

## Holy Week Devotions

*Written by: Claudia Johnson*

[Come Back to Bethany:](#)

[Read: Matthew 26:6–13 and John 12:1–8](#)

Look at the focal verse: “Then Mary took about a pint of pure nard, an expensive perfume; she poured it on Jesus’ feet and wiped his feet with her hair. And the house was filled with the fragrance of the perfume” (John 12:3 NIV).

**Reflect:** When we throw parties for those we love, we put thought into whom we’ll invite and what we’ll serve. We know how we want our guests to feel, and we often make extravagant plans so that the honoree receives the recognition he or she deserves.

Many women use Pinterest boards that provide places to collect party ideas. They pin pictures to help them plan long before the event. Many plan to post the pictures on social media to be remembered long after the party is over.

In Jesus’ day, a form of social networking was also used surprisingly well. The Bible tells us that many were looking for Jesus and wondering whether or not He’d be at the Jewish Passover in Jerusalem. They had heard through the ancient grapevine that Jesus had raised Lazarus from the dead, and that made them want to see both Jesus and Lazarus.

Though the passage in Matthew talks about Mary anointing the head and the verses in John say that she anointed the feet, imagine how surprised the guests must have been when at the end of the dinner Mary begins using her fragrant oil on Jesus.

Judas questioned Mary’s motivation for the lavish gift, but Jesus responded, “It was intended that she should save this perfume for the day of my burial. You will always have the poor among you, but you will not always have me” (John 12:7b–8 NIV). **Respond:** As we prepare for Easter this year, we invite you to come back to the house in Bethany today. Imagine the celebration scene before you!

Mary and Martha have the fresh memory of mourning the death of their brother. They also remember the shock and joy they felt when Jesus arrived four days later and called Lazarus back to life from the grave. If you were Mary or Martha, what would you want to do for Jesus?

How would you celebrate if you were another guest? On the one hand, Jesus is a hero at this party. He has given life back to Lazarus. On the other hand, though, He's shocking. He has raised Lazarus from the dead and Lazarus is laughing and enjoying the party at the head table with Jesus.

Will you respond like Judas, a little fed up with all of the attention Jesus is getting and wonder why this money wasn't spent on something else? Would you want Jesus to quit working so slowly and go ahead and take over the kingdom and let you bask in the glory as one of His followers?

As you visit this house in Bethany, forget for a moment what others might think of you. Instead, think of the miracle of Jesus bringing Lazarus back to life. Think of the miracle of Easter and Jesus as the risen Savior. Think about your own life. Have you been given eternal life? What are you doing to celebrate the life He has given you?

**Come Back to My Village:**

**Read: Luke 19:28–38**

Look at the focal verses: “Those who were sent ahead went and found it just as he had told them. As they were untying the colt, its owners asked them, ‘Why are you untying the colt?’ They replied, ‘The Lord needs it’ ” (Luke 19:32–34 NIV).

**Reflect:** When we first moved to Asia, I was surprised when my neighbor picked up our garden hose and started using it to wash off some things in her yard within reach of our hose. This initially disturbed me. After all, we were paying for the water, but it was completely natural for her to use it when she needed it, without asking.

Soon, I learned that she would also easily share her possessions whenever I needed them. This is just what neighbors do in Asia. Possessions are rather fluid. When someone needs them, we share, and when we have a need, they share. It's not very different from what we learn in preschool and from what our parents teach us: we learn to love one another.

Jesus' entry into Jerusalem, on a path that leads us to remember the Easter story, has some similarities. Several of His physical needs were met by a variety of “neighbors” who shared their possessions with Jesus.

**Respond:** Will you accept the invitation to go back to my village and look at the colt

as we approach Easter on this Palm Sunday? Imagine you see the disciples untying the colt you own. What would you say?

