been with Jesus and it showed. Historically speaking, some religious folk over the centuries may not have been too happy about Mary's rising fame in Christian history. She was being named "the apostle to the apostles" as she was the first to see and recognize the risen Jesus and then was immediately sent to go and tell the brothers. The very definition of apostle is "one who is sent."

For nearly 1,400 years, Western Christianity called her a prostitute – not because the Bible said so, but because in 591 AD Pope Gregory I merged her story with two other women in a single sermon, one of them being an unnamed woman described in Luke 7:36-50 with the descriptor "who was a sinner" which is code for prostitute. That label stuck and it wasn't corrected by the Catholic Church until 1969.

Let's get to know this woman a bit.

We know that Mary is from Magdala, a finishing city on the shores of Galilee. Magdala, the city, had found their "thing" they're famous for.

Let's play a game. I'll say a name and you tell me what FOOD they're famous for:

- Philadelphia, Pennsylvania – Cheesesteak
- Boston, Massachusetts – Clam chowder
- Dodger Stadium – Dodger Dog



What was the city of Magdala like?



Magdala, a subdivision of Galilee – what? You don't know? It's salted fish and lots of it. Everybody eats their salted fish, which made Mary's hometown a money town and it looks like Mary Magdala was a woman of means. She and other women funded Jesus' ministry.

Mary was also an independent woman, and we learn that by the placement of her name always landing first when the women are named. Which could also mean that Mary Magdalene was the most senior, or the oldest among the women.

One more tidbit, the fact that her name is attached to her city of origin and not to her family, father or husband also supports that Mary Magdala was a woman of social status, whether by family industry or inheritance, possibly a rich widow.

But with money comes power and power corrupts, as the saying goes. This could have been the way that Mary came into the bondage of a group of demons setting up house inside of her. What if we knew the names of those demons?

Were they:

Trauma? Bitterness? Divination? Or maybe Rejection? Anxiety or Depression?

Whatever they were, Jesus delivered Mary from the voice of the crushing liar, the rattling chains that satan had her tangled in.

This is Who Jesus is. This is what Jesus does – he sets people free!

Another thing we're certain about Mary Magdalene, after Jesus was crucified, she followed Jesus' body to where he was placed in a borrowed tomb ([Matthew 27:55-56](#)).

Then, she went to the garden tomb as soon as she possible could. The weekend Jesus was crucified bumped up against the Sabbath day, so no work was allowed. But as soon as the sun was rising on the first day of the week, Mary headed to find where they had laid her deliverer, Jesus, because she knew where they put him ([John 20:11-18](#)).

Mary went to a graveyard because that's where you put people who have died. Jesus, her friend, was now dead. We don't like to think about death. For every person, death is our greatest enemy, and death wins 100% of the time.

As a culture we have mastered the art of ignoring the guaranteed conclusion to life on planet earth and ignoring works most days. But then you get a notification on your phone screen that Kobe Bryant and his daughter Gianna and 7 others all went down in a helicopter crash. Remember?

Or a child succumbs to their short battle with cancer. Or your mom slips out of this world, breathing her last breath right in front of your eyes you are reminded that death is a real thing.

Three times in this portrait of Mary Magdalene, before she recognizes Jesus, we're told she's weeping. Why does the first person in human history to recognize the risen Jesus see him through tears?

Because Mary is knowing great pain, the kind of loss that upends your world and literally breaks you.

Have you experienced that kind of pain?



Mary doesn't recognize Jesus at first.

“She turned to leave and saw someone standing there. It was Jesus, but she didn't recognize him. “Dear woman, why are you crying?” Jesus asked her. “Who are you looking for?” She thought he was the gardener. “Sir,” she said, “if you have taken him away, tell me where you have put him, and I will go and get him.” John 20:14-15 NLT

Jesus spoke her name, **'Mary.'**

What Jesus actually says is her Aramaic name, Mariam. It's her name in her heart language, her native tongue. The name her momma would have called her as a little girl. When she hears Jesus speaking to her by her name, she realizes who she is talking to, and who's been there all along.

