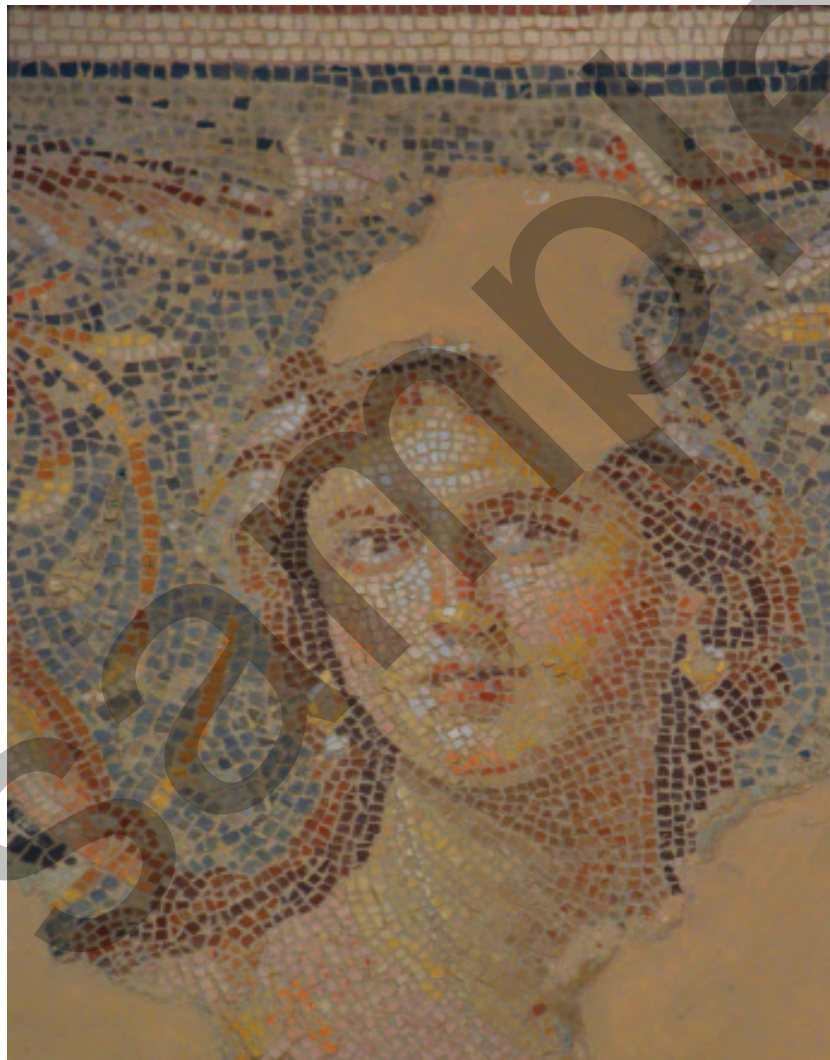


**A
FRIENDLY
GUIDE TO**

WOMEN IN THE
NEW TESTAMENT



ROSEMARY CANAVAN


garratt
PUBLISHING

Published in Australia by
Garraatt Publishing
32 Glenvale Crescent
Mulgrave, Vic. 3170

www.garrattpublishing.com.au

Copyright © Rosemary Canavan 2017
All rights reserved. Except as provided by
the Australian copyright law, no part of this
book may be reproduced in any way without
permission in writing from the publisher.

Design and typesetting by Lynne Muir

Attributions List from Creative Commons:
Page 13
© 2011 Ted, Flickr, CC BY-SA 2
St Mary Magdalene & the Risen Christ, Shkolnik
icon in St Paul Church. Dayton, OH.
Page 24-25
Creative Commons
Pic of woman anointing Jesus' feet, CC BY SA 4
Page 33
The dream of Pilates' wife by Alphonse Francois
Permission, PD-US
Images from iStockphoto on pages 5, 6, 10, 17,
20, 23, 30, 34, 37, 48.
Other photos by Rosemary Canavan.