The owners of the colt probably had no idea that Scripture had already written the colt into the story of Jesus' triumphal entry into Jerusalem. For the owner of this colt, the urgency in the voices of the disciples likely helped him make a quick decision to lend his colt to the Lord, who needed it. Maybe the owner knew Jesus already and was prepared to provide the colt. Although he didn't question the Lord's need, he probably went to see how his colt was used in the unfolding story of Jesus.

Imagine that you are the colt's owner. How might you feel as you see Jesus riding on the colt and people throwing down their cloaks and singing praises to Him? Just imagine how surprised you would be if you had an opportunity to read the prophecy in Scripture, "Rejoice greatly, Daughter Zion! Shout, Daughter Jerusalem! See, your king comes to you, righteous and victorious, lowly and riding on a donkey, on a colt, the foal of a donkey" (Zechariah 9:9 NIV).

As you visit this village and look at this colt, consider how you might feel if this were your colt. We often hold our possessions tightly, but maybe we should think differently about the things we "own." When we determine that our possessions actually belong to God, how will that change the way we share them with others? Can we possibly let God use everything He has entrusted to us for His eternal purposes?

### **Come Back to the Temple Court:**

**Read: Matthew 21:12–13; Mark 11:15–17; and Luke 19:45–48**

Jesus gives the people an interesting perspective about the Temple. "And as he taught them, he said, 'Is it not written: 'My house will be called a house of prayer for all nations'? But you have made it 'a den of robbers' " (Mark 11:17).

**Reflect:** When we travel to other countries, we gain a different view of markets. In some of the busiest and very modern cities of our world, we might be surprised to find street vendors hoping to sell us knock-off versions of brand names, thus keeping us out of the nicer shopping centers.

In areas where police jurisdiction is fairly lenient, we may likely find so many street vendors that we can't get into the shops easily. Quite often we find ourselves walking out into the streets to get around these vendors. These kinds of markets annoy

customers who are trying to get to a particular shop, and shop owners aren't likely to appreciate them either.

In Jesus' day, the Temple court, where the Gentiles were supposed to go for prayer, had become a market place. Sacrificial lambs and other animals were sold at high prices, and Jesus called it "a den of robbers." Luke 11:15–16 tells how Jesus drove out those who were selling and turned over the tables until the Temple was again returned to its original purpose.

**Respond:** As we prepare for Easter this year, we invite you to come back to the Temple court in Jerusalem today. Imagine the scene before you! Imagine you are one of the people who journeyed to Jerusalem to pray in the temple.

The sounds and bad smells of sheep, doves, and other sacrificial animals are everywhere. Even though you didn't want to travel a long distance with your own animals, these are extremely expensive. You may wonder why the vendors can sell at such high prices right there at the Temple where people are supposed to be at their best.

Jesus refused to accept this kind of behavior in a place meant for prayer. He "cleaned out the Temple" so that people of all nations were free to worship and pray.

This tells us a few things about Jesus. Though we know He is the Prince of Peace, He may also disturb the peace of some people (like the vendors). He chose to clean out those things that blocked others who wanted to pray. He loves the nations so much that He gave His life so that each of us could pray freely.

First Corinthians 6:19–20 says, "Do you not know that your bodies are temples of the Holy Spirit, who is in you, whom you have received from God? You are not your own; you were bought at a price. Therefore honor God with your bodies." Are there things that are keeping us from serving the purpose God intended? Are there areas where we need Jesus to do some spring-cleaning?

**Come to My Place:**

**Read: Matthew 26:17–19 and Luke 22:10–12**

He replied, "Go into the city to a certain man and tell him, 'The Teacher says: My appointed time is near. I am going to celebrate the Passover with my disciples at your house' " (Matthew 26:18 NIV).

**Reflect:** Hospitality is known as a great Southern tradition. We enjoy opening our homes to friends and families and take great efforts to prepare our houses to entertain our guests. It is much less common to open our homes to complete strangers.