Jesus comforts Mary but wait, there's so much more! If Jesus is alive, do you know what this means? It means the grip that death had on Mary, the grip that death has on you and me is broken! Death was the bill that we all had coming due, what we earned for wandering away from His voice of love and belonging. Death is separation from our Creator and death is our greatest and ultimate enemy.

But the gift of God is eternal life in Jesus Christ, Mary's risen Lord. And if Jesus is Mary's risen Lord, Jesus can be my risen Lord. If Jesus call's Mary's name, you can know He calls your name.

Like Mary Magdalene, Jesus sees you, he calls you. He breaks the chains and like Mary, Jesus commissions you to go and tell the brothers and sisters.

What are some of our cultural perceptions of women today?

How do we handle women's reputations today?

Are they judged differently than men?

What are the socio-political perceptions?

What are the religious perceptions?

What are the cultural perceptions?

Cities from our culture and perceptions of an individual – like Magdala tells us what Mary was like.



I believe that God loves the cities of our world. He even loves the city of “the angels!”

I also believe there are strong, evil powers and principalities over our cities.

- Every city has a culture! L.A. is a little different than O.C.
- Beach cities are different from Low Desert cities – Huntington Beach vs Lancaster.
- Lakewood is different from Brentwood.

A city absolutely can frame the culture and perceptions of an individual.

Mary Magdala was named after her city, with all its iconic images of its day. She had a past and a life that we were only given a glimpse into. But that glimpse was a serious one, being possessed by SEVEN DEMONS. She was broken and had lost all sense of who she was until Jesus kicked the hellions right out of her.

1. Cancel culture is nothing new... but Jesus never participated in it. Mary was cancelled for 1,400 years by a church that should have known better.

- The world has always been quick to reduce people to their worst moment, their demons, their zip code, or their gender. Jesus has never done that — not once in the Gospels. He consistently moved *toward* the people everyone else stepped around.

2. The city or culture you're from doesn't have to define where you're going.

- Magdala shaped how the world saw Mary; a city with a cultural reputation, and a woman who carried the weight of it. But Jesus didn't meet Mary at her city. He met her at her pain. Whatever city shaped you; whatever label was attached to your name before you had a say; Jesus sees past the address to the person.

3. Seven demons couldn't disqualify her. Neither can yours.

- Whatever name we give our personal demons; trauma, rejection, anxiety, bitterness, addiction; Jesus is in the business of casting them out, not cataloguing them. Mary's deliverance wasn't a side note. It was the foundation of everything that came after. You cannot be commissioned until you've been set free.

4. Healing is always followed by a commission.

- Because going forward in purpose, rather than backward into our old ways, protects us. Jesus never heals and says, "now rest." He heals and says, "now go." Mary was set free *and* sent. Joanna was healed *and* used her palace access to fund the mission. Susanna was restored *and* showed up. The pattern is always the same: encounter Jesus, then become a witness of what He's done. Your story isn't just yours to keep.

REFLECTIONS

- **What label has been attached to your name that Scripture never assigned you?**
- **Is there a "city", a culture, a past, or a season, that you've let define your ceiling?**
- **Which part of your story have you been hiding rather than offering as a witness?**

APPLICATION

What This Means for Us

- **See people the way Jesus sees them.** Mary was labelled, rumored about, and reduced. Most of us have someone in our life that the culture has handed us a verdict on. This week, identify one person you've written off or allowed someone else's narrative to define, and choose one intentional act of dignity toward them.
- **Stop participating in the labelling of others.** The whisper that called Mary a prostitute started with one sermon and lasted fourteen centuries. **Words about people have consequences that outlast us.** Before we repeat a story about someone, ask: *Is this what Jesus would say about them?*
- **Live as someone that Jesus called by name.** Mary's recognition of Jesus came the moment He said *Mariam*. She was known. If you are in Christ, you are not a statistic, a demographic, a label, or a reputation. You are *known* by God and that changes how you see yourself, how you treat others, and how you engage with a world that is desperate to hear that they are known too.

