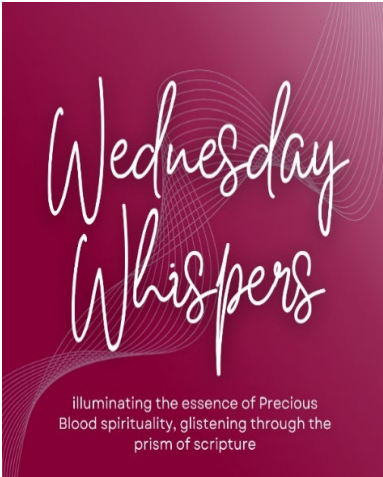




A weekly reflection by members
of the Precious Blood Community

September 17, 2025

Maureen Lahiff

"I have seen the Lord" John 20:18



**Mary of Magdala and the community that gave us the fourth gospel,
three letters, and the Book of Revelation, and our strongest
Precious Blood images**

Mary of Magdala, honored with the title "Apostle to the Apostles" because the Risen Lord appeared to her first in the Gospel of John and commissioned her to announce the Resurrection to the disciples, is perhaps one of the most misunderstood figures in the New Testament. I appreciate this opportunity to reflect on Mary of Magdala, a key figure in the Johannine community, because this community gave us almost all of the texts and

images of the Lamb of God, the blood of Jesus, and the clearest New Testament statements that the Lamb *is* God.

First, the images, then the saint, and a question to ponder.

The Lamb of God

“Behold, the Lamb of God, who takes away the sin of the world.” John 1:29

John the Baptist identifies Jesus as the Lamb of God (John 1:29) and the Son of God (John 1:34). He repeats the identification of Jesus as the Lamb of God to two of disciples the next day (John 1:35-36), who then followed Jesus. It turns out that one of these two disciples was Andrew, the brother of Simon Peter.

In the gospel of John, Jesus dies on the cross exactly when the Passover lambs are being slain. That’s why Jesus’s last meal with his disciples on the night before he was executed is not a Passover Seder.

The first letter of John states clearly that the blood of Jesus cleanses us from all sin (1:7). Chapter 5:6 gives us the poetic language This is the one who came through water and blood, Jesus Christ, not by water alone, but by water and blood.

The Book of Revelation opens by saying that Jesus has “freed us from our sins by his blood.” (1:5) Revelation piles up image after image of the Lamb. It is the slain Lamb who is worthy to open the seals (5:14). and the one who “with your blood you purchased for God those from every tribe and tongue, people and nation.” (5:9). It is the Lamb “in whose blood those who have conquered have washed their robes.” (7:14).

The Book of Revelation does not speak in the language of systematic theology, but over and over in its images, it identifies the Lamb with the one seated on the throne, which is the throne of God (22:3). The Lamb is “Lord of lords and king of kings.” (17:14) There’s more, lots more.

Mary of Magdala in the gospels

As with so many important people in the New Testament, Mary of Magdala is mentioned in only a few texts. What is clear is that she was an important witness to the Resurrection. In three of the gospels, she is the first or among the first of the disciples to encounter the Risen Lord,

In Chapter 8 of the Gospel of Luke, relatively early in Jesus' travels and preaching, Mary Magdalene is listed as one of the women who traveled with Jesus and the Twelve, supporting their ministry financially. The gospel of Luke says that Jesus had cured these women of "evil spirits and infirmities" and describes Mary Magdalene as one "from whom seven demons had gone out." In the gospel of Luke, these women who had followed Jesus from Galilee watched his crucifixion and death from a distance, and followed those who buried him, noting where the tomb was located, so that they could prepare spices and perfumed oils to anoint Jesus's body after the Sabbath. When the women, who are named in Luke 24:10, returned early in the morning, they found the stone rolled away and the tomb empty, and then encountered two "men in dazzling garments." In Luke, Jesus does not appear to these women; we only hear about his appearance to Simon when the disciples who met Jesus on the road to Emmaus return to tell those gathered in Jerusalem about their encounter with the Risen Lord.

