

John 20:1-18
January 25, 2026

Open with Prayer

HOOK:

We are getting ready to read the resurrection story of Jesus, and our author, John, tells us about three people who see the empty tomb: Mary Magdalene, Peter, and the beloved disciple. All three respond differently. So here's the question:

Q: What is the difference between *seeing*, *understanding*, and *believing*? [Let people engage – share the empty chair illustration]

Transition: Chapter 20 in the gospel of John is centered on a key word: “BELIEVE.” This word occurs (6) six times in today’s passage, and 87 times total in the gospel of John! The biblical word “believe” means more than simply believing that someone exists: it means “to trust.” It is a word that defines your heart’s devotion, i.e. who you give your life to. We were bought (by the blood of Jesus shed on the cross for us) at a great price. Our life is not our own. So let’s read today’s text and watch the reactions of the first people who discovered the empty tomb.

BOOK:

The Empty Tomb

20 Early on the first day of the week, while it was still dark, Mary Magdalene went to the tomb and saw that the stone had been removed from the entrance. ² So she came running to Simon Peter and the other disciple, the one Jesus loved, and said, “They have taken the Lord out of the tomb, and we don’t know where they have put him!” ³ So Peter and the other disciple started for the tomb. ⁴ Both were running, but the other disciple outran Peter and reached the tomb first. ⁵ He bent over and looked in at the strips of linen lying there but did not go in. ⁶ Then Simon Peter, who was behind him, arrived and went into the tomb. He saw the strips of linen lying there, ⁷ as well as the burial cloth that had been around Jesus’ head. The cloth was folded up by itself, separate from the linen. ⁸ Finally the other disciple, who had reached the tomb first, also went inside. He saw and believed. ⁹ (They still did not understand from Scripture that Jesus had to rise from the dead.)

Jesus Appears to Mary Magdalene

¹⁰ Then the disciples went back to their homes, ¹¹ but Mary stood outside the tomb crying. As she wept, she bent over to look into the tomb ¹² and saw two angels in white, seated where Jesus’ body had been, one at the head and the other at the foot.

¹³ They asked her, “Woman, why are you crying?”

“They have taken my Lord away,” she said, “and I don’t know where they have put him.” ¹⁴ At this, she turned around and saw Jesus standing there, but she did not realize that it was Jesus.

¹⁵ “**Woman,**” he said, “**Why are you crying? Who is it you are looking for?**”

Thinking he was the gardener, she said, “Sir, if you have carried him away, tell me where you have put him, and I will get him.” ¹⁶ Jesus said to her, “**Mary.**”

She turned toward him and cried out in Aramaic, “Rabboni!” (which means Teacher).

¹⁷ Jesus said, “**Do not hold on to me, for I have not yet returned to the Father. Go instead to my brothers and tell them, ‘I am returning to my Father and your Father, to my God and your God.’**” ¹⁸ Mary Magdalene went to the disciples with the news: “I have seen the Lord!” And she told them that he had said these things to her.

Process Observations/Questions:

Q: What stood out to you? What questions do you have? [Let people engage]

- What emotion are you feeling having read this account?
- Why do you think John emphasizes that it was *still dark* when Mary arrived?
- What details in this text feel strange, or surprising, or easy to overlook?
- Why do you think Mary doesn’t recognize Jesus at first, when he’s standing right in front of her?
- What does this passage tell us about how grief affects perception?

Q: What did you learn about man? [Let people engage]

Q: What did you learn about God or Jesus or the Holy Spirit? [Let people engage]

Q: What is your takeaway? [Let people engage]

LOOK:

Faith doesn’t always mean instant understanding. Mary assumed Jesus’s body had been stolen.

Peter and John see the tomb and still don’t fully understand what has happened.

Misunderstanding doesn’t disqualify you from faith. You can be sincere, devoted, and still wrong – and Jesus will patiently reveal truth in time. This encourages humility and perseverance rather than pretending certainty.

Close in Prayer

Commentaries for Today's Lesson:

Wiersbe, W. W. (1996). The Bible Exposition Commentary (Vol. 1, pp. 387-391-). Wheaton, IL: Victor Books.