- **Take that next step in following Jesus.** Maybe it starts with belief in Jesus and you are ready to commit your life to him today. **Or since you've said yes and believed, maybe it's getting baptized – you can do that today!**
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- Prayer for freedom from what others think.
 - Prayer believing in God's purpose for our life.
 - Prayer for boldness to take that next step.
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SCRIPTURES

Luke 8:1-3 NLT ON SCREEN

Soon afterward Jesus began a tour of the nearby towns and villages, preaching and announcing the Good News about the Kingdom of God. He took his twelve disciples with him, along with some women who had been cured of evil spirits and diseases. **Among them were Mary Magdalene, from whom he had cast out seven demons;** Joanna, the wife of Chuza, Herod's business manager; Susanna; and many others who were contributing from their own resources to support Jesus and his disciples.

John 20:14-15 NLT ON SCREEN

She turned to leave and saw someone standing there. It was Jesus, but she didn't recognize him. "Dear woman, why are you crying?" Jesus asked her. "Who are you looking for?" She thought he was the gardener. "Sir," she said, "if you have taken him away, tell me where you have put him, and I will go and get him."



DIG DEEPER NOTES

LINKS TO MORE NOTES!

[Jesus Elevating the Outcasts in the Gospels](#)

[Jesus Healings in the Gospels – Men vs Women, Jewish vs Gentile & Individuals](#)

[Who was Mary Magdalene – Nat Geo Article](#)

[Was Mary Magdalene actually a rich woman – Nat Geo Article](#)



Magdala: A City of Commerce and Wealth

The World She Lived In

Mary's hometown wasn't a quiet fishing hamlet. Magdala — also known by its Greek name Taricheae, meaning "salted fish" — was one of the most prosperous cities on the shores of the Sea of Galilee.

Archaeology has revealed:

- A marketplace with 28 commercial shops

- A harbor with a 700-meter wharf
- Over 4,000 ancient coins, most minted in Jerusalem
- One of Galilee's only first-century synagogues with mosaic floors
- A thriving fish-salting and boat-building industry that exported as far as Rome

Historians like Strabo and Pliny the Elder wrote about Magdala's salted fish as an international commodity. This was not a poor village — it was a commercial powerhouse.

Magdala vs. Jerusalem

1. Jerusalem was the religious center; Magdala was a regional town

Jerusalem was dominated by the **Temple**. That changed everything. The Temple made Jerusalem the center of Jewish sacrifice, pilgrimage, priestly authority, festivals, courts, and national religious identity. Early Roman Jerusalem's economy was deeply shaped by pilgrimage because the Temple functioned as a religious and judicial center for Jews locally and across the diaspora.

Magdala, by contrast, had a synagogue; Jerusalem had **the Temple**. That is the biggest difference.

A synagogue was a local place for Scripture, prayer, teaching, and communal life. The Temple was the place of sacrifice, priesthood, pilgrimage, national worship, and symbolic Jewish identity. Magdala's synagogue shows strong Jewish faith; Jerusalem's Temple represented the heart of Jewish covenant life.

2. Magdala was commercial; Jerusalem was ceremonial and political

Magdala's economy was probably built around fish, trade, lake transport, and local markets. Jerusalem's economy was built heavily around pilgrimage, Temple services, hospitality, sacrificial animals, money exchange, priestly administration, and festival crowds. The scale and symbolic weight were completely different.

Magdala was a town where people worked the lake. Jerusalem was a city where Israel came to worship.

3. Magdala was Galilean; Jerusalem was Judean

This matters socially. Galileans were often viewed by Judean elites as more provincial, rural, and less refined. Their accents even gave them away; Peter's Galilean speech identifies him during Jesus' trial in Matthew 26:73. That kind of regional distinction helps explain some of the tension between Jesus' Galilean ministry and the Jerusalem authorities.

