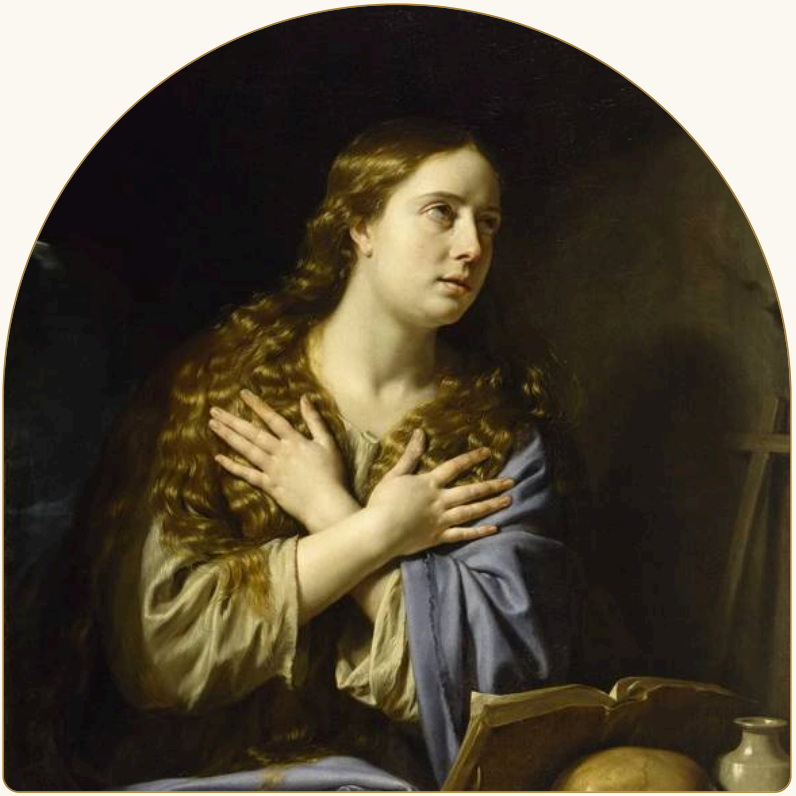


BOOKLET TO PRINT

Saint Mary Magdalene

Life, prayer, novena and pilgrimage

Feast day: July 22

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IN BRIEF

Saint Mary Magdalene

Disciple of Jesus, first witness of his Resurrection, "Apostle to the Apostles".

Feast day	July 22
Born	first century, Magdala, Galilee (from her name)
Died	first century
Canonized	Pre-congregation (immemorial cult); raised to a liturgical feast in 2016
Era	1st century
Patron saint of	penitents, perfumers

In this booklet

Life

Prayer to Saint Mary Magdalene, Witness of the Resurrection

Novena to Saint Mary Magdalene

Basilica of Saint-Maximin and the Cave of La Sainte-Baume

Credits and sources

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LIFE

Saint Mary Magdalene

Saint Mary Magdalene, or Mary of Magdala, was one of the women who followed Jesus in Galilee. She stood at the foot of the cross and, according to the Gospels, was the first to meet the risen Christ on Easter morning and the first to bring the news to the apostles, which has earned her since ancient times the title "Apostle to the Apostles." She is celebrated on July 22, and in 2016 Pope Francis raised her memorial to the rank of a liturgical feast. In France, the Provençal tradition links her to the Sainte-Baume cave and to Saint-Maximin.

Who was Saint Mary Magdalene?

The Gospels say little about her origins. Her name, "the Magdalene," connects her to Magdala, a fishing town on the shore of the Sea of Galilee. Saint Luke lists her among the women who traveled with Jesus and the Twelve and supported them out of their own means. He adds that Jesus had freed her from "seven demons" (Luke 8:2), an expression for a deep affliction, physical or spiritual, about which nothing more can be said. Nowhere does the text say that she was a public sinner.

She reappears at the decisive moment of the Passion. While most of the disciples had fled, she stood near the cross with Mary, the mother of Jesus, and other women (John 19:25). She watched where the body was laid, then returned to the tomb at dawn on the first day of the week. All four evangelists name her among the witnesses of the empty tomb, a point on which their accounts agree remarkably.