Scripture quotations are drawn from the *New
Revised Standard Version of the Bible*, copyright
© 1989 by the Division of Christian Education of
the National Council of the Churches of Christ in
the USA.

Used by permission.
All rights reserved.

Nihil Obstat: Reverend Monsignor Peter J Kenny
STD
Imprimatur: Monsignor Greg Bennet MS STL VG
EV Vicar General
Date: 9 February 2017

The Nihil Obstat and Imprimatur are official
declarations that a book or pamphlet is free
of doctrinal or moral error. No implication is
contained therein that those who have granted
the Nihil Obstat and Imprimatur agree with the
contents, opinions or statements expressed.
They do not necessarily signify that the work
is approved as a basic text for catechetical
instruction.

ISBN 9781925073355

Cataloguing in Publication information for this
title is available from the National Library of
Australia. www.nla.gov.au

The author and publisher gratefully acknowledge
the permission granted to reproduce the
copyright material in this book. Every effort has
been made to trace copyright holders and to
obtain their permission for the use of copyright
material.

The publisher apologises for any errors or
omissions in the above list and would be grateful
if notified of any corrections that should be
incorporated in future reprints or editions of this
book.

CONTENTS

| | |
|--|----|
| INTRODUCTION | 3 |
| DEDICATION | 4 |
| WOMEN IN THE GOSPELS | 5 |
| Mary | 6 |
| Mary Magdalene (Mary a woman of Magdala) | 12 |
| Elizabeth | 15 |
| Anna (Hannah in Hebrew, Hanna in Greek) | 18 |
| Joanna | 19 |
| Susanna | 20 |
| Mary the mother of James (and Joses/Joseph) | 21 |
| Mary of Clopas | 21 |
| Martha and Mary | 22 |
| Woman who anointed Jesus | 24 |
| A woman healed and a daughter restored to life | 26 |
| Samaritan woman at the well | 29 |
| The Syrophoenician woman and the Caananite woman | 31 |
| Peter's mother-in-law | 32 |
| Pilate's wife | 33 |
| Herodias and her daughter | 34 |
| Widows | 36 |
| Widow of Nain | 36 |
| WOMEN IN THE PAULINE LETTERS | 37 |
| Junia | 38 |
| Prisca (Priscilla) | 39 |
| Phoebe | 41 |
| Women in Rome | 42 |
| Other Women of the Pauline Household Communities | 43 |
| Apphia, Chloe, Euodia and Syntyche, Nympha | 43 |
| WOMEN IN ACTS | 44 |
| Lydia | 45 |
| Tabitha (Dorcas) | 47 |
| Sapphira | 47 |
| Other women in Acts | 48 |
| Damaris, Drusilla, Bernice | 48 |
| More women | 49 |
| Lois and Eunice | 47 |
| Claudia | 47 |
| CONCLUSION | 50 |
| BIBLIOGRAPHY | 51 |
| ENDNOTES | 52 |

INTRODUCTION

A *Friendly Guide to Women in the New Testament* illuminates the women who accompanied Jesus on his mission, those he met on the way, those who appear in the letters of Paul as co-workers and members of the early communities of Christ followers and those who are encountered in the growth of the Church in Acts. These women were disciples and apostles, mothers, wives, daughters and sisters, witnesses to the resurrection, and co-workers and followers of Paul in proclaiming Christ to the Gentiles. Naturally, Mary has pride of place as the mother and first disciple of Jesus. Among these women there are some who are unnamed yet take their place as significant women of faith and witness to Jesus, such as the woman who anointed Jesus: “wherever the good news is proclaimed, what she has done will be told in remembrance of her” (Mark 15:9; Matt 26:13). To keep this true to the fullness of the New Testament, some more unlikely characters are included: Herodias and her daughter, and Sapphira.

