

Sermon – April 1, 2018 – Easter – St Andrew’s and St James

John 20:1-18

20Early on the first day of the week, while it was still dark, Mary Magdalene came to the tomb and saw that the stone had been removed from the tomb. ²So she ran and went to Simon Peter and the other disciple, the one whom Jesus loved, and said to them, “They have taken the Lord out of the tomb, and we do not know where they have laid him.” ³Then Peter and the other disciple set out and went toward the tomb. ⁴The two were running together, but the other disciple outran Peter and reached the tomb first. ⁵He bent down to look in and saw the linen wrappings lying there, but he did not go in. ⁶Then Simon Peter came, following him, and went into the tomb. He saw the linen wrappings lying there, ⁷and the cloth that had been on Jesus’ head, not lying with the linen wrappings but rolled up in a place by itself. ⁸Then the other disciple, who reached the tomb first, also went in, and he saw and believed; ⁹for as yet they did not understand the scripture, that he must rise from the dead. ¹⁰Then the disciples returned to their homes.

¹¹But Mary stood weeping outside the tomb. As she wept, she bent over to look into the tomb; ¹²and she saw two angels in white, sitting where the body of Jesus had been lying, one at the head and the other at the feet. ¹³They said to her, “Woman, why are you weeping?” She said to them, “They have taken away my Lord, and I do not know where they have laid him.” ¹⁴When she had said this, she turned around and saw Jesus standing there, but she did not know that it was Jesus. ¹⁵Jesus said to her, “Woman, why are you weeping? Whom are you looking for?” Supposing him to be the gardener, she said to him, “Sir, if you have carried him away, tell me where you have laid him, and I will take him away.” ¹⁶Jesus said to her, “Mary!” She turned and said to him in Hebrew, “Rabbouni!” (which means Teacher). ¹⁷Jesus said to her, “Do not hold on to me, because I have not yet ascended to the Father. But go to my brothers and say to them, ‘I am ascending to my Father and your Father, to my God and your God.’” ¹⁸Mary Magdalene went and announced to the disciples, “I have seen the Lord”; and she told them that he had said these things to her.

Last Sunday after the service at St James, we decorated eggs the Ukrainian way, the way my grandmother used to do it, using wax, kistkas and dyes. I also recently did Ukrainian eggs with a group of Grade 7 and 8's at the Miramichi Rural School.



I was amazed! people caught on...both older people and much younger ones.

If you look it up, which I did, we find the practice of decorating eggshells is ancient. Decorated ostrich eggs 60,000 years old have been found in Africa. Even then, eggs were used to symbolize death and rebirth.

The Christian custom of dying and decorating Easter eggs, started among the early Christians of Mesopotamia, who stained eggs with red colouring "in memory of the blood of Christ, shed at His crucifixion".^{[7][14]} Christians say Easter eggs symbolize the empty tomb of Jesus, from which Jesus rose.



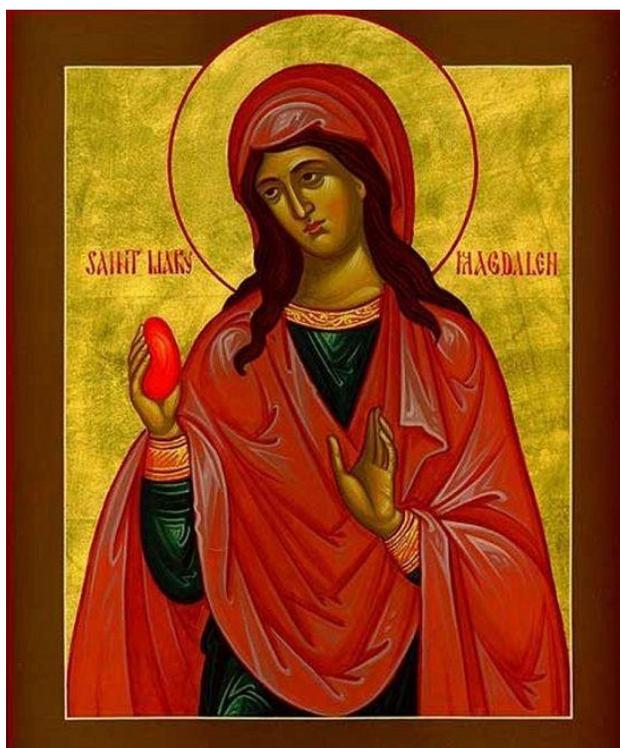
According to tradition, after Jesus' Ascension into heaven, Mary Magdalene—a wealthy woman of some importance, who had encountered the risen Christ — boldly presented herself to the Emperor Tiberius Caesar in Rome to proclaim the resurrection of Jesus Christ, with an egg in hand to illustrate her message.