Noli me tangere, fresco by Fra Angelico in the convent of San Marco, Florence (c. 1440).

Key dates in the life of Mary Magdalene

- **c. 28-30**: Freed by Jesus, she follows him in Galilee with other women (Luke 8:1-3).
- **c. 30**: She witnesses the crucifixion and burial of Jesus in Jerusalem.
- **Easter morning**: First witness of the risen Lord, she carries the news to the disciples (John 20:11-18).
- **591**: In a homily, Saint Gregory the Great identifies her with the sinful woman of Luke 7 and with Mary of Bethany, a reading that shaped the West.
- **Eleventh century**: The abbey of Vézelay, in Burgundy, becomes a great center of her cult.
- **1279**: Charles of Anjou, Prince of Salerno, has relics identified as hers uncovered at Saint-Maximin.

- **1295**: Construction begins on the basilica of Saint-Maximin, entrusted to the Dominicans.
- **1969**: The reformed Roman calendar distinguishes Mary Magdalene from Mary of Bethany.
- **June 3, 2016**: A decree of the Congregation for Divine Worship makes July 22 a feast.

Easter morning

Saint John's account (John 20:1-18) is at the heart of Mary Magdalene's story. Coming to the tomb while it was still dark, she found the stone rolled away and ran to tell Peter and the other disciple. Back at the tomb alone, she wept. She saw a man she took for the gardener and asked him where the body had been taken. Then Jesus called her by name: "Mary!" She recognized him and answered "Rabbouni," which means "Teacher." Jesus told her not to cling to him, but to go to his brothers. She went and announced: "I have seen the Lord."

This mission is the basis of her title "Apostle to the Apostles," used from the early centuries and taken up in the Middle Ages, notably by Saint Thomas Aquinas. In 2016, by raising her memorial to the rank of a feast, like those of the apostles, the Church wished to highlight her role as the first messenger of the Resurrection.

A figure long confused with others

The Gospels mention several women around Jesus: Mary of Magdala; Mary of Bethany, sister of Martha and Lazarus; and an unnamed sinful woman who anoints Jesus's feet in the house of a Pharisee (Luke 7:36-50). In 591, Pope Saint Gregory the Great merged them into a single person in a homily. The medieval West thus inherited a Magdalene who was a repentant sinner, with

long hair and a jar of ointment, whom painters and preachers would portray for centuries. The Eastern Churches, for their part, always kept these women distinct.

The liturgical reform of 1969 restored this distinction in the Roman calendar: Mary Magdalene is celebrated on July 22, and Mary of Bethany with Martha and Lazarus on July 29. What remains of the Western tradition is a beautiful spiritual insight, that of a love responding to forgiveness received, but as far as Mary of Magdala is concerned, it does not rest on the Gospel text.



The Magdalen with the Two Flames, by Georges de La Tour (c. 1640), an image of silent meditation.

The Provençal tradition

According to a tradition attested in Provence from the Middle Ages, Mary Magdalene left Palestine after the persecutions with Lazarus, Martha, Maximinus and other disciples, and landed on the coast of the Camargue, at Saintes-Maries-de-la-Mer. After preaching the Gospel, she is said to have

withdrawn for many years to a cave in the Sainte-Baume massif, before dying near Maximinus, the first bishop of Aix according to the same tradition. Another tradition, in the East, has her die at Ephesus, near Saint John.

These stories cannot be verified historically. Yet they fed one of the most important pilgrimages of medieval Christendom. From 1279, the discovery of relics at Saint-Maximin under Charles of Anjou moved the center of her cult from Vézelay to Provence. Kings, popes and crowds of pilgrims went to the basilica of Saint-Maximin and to the Sainte-Baume cave, both entrusted to the Dominicans.



The Sainte-Baume cave, where tradition places Mary Magdalene's retreat.

Why is Saint Mary Magdalene the patron saint of penitents and perfumers?

She became the patron of penitents because the Western tradition, following Gregory the Great, saw in her the forgiven sinner who loved much. Even though the Gospel does not say this of Mary of Magdala, her story still speaks to all who have been raised up from a deep wound. Perfumers took her as their patron because of the jar of ointment, linked to the anointing of Jesus and to the spices the women brought to the tomb on Easter morning.