Magdala would have felt like a lakeside trade/fishing town: busy, practical, commercial, and connected to the water. Jerusalem would have felt more formal, political, priestly, and institutionally religious.

4. Magdala had Jewish purity culture; Jerusalem centralized it

Magdala's mikvaot show that ritual purity mattered there. But Jerusalem multiplied purity concerns because pilgrims were approaching the Temple. Archaeology and scholarship regularly connect Second Temple Jerusalem with pilgrimage, ritual movement, Temple access, and purification. The recently discussed Pilgrims' Road/stepped street, for example, connected the Pool of Siloam area to the Temple Mount and functioned as a major route for pilgrims in Second Temple Jerusalem.

So Magdala was not religiously loose compared to Jerusalem; it was Jewish and observant. But Jerusalem was the **ritual epicenter**.

- **Magdala was where Jewish faith met the marketplace. Jerusalem was where Jewish faith met the Temple system.**
- **Magdala smelled like fish, nets, lake water, trade, and daily survival.**
- **Jerusalem smelled like sacrifice, incense, pilgrims, politics, and religious authority.**

That helps us imagine Mary Magdalene's world. She likely came from a place that was not backwoods and irrelevant. Magdala was economically active, religiously Jewish, and culturally connected. But it was still Galilean; far from the priestly center of Jerusalem.

Mary Magdalene did not come from the religious center of Jerusalem; she came from a working Galilean town where faith, commerce, sickness, shame, and survival all lived side by side. And that is exactly the kind of place Jesus kept walking into.



A Wealthy, Independent Woman

Luke 8:3 tells us Mary Magdalene financially supported Jesus and the disciples "out of her own resources." This implies real wealth. In a city built on the fish trade, a woman from a merchant or processing family could have owned or managed commercial enterprises.

*Jennifer Ristine, director of the Magdalena Institute at Magdala, puts it plainly: "**She was probably a woman of greater social status, a woman of wealth who accompanied Jesus, helping Jesus and his disciples with her own resources.**"*

The real question isn't where she got her money — it's why her wealth and independence made people so uncomfortable that they invented a story to explain it.

Jesus Healed Her (Luke 8:2)

"Mary, called Magdalene, from whom seven demons had gone out."

We don't know exactly what those seven demons represented — illness, torment, oppression, trauma. What we do know is that Jesus didn't walk past her. He stopped. He saw her. He restored her. Completely.

In a culture that would have seen her suffering as disqualifying, Jesus saw it as an invitation to heal.

Jesus Welcomed Her Into His Ministry (Luke 8:1–3)

After her healing, Mary didn't go home. She went on the road — traveling alongside Jesus, the Twelve, and other women as a fully participating disciple. She used her resources to fund the mission.

This was radical. Women did not travel publicly with male teachers in first-century Jewish culture. Jesus redrew that boundary on purpose.

Jesus Kept Her Near at the Cross (Matthew 27:55–56)

When the disciples fled, Mary stayed. She was present at the crucifixion, at the burial, and at the tomb before dawn on Sunday morning. Her loyalty to Jesus wasn't performance — it was the overflow of someone who had been profoundly loved back to life.

Jesus Chose Her First (John 20:11–18)

Here is the climax of her story — and the clearest statement Jesus ever made about the value of women:

In a first-century Jewish court, a woman's testimony was inadmissible as legal evidence. Women were not considered reliable witnesses.

Jesus chose a woman to be the first witness, the first herald, and the first evangelist of the resurrection — the most important news in all of human history.

He called her by name: "Mary." She turned and said, "Rabbouni" — Teacher.

Then he commissioned her: "Go and tell my brothers."

This is why the early church fathers — and Thomas Aquinas — gave her the title: *Apostola Apostolorum. The Apostle to the Apostles.*

The church got Mary Magdalene wrong for over a millennium. It reduced a woman of wealth, courage, and apostolic calling to a penitent prostitute — because she was independent, powerful, and unmarried.

Jesus never got her wrong.

