

**Supplement to the
Video Program**

One Who Was There

**Prepared by
Edgar A. Gossard**

**A UNITED METHODIST COMMUNICATION
PRODUCTION**

INTRODUCTION

This guide contains:

- I. Synopsis
- II. Tips for planning the program
- III. Themes to explore
- IV. Pertinent Bible references

I. SYNOPSIS

In the year 64 A.D., a woman sets out from Jerusalem on a journey toward Galilee. On the outskirts of the city, passing a place called Gethsemane, she is overcome by a searing memory: the events of a day years earlier when a man named Jesus was arrested there, tried and executed. The woman is a survivor, one of the few left who had been his followers. Tormented by the memory of his crucifixion, weary from long years of waiting for his return, she begins a search to find her life again.

During many days of travel from barren Judea to the fertile valley of the Jordan, the woman is transformed by her journey and the people she meets. She encounters a group of second-generation Christians whose joyful celebration of the Lord's presence begins to shake her out of her own despair. Others she meets, travelers who question or deny the faith, bring her face to face with events of her own life—seen in flashbacks—as a young woman who had been healed by him, who had loved and witnessed for him. Memories and encounters awaken the possibility of anew beginning for her life. Near Magdala, on the shores of the Sea of Galilee, past and present come together in a powerful experience of reliving the long-ago moment of his resurrection. One who was there, the first to see the risen Lord, Mary Magdalene, too, has come back to life. Her journey begins again—back down the road she has traveled, to those who need her.

II. TIPS FOR PLANNING THE PROGRAM

The program is designed for use with junior highs through adults. With care, it can be used with older elementary children (and of course with inter-generational groups).

What kind of preparation would be helpful before they see the program? Do you want them to do any reading in the Bible? If so, what? Do you want them to watch for anything specific as they watch? If so, what?

What kind of discussion or shared experience would you like to take place after the showing? How can you stimulate that discussion? Do you want the audience to dig into the Bible? At what points? Will you want to have Bibles available? Would you want to have a map of Biblical Palestine available? (For some groups, a useful post-viewing activity might be to trace Mary's journey from Jerusalem to Palestine.)

How would it be most helpful to organize for discussion? If the audience will be large, consider forming small groups for discussion. Do you need a leader for each group? Do the leaders need any special orientation? Will you want to provide a time for sharing from each of the small groups?

The running time for the film is 36 minutes. You'll need to make your plans for discussion with an idea of the total amount of time available for viewing and discussion.

The film has an emotional impact. Whatever your post-viewing plans, you may want to allow the audience a minute or two for personal reflection before moving into discussion.

The following themes and uses are most obvious. You may find other themes which can be explored with the help of the film.

- For worship, reflection, and study during **Lent and Easter**. This film can stand on its own for informal worship at family nights and similar events. It could be the sermon in a formal worship service.
- For insight into the biblical doctrines of Resurrection and Incarnation.
- For exploration of the beginnings of Christianity and the life of the early church.
- To motivate and educate for evangelism.
- To affirm the role of women in early Christianity and to explore the role of the Christian faith in affirming full personhood for women.
- To stimulate thought and study about the life and experience of Mary Magdalene.
- To stimulate Bible study—related to the passion story, the meaning of the Resurrection, the experience of the disciples, the Pentecost experience, the beginnings of the Christian church.
- As the sermon in a formal worship service at any time of year.

Now, for your own planning:

After previewing the film, ask:

Who is the audience for this showing?

What purposes do you want to help them achieve?

Can you state a purpose (or purposes) for the experience? Following are several purposes, any or all of which the film can help an audience achieve. Which seem most pertinent to you? (NOTE: You may want to decide whether you will make any reference in your introductory remarks to the fact that the film's main character is Mary Magdalene. The film does not actually reveal this fact until near the end, in the flashback of the Resurrection morning.)

- To affirm the Resurrection as the true starting point of the Christian faith—the event that brought the church to life.
- To engage the audience in sharing the feelings of those who experienced Jesus Christ alive again.
- To present the Resurrection as a powerful personal experience among those who followed Jesus, an experience that profoundly changed them.
- To show that the resurrection faith was the center of the early church's preaching and witness and the key to its growth.
- To remind us of the Biblical accounts of Jesus' arrest, trial, crucifixion, death and resurrection.
- To sketch briefly the story of Pentecost and the early missionary outreach of the church.
- To suggest the concept of "new life" as a universal theme in God's whole created order.
- To affirm that the Resurrection calls Christians to a renewal of life in this world, day by day, for themselves and in love and service to others.

One way to use the program is to show it, let the group share their reactions and then simply help discussion happen—that is, help the group identify and share their reactions. The following questions may help:

What are your first impressions after viewing? What about it makes you joyful? What do you want to share? What parts do you want to talk about? What do you want to argue with? What parts of it make you want to go to the Bible and check your own understanding? What are the most powerful images for you? Which scenes are most important to you? Most positive? Which scenes raise the most serious questions for you?

Another way to use the film is to identify the particular themes you want the audience to deal with and to guide the pre- and post-viewing activities or discussion along those lines. Using the themes identified earlier, the following questions may help:

III. THEMES TO EXPLORE

A. Lent, Easter, Resurrection, Incarnation

What are the meanings of resurrection you find in the film?

