

Women in the Bible: Mary Magdalene
Week Nine
Middle School (Ages 11-14)

Materials Needed for Red Eggs: 2 dozen hard-boiled eggs (brown eggs work significantly better), red Rit dye/red food coloring, saucepan, vinegar, water, slotted spoon, paper towels, vegetable oil (optional). Myrrh incense or myrrh essential oil (optional).

Opening Activity: Dyeing Red Eggs

This is a slight twist on the usual egg-dyeing activity. You can start by simply dyeing the eggs.

Add 1/2 package scarlet (No. 5) Rit fabric dye or a small bottle of red food coloring, 2 tablespoons vinegar, and 2 quarts of water in a large saucepan. Bring to a boil and then add the hard-boiled eggs. Allow them to remain in the dye until they are nice and red. Remove them from the dye with a slotted spoon and place them on paper towels to dry. When dry, the eggs can be polished with vegetable oil to make them shiny.

Lesson 1: Review

[Review theme and previous lessons, as appropriate. Review checklist removed.]

Lesson 2: Mary Magdalene as a Disciple?

Prompt: Today, we're going to talk about Mary Magdalene. Anybody heard of her or have any idea who she was or what she did? [Brainstorm/Guess/Share]

Prompt: There is a lot of controversy about who Mary Magdalene was exactly. Some people say she was a friend of Jesus. Some people say she was a prostitute or someone Jesus had healed, or both. Some people say she might have been Jesus' wife. Some people say she was the most loved of all the disciples. Some people say that Jesus taught her things that he didn't teach to the other disciples. The truth is that no one knows because we don't have very much information about her. But, she shows up in the Bible during some of the most important times in Jesus' life. At the very least, it seems like she was a very important person to Jesus.

Prompt: Let's start by reading some of the accounts of Mary Magdalene from the Bible. We first see Mary listed as one of the women who traveled around with Jesus and his 12 male disciples.

Read: Luke 8:1-3 (Some Women Accompany Jesus)

Soon afterwards he went on through cities and villages, proclaiming and bringing the good news of the kingdom of God. The twelve were with him, as well as some women who had been cured of evil spirits and infirmities: Mary, called Magdalene, from whom seven demons had gone out, and Joanna, the wife of Herod's steward Chuza, and Susanna, and many others, who provided for them out of their resources.

Prompt: Let's talk about this little passage a bit. We have Jesus and his 12 disciples traveling around preaching to the people. With them were these women who had been cured and "many others who provided for them." What does that even mean? What were these people doing? What were they providing? [Braintorm/Guess. Jesus and his disciples were traveling around, so Jesus could spread his message. Just like today, traveling cost money. Jesus and his disciples needed food, water, and places to stay. Also, back then, men did not cook for themselves. They women would be needed to gather water and make food.]

Prompt: The name Mary Magdalene came from Magdala, the coastal town where Mary was from. Jesus probably traveled there many times during his ministry, and it seems like, at some point, they met and Jesus

healed her. What do you think it means that she had seven demons? [Brainstorm/Guess. Probably that she was very sick. Back then, people had different ideas about illness and disease. They were often attributed to demons, as opposed to germs or chemical changes in the body. She had not just one demon, but seven, which may indicate that she was quite ill.]

Prompt: One of these people traveling in the group was the wife of Herod's steward. Do you know who Herod was? [Brainstorm/Guess. He was king of Judea – the land where all the Jews lived – so he could be considered the King of the Jews. His boss was the Roman Emperor, but Herod was a very powerful man. Lots of people think the steward's wife being in this group shows that Jesus was both well-known and well-respected. Powerful/wealthy people believed in what he had to say. (By the way, this is the same King Herod who asked for the head of John the Baptist. It was his father, Herod the Great, who is depicted in the wise men story and commanded the killing of all young boys from Bethlehem.)]

Prompt: A lot of people think these women were not just cooking and fetching water. Some people think these women were actually female disciples. We always hear about the 12 men, but it looks like there were women, too. Why do you think this is a big deal? [Brainstorm/Guess. Because Jewish men and women did not normally hang out with each other. This was a very new way of thinking. Kind of like letting Mary (Martha's sister) sit and listen to his preaching.]

Prompt: Why do you think we don't hear more about these women disciples? [Brainstorm – no correct answer here. Maybe there weren't that many female disciples or maybe they weren't around for very long. Maybe they weren't considered disciples in that day or at that time. Maybe the men who wrote the Bible didn't like the idea of having women be so powerful – even if Jesus thought it was a good idea. Maybe it's just an oversight – that there were other stories that were more interesting. Etc.]

Lesson 3: Mary Magdalene at the Cross

Prompt: In three of the four Gospels, Mary Magdalene is mentioned as one of the women at the cross when Jesus was crucified. Here are the passages.