He healed her when she was broken. He invited her when culture said she didn't belong. He stayed close to her when things got dangerous. And he called her name and sent her when history hung in the balance.

Whatever you carry — a label someone else gave you, a past you didn't choose, a season of torment you can't explain — Jesus sees past all of it. He calls you by name. And he has a mission for you that the world may not expect.

- The Magdala Archaeological Project (magdala.org) — explore the excavated city of Mary's hometown
- National Geographic: "Mary Magdalene probably wasn't a prostitute. Was she actually rich?" (2025)
- Karen L. King, *The Gospel of Mary of Magdala* (2003)
- Bart D. Ehrman, *Peter, Paul, and Mary Magdalene* (2006)
- Pope Francis elevated Mary Magdalene's memorial to a feast day (July 22) in 2016, honoring her role as "Apostle to the Apostles"



Mary Magdalene's Main Scripture Appearances

Luke 8:1–3 — **Introduced by name**; one of the women traveling with Jesus who financially supported the ministry. Seven demons had been cast out of her.

- Soon afterward Jesus began a tour of the nearby towns and villages, preaching and announcing the Good News about the Kingdom of God. He took his twelve disciples with him, along with some women who had been cured of evil spirits and diseases. Among them were Mary Magdalene, from whom he had cast out seven demons; Joanna, the wife of Chuza, Herod's business manager; Susanna; and many others who were contributing from their own resources to support Jesus and his disciples. **Luke 8:1-3 NLT**

Mark 16:9 — **Jesus appears first to Mary Magdalene** after the resurrection.

- After Jesus rose from the dead early on Sunday morning, the first person who saw him was Mary Magdalene, the woman from whom he had cast out seven demons. **Mark 16:9 NLT**

Matthew 27:55–56 — **Present at the crucifixion**, watching from a distance.

- And many women who had come from Galilee with Jesus to care for him were watching from a distance. Among them were Mary Magdalene, Mary (the mother of James and Joseph), and the mother of James and John, the sons of Zebedee. **Matthew 27:55-56 NLT**

Matthew 27:61 — Present at Jesus' burial. Sitting opposite the tomb after Jesus is buried.

- Both Mary Magdalene and the other Mary were sitting across from the tomb and watching. **Matthew 27:61 NLT**

Matthew 28:1 — Goes to the tomb early Sunday morning.

- Early on Sunday morning, as the new day was dawning, Mary Magdalene and the other Mary went out to visit the tomb. **Matthew 28:1 NLT**

John 19:25 — Standing near the cross during the crucifixion.

- Standing near the cross were Jesus' mother, and his mother's sister, Mary (the wife of Clopas), and Mary Magdalene. **John 19:25 NLT**

John 20:1–2 — Arrives at the tomb, finds it empty, runs to tell Peter and John.

- Early on Sunday morning, while it was still dark, Mary Magdalene came to the tomb and found that the stone had been rolled away from the entrance. She ran and found Simon Peter and the other disciple, the one whom Jesus loved. She said, "They have taken the Lord's body out of the tomb, and we don't know where they have put him!" **John 20:1–2 NLT**

John 20:11–18 — **The most extended passage about her. She weeps at the tomb, speaks with angels, and then encounters the risen Jesus.** He calls her by name; **she is commissioned to go tell the disciples.**

- Mary was standing outside the tomb crying, and as she wept, she stooped and looked in. She saw two white-robed angels, one sitting at the head and the other at the foot of the place where the body of Jesus had been lying. "Dear woman, why are you crying?" the angels asked her. "Because they have taken away my Lord," she replied, "and I don't know where they have put him." She turned to leave and saw someone standing there. It was Jesus, but she didn't recognize him. "Dear woman, why are you crying?" Jesus asked her. "Who are you looking for?" She thought he was the gardener. "Sir," she said, "if you have taken him away, tell me where you have put him, and I will go and get him." "Mary!" Jesus said. She turned to him and cried out, "Rabboni!" (which is Hebrew for "Teacher"). "Don't cling to me," Jesus said, "for I haven't yet ascended to the Father. **But go find my brothers and tell them,** 'I am ascending to my Father and your Father, to my God and your God.'" Mary Magdalene found the disciples and told them, "I have seen the Lord!" Then she gave them his message. **John 20:11–18 NLT**



She was unofficially titled, "The Apostle to the Apostles."

