

Fire Woman Rising¹

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In a recent conversation with Stancea Vichie mss she shared with me something of her experience of painting icons. I asked her would she do one of Mary Magdalene for me. To my surprise, the next morning she brought me one she had already done, painted on wood. It's beautiful. I placed it on my dining table, where I also do most of my writing. Mary Magdalene has been accompanying me ever since that day.

In the icon, Mary holds the jar of precious ointment with which she anointed Jesus 'in preparation for his burial'. For her, it was an outpouring of all the love within her, the gift of her total self to her Beloved.



The precious ointment also speaks to me of her wisdom: she was the one disciple who understood Jesus and his mission and embraced it as her own. The Gnostic gospels tell us, he loved her more than all the other disciples. She became his intimate companion, was with him throughout his life of teaching and healing. She was there as he hung on the cross and ministered to his body at his burial. She kept watch at his tomb, was the first to see him risen. He sent her to the disciples to tell them the good news. But they didn't believe her. The Gnostic gospels tell us that it was because she was a woman, so what would she know? Women in that patriarchal society had no status.

Yet those same gospels also tell us that, when Jesus left them with the mission to preach the Gospel 'to the ends of the earth', the male disciples were fearful and overwhelmed. It was Mary Magdalene who gathered them, encouraged them by reminding them of what Jesus had taught while he was with them, and of his promise to be with them always through his Holy Spirit.

Sitting with Mary's icon, pondering who she was, I went back to reading the Gospel of Mary Magdalene.² And, as happens each time I go back to it, new insights come alive for me. In the few fragments of that gospel that we have, we find the core of who Jesus was and of his mission. He was the Good that has come among us to reunite

¹ This title comes from a mandala painted on silk by Adelaide artist, Gail Donovan. I see Mary Magdalene as a Fire Woman.

² I use Leoup's, *The Gospel of Mary Magdalene*, with its very rich commentary. Published by Inner Traditions International, Rochester, Vermont USA 2002.

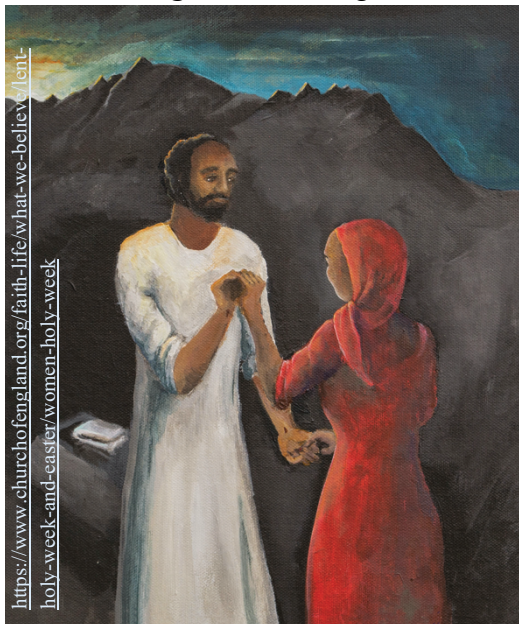
us with our 'roots'. Humans mostly live from only half of their selves. We have 'forgotten' our real nature, that we are incarnational beings, fully human and fully divine, each of us uniquely an expression of God's Self in human form, as Jesus was and Mary Magdalene. Over the past 50 years, since I first glimpsed this mystery, I have continued to grow into its the depth, and all the implications that flow from it.

As I pondered these things day after day, with Mary's icon accompanying me, a reflection by Sandi Rufo appeared in my mailbox, entitled *Reinterpreting the Tree of Knowledge in the Garden of Eden*.³ Sandy says she never bought the Adam and Eve story:

A loving God creates two innocent humans, places them in a paradise garden, puts the most tempting object imaginable in the middle of it, tells them not to touch it, allows a serpent to whisper in their ears, and then punishes all of humanity when they do exactly what curious, newly conscious beings would naturally do? That never made sense to me...

Many years ago, reflecting on this story myself, I sensed that when Eve plucked the fruit and ate it, God clapped. God made her free to make her choices and was delighted when she chose to eat the fruit of knowledge. Calling that sin didn't add up for me.

To return to Sandi's reflection, from the Adam and Eve story, she turns to Mary Magdalene's encounter with Jesus on Resurrection morning. Mary didn't recognise him, thinking he was the *gardener*. That's the word that struck Sandi. She writes:



Why gardener? Why name him that? Why include that detail at all unless the writer wanted us to hear the echo of another garden, another tree, another woman, another moment when humanity stood at the threshold of knowledge, death, shame, and divine intimacy?

...Jesus **was** the gardener. He was the gardener of a new creation, the New Adam, appearing in the garden at the edge of death and resurrection, not to shame humanity for what happened in Eden, but to begin the restoration of what had been misunderstood there.

And Mary? Mary is the restored Eve. Not Eve as the church taught her to us. Not the woman

blamed for sin. Not the temptress. Not the dangerous feminine who brought

³ <https://lolitamagdalenarising.substack.com/p/reinterpreting-the-tree-of-knowledge>. In this reflection I have picked out some of her insights. The whole reflection is well worth reading and pondering.

death into the world. Mary stands there as Eve returned without shame, without exile, without the curse of blame wrapped around her body.

The wound began in a garden.
The healing begins in one too.

In *The Gospel of the Beloved Companion*,⁴ there is an enormous Tree in the garden. It is laden with fruit. Jesus invites Mary Magdalene to eat the fruit from each one of its branches. Sandi reflects:

Mary does not simply walk up to a tree and grab whatever fruit looks delicious. She ascends. She passes through gates. She meets guardians. She must become free of the very forces that keep the soul bound.

