

# MARY MAGDALENE'S GOOD NEWS

*by E. Nelson James*



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# *Mary Magdalene's Good News*

A sunrise service drama  
with a mostly women cast

by  
**E. Nelson James**

This play is based on passages from the Bible: Matthew 27: 55-56, 61, 28: 1-10; Mark 15:40-41, 47, 16: 1-11; Luke 23: 27, 55-56, 24: 1-10; John 20: 1-18.

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## **CAST OF CHARACTERS**

**Mary Magdalene:** Narrator of the story of the Crucifixion and the Resurrection, she is a follower of Jesus Christ, who had healed her of a nervous breakdown (See *Interpreter's Bible*). She is in her thirties, younger than her companions, Mary and Salome, who also witnessed these events. When the male followers fled, these three women stayed on. Mary Magdalene is the leader of the three, and it is she who runs to tell the men the good news of the Resurrection. In death, she returns to tell us the story.

**Salome:** Wife of Zebedee and mother of James and John, she is a devout follower of Jesus. She is very proud of her sons and wants only what is best for them, like the preferred seats in heaven. She talks a good fight but is really not that brave. She is a homemaker.

**Mary:** Wife of Clopas and mother of James the younger and Joses, she is also a devout follower of Jesus. She, too, is proud of her sons. She is a homemaker. Through age, she has some difficulty in hearing and seeing and relies on Mary Magdalene to tell her what is going on.

**Angel:** A female spirit, she at first frightens Mary Magdalene by her radiance, but then reassures her that Christ has risen.

**Gardener:** A homely disguise that Jesus adopts; it does not frighten Mary Magdalene but rather reassures her that Christ has indeed risen.

## ***PRODUCTION NOTES***

**A NOTE ON STAGING:** This play is a chancel drama. When it was first performed at the First Congregational Church in DeKalb, Illinois, we used no painted scenery but let the pulpit, the lectern, the choir lofts, the platform between the choir lofts and the space in front of the chancel steps and all of the doors and even the aisles out in the sanctuary be our setting. We mimed props rather than trying to get authentic pieces. In other words, we relied a great deal on the imagination of the congregation, and we found that they were willing to be transported with us back to 30 A.D.

The play begins with Mary Magdalene in the pulpit. Then she comes down to an open area between the two choir lofts, where she is met by Mary and Salome, who enter through a door Up Right. The three women witness the Crucifixion, which takes place above the last row in the balcony. (One of the audience members seated on the main floor said she actually felt that the event was taking place up there.) After the scene of the Crucifixion, Mary Magdalene goes back into the pulpit to tell of the events between Good Friday and Easter. Mary and Salome go down the steps of the chancel and take their stations on the floor of the sanctuary in front of the pulpit (Salome's house) and in front of the lectern (Mary's house). After her speech, Mary Magdalene comes down from the pulpit and meets Mary and Salome in front of the steps to the chancel. The three women now go on a journey to the tomb. They circle the sanctuary and come back to the chancel. One of the choir lofts now becomes the tomb. The three women go up into the chancel and find the tomb empty. Mary and Salome leave by the center aisle of the sanctuary, and Mary Magdalene is left crying. The Angel then enters through a door (Up Right). She walks over and meets Mary Magdalene at the choir loft. After the Angel leaves, Mary Magdalene comes down to the floor of the sanctuary. The Gardener comes out through a door Down Right and meets her center. After their meeting he returns Down Right and she rushes down the center aisle.

The writer invites directors to adapt the action to their chancel and sanctuary.

Our one concession to realism was in our costuming, and there we tried to follow the costume books to come up with an authentic look for the women and the Gardener. The Angel, of course, is in white.

### ***SCENE***

The sanctuary of your church and Calvary and the Tomb.

### ***TIME***

Now and 30 A.D.

(The soloist sings "Were You There?" At the conclusion of this hymn, MARY MAGDALENE walks down the aisle of the sanctuary and takes her place in the pulpit.)

**MARY MAGDALENE:** Good morning, members of the \_\_\_\_\_ (insert your church's name). First, I want to thank your minister, \_\_\_\_\_ (insert name of minister), for allowing me to use his pulpit this morning. Some ministers would not have allowed me, Mary Magdalene, to be in their pulpits. But harlot I never was. Nor a drunkard, as some people thought in the Middle Ages. It's true that I was possessed of seven demons – or as your doctors would say, I had a nervous breakdown. That was before I met him – before I met Jesus. It was he who cast out my demons. It was he who cured me – permanently. You must believe that. From that time on I followed him, and several other women and I ministered to his needs. We followed him to the end and beyond, and it is that that I want to tell you about – the story of the greatest experience that has been given to any human being.