Read: Matthew 27:55-56 (The Death of Jesus)

Many women were also [at the cross], looking on from a distance; they had followed Jesus from Galilee and had provided for him. Among them were Mary Magdalene, and Mary the mother of James and Joseph, and the mother of the sons of Zebedee.

Read: Mark 15:40-41 (The Death of Jesus)

There were also women looking on from a distance; among them were Mary Magdalene, and Mary the mother of James the younger and of Joseph, and Salome. These used to follow him and provided for him when he was in Galilee; and there were many other women who had come up with him to Jerusalem.

Read: John 19:25 (The Crucifixion of Jesus)

...Meanwhile, standing near the cross of Jesus were his mother, and his mother's sister, Mary the wife of Clopas, and Mary Magdalene.

Prompt: Once again, we tend to think of Jesus traveling around with 12 guys – his male disciples. These verses paint a different picture. What do you think all these women were doing when Jesus was dying on the cross? Where were all the men? [Brainstorm/Guess. No one knows for sure. Historical evidence suggests that it would have been dangerous for the men to be around Jesus. He was being killed for his beliefs. The other disciples did

not want to die, too – although many of them did later on. It was much safer for the women to be around since no one cared what they thought anyway – one advantage of being a woman in those days, perhaps. Also, crucifixion was meant to be a shameful and unpleasant way to die. From what we can tell, it was not something everyone went out to watch. It also makes sense because it would have been women that cared for the body. Women were supposed to care for men; men did not care for men.]

Lesson 4: Mary Magdalene at Jesus' Burial

Prompt: Mary Magdalene also helped to prepare Jesus' body for burial.

Read: Matthew 27:57-61 (The Burial of Jesus)

When it was evening, there came a rich man from Arimathea, named Joseph, who was also a disciple of Jesus. He went to Pilate and asked for the body of Jesus; then Pilate ordered it to be given to him. So Joseph took the body and wrapped it in a clean linen cloth and laid it in his own new tomb, which he had hewn in the rock. He then rolled a great stone to the door of the tomb and went away. Mary Magdalene and the other Mary were there, sitting opposite the tomb.

Prompt: Guess what the most popular female name was in Jesus' day? [Mary. The Jewish version is Miriam. So it's hard to know who this "other Mary" was. It was maybe/probably Jesus' mother, but there could also have been someone else.]

Creative Response: Mary Magdalene and the Red Eggs

Prompt: You're probably wondering what the red eggs have to do with Mary Magdalene. There's a legend that is especially popular in Greece. According to this legend, Mary Magdalene and Mary the mother of Jesus put a basket full of eggs at the foot of the cross. As the blood from Jesus flowed from the cross, it turned the eggs red.

Prompt: In another legend, Mary Magdalene was having dinner with the emperor of Rome. When she spoke of Jesus' resurrection, he laughed at her and said that a man rising from the dead was about as likely as the egg in her hand turning red. Can you guess what happened? [Guess = the egg turned red immediately]

Prompt: For these reasons, people in Eastern Orthodox churches still dye their Easter eggs red, rather than the usual pastel colors used in the West.

Prompt: There's also a popular Easter egg game from the Eastern Orthodox tradition. It's called tsougrisma (tsoo-grees-mah) which means "clinking together" or "clashing." You Tube has several short, sweet videos of families playing tsougrisma. Simply search the term "tsougrisma" to find them. The written rules make the game seem much more difficult than it really is.

Basic rules:

- Select an egg that looks powerful and hearty.
- Select a partner.
- Decide whether you will clack "pointy end" to "pointy end" or "thick end" to "thick end."
- Hold the egg in your fist.
- The first person says, "Kristos Anesti" (Christ is risen.)
- The other person replies, "Haristos Anesti" (He is risen indeed.)
- The first person then taps egg #1 onto egg #2. The egg with the least amount of damage is declared the winner.
- If no one's egg cracked, the second person in the pair then taps egg #2 onto egg #1.

- Repeat with new partners. If you started with the “pointy end,” switch to the “thick end” for the next round.
- The top winner is the one whose egg never cracks!

Lesson 5: Mary Magdalene Sees the Risen Jesus

Prompt: There are several different versions of Jesus’ resurrection, and we’ll read at least one of them on Easter, but Mary Magdalene is in all four versions. She was either the first to see the empty tomb or the first person to see Jesus alive after he had died or both. Here’s one version.

Read: Most of John 20:1-18 (The Resurrection of Jesus, Jesus Appears to Mary Magdelene)

Early on the first day of the week, while it was still dark, Mary Magdalene came to the tomb and saw that the stone had been removed from the tomb. So she ran and went to Simon Peter and the other disciple, the one whom Jesus loved, and said to them, “They have taken the Lord out of the tomb, and we do not know where they have laid him.” Then Peter and the other disciple set out and went toward the tomb. The two were running together, but the other disciple outran Peter and reached the tomb first. He bent down to look in and saw the linen wrappings lying there....then Simon Peter came, following him, and went into the tomb. He saw the linen wrappings lying there....Then the disciples returned to their homes.