THE DAWNING OF A NEW DAY John 20:1-18

If the Gospel of John were an ordinary biography, there would be no chapter 20. I am an incurable reader of biographies, and I notice that almost all of them conclude with the death and burial of the subject. I have yet to read one that describes the subject's resurrection from the dead! The fact that John continued his account and shared the excitement of the Resurrection miracle is proof that Jesus Christ is not like any other man. He is, indeed, the Son of God. The Resurrection is an essential part of the Gospel message (1 Cor. 15:1-8) and a key doctrine in the Christian faith. It proves that Jesus Christ is the Son of God (Acts 2:32-36; Rom. 1:4) and that His atoning work on the cross has been completed and is effective (Rom. 4:24-25). The empty cross and the empty tomb are God's "receipts" telling us that the debt has been paid. Jesus Christ is not only the Savior, but He is also the Sanctifier (Rom. 6:4-10) and the Intercessor (Rom. 8:34). One day He shall return as Judge (Acts 17:30-31).

From the very beginning, the enemies of the Lord tried to deny the historic fact of the Resurrection. The Jewish leaders claimed that the Lord's body had been stolen from the tomb. This statement is absurd, for if the body was stolen by His followers, how did they do it? The tomb was guarded by Roman soldiers and the stone sealed by an official Roman seal.

Furthermore, His disciples *did not believe* that He was to be raised from the dead; it was His enemies who remembered His words (Matt. 27:62-66). *They* certainly would not have taken the body! The last thing they wanted was anyone believing that Jesus had indeed risen from the dead. If His friends *could not* steal the body, and His enemies *would not*, then who took it? Perhaps the disciples had "visions" of the risen Lord and interpreted them as evidences for the Resurrection. But they did not *expect* to see Him, and that is not the kind of psychological preparation from which hallucinations are made. And how could more than 500 people have the same hallucination at the same time? (1 Cor. 15:6)

Did the followers of our Lord perhaps go to the wrong tomb? Not likely. They carefully watched where He was buried (Matt. 27:61; Mark 15:47; Luke 23:55-56). They loved the Master and were not likely to get confused about His resting place. In fact, as the women approached the tomb, they were worried about who would roll back the heavy stone (Mark 16:1-3); so they were acquainted with the situation.

As to the foolish argument that Jesus did not die, but only swooned and was later revived, little need be said. It was proved by many witnesses that Jesus was dead when His body was taken from the cross. Later, He was seen alive by dependable witnesses. The only logical conclusion is that He kept His promise and arose from the dead.

But the glorious truth of the Resurrection was not understood immediately by even His closest followers. It gradually dawned on these grieving people that their Master was not dead, but alive! And what a difference it made when the full realization of His resurrection took hold of them!

For Mary Magdalene it meant moving from tears to joy (John 20:1–18); for the ten disciples it meant going from fear to courage (John 20:19–23); and for Thomas it meant moving from doubt to assurance (John 20:24–31). With Mary, the emphasis is on love; with the ten, the emphasis is on hope; and with Thomas, the emphasis is on faith.

As we consider Mary Magdalene’s experience that Lord’s Day morning, we can see three stages in her comprehension of the truth of the Resurrection. Peter and John are also a part of this experience.

Faith Eclipsed (John 20:1–2)

Mary Magdalene and several other women agreed to go to the tomb early on the first day of the week, so that they might show their love for Christ in completing the burial preparations. Joseph of Arimathea and Nicodemus had been forced by circumstances to prepare His body hastily, and the women wanted to finish the task. Their great concern was how to get into the tomb. Perhaps the Roman soldiers would take pity on them and give them a hand.

What they did not know was that an earthquake had occurred and the stone had been rolled back by an angel! It seems that Mary Magdalene went ahead of the other women and got to the tomb first. When she saw the stone rolled away from the door of the tomb, she concluded that somebody had broken into the tomb and stolen the body of her Lord. We may criticize Mary for jumping to conclusions; but when you consider the circumstances, it is difficult to see how she would have reached any other conclusion. It was still dark, she was alone, and, like the other followers of Jesus, she did not believe that He would return from the dead.

She ran to give the news to Peter and John, who must have been living together at a place known to the other believers. Perhaps it was the Upper Room where they had met with Jesus. Mary’s use of the pronoun “we” is interesting, for it included the other women who at that moment were discovering that Jesus was alive! (see Mark 16:1–8 and Luke 24:1–8) The women left the tomb and carried the angels’ message to the other disciples.