In Matthew 28, Mary Magdalene and "the other Mary" went to the tomb at dawn on Easter morning, encountered an empty tomb and an angel, who commissioned them to tell the disciples that Jesus had been raised from the dead and that they should go to Galilee, where they would see him. However, on their way to deliver this message, the women did encounter the Risen Jesus, who again commissioned them to tell the disciples to go to Galilee, where they would see him.

Mark 16:9 says that when Jesus "had risen, early on the first day of the week, he appeared first to Mary Magdalene, out of whom he had driven seven demons."

In the fourth gospel, Mary of Magdala first appears standing by the cross (John 19:25) and then in chapter 20:1-18. She is the first disciple to arrive at the tomb on Sunday morning. When she finds it empty, she runs to tell the disciples. Mary of Magdala returns to the garden and remains there as Peter and "the other disciple" examine the empty tomb and depart. Jesus approaches her and calls her by name. She recognizes him and receives a commission to carry the message to the disciples. She announces to them, "I have seen the Lord."

Mary of Magdala and the Johannine texts

The fourth gospel treats a community of Jesus's disciples as the most important, rather than the Twelve. This gospel, and likely this community, featured prominent women in addition to Mary of Magdala.

In chapter 11, Jesus tells Martha of Bethany "I am the resurrection and the life..." (verse 25) Martha replies, is a full confession of faith, "I have come to believe that you are the Messiah, the Son of God, the one who is coming into the world." (verse 27)

The “disciple whom Jesus loved” does not show up in the fourth gospel until Jesus’s last meal with the disciples. (John 13:23) In the passion account in chapter 19, it is not clear at the foot of the cross who the disciple “whom he loved” is (verse 26); is it one of the people just listed in verse 25 or an additional person?

The identity of this person seems deliberately obscured. Several places in this gospel there are references to “another disciple” or “the other disciple,” In John 20, it is Simon Peter and “the other disciple” who run for the tomb when Mary of Magdala informs the disciples that she tomb is empty. In John 21, which was likely added later in an attempt to build bridges between the Johannine community and the communities led by the Twelve, when Peter and Jesus take a walk after breakfast on the beach, the disciple “whom Jesus loved, the one who had also reclined upon his chest during the supper” followed them. (John 21:20). In John 21:24, as the gospel concludes, we read “It is this disciple who testifies to these things and has written them, and we know that his testimony is true.”

In the passion narrative, the gospel of John states clearly that it is the testimony of an eyewitness (19:15). But who is this eyewitness? It is likely the same person as John 21:24.

A better question, though equally unanswerable, is what community carried the witness forward and shared it with the second and third generations of Christians, as the fourth gospel and the other Johannine texts came into the form in which we have them today. Many conjectures that Mary of Magdala, Martha, and Lazarus of Bethany are behind the tradition.

Why have churchmen, down through the centuries, needed bad girls so badly?

This sentence with its cute turn of phrase is a bit snarky. The image of Mary of Magdala as a prostitute has not been confined to scholarly writing and preaching but appears in art and more broadly in legend and popular culture.

I have tried to find an honorable motive for the evident need to portray Mary of Magdala as a prostitute. And more importantly, to think about why this was apparently accepted and handed on by women. The best I have come up with is that if one considers female sexual sins to be the worst possible sins, then if Jesus can forgive those women, since nothing I have done is that bad, Jesus can forgive me and welcome me into the company of his disciples and friends. But I think that this portrayal of Mary of Magdala has led to an untold amount of hurt and harm, not only to individuals but to the community of disciples, the Church. It’s past time to say so, and to honor Mary of Magdala as an apostle.

Maureen Lahiff is a Precious Blood Companion. She lives in Oakland, California. Maureen considers the opportunity to take a course in the fourth gospel with Sandra Schneiders, IHM, as one of the highlights of her time studying at the Graduate Theological Union in Berkeley. She recommends Written that You May Believe to anyone curious about the role of women in the Johannine community, and a thought-provoking way to enter into this gospel.

This weekly reflection is made available to everyone in our Precious Blood family.
Feel free to share it with others. Would you like to write a reflection?
If so, please contact Vicky Otto at votto@pbspiritualityinstitute.org