Symbols and how to recognize Saint Mary Magdalene in art

- **A jar of ointment**, her most common attribute.
- **Long, loose hair**, often reddish or golden.
- **A skull, a candle or a book**, in images of the penitent Magdalene meditating.
- **The garden scene** with the risen Christ, known as *Noli me tangere*, "Do not cling to me."
- **A red egg**, in Eastern icons, linked to the proclamation of the Resurrection.

Where to pray to Saint Mary Magdalene

- **Saint-Maximin-la-Sainte-Baume, France**: the Basilica of Saint Mary Magdalene, a masterpiece of Provençal Gothic, and its crypt with the relics.
- **The Sainte-Baume massif**: the cave sanctuary kept by the Dominicans, reached on foot through the forest.
- **Vézelay, France**: the Basilica of Saint Mary Magdalene, a great Romanesque pilgrimage church.

- **Paris**: the church of La Madeleine, a large neoclassical building dedicated to her.
- **Jerusalem**: the Basilica of the Holy Sepulchre, site of the empty tomb.

To pray with her, use the prayer to Saint Mary Magdalene, built on the Easter Sequence, or follow the novena to Saint Mary Magdalene from July 13 to 21, ending on the eve of her feast.

PRAYER

Prayer to Saint Mary Magdalene, Witness of the Resurrection

There is no prayer written by Mary Magdalene herself. For centuries the Church has prayed with her through the Easter liturgy, especially the Sequence *Victimae paschali laudes*, which gives her a voice. Below you will find this ancient text, the words Saint John's Gospel places on her lips, and an original prayer to Saint Mary Magdalene by Saintspedia. Pray it in times of grief, when faith seems to have gone dark, or whenever you need courage to share the good news.

"Tell us, Mary": the Easter Sequence

The Sequence *Victimae paschali laudes* is sung at Mass on Easter Sunday and may be sung throughout the Easter octave. Composed in the eleventh century and attributed to Wipo, chaplain to Emperor Conrad II, it stages a dialogue with Mary Magdalene as she returns from the tomb. English translation from the Latin by Saintspedia; the original text is in the public domain.

> *Tell us, Mary, what did you see on the way?*
>
> *I saw the tomb of the living Christ, and the glory of the Risen One.*
>
> *I saw the angels, his witnesses, the shroud and the linen cloths.*
>
> *Christ my hope is risen! He will go before you into Galilee.*

Source: Sequence *Victimae paschali laudes* (*Dic nobis Maria, quid vidisti in via?*), eleventh century, Roman Missal, Mass of Easter Sunday.



Saint Mary Magdalene at prayer.

Mary Magdalene's words in the Gospel

On Easter morning, Mary was weeping beside the empty tomb. When Jesus called her by name, she recognized him. Then she went to find the disciples. These two sayings can be prayed just as they are:

> *"Rabbouni!" which means "Teacher!"*
>
> *"I have seen the Lord."*

Source: Gospel according to Saint John, chapter 20, verses 16 and 18.

Prayer to Saint Mary Magdalene

Saint Mary Magdalene, whom the Lord set free from evil and who followed him along the roads of Galilee, pray for me.

You who stayed at the foot of the cross when the others had fled, teach me faithfulness in dark hours. You who wept beside the tomb, I entrust to you all who are grieving and all who can see no way out.

You whom Jesus called by name, obtain for me the grace to recognize his voice through my tears. You who ran to announce, "I have seen the Lord," give me the courage to bear witness to my faith simply.

I also entrust to you my intention: (name it in silence). Through your prayer, may I pass from the night of the tomb to the joy of Easter morning. Amen.

This prayer is an original text by Saintspedia, free to use for personal and community prayer.

When to pray this prayer

Saint Mary Magdalene's feast day is July 22. Since 2016 it has had the rank of a feast, with its own preface presenting her as "Apostle to the Apostles." You can also pray with her during the Easter season, rereading chapter 20 of Saint John's Gospel. Her prayer is a good companion after the death of a loved one, in a time of doubt, or when you feel called to speak about your faith to others. For a longer time of prayer, follow the novena to Saint Mary Magdalene, from July 13 to 21.