When we have traveled overseas, we have often utilized websites where people offer their homes (for a fee) for us to stay. It's always exciting to enter the door the first time and be welcomed by our host. They show us around . . . and leave us for our stay. Sometimes, there are fresh baked goods, guides of good supermarkets and restaurants, or little welcome gifts. By the time we have left the homes, we feel that we have come to know our host—even though we have really not spent much time with them. Their hospitality allowed us to experience a special time in our lives in a unique way.

In today's verses, the host that night could have no idea what would happen in that room. Jesus would wash feet, share His deepest thoughts with His closest friends, and eat His last meal with those He had poured His life into for three years.

Hebrews 13:2 (NIV) comes to mind: "Do not forget to show hospitality to strangers, for by so doing some people have shown hospitality to angels without knowing it."

**Respond:** For many of us, hospitality comes naturally. For others, it is a spiritual discipline that needs a little nurturing. What does the practice of hospitality mean for you? It might mean a mad dash to clean the bathroom sink or vacuum the floors or prepare some elegant meal that isn't your norm, resulting in a huge mess in the kitchen that leaves you exhausted and resentful.

What if it just means having a door that swings open, welcoming any one in? (Just push that stack of books to one side and have a glass of water.) The Bible doesn't suggest that the host had to do any preparation himself. He just opened the door.

Does it remind you of another door opening? "Here I am! I stand at the door and knock. If anyone hears my voice and opens the door, I will come in and eat with that person, and they with me" (Revelation 3:20 NIV).

What are doors in your life that can be opened this Easter?

**Come Back to the Garden:**

**Read: Matthew 26:36–46; Mark 14:32–42; Luke 22:39-46**

“Then he returned to the disciples and said to them, ‘Are you still sleeping and resting? Look, the hour has come, and the Son of Man is delivered into the hands of sinners’” (Matthew 26:45 NIV).

**Reflect:** My dear friends were leaving the country, and we were taking them to the airport late one night. It was a difficult time for them, and I knew it. We had served with them, and we loved them dearly. It was one of those times when I needed to go to the airport, and yet, I was exhausted.

As I began asking questions, I found myself drifting off to sleep. This happened not once, but several times. Though I tried to fight it, I could not stay awake. Even in the moment, I knew that it was important, and yet I could not stay focused on her responses. Worn out and sleep deprived, my efforts to support her in her time of need amounted to nothing. I was completely embarrassed and disappointed with myself. How could I fall asleep when my friend needed me?

The disciples must have felt this, too. Jesus had fed them and washed their feet. He tried to explain that He was giving His life for them when He blessed the bread and gave them the cup. When Jesus took them to the garden with Him, He wanted them to be present with Him. He tried to explain His sorrow to them in Matthew 26:38 (NIV): “Then he said to them, ‘My soul is overwhelmed with sorrow to the point of death. Stay here and keep watch with me.’” Yet, they could not keep watch. They fell asleep.

**Respond:** Imagine yourself at the garden of Gethsemane. Do you think you might fall asleep in the garden as you wait with Jesus? Surely, we would be different! When Peter heard that he would deny Jesus three times, Peter was sure that he would not. But he did.

We would likely be much the same. How could we fall asleep in Jesus’ time of need?

Based on my experience, I’m pretty sure that I would have been asleep with the other disciples. So often, we hear Jesus speak to us telling us about the work He has for us. We want to do it with enthusiasm, but we grow weary.

This Easter, let’s go back to the garden and pray. Let’s ask Jesus to give us His vision and His strength to fight the good fight, finish the race, and keep the faith (2 Timothy 4:7).

**[Come to the Fountain:](#)**

**[Read: Matthew 27:11–25](#)**

“When Pilate saw that he was getting nowhere, but that instead an uproar was starting, he took water and washed his hands in front of the crowd. ‘I am innocent of this man’s blood,’ he said. ‘It is your responsibility!’