These are all women of the first century CE living in places across the Greco-Roman world under the regime of the Roman Empire in

Palestine, Asia Minor, Greece, and Rome. This is a world and time very distant from our own. To understand these women and their roles, we need to take off our shoes and walk in theirs. We need to enter their world and see with their eyes and



Byzantine icon, copy

their faith. Many are inspirational women, and yet they are also like the women of today, acting authentically to answer their call in their own world.

What we know of the women of the New Testament comes to us from the writings of men, mainly the evangelists and Paul, as well as the writers of the letters outside the

Pauline corpus. The portrayals of women are not always consistent across the writings, giving different perspectives and glimpses of these women in narratives written for specific communities and purposes. Always we remember that the focus of the New Testament is Jesus. Mark's Gospel begins: “The beginning of the good news of Jesus Christ Son of God”. It is the ongoing good news of the initiative of God, who gifts the world with Jesus, God's son, and the outpouring of the Holy Spirit. As we come to know the women we do so in relation to this meta-narrative. If we are disappointed that there is not more about the women, we also rejoice that they are inextricably woven into the fabric of the life and mission of Jesus from his birth to his death, as first witnesses of the resurrection and in the spread of the good news to the ends of the earth.

These are women of a particular time, whom we glimpse through cultural, political and social lenses that do not always give them voice or precedence. Sometimes there is need to imagine and read between the lines. These women continue to inspire women and men today, and they offer their legacy of faith and service to the story of the Church.

Dr Rosemary Canavan
Catholic Theological College
University of Divinity

THIS BOOK IS DEDICATED TO
ALL THE WOMEN
WHO HAVE INSPIRED,
ENCOURAGED AND JOURNEYED
WITH ME.



Cover image and right: Virgin Mary mosaic

Title page: The Mona Lisa of the Galilee from a mosaic in Sepphoris

WOMEN IN THE GOSPELS



MARY

Mary holds the hearts of believers throughout the centuries as mother and first disciple of Jesus. Muslims also hold her dear. Throughout Turkey she is held in great reverence, as is shown by the enormous statue near Mary's House in Ephesus. The tradition that surrounds Mary is very much larger than the person we discover in the New Testament. The Protoevangelium (Infancy Gospel) of James, written no earlier than the second century CE, is subtitled "The Birth of Mary the Holy Mother of God and Very Glorious Mother of Jesus Christ". It is the best known of the later texts containing legends about Mary and her birth, life, death and bodily ascension into heaven. It is this apocryphal text that recounts

Joachim as Mary's father and Anna as her mother. Much of this text echoes Luke's narrative and attributes similar sayings to Mary as are noted of Jesus in the Gospel of Luke.

MEETING MARY IN THE BIRTH NARRATIVES

The Gospels of Luke and Matthew add accounts of the birth and infancy of Jesus primarily to establish who Jesus is from the beginning. These are not historical accounts. Rather, they draw on the Old Testament scriptures artfully and theologically to weave the backdrop for the arrival of the Messiah and the fulfilment of God's promise. We need to remember as we focus on Mary that she too is threaded into this backdrop. Our attention to the symbols and

scriptural references will help us hear and understand these accounts in all the richness that the first audiences enjoyed.

MARY AND THE ANNUNCIATION AND BIRTH OF JESUS ACCORDING TO LUKE

Luke's Gospel, written around 85 CE, relates a divine annunciation to Mary and the birth of Jesus. Mary receives the word of God via the angel Gabriel:

And behold, you will conceive in your womb and bear a son, and you will name him Jesus. He will be great, and will be called the Son of the Most High, and the Lord God will give to him the throne of his ancestor David. (Luke 1:31–32*)

Below: Mary's House, Ephesus, Turkey

Right: Statue of Mary, Ephesus, Turkey



** an asterisk denotes the author's translation*



The entrance of Gabriel signifies a message from God, a divine intervention. His appearance to announce both the birth of John the Baptist to Zechariah and the birth of Jesus to Mary is met with great fear, which is the usual response before an epiphany. What we observe of Mary is her openness to the word and her willing and faithful trust to what we would imagine as an incomprehensible request. Her faithfulness to God is paramount as she humbly says yes to becoming the mother of Jesus.