NOVENA

Novena to Saint Mary Magdalene

This novena to Saint Mary Magdalene is an original composition by Saintspedia that follows her path in the Gospels, from her healing in Galilee to Easter morning. It is not an official liturgical text. To finish it on the eve of her feast, begin on July 13: it ends on July 21, the day before her feast on July 22. You can also pray it during the Easter season, in a time of mourning, or whenever you are searching for the Lord in the dark.

How to pray this novena

Each day, entrust your intention to God, read the meditation and, if possible, the Gospel passage mentioned. Then say the prayer of the day, followed by an Our Father and a Hail Mary. The small act suggested for the day helps you live it with her. If you miss a day, simply pick up where you left off.

Mary Magdalene's story in the Gospels is short, but it covers everything: a healing, a life of following, the cross, the silence of the tomb, tears, and finally the joy of being called by name. Each day of this novena takes one of those steps.

Day 1: Set free by Jesus

Luke reports that Jesus had driven "seven demons" out of Mary (Luke 8:2). Whatever this affliction was, she was freed from it. All her attachment to Christ starts there: from a healing received.

Prayer: Lord, you know what holds me back. Free me from whatever keeps me from living and from loving you.

Today: Name before God an inner chain you would like to be freed from.

Day 2: Following the Teacher

Mary left her former life to follow Jesus from village to village, with the Twelve and other women. Gratitude became a road.

Prayer: Jesus, let me follow you not out of habit, but out of gratitude for what you have done for me.

Today: Write down three graces you have received in your life and give thanks for them.

Day 3: Serving with what we have

The women who traveled with Jesus supported him out of their own resources (Luke 8:3). Quiet service is part of the mission, even when no one sees it.

Prayer: Lord, make me generous with my time and my goods, without seeking to be noticed.

Today: Give something or do someone a service without mentioning it.

Day 4: Staying at the foot of the cross

When most of the disciples had fled, Mary Magdalene was there, near the cross, with the mother of Jesus (John 19:25). She could do nothing except stay. Sometimes presence is the only form of love possible.

Prayer: Lord, keep me from running away from the suffering of others, and teach me simply to stay beside them.

Today: Visit someone who is sick, alone or grieving.

Day 5: The silence of Saturday

After the burial came the Sabbath, a day of waiting with no answer. Mary, like the others, did not yet know. There are times when faith simply means holding on.

Prayer: Lord, in my days of waiting and uncertainty, keep the small flame of hope alive.

Today: Spend a moment of silence before a crucifix.

Day 6: Searching in the dark

"On the first day of the week, early in the morning, while it was still dark," Mary went to the tomb (John 20:1). She looked for the one she loved, even when he seemed lost.

Prayer: Lord, when I can no longer see you, let me keep looking for you, early in the morning.

Today: Get up a little earlier to pray before the day begins.



Praying with Saint Mary Magdalene.

Day 7: Tears at the tomb

Mary wept, and she dared to speak her sorrow: "They have taken away my Lord, and I do not know where they have laid him" (John 20:13). God is not afraid of our tears.

Prayer: Lord, I entrust to you my tears and the tears of those I love. Come to meet us in the heart of our grief.

Today: Pray for someone who has died, naming them.

Day 8: Called by name

Jesus simply said, "Mary!" and she recognized him. The risen Lord does not speak to an anonymous crowd: he calls each person by name.

Prayer: Jesus, call me by my name, and open my eyes so that I may recognize you.

Today: Slowly reread John 20:11-18, putting yourself in Mary's place.

Day 9: Announcing the Resurrection

Mary did not keep the news to herself. She ran to tell the disciples: "I have seen the Lord." She became the first messenger of Easter, the "Apostle to the Apostles."

Prayer: Risen Lord, at the end of this novena I place my intention in your hands. Through the intercession of Saint Mary Magdalene, make me a joyful witness to your victory over death. Amen.

Today: Share with someone a reason for hope.