“All the people answered, ‘His blood is on us and on our children!’” (Matthew 27:24–25 NIV).

**Reflect:** Matthew 27:24–25 gives a beautiful picture of how Jesus’ kingdom is quite different than what we expect. Pilate wanted to wash his hands of the blood of Jesus, while the crowd said that they would take His blood on them. Isn’t that interesting?

Today, we know that having the blood of Jesus on us really is the only way to wash away our sins as Pilate was trying to do. But Pilate did not understand how Jesus’ kingdom would occur. Pilate had been warned by his wife about Jesus. “While Pilate was sitting on the judge’s seat, his wife sent him this message: ‘Don’t have anything to do with that innocent man, for I have suffered a great deal today in a dream because of him’ ” (Matthew 27:19). Pilate’s response was to try freeing another prisoner. When that didn’t work, he washed his hands.

This Passover feast, celebrated since the angel of death passed over the Israelites while they were in Egypt, had been celebrated every year. However, at the time of this Easter week’s Passover celebration, God would provide the Passover lamb. Jesus tried to explain all of the elements of His sacrifice to the disciples by telling them that His body would be the bread and that His blood would be the wine. He even washed their feet to serve them and to show how His sacrifice would call each of them to take up His cross for the sake of the gospel.

**Respond:** In the eighteenth century, William Cowper penned the words, “There is a fountain filled with blood, drawn from Immanuel’s veins, and sinners plunged beneath that flood lose all their guilty stains.”

What a beautiful picture of this terrible day for the disciples and all of those who followed Jesus.

Yet, the miraculous resurrection was soon to come. Imagine that you are at the fountain of blood being spilled at the cross this Easter. How will you respond? Will you be washed clean by the blood of God’s sacrificial lamb?

**Come Carry the Cross:**

**Read: Luke 23:26–27; Mark 15:21; Matthew 27:32**

“As the soldiers led him away, they seized Simon from Cyrene, who was on his way in from the country, and put the cross on him and made him carry it behind Jesus” (Luke 23:26 NIV).

**Reflect:** I went to a Christian university and had opportunities to make friends with a lot of missionary kids who opened my eyes to worlds I knew nothing about. During finals, you would find them playing Monopoly and other board games and going around barefooted in the cafeteria. What you might not expect is all of the strange things they’d done that were quite foreign to us. Many of them spoke at least two languages, had been in movies or commercials, and had a sense of family connection that I found quite interesting.

After we moved overseas, I found myself doing things I’d have never imagined. Some were unusual things like doing a tango on a stage at a Christian saxophone concert, making a wedding cake, and coaching a jazz singer with her pronunciation. Others were more difficult. We were often first on the scene when a family member died, in a hospital room translating a difficult report to a patient, visiting a relative of someone who found himself or herself in trouble with visas, and taking food to hungry refugees who were in hiding.

Good Friday must have been a shock to Simon of Cyrene. He had come in from the country and found himself being forced to carry the cross of Jesus. Can you imagine that?

**Respond:** This Easter, let’s go back to the path leading to Golgotha. Imagine that you have been forced to carry the cross of Jesus. What might you be thinking? How would you feel to be associated with a small part of Jesus’ death that has been recorded in the Bible?

How would this experience draw you closer to Jesus as you carry His cross? Would you have more empathy for Him after this experience?

How would you tell this amazing story to your family when you returned to the countryside?

Luke 9:23 (NIV) says, “Then he said to them all: ‘Whoever wants to be my disciple must deny themselves and take up their cross daily and follow me.’”

Are you willing to take up your cross this Easter? How will you share that story with others?



## Come Back to the Tomb:

Read: Matthew 27:57–60; John 19:38–42; Mark 15:42–47; Luke 23:50–56

“Going to Pilate, he [Joseph of Arimathea] asked for Jesus’ body, and Pilate ordered that it be given to him. Joseph took the body, wrapped it in a clean linen cloth, and placed it in his own new tomb that he had cut out of the rock. He rolled a big stone in front of the entrance to the tomb and went away” (Matthew 27:58–60 NIV).