Mary's pregnancy and the birth of Jesus are paralleled with Elizabeth and the birth of John the Baptist. In a beautiful centrepiece to this section of the narrative we see Elizabeth and

Mary embrace as kinswomen, old and young, both with the promise of God, bearing the herald of the good news and Jesus the Messiah.

Elizabeth greets Mary with the words

that have become the prayer of the faithful through the ages: "Blessed are you among women, and blessed is the fruit of your womb" (Luke 1:42). Mary responds with a canticle of praise, echoed daily in the Prayer of the Church. Luke weaves this and a number of other great songs or canticles of Israel into his narrative. This song that Mary sings as she meets Elizabeth is very similar to that sung by Hannah (1 Sam 2:1-10) when she discovers that she is pregnant. Hanna's song is in praise and thanks to God for looking after the "little people", those who are hungry or weak. Mary's song, which we know as the Magnificat, echoes these values which are the thrust of the mission of Jesus in Luke's Gospel.

DID YOU KNOW?

✚ The Angel Gabriel, named only in Luke's Gospel (Luke 1:19, 26), is also mentioned in the Book of Daniel (9:20). Gabri-el in Hebrew means "the mighty one of God". (El means God.)

DID YOU KNOW?

✚ Today there are two traditional sites for the Shepherd's Field, not far out of Bethlehem. The Catholic site maintained by the Franciscans is remembered with a beautiful chapel designed by Antonio Barluzzi in 1954, which adjoins the ruins of a fourth century church. Not far from these are some shepherd cave chapels. The Greek Orthodox site has excavated a subterranean fourth century church with mosaic floors.

✚ In the first century, Nazareth was a village of about 500 inhabitants unlike the city of around 70,000 that it is today. Excavations next to the Basilica of the Annunciation show remains of the houses of Nazareth. Nearby in the International Centre of Mary there are remains of what is believed to be a first century house, something like the one in which Mary grew up.




Above: Nativity image from Shepherd's Field Chapel, designed by Antonio Barluzzi on the outskirts of Jerusalem

The mention of Jesus in a manger recalls a passage from Isa 1:3: "The ox knows its owner, and the donkey the manger of its master; but Israel has not known me, and my people have not understood me." (Isaiah 1:3*). In the birth narrative, faithful Israel does recognise Jesus through Elizabeth, Simeon and the shepherds. These poor, lowly and barren will also be the focus of the mission of Jesus in Luke.

Sadly, the rulers will later fulfil Isaiah's words.

Below: Mary with Anne and Joachim, Chora Church Museum, Istanbul, Turkey





It is through Luke's telling that we come close to Mary and the way that she walks as mother and disciple. We imagine her as a young Palestinian woman betrothed to be married. The annunciation is depicted in classic art works and icons that lift the story from the text and into our vision and memory. Her response to God, "Behold the servant of the Lord; let it be with me according to your word." (Luke 1:38*), abides as the faithful response to the call of God.

Having stayed with Elizabeth in her confinement, Mary returns to Nazareth, and the time for John to be born arrives with little occasion. As the time for Jesus' birth arrives, the narrative draws us away from the rural environment and sets the scene in the Roman Empire with a decree from the Emperor Augustus. Mary needs to travel with Joseph to Bethlehem, to the city of David, as Joseph is from the "house and family of David" (Luke 2:4). She will bear her child away from home and away from her kinswomen.