But Mary stood weeping outside the tomb. As she wept, she bent over to look into the tomb; and she saw two angels in white, sitting where the body of Jesus had been lying, one at the head and the other at the feet. They said to her, “Woman, why are you weeping?” She said to them, “They have taken away my Lord, and I do not know where they have laid him.” When she had said this, she turned around and saw Jesus standing there, but she did not know that it was Jesus. Jesus said to her, “Woman, why are you weeping? Whom are you looking for?” Supposing him to be the gardener, she said to him, “Sir, if you have carried him away, tell me where you have laid him, and I will take him away.” Jesus said to her, “Mary!” She turned and said to him in Hebrew, “Rabbouni!” (which means Teacher). Jesus said to her, “Do not hold on to me, because I have not yet ascended to the Father. But go to my brothers and say to them, ‘I am ascending to my Father and your Father, to my God and your God.’” Mary Magdalene went and announced to the disciples, “I have seen the Lord” and she told them that he had said these things to her.

Prompt: Do you think there’s any significance to Mary Magdalene being the first person to see the empty tomb and the first person to see Jesus alive again? [Brainstorm/Guess. No correct answer here. Perhaps she was at the tomb first, since women were the ones to care for the body. Also, it still would have been dangerous for the male disciples to be hanging around. Maybe she was the first person to see Jesus because she was such good friends with him. Maybe she was just in the right place at the right time. Maybe she was a rather hysterical person, prone to visions. No one knows.]

Prompt: Have you ever had that experience – at first you didn’t recognize someone, but then they did something or said something, and then you knew who they were? [Share]

Prompt: Many people report seeing someone who has died, particularly when the person who died was a good friend or a close relative. Has this type of thing ever happened to you? [Share]

Lesson 6: Eastern Orthodox Church

Prompt: Before we played the egg cracking game, we mentioned that the legend of Mary Magdalene and the red eggs is not familiar to most Americans. Instead, it is a tradition that comes out of the Eastern Orthodox Church. Anyone know what that is or what they believe? [Guess/Share]

Prompt: Right after Jesus died, the Christianity movement began. At that time, there was only one Christian church. Things pretty much stayed that way for 1,000 years. In 1054 (about 1,000 years ago) that church split into two – the Eastern Orthodox Church and the Roman Catholic Church. Since then, many denominations have split off from the Roman Catholic Church, but the Eastern Orthodox Church has remained unified. Most Christians in Greece, Russia, and Romania are Eastern Orthodox. In America, there are about 700 Eastern Orthodox churches. They are also called Greek Orthodox Churches. [See if there is one in your area.]

Prompt: They believe roughly the same things as many other Christians, with some differences. They are very known for their iconography. [Show them this word.] This is a style of artwork used in these churches. Here are some examples. [Show first page of images]. It's pretty easy to see the style. In this art, the hand position and the objects shown along with the person are important.

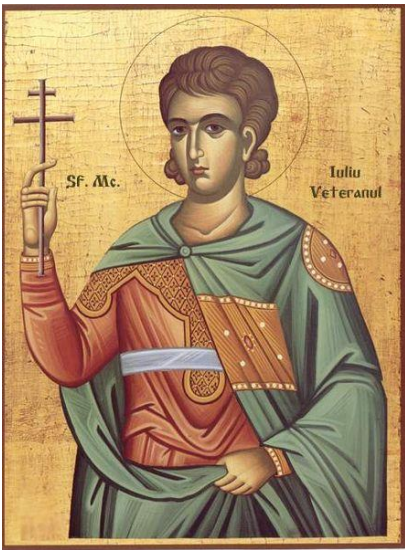
Prompt: The last several pictures are all Eastern Orthodox images of Mary Magdalene. [Show second page of images]. You can see that she is often shown with a red egg. She is also almost always shown holding a jar of something. Any ideas what that might be? [Brainstorm/Guess]

Prompt: It's a jar of myrrh. Ever heard of myrrh before? Know where it comes from? Know what it is? [They might remember that the three wise men are said to have brought gold, frankincense, and myrrh.]