Holding the egg out to him, she exclaimed for the first time what is now the universal Easter proclamation among Christians, “Christ is risen!”

The emperor, mocking her, said that Jesus had no more risen than the egg in her hand was red. Immediately, the egg turned red as a sign from God to illustrate the truth of her message. The Emperor then heeded her complaints about Pilate condemning an innocent man to death, and had Pilate removed from Jerusalem under imperial displeasure.

While we do not know if these stories are true with absolute certainty, we do know that the tradition of handing out red eggs at Easter is one that originated among Christians in Apostolic times. And Mary Magdalene is depicted in many different icons holding a red egg.





In our Easter Gospel this morning, Mary Magdalene is a key player. She has been devoted to Jesus – helping to support him in his ministry. She followed him to his crucifixion and stood at a distance with the other women and wept. She rose early after the Sabbath day of rest to go to the tomb with extra spices to anoint Jesus’ body. She is really upset that his body is gone, thinking maybe someone has taken his body away. She stands and weeps at the tomb unable to leave like the others.

And it is to Mary that the risen Christ first appears; Mary, saddened, weak, and a woman! He chooses her. When she mistakes him for the gardener, he calls her by name. He knows exactly who she is.



Despite being grief stricken...and desolate, Jesus chooses Mary to carry the message that she has seen the Lord. So Mary is sent. In the Orthodox church she is called 'Apostle to the Apostles' because it was her job to tell the apostles that Jesus was alive.

Out of death, comes new life. New risen life for our Lord and new life for Mary and for the apostles too. They were never the same! There is New life for us as well. We are an Easter people. Just as our Lord knew Mary weak as she was, our Lord knows each of us, weak as we are. He calls each of us by name. It is we who embody new life, hope, second chances and love. Let us (begin to peck at the hard shells that enclose us) zoom out of here with hope, with confidence, saying I have seen our Lord, confident in God's saving work for us.

The practice of decorating eggshells as part of spring rituals is ancient,^[11] with decorated, engraved [ostrich](#) eggs found in Africa which are 60,000 years old.^[12] In the [pre-dynastic period](#) of [Egypt](#) and the early cultures of [Mesopotamia](#) and [Crete](#), eggs were associated with death and rebirth, as well as with kingship, with decorated ostrich eggs, and representations of ostrich eggs in gold and silver, were commonly placed in graves of the ancient Sumerians and Egyptians as early as 5,000 years ago.¹

According to tradition, during a dinner with the emperor [Tiberius](#) Caesar, Mary Magdalene was speaking about Christ's [Resurrection](#). Caesar scoffed at her, saying that a man could rise from the dead no more than the egg in her hand could turn red. Immediately, the egg turned red. Because of this, icons of Mary Magdalene sometimes depict her holding a red egg. Also, this is believed to be an explanation for dyeing eggs red at [Pascha](#).

Why would Mary Magdalene bring an egg to talk about Jesus with the Roman Emperor?

In another tradition, it is said that Mary Magdalene brought a basket of white boiled eggs with her on Easter morning to the tomb of Jesus—perhaps as a meal for herself and the others as they waited for someone to roll the stone away. When she arrived at the site of the Resurrection, finding the stone already rolled away, she also found that the eggs in her basket had turned into bright shades of color.

Perhaps this is why she brought an egg to the Emperor; did she expect that Jesus would perform a similar miracle for her egg as he had done on that first Easter morning?