You've read the story, of course, in Matthew or Mark or Luke or John because I reported it to others and it was finally written down. But this is not enough for me. I had a mandate to "go and tell," and so I tell my story in death as I told it many times in life.

It was that day that has come to be known as Good Friday. A group of us women were following Jesus at a distance. We stopped on a hill near Calvary. I was with Salome, wife of Zebedee and mother of James and John, and Mary, wife of Clopas and mother of James the younger and Joses. (MARY MAGDALENE goes down from the pulpit and stands at the center of the platform. She is joined by MARY and SALOME, who have come in from the Up Right entrance.)

**SALOME:** I'll not go a step further.



- 1 MARY MAGDALENE: But we don't have that far to go. Just  
2 down in the valley and then up Calvary.
- 3 SALOME: Just down this hill and up the next. You make it  
4 sound so easy. But what about that angry mob down  
5 there? Those men look like they could do anything to us.  
6 Beat us. Even rape us.
- 7 MARY MAGDALENE: What about you, Mary? Are you  
8 willing to go on?
- 9 MARY: No. I'm like Salome. I'm afraid of the Roman  
10 soldiers. It might be all right if we had our men with us,  
11 but they're all at home hiding.
- 12 SALOME: Speak for yourself. My son is somewhere over  
13 there on Calvary with Mary.
- 14 MARY MAGDALENE: We ought to be over there with her,  
15 too. Come on. Nothing bad will happen to us.
- 16 SALOME: How can you be so sure?
- 17 MARY MAGDALENE: Jesus will protect us.
- 18 SALOME: How can he do that when he can't take care of  
19 himself?
- 20 MARY MAGDALENE: He has in the past.
- 21 SALOME: That was a week ago, but now he can't even  
22 protect himself. Look at all those men with their clubs  
23 and fists and those Roman soldiers with their swords  
24 and spears.
- 25 MARY: Listen to their taunts. They look meaner and  
26 meaner. I think we'd better go back home. I should have  
27 stayed in the house and kept my doors and windows shut  
28 tight.
- 29 SALOME: You're right. Let's go back home. We should  
30 never have listened to you, Mary Magdalene.
- 31 MARY: Yes, why did you want to come here in the first place?  
32 You know how angry the people were at the trial. Why  
33 did you bring us here?
- 34 MARY MAGDALENE: Because he is our leader. He has  
35 helped all of us in our times of trouble, and now we ought

- 1           to stand by him in his time of trial.
- 2   **MARY:** But what can we do? Three weak women against all
- 3           those men!
- 4   **SALOME:** Yes, let's go home.
- 5   **MARY MAGDALENE:** No, please stay with me.
- 6   **SALOME:** What good can we do?
- 7   **MARY MAGDALENE:** I don't know yet. But we can watch
- 8           and wait. And maybe there will be something. What
- 9           about it, Salome?
- 10   **SALOME:** Well, all right. We're in a rather safe place. And
- 11          we do have a good view of what's going on.
- 12   **MARY MAGDALENE:** And you, Mary?
- 13   **MARY:** I'd rather go home, but . . . oh, I'll stay. But my
- 14          hearing isn't so good anymore, and I might have trouble
- 15          hearing what's going on over on Calvary.
- 16   **MARY MAGDALENE:** We'll try to listen for you. I admit it
- 17          will be quite a strain, but between Salome and me we
- 18          should be able to hear what is going on over there.
- 19          Shouldn't we, Salome?
- 20   **SALOME:** What's that?
- 21   **MARY MAGDALENE :** *(Laughing)* Well, I'll try to listen very
- 22          hard for the three of us. *(There is silence as they look on*
- 23          *the distant scene.)* Do you see that?
- 24   **MARY:** What? What?
- 25   **MARY MAGDALENE:** It's Jesus, and the soldiers are
- 26          offering him something to drink.
- 27   **SALOME:** Where?
- 28   **MARY MAGDALENE:** *(Pointing)* Over there.
- 29   **SALOME:** Oh, yes. I see.
- 30   **MARY:** There's some good even in the Roman soldiers.
- 31   **SALOME:** Hmph, it's probably poison.
- 32   **MARY:** Is he drinking it?
- 33   **MARY MAGDALENE:** No, he isn't taking it.
- 34   **SALOME:** What did I tell you? It's poison.
- 35   **MARY:** Oh, if I could only take something over there for him

1           to drink.