The phrase was formalized by Thomas Aquinas in the 13th century, but the concept goes back much further. Several early church fathers used similar language:

- **Hippolytus of Rome** (early 3rd century) is one of the **earliest to call her the "apostle to the apostles"** in his commentary on the Song of Songs, where he connects her to the role of **herald of the resurrection.**
- **Augustine of Hippo** (4th–5th century) also referenced **her role as the one who brought the resurrection news to the male disciples.**

- **Thomas Aquinas** (13th century) gave it the formal Latin expression — **Apostola Apostolorum** — that stuck in theological tradition.

Pope Gregory I collapsed three different women into one figure in a single sermon

- the unnamed sinful woman of Luke 7, (this was not Mary Magdalene)
- Mary of Bethany (sister of Martha and Lazarus), and
- Mary Magdalene.

in 591 AD, her status quietly eroded. It's hard to honor someone as the premier witness of the resurrection when you've also labeled her a former prostitute. The title didn't vanish entirely, but it lost its cultural force in the Western church for centuries. **That error shaped Western Christianity's view of her for over 1,300 years.**

The Eastern Orthodox Church never made that mistake — they always treated her as a distinct figure and honored her as "Equal to the Apostles."

Pope John Paul II Restored Mary's reputation

He reinvoked the title of Apostle to the Apostles in 1988, and then in **2016 Pope Francis** took the most significant modern step — elevating her feast day (July 22) from a memorial to a full liturgical feast, on the same level as the male apostles. The Vatican's decree explicitly cited her role as *Apostola Apostolorum* as the reason.

What makes her title so powerful is the irony of the moment.

In first-century Jewish culture, a woman's testimony wasn't legally admissible. You literally could not use a woman as a witness in court. And yet Jesus — knowing full well the cultural weight of that — chose a woman to carry the testimony that would become the foundation of the entire Christian faith. He didn't just elevate Mary

Magdalene. He made a deliberate, unmistakable statement about whose voice matters in the Kingdom.



The Prevalent Theories on Mary Magdalene's Wealth

Theory 1: Affluent Family Background

This is the primary argument of the National Geographic article, written by scholar Jean-Pierre Isbouts. The answer to the puzzle of her independence may be that Mary Magdalene hailed from an affluent family, and thus enjoyed a greater level of independence. Luke suggests as much when he says that she belonged to a group of women who "provided for them out of their own resources" (Luke 8:2–3). [National Geographic](#)

The logic here is simple: in a rigidly patriarchal society, the only way an unmarried woman could travel freely without a male guardian was if her family had enough wealth and status that the normal rules bent around her.

Theory 2: The Fish Trade Industry

This connects directly to Magdala's economy. Archaeological finds suggest Mary came from a wealthy background — a detail that comports with the Gospel reference to certain women financially supporting Jesus' ministry. Among the recent finds are objects suggesting a large fish industry: fishhooks, fishing accessories, and 40 pools to salt fish. [Aleteia](#)

A woman from a merchant or fish-processing family in Magdala — one of the most commercially active cities on the Sea of Galilee — could have inherited or managed a legitimate business enterprise. The city's export trade reached all the way to Rome, meaning real wealth was being generated there.

Theory 3: Wealthy Widow

New discoveries suggest Mary Magdalene might have been a rich widow whose money funded a synagogue or house of prayer for believers. **This theory carries significant weight because widowhood was one of the few socially acceptable ways a first-century woman could control her own finances.** A widow had legal standing over her late husband's estate in ways a never-married woman did not. It would also explain why she appears in the Gospels with no father, husband, or brother ever mentioned — and why she had both freedom of movement and disposable wealth.