Before she can eat the fruit of love and compassion,
she must be free of judgment and wrath.

Before she can receive wisdom and understanding,
she must be free of ignorance and intolerance.

Before she can receive honour and humility,
she must move beyond duplicity and arrogance.

Before she can receive strength and courage,
she must confront the illusion of fear.

Before she can receive clarity and truth,
she must reject the deceiver and become silent to the voice of the world.

Only then can she receive power and healing, light and goodness, and finally the grace and beauty of the spirit.

In the final moment of the tree vision the *Gospel of the Beloved Companion*, after Mary ascends to the eighth bough, she sees a woman of extraordinary beauty clothed in white. Mary is drawn into her embrace and realizes "the fetter of forgetfulness was temporary." Then she hears Yeshua tell her that she has seen the All, known the truth of herself, and become the 'completion of completions'.

I have read Sandi's reflection several times since it first arrived in my mailbox a couple of weeks ago. Its truth is what our world needs today to turn back from its violent murderous ways and begin to heal the wound of forgetfulness of who we really are. Each of us is called to be Mary Magdalene, reclaiming our full divine feminine, together with the divine masculine qualities and so come into the fulness of our human-divine nature, incarnating the Divine Feminine and the Divine Masculine as our true identity.



⁴ *The Gospel of the Beloved Companion*, a non-canonical gospel written possibly in the first century, translated with commentary by Jehanne De Quillan

In the Gospel of Mary Magdalene, the disciples ask Jesus about sin. Jesus replies, "Sin does not exist. It is you who make sin exist when you act according to your corrupted nature. That is where sin lies. This is why the Good has come into your midst. It acts with the elements of your nature so as to reunite it with its roots."⁵ That is, to be reunited with our full divine-human nature. This is what Jesus means when, in the Gospel of Mary Magdalene, he tells us to wake up to our real nature, to reunite with our roots: "That is why I tell you: Be in harmony..."

When we 'forget' and are disconnected from our original goodness, from the Divine incarnation that is core of our real identity, we end up being fractured within ourselves which then impacts all our relationships. Sexuality and sensuality and women are seen as 'sinful' and often targeted as a weapon with which women are humiliated, degraded, raped. Sexual violence is rife in our world at all levels of society because we have lost touch with our true nature.

These past few weeks have drawn me deeper and deeper into the mystery of Mary Magdalene and the Gospel that bears her name. To return to our roots is to claim our full divine feminine selves, together with our divine masculine qualities and be in harmony with both. And that applies to both women *and* men. A world in the grip of extreme patriarchal energies is tearing itself apart. Wise visionaries and climate scientist are warning that we are blindly rushing to the cliff top, to perish as we go over the edge and drop down into the deep. Our Earth cannot sustain the constant level of destruction we human beings relentlessly visit on her. Hence the return of the feminine is critical at this stage of history, for the salvation of the world. I suspect that is why Mary Magdalene is making her presence felt in so many people and situations today. She is the feminine embodiment of the Christ, partnering with Jesus in the work of redemption.

Yesterday morning, in that state between sleeping and waking, an image comes to me: the great Earth Mother. She reminds me that the mystery of the Divine Feminine which we embody, is embedded in the earthiness of Mother Earth. The mystery of the incarnation is embedded in the whole of creation. While on my usual predawn walk, Earth Mother's story unfolds:

⁵ See Leloup, *The Gospel of Mary Magdalene*, p. 25.

She comes in the shadows of the night, the great Earth Mother, so softly and gently, I could have missed seeing her. She finds her way to the ancient stump of the Forest Ancestor and sits down at its base.

The night creatures gather, joined by the early wakers among the day creatures. Silently they gather, settle down and wait, expectantly. I wait with them.

Earth Mother begins to croon, very softly at first. Gradually her voice becomes stronger, not very loud, but such that it seems to travel to the ends of the Earth on the soundwaves. "Come", she sings.

"Come you squabbling human children.



Come, listen to a story you need to hear,
a story that points you to the treasure
that meets the deepest yearnings of
your hearts;
the treasure you are seeking
in all your fighting and squabbling
and your need to conquer, no matter
who pays the cost.
Come, I will show you how to fulfil
your heart's desire.
It is here,
free to all who open themselves to
receive it.
And once you find that treasure,
You will know that it is so great
that you can share it
with all those you now fight against
and in the giving, the treasure grows

– and you also grow."

But the chaos and noise of their fighting preoccupies them so fully, they don't hear her voice. And even had they heard her, they would not have responded because they had more important battles to fight...

Earth Mother quietly weeps:

Jerusalem, Jerusalem... How often I have longed to gather your children together, as a hen gathers her brood under her wings, but you would not! (Luke 13: 34).

I feel her tears and share them. When, O when will we human beings wake up to who we truly are, to our true nature, as Jesus says in the Gospel of Mary Magdalene, the Divine in human form?

That waking up is the purpose of our daily contemplative hour. One day those who have woken up will become the tipping point that will turn the tide of human consciousness. That is our desire, our hope, our prayer as we stop for our daily contemplative hour as members of CEN. And we who have been privileged to hear Earth Mother's story, endeavour to live it in all our relationships, sharing the treasure with all who are open to receive it. And in the giving, we grow into the harmony of our divine-human identity.

On 22nd July we celebrate the feast

of Mary Magdalene, Jesus' intimate Companion and Apostle to the Apostles. Let us celebrate this feast with joy and gratitude for the woman she is, and who we come to realise we are as we reflect on her profound living of the Divine within herself and in relation to Jesus, the Christ.

St Mary Magdalene, be with us on our journey into the Divine Mystery, the root of the true nature, our real identity, both human and divine.

Amen.



Icon by Mary Jane Miller. www.sanmiguelicons.com