It is significant that the first witnesses of the resurrection of Christ were *believing women*. Among the Jews in that day, the testimony of women was not held in high regard. “It is better that the words of the Law be burned,” said the rabbis, “than be delivered to a woman.” But these Christian women had a greater message than that of the Law, for they knew that their Saviour was alive.

Mary’s faith was not extinguished; it was only eclipsed. The light was still there, but it was covered. Peter and John were in the same spiritual condition, but soon all three of them would move out of the shadows and into the light.

Faith Dawning (John 20:3–10)

John 20:3 suggests that Peter started off first to run to the tomb, but John 20:4 reports that John got there first. Perhaps John was a younger man in better physical condition, or perhaps John was just a better runner. It is tempting to “spiritualize” this footrace and relate it to Isaiah 40:31 and Hebrews 12:1–2. When a believer is out of fellowship with the Lord, it is difficult to run the race of faith. However, both men deserve credit for having the courage to run into enemy territory,

not knowing what lay before them. The whole thing could have been a clever trap to catch the disciples.

When John arrived at the tomb, he cautiously remained outside and looked in. Perhaps he wanted Peter to be with him when he went into the burial chamber. What did John see? The graveclothes lying on the stone shelf without any evidence of violence or crime. *But the graveclothes were empty!* They lay there like an empty cocoon, still retaining the shape of Jesus' body.

Peter arrived and impulsively went into the tomb, just as we would expect him to do. He also saw the linen clothes lying there empty and the cloth for the head carefully rolled and lying by itself. Grave robbers do not carefully unwrap the corpse and then leave the graveclothes neatly behind. In fact, with the presence of the spices in the folds of the clothes, it would be almost impossible to unwrap a corpse without damaging the wrappings. The only way those linen clothes could be left in that condition would be if Jesus *passed through them* as He arose from the dead.

John then entered the tomb and looked at the evidence. "He saw, and believed." When John wrote this account, he used three different Greek words for *seeing*. In John 20:5, the verb simply means "to glance in, to look in." In John 20:6, the word means "to look carefully, to observe." The word "saw" in John 20:8 means "to perceive with intelligent comprehension." Their Resurrection faith was now dawning!

It seems incredible that the followers of Jesus did not expect Him to come out of the tomb alive. After all, He had told them many times that He would be raised from the dead. Early in His ministry He had said, "Destroy this temple, and in three days I will raise it up" (John 2:19). After His resurrection, the disciples remembered that He had said this (John 2:22); however, His enemies remembered it too (Matt. 27:40, 63–64).

He compared Himself to Jonah (Matt. 12:40), and on two occasions clearly announced His resurrection after three days (Matt. 16:21; 20:19). On Thursday of His last week of ministry He again promised to be raised up and meet them in Galilee (Matt. 26:32, and see Luke 24:6–7). What kind of faith did Peter and John have at that stage in their spiritual experience? They had faith based on evidence. They could see the graveclothes; they knew that the body of Jesus was not there. However, as good as evidence is to convince the mind, it can never change the life. Those of us who live centuries later cannot examine the evidence, for the material evidence (the tomb, the graveclothes) is no longer there for us to inspect. But we have the record in the Word of God (John 20:9) and that record is true (John 19:35; 21:24). In fact, it is faith *in the Word* that the Lord really wanted to cultivate in His disciples (see John 2:22; 12:16; 14:26). Peter made it clear that the Word of God, not personal experiences, should be the basis for our faith (1 Peter 1:12–21).

The disciples had only the Old Testament Scriptures, so that is what is referred to in John 20:9. The early church used the Old Testament to prove to both Jews and Gentiles that Jesus is the Christ, that He died for sinners, and that He arose again (Acts 9:22; 13:16ff; 17:1–4; etc.). The Gospel includes "and that He arose again the third day according to the Scriptures" (1 Cor. 15:4). What Scriptures did Paul and John have in mind?