[Christian Today](#)

Scholar T. Wray, author of *Good Girls, Bad Girls of the New Testament*, goes further: "I believe that Mary Magdalene is an older, wealthy widow who serves as Jesus' comrade, confidant, and friend." [Aleteia](#)

Theory 4: Her Name Itself Signals Status

"Usually, **when a town or village is mentioned in connection with a woman's name in the Bible, it indicates that she is a woman of wealth or higher social status,**" said Wray. In other words, being identified by your hometown rather than by your father or husband — "Mary of Magdala" rather than "Mary, daughter of so-and-so" — was itself a marker of independence and standing. Ordinary women were identified by their male relatives. Women identified by place were notable enough to stand on their own. [Aleteia](#)

Theory 5: Independent Businesswoman (The "Rebel" Reading)

A less mainstream but compelling scholarly reading points out that Mary Magdalene seems to be the "rebel" feminist of her time — able to access wealth and use it as she pleased. Because of this, it's believed this is why she was labeled the way she was — not because she was literally a prostitute, but because she did not follow the norms of what women were

doing in her time. She was "loose" in the sense that she did not have a male guardian as all other women were expected to have. [Substack](#)

This theory essentially argues that her financial independence was the scandal — and that the prostitute label was a social weapon used to explain away a woman who didn't fit the expected mold.

All five theories actually reinforce the same point beautifully: however she got her money, she used it for the Kingdom. She didn't hoard it, spend it on herself, or use her independence for personal gain. She poured her resources into funding Jesus' ministry at a time when no one else — including most of the male disciples — was doing that at that level.

And none of it came from prostitution. The archaeology, the Scripture, and the scholarship all point the same direction: she was a woman of means, substance, and status — which made Jesus' choice to heal her, include her, and commission her all the more remarkable, because she wasn't a charity case. She was a peer. And he still chose to elevate her.



Which one of these theories best aligns with the fact that Mary picked up SEVEN DEMONS that were exercised by Jesus?

The Critical Detail: Seven Demons

The Wealthy Widow theory actually aligns the best. Here's why:

Widowhood in first-century Palestine wasn't just a legal status — it was frequently a crisis. A woman who lost her husband lost her primary social protection overnight. She became vulnerable to exploitation, property disputes, and community suspicion. The psychological and spiritual weight of that kind of isolation and loss — especially if the death was sudden, or if she had no sons to protect her — could absolutely map onto the kind of deep, pervasive torment the Gospels describe. Wealth without protection in that world wasn't security. It made you a target. And targets who had no recourse sometimes found themselves in very dark places spiritually.

The wealthy widow theory also explains something the others don't: **why she needed Jesus specifically.** If she was simply from a prosperous merchant family, her demons would be someone else's problem to manage — her father would have taken her to a synagogue leader or a physician. **But a widow with no male guardian had no one to advocate for her healing. She was on her own — until Jesus.**

The Businesswoman / Fish Trade theory is the weakest fit. A woman actively running a successful commercial enterprise would need to be functional, present, and socially engaged. Severe demonic oppression — the kind Luke is describing — would make that nearly impossible to maintain. The two pictures don't fit together easily.

The Affluent Family Background theory has a partial fit. Wealthy families in the ancient world did sometimes isolate or hide members who were mentally or spiritually afflicted rather than

seek public healing — because public affliction was public shame. So it's possible she came from money but her condition had effectively removed her from normal family life. However, this theory still doesn't explain why no father, brother, or male relative is ever mentioned as being with her or advocating for her.

The "Her Name Signals Status" theory is more of a linguistic observation than a biographical one, so it doesn't really engage the demon question directly.

The Most Compelling Picture

When you put it all together, the scenario that best fits all the evidence — the wealth, the freedom of movement, the absence of a male guardian, and the seven demons — is this:

Mary was likely a widow of means who had fallen into complete spiritual ruin following her husband's death. Her wealth kept her from being destitute, but money couldn't touch what was destroying her. She had resources but no rescue. She had independence but no peace. She was, in every meaningful sense, a woman who had everything the world could offer and was still completely undone.

