



What Mary Knew: Burial, Resurrection, and the Second Coming

By Priscilla Davis

HOLIDAYS

April 14, 2025

Before the cross, Mary understood the resurrection. How does her devotion help us better understand His return?

In recent years, observing the events of Holy Week has increased in importance for Latter-day Saints. Social media influencers and BYU professors like John Hilton III [speak more noticeably](#) about the Easter season. [A notable invitation](#) from Elder Stevenson said,

How do we model the teaching and celebration of the Resurrection of Jesus Christ, the Easter story, with the same balance, fulness, and rich religious tradition of the birth of Jesus Christ, the Christmas story? It seems we are all

trying. I observe a growing effort among Latter-day Saints toward a more Christ-centered Easter.

This change is necessary in these latter days if we are to become a people who “talk of Christ, rejoice in Christ, and preach of Christ” (2 Nephi 25:26).

Typically, mentions of Easter exclusively include the most key moments from the Holy Week: “7 stories for the 7 days” of the week, including:

- The Triumphal Entry on Palm Sunday (Matthew 21:1-11, Mark 11:1-11, Luke 19:28-40, John 12:12-19)
- Jesus’ Prayer in Gethsemane (Matthew 26:36-46, Mark 14:32-42, Luke 22:39-46)
- His Crucifixion on Good Friday (Matthew 27:27-56, Mark 15:16-41, Luke 23:26-49, John 19:16-30)
- And the crowning moment of His literal resurrection on Sunday (Matthew 28:1-10, Mark 16:1-8, Luke 24:1-12, John 20:1-18)

All of these events are central to the meaning of Easter and Holy Week in the Christian tradition worldwide.

However, in pondering personal “lessons from Holy Week” in preparation for Easter, my mind immediately went to a story that is lesser known, yet significant in the grand story of Easter and the mission of Jesus Christ. I thought of Mary of Bethany anointing Jesus Christ with oil. She was the ultimate example of “[eyes to see and ears to hear](#).” She seemed to know what the twelve apostles did not yet fully grasp: Jesus Christ would die to be resurrected and become the Savior of the world.

While the timing varies slightly between the three Gospels, a reader can easily connect the dots to the Easter Story. A close reading of the Bible places the story shortly before Holy Week, six days before Passover, as noted in the [Gospel of John](#). This event is also mentioned in the Gospels of [Matthew](#) and [Mark](#), but not Luke, as leading up to the Crucifixion and burial—making it part of the broader narrative of Holy Week.

Mary of Bethany was the sister of Martha and Lazarus, living in the village of Bethany near Jerusalem. She is known in [another story](#) for sitting at Jesus’ feet and listening to His teachings while her sister was busy and “cumbered about much serving.” The event

that caught my pondering also took place at a dinner in Bethany, though later in Christ's life. As an act of deep love and reverence for the Savior, Mary anointed Jesus' feet with oil and wiped them with her hair; symbolic as both an honor to Him and a preparation.

The Bible tells what type of oil was used. The text refers to "nardos" (νάρδος). "Nard" in the Greek New Testament refers to spikenard, a plant native to the Himalayas. It was rare and costly, which is why Judas Iscariot criticizes the act:

Mary knew exactly what she was doing ... her anointing was a prophetic act preparing for burial.

Why was not this ointment sold for three hundred pence, and given to the poor?

This [Judas] said, not that he cared for the poor; but because he was a thief, and had the bag, and bare what was put therein.

Then said Jesus, Let her alone: against the day of my burying hath she kept this. For the poor always ye have with you; but me ye have not always (John 12:5-8).

Mary knew what Judas and others would not, and Jesus Himself was confirming Mary's thoughts and personal revelation. This oil, [spikenard](#) oil, was known in the ancient world for both its medicinal properties and its use in burial rituals. It was a key component used to prepare the dead for burial. She used the oil because she seemed to understand that Jesus was heading toward a sacrifice and burial. Many others, including his apostles and disciples, did not fully grasp this concept even after several attempts by Jesus to explain so (Matthew 16:21-23 & 17:22-23, and Mark 8:31-33 & 9:30-32, among others). His disciples often seemed oblivious to or confused by His prophecies. I don't know why the disciples "missed the mark," but it is clear Mary knew exactly what she was doing. Christ recognized that her anointing was a prophetic act, preparing His body for burial. Mary had a remarkable understanding of Jesus' mission and impending death, so she felt the need to prepare him by performing a burial ritual.

I observe that Mary had “eyes to see and ears to hear” what Jesus was trying to teach all along. He had a mission, and it was different than what most supposed. Instead of being a political/military leader and victorious Messiah rescuing the Jews from Roman rule, Christ came to fulfill the Atonement. He came to pay the price for our sins and sufferings so we would be clean to live with our Father in Heaven again.

How can we apply Mary’s Easter story to our day? We can be the ones to have “eyes to see and ears to hear” as we expect the Savior’s return rather than His death. Since 2020, I feel a shift in priorities has happened for many Latter-day Saints. President Nelson highlighted this priority in his [April 2020 Liahona article](#), “The Future of the Church: Preparing the World for the Savior’s Second Coming.” Elder Christoffel Golden of the Seventy, in his October 2021 [General Conference address](#), clearly tells us, “For those who have eyes to see, ears to hear, and hearts to feel, more than ever before, we are required to confront the reality that we are getting ever closer to the Second Coming of Jesus Christ.” While some members of the Church may say President Nelson’s second plea in his 2024 [General Conference address](#) to prepare for the Second Coming of Jesus Christ is an attempt to fearmonger people into compliance, we can be comforted in knowing the blessings of trying to live and keep our covenants: it will be a glorious day!

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What better example than Mary can we have as Latter-day Saint women? We can play an important role in knowing Christ and knowing what others can’t see. We can have a deep relationship with Jesus Christ and have more of an understanding of His mission. We can learn line upon line, precept upon precept. We can show faith by action, show our devotion like Mary, and instead of anticipating His death, we can anticipate His return. Even if others are in denial or unable to see it clearly, we can prepare our minds and our hearts for His Second Coming.

Perhaps the greatest part about the Easter story and Holy Week is that the story isn’t over. He told his disciples that after His resurrection, He would be coming again (see [textbox](#)). May we be those disciples, those women, who are anticipating the great

prophecies of old that when Jesus Christ returns, “the glory of the Lord shall be revealed, and all flesh shall see it together” ([Isaiah 40:5](#)).

Acts 1:6-11:

Then they gathered around him and asked him, 'Lord, are you at this time going to restore the kingdom to Israel?'

He said to them: 'It is not for you to know the times or dates the Father has set by his own authority. But you will receive power when the Holy Spirit comes on you; and you will be my witnesses in Jerusalem, and in all Judea and Samaria, and to the ends of the earth.'

After he said this, he was taken up before their very eyes, and a cloud hid him from their sight.

They were looking intently up into the sky as he was going, when suddenly two men dressed in white stood beside them.

'Men of Galilee,' they said, 'why do you stand here looking into the sky? This same Jesus, who has been taken from you into heaven, will come back in the same way you have seen him go into heaven.'

About the author

Priscilla Davis

Priscilla Davis is a certified brain health and family life coach, and social media creator @SheSharesGoodness. She helps moms and their youth build emotional resilience through Christ-centered principles.