Paul saw the Resurrection in Psalm 2:7 (Acts 13:33). Peter saw it in Psalm 16:8–11 (Acts 2:23–36 and note 13:35). Peter also referred to Psalm 110:1 (Acts 2:34–35). The statement “He shall prolong His days” in Isaiah 53:10 is also interpreted as a prediction of Christ’s resurrection. Jesus Himself used the Prophet Jonah to illustrate His own death, burial, and resurrection (Matt. 12:38–40); and this would include the “three days” part of the message. Paul saw in the Feast of Firstfruits a picture of the Resurrection (Lev. 23:9–14; 1 Cor. 15:20–23), and again, this would include “the third day.” Some students see the Resurrection and “the third day” in Hosea 6:2. After His resurrection, our Lord did not reveal Himself to everyone, but only to selected witnesses who would share the good news with others (Acts 10:39–43). This witness is now found in Scripture, the New Testament; and both the Old Testament and the New Testament agree in their witness. The Law, the Psalms, the Prophets, and the Apostles together bear witness that Jesus Christ is alive!

Peter and John saw the evidence and believed. Later, the Holy Spirit confirmed their faith through the Old Testament Scriptures. That evening, they would meet the Master personally! Faith that was eclipsed has now started to dawn, and the light will get brighter.

Faith Shining (John 20:11–18)

When I think of Mary Magdalene lingering alone in the garden, I recall Proverbs 8:17—“I love them that love Me; and those that seek Me early shall find Me.” Mary loved her Lord and came early to the garden to express that love. Peter and John had gone home by the time Mary got back to the tomb, so they did not convey to her what conclusion they had reached from the evidence they had examined. Mary still thought that Jesus was dead. Another verse comes to mind—Psalm 30:5, “Weeping may endure for a night, but joy cometh in the morning.”

Mary’s weeping was the loud lamentation so characteristic of Jewish people when they express their sorrow (John 11:31, 33). There is certainly nothing wrong with sincere sorrow, because God made us to shed tears; and weeping is good therapy for broken hearts. The sorrow of the Christian, however, must be different from the hopeless sorrow of the world (1 Thes. 4:13–18), because we have been born again “unto a living hope by the resurrection of Jesus Christ from the dead” (1 Peter 1:3, NASB). We weep—not because our believing loved ones have gone to heaven—but because they have left us and we miss them.

When Mary looked into the sepulcher, she saw two men in white. Their position at either end of the shelf where the body had been lying makes us think of the cherubim on the mercy seat (Ex. 25:17–19). It is as though God is saying, “There is now a new mercy seat! My Son has paid the price for sin, and the way is open into the presence of God!” Mary apparently was not disturbed at seeing these men, and there is no evidence that she knew they were angels. The brief conversation neither dried her tears nor quieted her mind. She was determined to find the body of Jesus.

Why did Mary turn back and not continue her conversation with the two strangers? Did she hear a sound behind her? Or did the angels stand and recognize the presence of their Lord? Perhaps both of these speculations are true, or neither is true. She was certain that the Lord’s body was not in the tomb, so why linger there any longer?

Why did she not recognize the One for whom she was so earnestly searching? Jesus may have deliberately concealed Himself from her, as He would later do when He walked with the Emmaus disciples (Luke 24:13–32). It was still early and perhaps dark in that part of the garden. Her eyes were probably blinded by her tears as well.

Jesus asked her the same question that the angels had asked, “Why are you weeping?” How tragic that she was weeping when she could have been praising, had she realized that her Lord was alive! Then He added, “Whom are you seeking?” (He had asked the mob the same question in the Garden—John 18:4.) It is encouraging to us to know that “Jesus knows all about our sorrows.” The Savior knew that Mary’s heart was broken and that her mind was confused. He did not rebuke her; tenderly, He revealed Himself to her.

All He had to do was to speak her name, and Mary immediately recognized Him. His sheep hear [recognize] His voice, and He calls them by name (John 10:3). Apparently, Mary had turned away from Jesus, for when He spoke her name, she had to turn back to look at Him again. What a blessed surprise it was to see the face of her beloved Master!

All she could say was, “Rabboni—my Master, my Teacher.” The title *Rabboni* is used in only one other place in the Gospels, Mark 10:51 (in the Greek text “Lord” is “Rabboni”). “Rabbi” and “Rabboni” were equivalent terms of respect. In later years, the Jews recognized three levels of teachers: rab (the lowest), rabbi, and rabboni (the highest).