And that is exactly **the kind of person Jesus keeps showing up for in the Gospels.**

This actually makes her story more powerful, not less. She wasn't poor and desperate with nothing to lose. She was wealthy, independent, and still couldn't fix herself. The demons didn't care about her bank account. Her status in Magdala's marketplace didn't protect her inner life.

Jesus didn't heal her because she was needy in the conventional sense. He healed her because He saw her — fully seen, fully broken, fully restored — and then trusted her with the most important assignment in history.

That's not a poverty-to-purpose story. That's a power-to-surrender-to-greater-power story. And that might actually land harder with a modern congregation.



What about the other women Luke mentions in Luke 8 – Joanna & Susanna?

Joanna, Wife of Chuza

Who Was She?

Joanna's name means "God has been gracious." She was the wife of Chuza, the steward of Herod Antipas — the tetrarch of Galilee and the same Herod who had John the Baptist executed. [America Magazine](#)

The role of "steward" was no minor position. As steward of Herod's household, Chuza was an influential major-domo — something like a White House chief of staff, but on a smaller scale. This means Joanna wasn't just wealthy — she was *palace wealthy*. She lived inside the court of the man who was actively hostile to Jesus' movement. [America Magazine](#)

The Theological Bombshell of Her Presence

Think about what Luke is quietly telling us here. Herod probably knew Chuza's wife Joanna well. That raises intriguing questions — especially since in Luke's Gospel, Jesus calls Herod "a fox." How did Herod become so interested in John the Baptist and Jesus? Were Joanna and Chuza talking enthusiastically about them inside Herod's palace? [America Magazine](#)

In other words — Jesus may have had an informant inside Herod's own household. The enemy's house was funding the Kingdom.

She Was Also a Resurrection Witness

Joanna knew Jesus at least as well as any of the apostles did and was committed to his mission. She appears again in Luke 24 at the empty tomb — making her, like Mary Magdalene, a witness to the resurrection. The fact that Joanna's name appears at the center of a literary chiasm in Luke's resurrection account indicates she was being presented as a centrally important witness. [Women In The Bible Wikipedia](#)

A Fascinating Archaeological Thread

One possible explanation for her prominence relates to the discovery of a first-century ossuary in Jerusalem belonging to a woman named "Joanna" who was the granddaughter of Theophilus the high priest. If this is the same woman Luke mentions, her role as a key witness to the empty tomb could be explained by the fact that in Luke 1:3, he wrote to a "most excellent Theophilus" — and as Theophilus's granddaughter, Joanna would have been someone Luke loved and trusted. That's potentially *why* Luke names her specifically — she may have been one of his primary eyewitness sources. [Wikipedia](#)

Susanna

Susanna is the great mystery of the three. Her name means "lily" — a feminine name derived from a flower, similar to Rhoda meaning "rose" and Tamar meaning "palm." Nothing further is known of the person thus named. She appears exactly once in all of Scripture — right here in Luke 8:3 — and then vanishes entirely from the historical record. [Bible Hub](#)

However, it seems clear that Luke must have come into personal contact with some, at least, of those whom he describes so fully. They were, we may well believe, among the "eyewitnesses and ministers of the word" from whom he derived much of his information. So the fact that Luke names her at all — rather than leaving her in the "many others" category — suggests she was known, significant, and likely a source for his Gospel. [Bible Hub](#)

Powerful Trio of women

What's remarkable about this trio when you step back is the *range* they represent.

- You have Mary Magdalene — a wealthy merchant-class woman from Magdala who had been in spiritual ruin.
- You have Joanna — a palace insider, married to a government official in the court of Jesus' enemy. And
- you have Susanna — a woman we know almost nothing about, which may mean she represents every ordinary woman whose name history didn't think worth preserving.

Jesus built his support network from all three. The healed outsider. The well-connected insider who risked everything. And the unnamed ordinary woman.