





2018



READING JOHN

2018



THE WOMEN IN THE FOURTH GOSPEL

An urgent topic for today

SEQUENCE

- The importance of the topic
- The Fourth Gospel?
- The Women in the Fourth Gospel
- Stories in context
- Message for today

IMPORTANCE OF THE TOPIC

- Role of women in society and church
- The women in John are few but all significant; the men are many but of variable "use"
- Method: what I am not doing
- What I (think) I am doing

IMPORTANCE OF THE TOPIC

- **Witness:** John the Baptist
- **Seven named disciples:** Andrew, unnamed disciple, Peter, Philip, Nathanael, Judas, the Twelve, Beloved Disciple (actually unnamed), Thomas, the (unnamed) sons of Zebedee and two "other" disciples (also unnamed)
- **Other actors:** Nicodemus, royal official and child, paralysed man, blind man, some Greeks, Joseph of Arimathea,
- **Opposition:** Pharisees, scribes, the "Jews", Judas, Annas, Caiaphas, Pilate, Barabbas

THE FOURTH GOSPEL

- Mostly: one-to-one conversations
- Mostly: characters make one appearance
- Sometimes: characters move across the Gospel
- The women in John are good examples of all three modes

THE WOMEN

- Q: Who are the women of the Fourth Gospel?
- The mother of Jesus
- The Samaritan woman
- Mary and Martha
- Mary Magdalene
- Plus: one unrecognised figure

THE WOMEN

John Reference

3:4 Nicodemus asks about returning to a **mother's womb** and being born a second time

3:29 John (the Baptist) uses an analogy involving a **bride** and bridegroom

6:42 Some Jews claim that they know Jesus' "father and **mother**"

9:18-23 The parents of the Man Born Blind (implicitly also the **mother**) are questioned by the Pharisees

12:15 The Evangelist mentions the "**daughter of Zion**" while quoting Zech 9:9

16:21 Jesus uses the image of a **woman in labour** as an analogy for sorrow turning into joy

18:16-17 The **woman gatekeeper** challenges Peter in the courtyard of the High Priest

THE WOMEN

Prologue
1:1-18

The Book of Signs
1:19-12:50

The Book of Glory
13:1-20:31

Epilogue
21:1-25

Mother

Mother
2 (Cana)

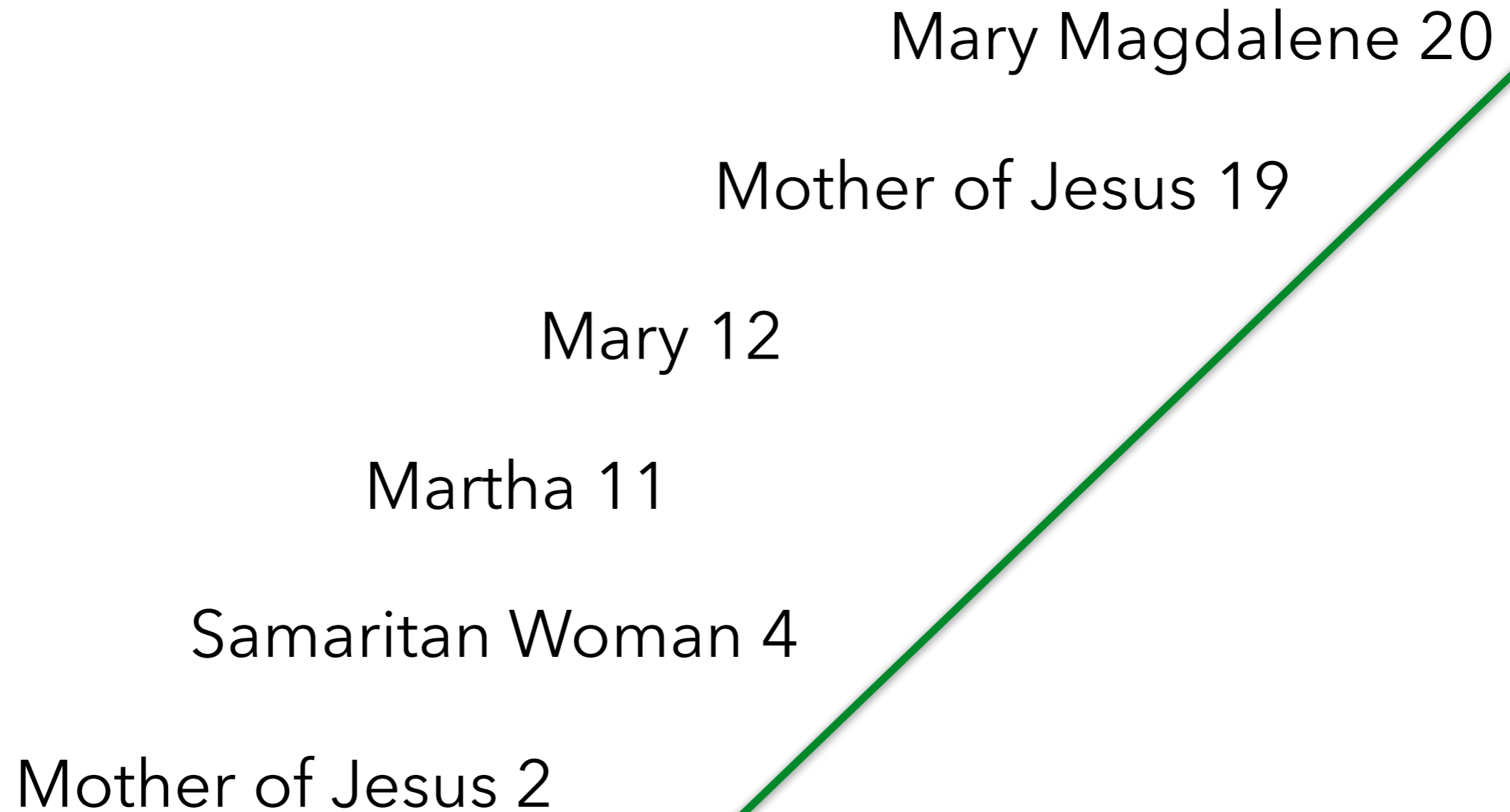
19 (Jerusalem; with others)
(his mother's sister; Mary the wife of
Clopas)