And she gave birth to her firstborn son and wrapped him in bands of cloth, and laid him in a manger, because there was no place for them in the inn.
(Luke 2:7)

These few lines do not reveal anything of the experience of the birth for Mary. This miraculous, wonderful moment is recorded without fanfare or emotion. The heavenly choir of angels will appear to the shepherds announcing the good news:

"Do not be afraid; for see—I am bringing you good news of great joy for all the people: to you is born this day in the city of David a Saviour, who is the Messiah, the Lord." (Luke 2:10–11).

The shepherds set off and find Mary and Joseph, with Jesus lying in the manger. Whatever the conversation between shepherds and Joseph and Mary, we only have the narrator's comment: "But Mary treasured all these words and pondered them in her heart" (Luke 2:19).

When the time comes for their purification, Mary travels again with Joseph and Jesus to Jerusalem to present him to the Lord. Mary is faced with great challenges as she is told by Simeon in the Temple that her soul will be pierced with a sword. She hears this along with the acclamation of who Jesus is, and yet we have no word from her. Later, when Jesus stays behind in the Temple and his parents search desperately for him, Mary again is observed to have "treasured all these things in her heart" (Luke 2:51).

Mary's wisdom in treasuring these things also shows her trust in God. She will walk the path of the joy and heartbreak of her son in faithfulness and hope, not always understanding but pondering and treasuring all that comes with the gift of her son, Jesus.

MARY AND THE BIRTH OF THE MESSIAH ACCORDING TO MATTHEW

In contrast, Matthew's account of Jesus' birth emphasises Joseph. God's word comes to Joseph in a dream. Mary has no word in this. She is the wife of Joseph and the means for the birth of the Messiah. Mary travels to Bethlehem with Joseph and bears the child. The larger narrative fills in the details of the star that guides the Magi (wise men), the Magis' encounter with King Herod and the need for Joseph, Mary and Jesus to flee to Egypt. In Matthew, the Magi enter the house, where they find "the

DID YOU KNOW?

✚ Matthew's account has deep echoes in the Old Testament. This enables Matthew to portray Jesus as a prophet like Moses and as the fulfilment of the ancient prophecies.

✚ Jesus is revealed to be like Moses through the patterning of his birth narrative on the story of Moses' birth. Jesus is saved from Herod's decree for all the boys under two to be slaughtered just as Moses is saved from the Pharaoh who orders all the baby boys be killed (Exod 1:22).

✚ The portrayal of Joseph recalls the figure of Joseph, son of Jacob, who was a man of dreams (Gen 40), who protected his family and brought them to Egypt (Gen 46).

✚ When Moses led Israel out from Egypt he met a Magus (wiseman) who spoke of a star rising from Israel, which is symbolic of a future king: "I see him, but not now; I behold him, but not near—a star shall come out of Jacob, and a sceptre shall rise out of Israel;" (Numbers 24:17a).

child with Mary his mother" (Matt 2:11). Here Mary is silent, and there is only imagination to fill in the gaps.

MARY ON THE ROAD WITH JESUS

In the Gospel of John, Mary is only identified as "Mother of Jesus".¹ She is there with Jesus at beginning and end of his ministry. At Cana she initiates the action, advising him at the wedding of the lack of wine. She encourages the servants "Do whatever he tells you" (John 2:5). Jesus protests that his "hour" has not yet come. Yet Mary believes that he will intervene, and he does. The abundance of wine is the first sign that reveals the identity of Jesus and his disciples believe (John 2:11). After this event, Jesus, his mother and the disciples go to Capernaum. We observe that a household of believers is forming around Jesus (John 2:12).

Beyond this, there is little mention of Mary on the road with Jesus. When Jesus is rejected in his hometown, we hear that the locals recognise him as the son of Mary (Matt 13:55; Mark 6:3; John 6:42). In Luke we hear, "And he was told, 'Your mother and your brothers are standing outside, wanting to see you'" (Luke 8:20). Jesus' response seems unkind as he tells those assembled, "My mother and my brothers are those who hear the word of God and do it" (Luke 8:21). On this occasion his words affirm that his mother and brothers are models. Similar accounts in Matthew and Mark are not so inclusive, recounting Jesus indicating to those in front of him that they are his mother and brothers (Matt 12:49; Mark 3:34).