2   **MARY MAGDALENE:** No, Salome. What have you just been  
3           telling me? It's too dangerous.

4   **SALOME:** You're right. But I get so angry when I see what  
5           they're doing to him.

6   **MARY MAGDALENE:** We're just going to have to watch and  
7           wait. *(Again they watch. Then MARY MAGDALENE begins*  
8           *to cry.)*

9   **MARY:** What is it, Mary Magdalene?

10   **MARY MAGDALENE:** *(Between sobs)* They're – they're –  
11           nailing – him to the cross.

12   **MARY:** *(Throwing herself into the arms of MARY MAGDALENE*  
13           *and dissolving into tears)* Oh, Mary Magdalene.

14   **SALOME:** *(Knotting her fists and shaking them at the soldiers)*  
15           Oh, you swine. You swine. *(Turning away from the others*  
16           *to hide her tears)*

17   **MARY MAGDALENE:** Friends, we're forgetting him. We're  
18           thinking only of ourselves. Let's take courage and keep  
19           our vigil. *(They again watch.)* Mary, they're raising the  
20           cross, and he seems to be saying something.

21   **MARY:** What is he saying?

22   **MARY MAGDALENE:** Shhh. *(Listening intently and trying to*  
23           *make out the words)* "Father – forgive – them; for – they  
24           – know – not – what – they – do."

25   **MARY:** "Father, forgive them." How like him!

26   **SALOME:** It makes me ashamed of the way I just acted.  
27           Making fists. Calling out names. Will I ever be able to  
28           be like him?

29   **MARY:** No.

30   **SALOME:** *(Bristling)* What?

31   **MARY:** *(Quickly)* None of us will be able to be like him.

32   **MARY MAGDALENE:** *(Trying to distract them)* The soldiers  
33           seem to be doing something with his clothes.

34   **MARY:** What is it?

35   **MARY MAGDALENE:** I don't know. I can't make it out.

1           What do you think they're doing, Salome?  
2   **SALOME:** Why – why – they're casting lots. They're gam-  
3           bling for his clothes. Swine! Swine! Swine! I'd like to  
4           get my hands on them.  
5   **MARY MAGDALENE:** Salome, get hold of yourself. Shhh.  
6           He seems to be saying something again.  
7           *(Pause)* Why, he's talking to his mother. *(Pause as she*  
8           *listens intently)* Woman – behold – your – son.  
9   **SALOME:** *(Bursting with pride and excitement)* Why, that's my  
10          son – that's my John he's talking about!  
11   **MARY MAGDALENE:** Shhh. He's saying something else.  
12          "Behold – your – mother."  
13   **SALOME:** "Behold your mother." He said that to my John.  
14          Surely John is the beloved of Jesus.  
15   **MARY:** Watch out, Salome. You're falling into the sin for  
16          which Jesus rebuked you: the time you wanted your  
17          sons to sit on the right and left hand of him in heaven.  
18   **SALOME:** *(Pause, shamedly)* I know. But it's so hard not to  
19          be proud of sons like James and John.  
20   **MARY:** Yes, but don't forget: "He who would be greatest  
21          among you, let him minister."  
22   **SALOME:** I try to remember. I really do. *(Pause)*  
23   **MARY MAGDALENE:** Look. Two more crosses.  
24   **MARY:** One on either side of him. But who are they?  
25   **MARY MAGDALENE:** There was talk of crucifying two  
26          thieves with him.  
27   **SALOME:** Thieves. How dare they!  
28   **MARY MAGDALENE:** Shhh. The crowd is jeering at him.  
29   **MARY:** What are they saying? Their shouts are so loud, but  
30          I can't make it out.  
31   **SALOME:** Why, they're daring him to come down off the  
32          cross and save himself! Oh, I wish he would.  
33   **MARY:** Is he? Is he?  
34   **SALOME:** No, and they just go on laughing at him and calling  
35          him names. Builder of the temple. Savior. Christ. King

1 of Israel.

2 MARY: Those are good names, but they sound so dirty in  
3 their mouths.

4 MARY MAGDALENE: Shhh. Something else seems to be  
5 happening.

6 SALOME: What is it? The crowd seems to have quieted down  
7 a little.

8 MARY: What's happening, Mary Magdalene?

9 MARY MAGDALENE: Look. One of the thieves seems to be  
10 saying something to him. *(Listening intently and trying to*  
11 *catch the words)* Why, he's asking Jesus to save himself  
12 and them.