Closing prayer

Saint Mary Magdalene, faithful disciple and first witness of the Risen One, I entrust to you the intention of these nine days. Pray for those who seek God in the night, for those who weep and for those who proclaim the Gospel. Obtain for us the grace to hear Christ call us by name. Amen.

After the novena

On July 22, if you can, attend Mass for her feast and listen to the Gospel of the garden, read that day. Keep one small act from these nine days, perhaps an early morning prayer or a regular visit to someone who is alone. And when grief or doubt returns, remember that Mary Magdalene found the Lord exactly where she was weeping.

PILGRIMAGE

Basilica of Saint-Maximin and the Cave of La Sainte-Baume

In Provence, two neighboring places carry the memory of Saint Mary Magdalene: the Basilica of Saint-Maximin-la-Sainte-Baume, in the Var, which preserves relics venerated as hers, and the cave of La Sainte-Baume, about twenty kilometers (12 miles) to the south, where tradition places her long retreat. Since the late 13th century, together they have formed one of the great pilgrimages of France.

A Provençal tradition

According to a tradition attested in the Middle Ages, Mary Magdalene, Lazarus, Martha, and Maximin landed in Provence after leaving Palestine. Magdalene is said to have withdrawn to a cave on the mountain of La Sainte-Baume, then to have died near Maximin, regarded as the first bishop of Aix, and to have been buried on the spot where the town bearing his name now stands. These accounts cannot be verified historically, but they have shaped the piety of the whole region.



Basilica of Saint-Maximin and the cave of La Sainte-Baume.

The Basilica of Saint-Maximin

In 1279, Charles of Anjou, Prince of Salerno and future Count of Provence as Charles II, had the crypt of the church of Saint-Maximin excavated and brought to light sarcophagi attributed to the saint and her companions. Beginning in 1295, he had a vast Gothic basilica built and entrusted the shrine to the Dominicans, who founded a royal convent there. The building, left unfinished at the west end, is considered the finest example of Gothic architecture in Provence.

Beneath the choir, the older crypt houses late-antique sarcophagi and the gilded reliquary containing the head venerated as that of Mary Magdalene. The basilica also has a historic 18th-century organ, the work of the organ builder Jean-Esprit Isnard, which came through the Revolution.

The cave of La Sainte-Baume

The Provençal word "baumo" means cave. At the foot of the massif's high limestone cliff, a cavity arranged as a shrine is run by the Dominicans. You climb to it on foot by a path through an ancient forest of beech, linden, and yew trees, protected for centuries because of its sacred character. Inside, altars, statues, and a reliquary recall the saint's presence. Higher up, at the top of the ridge, the chapel of the Saint-Pilon marks the spot where, according to legend, angels lifted her every day for prayer.

Praying in the footsteps of Mary Magdalene

Before you leave, you can reread the life of Saint Mary Magdalene and chapter 20 of the Gospel of John. The climb to the cave lends itself to silent prayer or the rosary; once you arrive, a time of recollection lets you entrust an intention, for example for someone in mourning. The prayer to Saint Mary Magdalene can accompany this moment, as can the novena preparing for the feast on July 22. These suggestions are offered by Saintspedia.

Other places of Mary Magdalene

- **Vézelay** (Yonne): the Romanesque Basilica of Sainte-Marie-Madeleine, a great medieval pilgrimage site and the starting point of a route to Compostela.
- **Saintes-Maries-de-la-Mer** (Bouches-du-Rhône): the fortified church linked, according to tradition, to the arrival of the disciples in Provence.
- **Paris**: the Church of the Madeleine, in the 8th arrondissement.
- **Jerusalem**: the Church of the Holy Sepulchre, the place of Christ's death and resurrection.
- **Magdala** (Israel): the archaeological site of the ancient town, on the shore of the Sea of Galilee.

Practical information

Saint-Maximin-la-Sainte-Baume is between Aix-en-Provence and Brignoles, near the A8 motorway. The cave is reached from the Plan-d'Aups plateau, where the paths begin; bring good shoes and allow about an hour for the climb on foot. Around July 22, celebrations and a procession of the relics are held. Mass times and visiting hours change with the season: check with the shrine or the tourist office before you come.

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