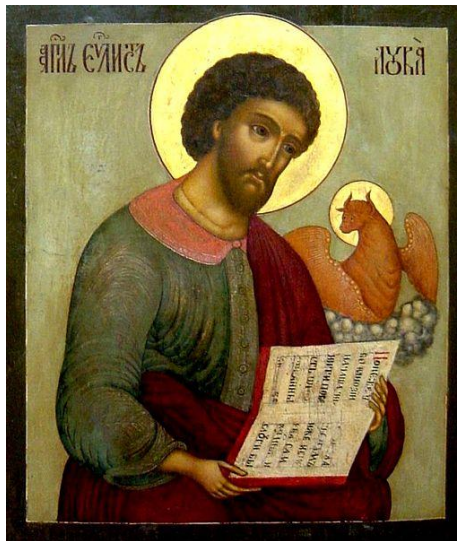
Prompt: Myrrh is found in the sap of certain trees. It is a combination of an essential oil and a resin. The word "myrrh" means "bitter." It was so valuable in ancient times that it was considered to be worth at least the same as gold. During Jesus' day, myrrh oil was used during burials to help keep the dead body from being too smelly. Presumably, Mary Magdalene was bringing myrrh oil to the tomb on the morning that she found it empty. For that reason, she is called a myrrh-bearer. Myrrh oil and myrrh incense are commonly used in the Eastern Orthodox Church for various rituals. They even have a special Sunday to honor the women who visited the tomb on Easter morning. It's called the Sunday of the Myrrhbearers. [If you have myrrh incense or myrrh oil, let them smell it. You can also play hangman to see if they can figure out how to spell "myrrh."]

Sources:

- 1) *Holy Bible: New Revised Standard Version*. San Francisco, CA: HarperOne, 2007. Print.
- 2) Many thanks to David Yetter of St. Mary Magdalene Orthodox Christian Chapel, Manhattan, KS for the hint about using brown eggs (instead of white eggs) and for encouraging me to include the legend of the skeptical Roman official.



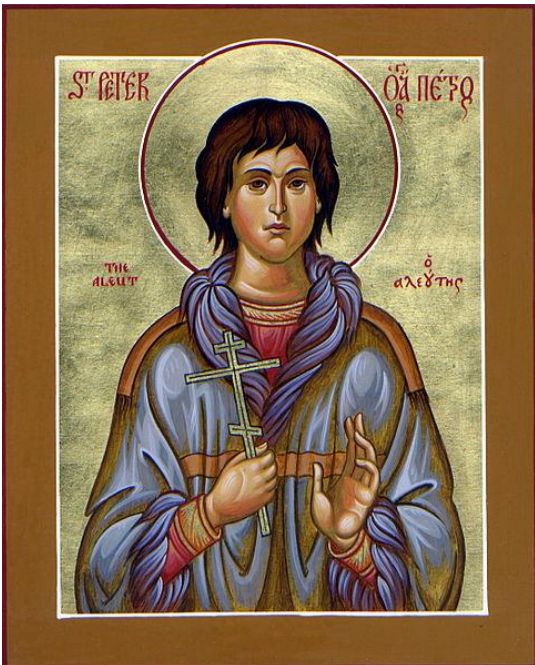
Icon of St. Julius the Veteran
(Wikimedia Commons)



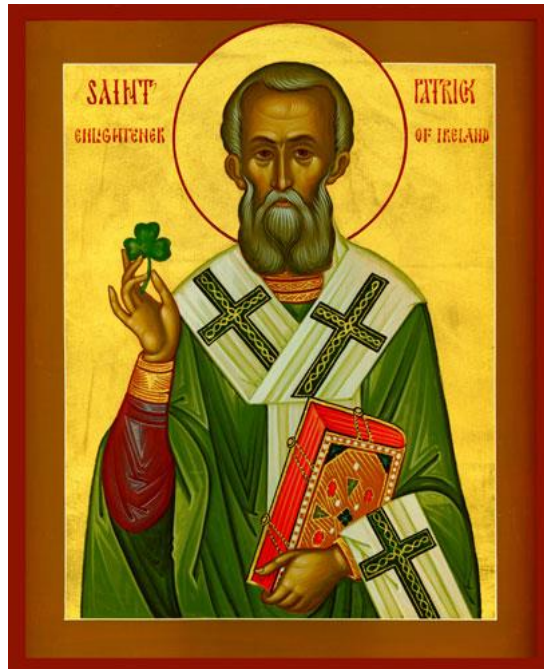
Saint Luke the Evangelist
(Wikimedia Commons)



Saint Irene
(Permission: Holy Dormition Orthodox Parish)



Saint Peter the Aleut
(Wikimedia Commons: Andrew Drozdowski)



St. Patrick the Enlightener of Ireland
Permission: Holy Domition Orthodox Parish



Apostle Thomas
(Wikimedia Commons)



Mary Magdalene
Permission: Holy Dormition Orthodox Parish



By keeping His commandments and laws,
holy Mary Magdalene,
you followed Christ, Who for our sake
was born of the Virgin,
and in celebrating your most holy memory today,
we receive forgiveness of sins by your prayers.

St. Mary Magdalene
Permission: Bess Chakravarty (PrayerfulIcons.com)



Saint Mary Magdalene
Courtesy of: Nick Papas Studio (Facebook)



Icon of St. Mary Magdalene
Courtesy of: www.monasteryicons.com