Samaritan Woman
4 (Sychar)

Mary and Martha
11 (Bethany)
Mary
12 (Bethany; on her own)

Mary Magdalene
19 (Jerusalem; with others)
20 (Jerusalem; on her own)

STORIES IN CONTEXT



STORIES IN CONTEXT

- NB context of the time of writing
- NB literary context in the Gospel
- We are not dealing with history but with symbolic representations for the time of writing
- The accounts are rich in potential for faith today

STORIES IN CONTEXT

- The mother of Jesus
- Present only in John 2 and 19
- In 2: in the nuptial sequence
- In 19: Judaism and Christianity
- Never by name; always by role

STORIES IN CONTEXT

- Cana: symbolism of marriage, wine and banquet
- Mother: the mother religion
- Jesus: the bridegroom, with new wine
- Key: complex relationship with Judaism

STORIES IN CONTEXT

- The Samaritan woman
- Present only in John 4
- In the nuptial sequence
- A classic quest story of the Fourth Gospel

STORIES IN CONTEXT

- Well story: meeting your future wife
- Stages of recognition greatly expanded
- New role of proclamation
- Key: the woman represents all who long for the water of life

STORIES IN CONTEXT

- Mary and Martha
- Present only in John 11-12
- (Unconnected to Mary, Martha and Lazarus in Luke)
- Two scenes: resurrection and death of Jesus

STORIES IN CONTEXT

- Centre: Jesus himself as the resurrection
- Climax of the seven I am sentences of this Gospel
- The story illustrates Christian faith in Jesus
- The two sisters represent all who mourn
- Key: resurrection discloses the love of God

STORIES IN CONTEXT

- Mary Magdalene
- Present only in John 19-20
- Not to be confused with any other figure
- One-to-one conversation = coming to Easter faith

STORIES IN CONTEXT

- Mary represents faithful discipleship
- Thus, she resembles the Beloved Disciple
- NB “What are you looking for?” (John 1:38)
- NB “Whom are you looking for?” (John 20:15)
- Key: Easter is a calling into relationship

STORIES IN CONTEXT

- The roots of our faith (the mother)
- All who quest (the Samaritan woman)
- All who mourn (Mary and Martha)
- All who come to faith (Mary Magdalene)
- NB: Two of the women become “proclaimers”

STORIES IN CONTEXT

- The women are placed strategically across the Gospel:
- **Cana**: offer of salvation, underlining love and joy
- **Sychar**: journey of faith, outreach to outsiders and a witness
- **Bethany**: climax and critical transition
- **Jerusalem**: death of Jesus, the new “family” of the faith
- **Jerusalem**: resurrection of Jesus, a synthesis of faith/love, a witness, the first apostle to announce his resurrection

MESSAGE FOR TODAY

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1:19-12:50

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MESSAGE FOR TODAY

- Roots in Judaism (wedding = love)
- Spiritual quest (well / wedding = love)
- The tragedy of the human condition (friendship = love)
- Called into relationship ("Mary" = love)
- Key: love throughout

MESSAGE FOR TODAY

- On the level of narrative, the women are portrayed as acting independently
- They are closer to Jesus than in the other Gospels
- Some of them take up roles such as proclamation (Samaritan women), prophetic gesture (Mary), bearers of the good news (Mary Magdalen)
- Here we see how women “functioned” in the community of the Fourth Gospel



Almighty, ever-living God,
your only-begotten Son Jesus Christ
made Mary Magdalen the first herald of Easter joy.

Grant that, following her example and her prayers,
we may, in this life, proclaim the living Christ,
and come to see him reigning in your glory.

Through our Lord Jesus Christ, your Son,
who lives and reigns with you in the unity of the Holy Spirit,
one God, for ever and ever.

Amen.

PRAYER

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