The presence of Mary at Cana and Capernaum and then later outside a place where Jesus was teaching gives an indication that she was in touch with him and following



Above: Crucifixion icon with Mary and John

his mission. She enters John's narrative again at the cross. We are not privy to other family information. The image of Mary treasuring things in her heart (Luke 2:19, 51) gives insight to a mother's love when grownup children set out into the world on their own journey of life and faith that takes them beyond the close family ties.

MARY AT THE CROSS

Mary mother of James and Joseph/Joseph appears among the women at the cross in Matthew and Mark. It is possible that this is a means of including Jesus' mother in the scene and indicating James and Joseph/Joseph as brothers or close relatives

of Jesus (Matt 27:56; Mark 15:40).

In John's Gospel, once again Mary is not named but simply called "the mother of Jesus" as she stands with other women and the "disciple whom he loved". Her role as mother is critical for John's theology. Jesus' words to his mother and this beloved disciple establish a new relationship between them as that between a mother and a son: "Woman, behold your son" (John 19:26*) and "Behold your mother" (John 19:27*). Responding to these words, "the disciple took her as his own" (19:27* — the Greek text does not indicate that the beloved disciple took her into his home, as is the long held tradition). In becoming "son" to the mother of

Jesus, the disciple now has a new relationship with Jesus (brother/sister) and a new relationship with God (son/child). In the resurrection account, Mary Magdalene is commissioned, "Go to my **brothers and sisters** and say to them, 'I am ascending to my father and **your Father**'" (20:17). Although never named in this Gospel, the mother of Jesus has a key theological role enabling the evangelist to depict his theology as promised from the Prologue, "But to all who received him, who believed in his name, he gave power to become children of God" (1:12).

MARY AND THE RESURRECTION AND BEYOND

Luke includes Mary the mother of James among the women who announce the resurrection to the apostles (Luke 24:10). If, as above,

she is Mary the mother of Jesus, then she is also witness to the resurrection.

At the beginning of Acts, believed to be the second volume attributed to Luke, Mary the mother of Jesus is included with all those gathered together and praying in Jerusalem after the ascension and awaiting the Holy Spirit (Acts 1:13–14). When Pentecost comes they are all gathered in the room so presumably Mary is with them. In Eastern icons Mary is depicted as central to the image, with the Holy Spirit above her. She stands out in her blue/purple robe with the apostles around her in plain coloured robes.

When they had entered the city, they went to the room upstairs where they were staying, Peter, and John, and James, and Andrew, Philip and Thomas, Bartholomew and Matthew, James son of Alphaeus, and Simon the Zealot, and Judas son of James.¹⁴ All

these were constantly devoting themselves to prayer, together with certain women, **including Mary the mother of Jesus**, as well as his brothers.

(Acts 1:13–14)

MARY THE MOTHER OF JESUS AND OUR MOTHER

In examining the scriptures we are able to revisit what we know of Mary in the New Testament. We know very little. Mary has few words to say. Her presence is powerful even in silence. She is the one who said yes to God to give birth to Jesus and in doing so gave birth to the Word of God active in the world. The later tradition adds to our understanding of Mary. She is our Mother as we are brothers and sisters of Jesus. She is our sister in discipleship and our model and inspiration in faithful service.

Below: Japanese image of Mary at Basilica of the Annunciation, Nazareth



DID YOU KNOW?

✦ Inside the Basilica of the Annunciation in Nazareth is the chapel of Mary believed to be at the site of the annunciation. Silence is maintained down in this chapel where people spend time in prayer. In the Basilica above mass is celebrated regularly and around the walls and outside in the courtyard are depictions of Mary from around the world, including Australia.