**Reflect:** There are a few things we don’t really like to talk much about in our families—little things that irritate us with our spouses, like snoring and smacking gum; financial problems that we are ashamed of; or worries about our health. We surely don’t like addressing the subject of preparing for our own deaths. We tiptoe around the subject, even with our aging parents. I have met people in the hospital in their 70s and 80s with terminal illnesses who have never addressed the issue with their children.

It is such a relief to encounter those that have addressed the inevitable issue of their own deaths in a practical way. Both sets of our parents have long ago purchased their burial plots, even having the tombstones prepared (without filling in the departure dates, of course). There are few things more personal than a burial plot. In fact, our bodies may spend a lot more time there than they did walking around!

What would motivate a person to readily give his most personal possession to someone else—in this case a person who suffered the death of a common criminal? Yet, all four gospel accounts share the story of a man who willingly gave for a place for the body of Jesus.

**Respond:** What is the most personal thing you hold? Is it your family? Your job? Your hope for a future? Your boyfriend or spouse?

Christ was certainly known for His directness when addressing our treasures. In His talk on the mountain, early in His ministry, He plainly told His followers, “Where your treasure is, there your heart will be also.” (Matthew 6:21 NIV).

Jesus' trial and death happened quickly. For most, it was quite unexpected. Joseph probably did not have a lot of time to weigh pros and cons of offering his most personal possession to Christ. It was automatic. He was ready to give.

What would our walk with God be like if we were that ready to give?

### Come Meet My Teacher:

### Read: John 20:11–16

“Jesus said to her, ‘Mary.’ “She turned toward him and cried out in Aramaic, ‘Rabboni!’ (which means ‘Teacher’)” (John 20:16 NIV).

**Reflect:** Before I lived overseas, I didn't quite understand the term mother tongue. Having grown up in rural America, I had little occasion to speak with people who did not know English well (my mother tongue). I've heard people say things like, “They are in America now; they need to speak English.” It might have been my belief, too, had God not given me an opportunity to live in another culture.

Upon our arrival in Thailand, my teacher became my dear friend. She would call me when things happened in our country that she knew I wouldn't understand. One day, I heard an explosion. I remember grabbing my child and hiding under the stairwell with him. My husband was out of the country, and I didn't know whether or not to expect more explosions. Within a few minutes, my Acharn (“teacher” in phonetical Thai) called to tell me about the explosion and that I should not be concerned.

I loved my Thai teacher. She worked hard to invest in me, with hope that I would speak clearly using the correct tones. She did not want people to make fun of me because I couldn't speak well. As I grew in knowing more of the language, I was able to converse more in Thai. I worked hard to always be speaking Thai when I was with a Thai person. My teacher would often speak with me in English, but whenever she spoke about something meaningful, she would change to Thai, her mother tongue. I knew that it was necessary to learn Thai well in order to speak to Thai people about spiritual things.

**Respond:** A good teacher can make a world of difference in the ways we see ourselves, and I'm sure that Jesus, Mary Magdalene's teacher, did just that for her.

Many of us have had a teacher or someone who inspired us and who saw things that we didn't see in ourselves. Who believed in you when others did not?

Mary Magdalene is referred to as the Mary from whom Jesus cast seven demons (Mark 16:9). Imagine the love she felt for Jesus, her teacher, and how His crucifixion must have broken her heart.

Notice what happened when Jesus spoke her name on Easter Sunday: “Mary.” She recognized her teacher’s voice and responded in her mother tongue, “Rabboni” (Teacher).

Jesus cares deeply for each of us, too. He created us on purpose and wants us to know His voice, as Mary did, and speak to Him with our heart language. How about this Easter? He is very much alive. He is here to speak intimately with you and to take you on a journey you cannot imagine.

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