Mary not only spoke to Him, but she grasped His feet and held on to Him. This was a natural gesture: now that she had found Him, she did not want to lose Him. She and the other believers still had a great deal to learn about His new state of glory; they still wanted to relate to Him as they had done during the years of His ministry before the cross.

Jesus permitted the other women to hold His feet (Matt. 28:9), and He did not forbid them. Why did He say to Mary, “Do not cling to Me”? One reason was that she would see Him again because He had not yet ascended to the Father. He remained on earth for forty days after His resurrection and often appeared to the believers to teach them spiritual truth (Acts 1:1–9). Mary had no need to panic; this was not her last and final meeting with the Lord.

A second reason is that she had a job to do—to go tell His brethren that He was alive and would ascend to the Father. “He is not ashamed to call them brethren” (Heb. 2:11). “I will declare Thy name unto My brethren” (Ps. 22:22). He had called His own *servants* (John 13:16) and *friends* (John 15:15), but now He called them *brethren*. This meant that they shared His resurrection power and glory.

Some students feel that Jesus did return to the Father on that morning, and that was the ascension He was referring to; but no other New Testament passage corroborates this interpretation. To say that He was fulfilling the symbolism of the Day of Atonement and presenting the blood to the Father is, I think, stretching a type too far (Lev. 16). For that matter, *He had no blood to present*; He had presented that on the cross when He was made sin for us. In His resurrection glory, Jesus was “flesh and bones” (Luke 24:39), not “flesh and blood.” The Resurrection itself was proof

that the work of redemption had been completed (“raised because of our justification”—Rom. 4:24–25, NASB). What more could He do?

Our Lord never used the phrases “our Father” or “our God.” His relationship to the Father was different from that of the disciples, and He was careful to make that distinction. We say, “our Father” and “our God” because all believers belong to the same family and have an equal standing before God. He reminded Mary and the other believers that God was their Father and that He would be with the Father in heaven after His ascension. In His Upper Room message, He had taught them that He would return to the Father so that the Spirit might come to them. Though it was the same Jesus, only in a glorified body, it was not quite the same relationship.

We must be careful not to relate to Christ “after the flesh” (2 Cor. 5:16), that is, relate to Him as though He were still in His state of humiliation. He is today the exalted Son of God in glory, and we must honor Him as such. The juvenile familiarity that some people display in public when they testify, pray, or sing only reveals that they have little understanding of Paul’s words in 2 Corinthians 5:16. When John was with Jesus at the table, he leaned against His bosom (John 13:23); but when John saw Jesus on the Isle of Patmos, he fell at His feet as dead! (Rev. 1:17) It would have been selfish and disobedient for Mary to have clung to Jesus and kept Him to herself. She arose and went to where the disciples were gathered and gave them the good news that she had seen Jesus alive. “I have seen the Lord!” (note John 20:14, 18, 20, 25, 29.) Mark reports that these believers were mourning and weeping—and that they would not believe her! (Mark 16:9–11) Mary herself had been weeping, and Jesus had turned her sorrow into joy. If they had believed, their sorrow would also have turned to joy. Unbelief has a terribly deadening effect on a person. No wonder God warns us against “an evil heart of unbelief” (Heb. 3:12). Mary not only shared the fact of His resurrection and that she had seen Him personally, but she also reported the words that He had spoken to her. Again, we see the importance of the Word of God. Mary could not transfer her experience over to them, but she could share the Word; and it is the Word that generates faith (Rom. 10:17). The living Christ shared His living Word (1 Peter 1:23–25).

It is good to have faith that is based on solid evidence, but the evidence should lead us to the Word, and the Word should lead us to the Saviour. It is one thing to accept a doctrine and defend it; it is something else to have a personal relationship to the living Lord. Peter and John believed that Jesus was alive, but it was not until that evening that they met the risen Christ in person along with the other disciples. (Jesus appeared to Peter sometime during the afternoon, Luke 24:34; 1 Cor. 15:5.) Evidence that does not lead to experience is nothing but dead dogma. The key is faith in the Word of God.

Dr. Robert W. Dale, one of Great Britain’s leading Congregational pastors and theologians, was one day preparing an Easter sermon when a realization of the risen Lord struck him with new power. “Christ is alive!” he said to himself. “Alive—alive—alive!” He paused, and then said, “Can that really be true? *Living* as really as I myself am?” He got up from his desk and began to walk about the study, repeating, “Christ is living! Christ is living!”