13 MARY: What does Jesus say to that?

14 MARY MAGDALENE: Nothing. Shhh. The other thief is  
15 speaking. *(Listening intently and trying to catch the words)*  
16 He is telling the other thief that the two of them are  
17 receiving their just rewards, but Jesus has done nothing  
18 wrong.

19 MARY: Good for him.

20 SALOME: He seems to be saying something else. What is it,  
21 Mary Magdalene?

22 MARY MAGDALENE: Shhh. *(Listening intently)* Why, he  
23 asked Jesus to remember him when he comes into his  
24 kingly power.

25 MARY: And what does Jesus say –

26 SALOME: Shhh.

27 MARY MAGDALENE: *(Trying to make the words out)* Truly –  
28 I – say – to – you – today – you – will – be – with – me  
29 – in – Paradise.

30 MARY: *(Repeating the words and letting them sink in)* Today you  
31 will be with me in Paradise. Oh, the sweetness of Jesus.

32 SALOME: Yes, and to a common thief.

33 MARY MAGDALENE: *(Ruminating)* Today you will be with  
34 me in Paradise.

35 SALOME: How do you suppose it will take place? Will God

- 1           come down to earth and remove them from the cross and  
2           lift them up to Paradise? Will it be a miracle?
- 3   **MARY MAGDALENE:** I don't know. We'll just have to wait.
- 4   **MARY:** Oh, Mary Magdalene, it's getting so dark!
- 5   **SALOME:** We've been here a long time, but it is still morning,  
6           isn't it?
- 7   **MARY MAGDALENE:** I think so.
- 8   **MARY:** I wish the darkness would go away. I'm getting  
9           frightened.
- 10   **SALOME:** The darkness scares me, too. It was hard enough  
11           to wait here in the daylight, but now – what are we going  
12           to do, Mary Magdalene?
- 13   **MARY MAGDALENE:** Why, stay of course. We have nothing  
14           to fear. Think of what he said. "Today you will be with  
15           me in Paradise." The thought will conquer darkness and  
16           despair.
- 17   **MARY:** I'm cold.
- 18   **MARY MAGDALENE:** *(Opening her coat and wrapping part of*  
19           *it around MARY)* There, Mary, share my coat.
- 20   **SALOME:** I'm cold too, you know.
- 21   **MARY MAGDALENE:** *(Opening the other side of her coat and*  
22           *wrapping it around SALOME)* Come. You may share it too.  
23           *(The three women stand huddled and waiting. MARY*  
24           *MAGDALENE cries out.)* Oh, no!
- 25   **MARY:** What's the matter?
- 26   **SALOME:** He spoke again, didn't he?
- 27   **MARY MAGDALENE:** *(Crying)* Yes.
- 28   **MARY:** What did he say?
- 29   **SALOME:** Tell us, Mary Magdalene. Please tell us.
- 30   **MARY MAGDALENE:** He said –
- 31   **SALOME:** Yes?
- 32   **MARY MAGDALENE:** *(Finally the words rush out)* My God,  
33           my God, why hast thou forsaken me?
- 34   **MARY:** *(Crying and coming out from MARY MAGDALENE's*  
35           *coat)* Forsaken – oh, no!

- 1 SALOME: (*Crying and coming out from MARY MAGDALENE's*  
2 *coat*) What's the use?
- 3 MARY MAGDALENE: (*Recovering*) No, no. We can't allow  
4 ourselves to fall into this despair. We can't. Remember,  
5 "Today you will be with me in Paradise."
- 6 SALOME: But you just told us he said, "My God, my God, why  
7 hast thou forsaken me?"
- 8 MARY MAGDALENE: I know, but he didn't mean it.
- 9 SALOME: How can you be so sure?
- 10 MARY MAGDALENE: I can't tell you that. I just feel it.
- 11 SALOME: Why don't you just give up? It's useless –
- 12 MARY MAGDALENE: Shhh. He's saying something again.
- 13 MARY: What? What? What did he say?
- 14 MARY MAGDALENE: "I thirst."
- 15 MARY: Oh, I wish I could give him something to drink!
- 16 SALOME: I'm tired of waiting. I'm going over there to give  
17 him something to drink.
- 18 MARY MAGDALENE: (*Grabbing onto her coat*) No, stay here.  
19 The soldiers are giving him something.
- 20 SALOME: Probably the same thing they gave him before.  
21 Look – he's spitting it out.
- 22 MARY: What do you suppose it is?
- 23 SALOME: I don't know. Maybe vinegar.
- 24 MARY: (*Screwing up her face*) Vinegar – ugh.
- 25 MARY MAGDALENE: The sourness of vinegar can't com-  
26 pare with that of the taunts of the crowd.
- 27 SALOME: Why? What are they saying?
- 28 MARY MAGDALENE: Jesus has been calling for Elijah, and  
29 the crowd is daring Elijah to come and take him down  
30 from the cross.
- 31 SALOME: Oh, if Elijah only would. I wish he would show  
32 them. (*MARY screams.*) What's happening? The ground  
33 is shaking.
- 34 MARY MAGDALENE: It must be an earthquake.
- 35 MARY: (*Tearfully*) What's going to happen to us?