What is the nature of Jesus' death? What effect did his death have on his followers? Immediately? After the Resurrection? In the years after Pentecost?

Read the accounts of the Resurrection in the Gospels. (Notice the different details each notes. The accounts in John's Gospel was the primary source for the film's story of the Resurrection.) Does the film enrich your reading of these accounts? What does the Resurrection mean for us today?

Mary Magdalene seems to experience the power of the Resurrection in several ways in the film. Can you identify these experiences? What are the ways in which we experience resurrection?

The film's treatment of the Crucifixion is impressionistic; it tries to convey Mary's experience of it as she remembers. What does it convey to you? What is the relationship of death to resurrection?

Who was Jesus? Who does the film say he was? Who does the Bible say he was? Who do you say he was? Who he is?

B. Beginnings of Christianity, the Early Church, Evangelism and Mission

Mary is invited to the home of a young man who is the leader of a group of Christians in Jericho. She participates in a celebration of the Eucharist. How is this celebration similar to our service of Communion? How is it different? Read the accounts of the Last Supper in the Gospels. How and why did the early church celebrate the Eucharist? What is its meaning for us today? Can you identify details (costumes, settings, customs, etc.) of Biblical life in the film which enrich your understanding of the Bible?

How do these Christians act toward one another? Toward outsiders? How do we act as a community of Christians?

In the film, how do persons outside the Christian faith view Jesus and the stories about him? What do you think the stranger (who was present in the church at Jericho and who invited Mary to his home at Pella) felt after he left Mary? How might he have reacted to his experience of the Christian faith.

There are two sermons in the film: one at the river bank by the young leader of the Jericho church and one by Peter in the flashback about Pentecost. Both are based on Biblical accounts of early Christian sermons. What are the basic elements and purposes of them? What did these early Christians seem to think was the most important?

What do we learn about Peter from this film? How did he act during Jesus' trial and crucifixion? How did he act after the Resurrection? What role did he play in the early church? From your reading of the Bible, do you agree with the picture of Peter you get from the film?

Near the end of her journey, Mary encounters a man beside the road, ill with fever. How does this encounter remind you of the story of the Good Samaritan? How does Mary treat the old man? How does he treat her? How should Christians react to people who are not ready to hear their witness? What is the relationship between service and evangelism?

Mary remembers the calling of the disciples. What does the film suggest about discipleship? Who is called? To what are disciples called?

Mary meets people who differ in their understanding of the Christian faith. Do you meet such people? How do you hope they see the Christian faith? How can you help them see it for what it is?

How did Mary and the disciples respond to Jesus? How did the early church respond? How does our world response to Jesus? Our congregation?

C. Mary Magdalene, the Role of Women

(You will want to be aware that the film's story of Mary's trip from Jerusalem to Magdala is imagined by the filmmakers. The Bible does not give us information about Mary Magdalene after the accounts of the Resurrection.)

What role does Mary Magdalene play in the discovery of resurrection? What does the New Testament tell us about Mary?

In what ways does the film suggest that the Christian faith saw women as full human beings? Does this view seem to be supported by the Biblical record?

Mary tells the old man how she was healed by Jesus. What do you think is the Biblical basis for this story she tells? What do you see as the significance of the Biblical accounts of Jesus' healing ministry? Biblical scholars suggest that the reference in Luke 8:2 (see also Mark 16:9) may indicate that Mary Magdalene suffered from a mental breakdown and was healed by Jesus. Does this agree with your own ideas about Mary? (An interesting exercise might be to examine all the New Testament passages which mention Mary Magdalene. What kind of picture do we get? Does the film seem true to that picture?)

During her journey from Jerusalem to Magdala, Mary decides to leave situations where she had good reason to stay. Did you want her to stay? Why do you think she chose to leave? What would you have done?

What happens to Mary at the end of the film? Where is she going? What will she do? What do you hope she does?

D. Renewal and Affirmative Life Choices For Older Persons

Assuming that Mary Magdalene was about the same age as Jesus, she would have been about 60 at the time the film takes place. Do you see new possibilities for Mary? How should we (the Christian community) view an older person? How should we (older members of the Christian community) view ourselves?

What are the present-day possibilities for older persons? How does Mary grow? How is Mary typical of older persons? How is she not typical? Does she seem on the verge of beginning a new life at 60? Can the church help with that? How? How can/should the present Christian community act to help older persons continue to see and move toward new possibilities?

IV. SOME PERTINENT BIBLE REFERENCES

The following references are part of the background material for the film and would be useful for any group or person wishing to use the film as a departure for Bible study.

John 18:1 - 20:18

Luke 22:39 - 24:12

Mark 14:26 - 16:8

Matthew 26:30 - 28:8

Acts 2

Most Biblical references to Mary Magdalene are found in the accounts of the Crucifixion and Resurrection in all four Gospels. Luke 8:2-3 identifies her as one of Jesus' followers and financial supporters during his ministry and says that "seven demons" were cast from her. Mark 15:40-41 and Matthew 27:55-56 also point out that she had been among Jesus' followers before the events of the Passion.

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Gateway Films / Vision Video

P. O. Box 540

Worcester, PA 19490

610-584-3500

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E-Mail: info@visionvideo.com

Web: www.visionvideo.com