Dr. Dale had known and believed this doctrine for years, but the reality of it overwhelmed him that day. From that time on, “the living Christ” was the theme of his preaching, and he had his

congregation sing an Easter hymn every Sunday morning. “I want my people to get hold of the glorious fact that Christ is alive, and to rejoice over it; and Sunday, you know, is the day on which Christ left the dead.”

Historical faith says, “Christ lives!”
Saving faith says, “Christ lives *in me!*”
Do you have saving faith?

Blum, E. A. (1985). *John*. In J. F. Walvoord & R. B. Zuck (Eds.), *The Bible Knowledge Commentary: An Exposition of the Scriptures* (Vol. 2, pp. 341-343) Wheaton, IL: Victor Books

F. The empty tomb (20:1–9)

John’s Gospel comes to a conclusion with a proclamation of Jesus’ victory over death (chap. 20) followed by an epilogue (chap. 21). Each Gospel writer stressed certain aspects of the events. John began with a testimony of how he came to personal faith in the Resurrection by considering the evidence found in the open tomb.

20:1–2. **The first day of the week**, Sunday, **Mary of Magdala** and other women (cf. **we** in v. 2) came **to the tomb**. “Mary of Magdala” is a translation of the same Greek words which elsewhere are rendered “Mary Magdalene” (Matt. 28:1; Mark 16:1, 9; Luke 24:10). Her devotion to Jesus, living and dead, was based on her gratitude for His delivering her from bondage to Satan. She had been an observer at the cross and now was the first person at the grave. This tomb had been closed with a large rock door (Mark 16:3–4) and had been sealed by the authority of the Roman governor Pontius Pilate (Matt. 27:65–66). The women were amazed to see an open and apparently empty tomb. They ran and told **Peter and the beloved disciple** (cf. John 19:26) that a terrible thing had occurred. They assumed that grave robbers had desecrated the tomb.

20:3–9. **Peter and John** started a footrace to **the tomb**. John beat Peter to the garden and looked in **the tomb**. It was not quite empty for John saw the grave clothes. Perhaps his first thought was that the women had made a mistake! **He bent over and looked** (*blepei*) **in** but **did not** enter the tomb, probably for fear of defilement. When **Peter ... arrived** he rushed in and **saw** (*theōrei*, “beheld attentively”) the grave clothes and the **separate burial cloth**. He must have remained inside puzzled at what he saw. After a period of time John **went** in and **saw** (*eiden*, “perceived”—the third Gr. word for “see” in these verses) the significance of the grave clothes **and believed**. Peter must have been thinking, “Why would a grave robber have left the clothes in this order? Why take the body of Jesus?” But John perceived that the missing body and the position of the grave clothes was not due to a robbery. He realized that Jesus had risen from the dead and had gone through the grave clothes. The tomb was open not to let Jesus’ body out but to let the disciples and the world see that He rose.

This section of John’s Gospel (20:1–9) is a powerful eyewitness testimony which strikes the perceptive reader as being psychologically and historically true. John commented (v. 9) that even after a long period of teaching by Jesus the disciples **still did not understand from Scripture that Jesus had to rise from the dead** (cf. Pss. 16:10–11; 110:1, 4; Isa. 53:11–12).

G. Jesus’ appearance to Mary (20:10–18).

20:10–14. Jesus' first resurrection appearance was to **Mary** of Magdala, out of whom He had cast seven demons (Luke 8:2). (For a list of His resurrection appearances see Matt. 28.) **The disciples returned to their homes** while Mary remained **outside the tomb crying**. John must not have yet told her that Jesus was risen. He probably was too stunned and puzzled to say anything significant. Mary looked **into the tomb and saw two** individuals who were **angels**. In the Bible when angels appeared to people, the angels looked like men; they did not have halos or wings. In certain visions, winged beings appeared (e.g., Isa. 6) but the norm for angels was that they were in humanlike forms.