- 1     **MARY MAGDALENE:** *(Putting her arm around her)* Let's just  
 2         stay together and trust.
- 3     **SALOME:** What do you suppose brought on this earthquake?  
 4         Didn't Jesus say something just as all this was happen-  
 5         ing?
- 6     **MARY MAGDALENE:** Yes, he did.
- 7     **SALOME:** What?
- 8     **MARY MAGDALENE:** "It is finished."
- 9     **MARY:** Oh, surely the world is coming to an end.
- 10    **SALOME:** I wish I'd never come. How I wish I were at home  
 11       in bed with covers over my head! *(They stand there holding*  
 12       *onto one another, shaken by the ground and their own*  
 13       *emotions.)* What's happening now? The ground has  
 14       stopped shaking.
- 15    **MARY:** It's getting light again. But why? What's happened?
- 16    **SALOME:** I thought he spoke again. Didn't he, Mary  
 17       Magdalene?
- 18    **MARY MAGDALENE:** Yes. He said, "Father, into thy hands  
 19       I commend my spirit."
- 20    **MARY:** *(The truth finally sinking in)* He's dead. *(Breaking loose*  
 21       *from the others and beginning to wail)* Ohhh Ohhh Ohhh.
- 22    **SALOME:** *(Also breaking loose from MARY MAGDALENE and*  
 23       *wailing)* Ohhh Ohhh Ohhh.
- 24    **MARY MAGDALENE:** *(Following the others and giving vent to*  
 25       *her sorrow)* Ohhh Ohhh Ohhh. *(The three women continue*  
 26       *their wailing according to Jewish mourning customs. As she*  
 27       *wails, MARY begins to pound her chest with her fist. As she*  
 28       *wails, SALOME tears off her headpiece and begins to tear her*  
 29       *hair. As she wails, MARY MAGDALENE starts to tear her*  
 30       *tunic at the neck. MARY MAGDALENE suddenly realizes*  
 31       *what she is doing.)* No. Enough of this mourning. Enough.
- 32    **SALOME:** What are you saying? Is this enough mourning for  
 33       our friend? And I thought you loved Jesus.
- 34    **MARY MAGDALENE:** I did. I do. But don't you remember  
 35       his words? "This day you will be with me in Paradise."



- 1 MARY: (*Tearfully*) But he also said, "It is finished." How do  
2 you explain that?
- 3 MARY MAGDALENE: I don't know, but I'm going to try to  
4 find out.
- 5 MARY: (*Wearily*) Let's go home. I'm so tired.
- 6 SALOME: Yes, let's. I want to go home where I can weep for  
7 him in the privacy of my own home.
- 8 MARY MAGDALENE: No, I think it's best to stay here.
- 9 SALOME: But why?
- 10 MARY MAGDALENE: I want to see what they do with the  
11 body. Look. They're doing something now.
- 12 MARY: What?
- 13 SALOME: It looks like – it is. They're breaking the legs of the  
14 two thieves. They wouldn't do that to him, would they?
- 15 MARY MAGDALENE: I don't know. No they aren't – but –  
16 they're – oh – they're running a spear through his body.
- 17 MARY: Oh! More suffering. Poor Jesus!
- 18 MARY MAGDALENE: No. He doesn't feel it any more. He's  
19 – dead.
- 20 SALOME: But somebody's taking his body down from the  
21 cross. Can you see who it is?
- 22 MARY MAGDALENE: No – yes – it's Joseph of Arimathea.  
23 And that must be his brother.
- 24 MARY: What do you suppose they're going to do with the  
25 body?
- 26 MARY MAGDALENE: I don't know.
- 27 SALOME: They're carrying it off. Shall we follow them?
- 28 MARY MAGDALENE: Yes – wait – they seem to have  
29 stopped already. They're carrying it into a tomb in a  
30 rock.
- 31 MARY: Can you see inside it?
- 32 MARY MAGDALENE: No.
- 33 MARY: What do you think they're doing?
- 34 MARY MAGDALENE: Maybe they're giving it a proper  
35 burial with spices and strips of linen cloth.



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