Because of her grief Mary did not notice anything unusual. Their question and her answer set the stage for the greatest “recognition scene” in all of history (perhaps the second greatest is “I am Joseph”; cf. Gen. 45:1–3). The appearance of **Jesus** to Mary was so unexpected that **she did not realize that it was Jesus**. The fact that He appeared to Mary rather than to Pilate or Caiaphas or to one of His disciples is significant. That a woman would be the first to see Him is an evidence of Jesus' electing love as well as a mark of the narrative's historicity. No Jewish author in the ancient world would have invented a story with a woman as the first witness to this most important event. Furthermore, Jesus may have introduced Himself to Mary first because she had so earnestly sought Him. She was at the cross while He was dying (John 19:25), and she went to His tomb early on Sunday morning (20:1).

20:15–16. Mary talked with Jesus but still did not realize who He was. Some suggest that Jesus' appearance was changed; others say she had a temporary “blindness” as did the Emmaus Road disciples who “were kept from recognizing Him” (Luke 24:16) until His act of disclosure. Others say that possibly the tears in her eyes kept her from recognizing Him.

Jesus said to her, Mary. As the Good Shepherd, He calls His sheep by name (cf. John 10:3) and “they know His voice” (10:4). Immediately she recognized Him! She responded with the cry **Rabboni! (which means my Teacher)**

20:17–18. She may have embraced Him physically, for the Lord responded, **Do not hold on to Me, for I have not yet returned to the Father. Go instead to My brothers and tell them....** These words spoke of a new relationship, new relatives, and a new responsibility. Many wanted to “hold onto” Jesus. The KJV translation “Touch Me not,” has caused many interpreters to wonder why He could not be “touched.” The NIV translation is more accurate, for He certainly was not untouchable (cf. Matt. 28:9; John 20:27). Mary had lost Jesus once before (at His crucifixion) and it was natural to fear the loss of His presence again.

Jesus said, in effect, “This (the physical contact) is not My real presence for the church. A *new relationship* will begin with My Ascension and the gift of the Holy Spirit to the church.” Jesus then explained the fact of the *new relatives*. He called His disciples His brothers. Earlier He had said they were friends: “I no longer call you servants ... instead, I have called you friends” (15:15). Believers in Jesus become a part of Jesus' family with God as their Father (cf. Heb. 2:11–12; Rom. 8:15–17, 29; Gal. 3:26). Mary's *new responsibility* was to testify to His risen presence. She was the recipient of four special graces: to see angels; to see Jesus risen; to be the first to see Him alive; and to be a proclaimer of the good news. Christians today are also the

recipients of special grace; they too are given this new responsibility to witness to the world (cf. Matt. 28:16–20).

Jesus' words, **I am returning to My Father** indicate His unique sonship. **Mary** and the other women told **the news to the disciples**, but according to Luke, they did not believe her or the other women “because their words seemed to them like nonsense” (Luke 24:11; cf. Luke 24:23).

White, J. E. (1998). *John*. In D. S. Dockery (Ed.), *Holman Concise Bible Commentary* (p. 489). Broadman & Holman Publishers.

The Resurrection (20:1–9)

The first person to the tomb of Jesus was Mary Magdalene. Upon seeing the stone removed from the tomb, she ran to Peter and John, exclaiming that they had taken Jesus from the tomb. Mary did not understand that Jesus' body had not been stolen but that He had been raised from the dead. Peter and John ran to the tomb, finding only the strips of Jesus' burial clothes. Peter and John, as did Mary, failed to understand that the resurrection had taken place (20:9).

First Appearance (20:10–18)

Commentators often have suggested that Mary Magdalene was the first to see Jesus following His resurrection because she was the person who needed to see Him the most. After all the others had left the empty tomb, she stood alone by its side weeping. Two angels appeared to her, asking her why she was expressing such grief. After answering that someone had taken her Lord away and she didn't know where He was, she turned and saw Jesus.

The tenderness of the moment when he said “Mary” and her recognition of Him and cry of “Rabboni!” (teacher) is one of the emotional highlights of the entire Gospel. Jesus' warning not to “hold on” to Him for He had “not yet returned to the Father” is at first confusing (20:17). When Jesus spoke of not having returned to the Father, clearly the ascension is in view. Also to be considered here is the idea that Jesus was not to be held to in the same sense as before the resurrection, for now Mary's relationship with Him would be through the Holy Spirit (16:5–16).

The Holy Bible: New International Version. (1984). John 20:1-18. Grand Rapids, MI: Zondervan.

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