

## About the Story

Mary Magdalene (John 20:11-18)

---

### Angels

Angels were understood to be spiritual beings, representing a divine presence, though they themselves were not God. They were mediators or messengers from God. Biblical angels that had names (Gabriel, Michael) were male. Persian mythology, which influenced Israelite (and thereby Christian) thought, included good and evil angels. Being dressed in white was a sign of being a good angel, sent by God.

### They have taken away my Lord

Mary does not specify who she thinks took Jesus' body. Who would have? Scholars suggest three possibilities:

1. The previous story tells how Joseph of Arimathea put Jesus' body in the tomb. Probably this was his family tomb, as there would not have been time to make a new tomb. Members of Joseph's family might have taken Jesus out because he was not a member of their family.
2. Perhaps his followers took him out to rebury him. But if not Peter, then who? This seems unlikely.
3. Grave robbers were a known threat as indicated by this edict issued by Caesar Claudius in the mid-first century: "It is my pleasure that graves and tombs remain undisturbed in perpetuity...For it shall be much more obligatory to honour the buried. Let it be absolutely forbidden for any one to disturb them. In case of contravention I desire that the offender be sentenced to capital punishment on charge of violation of sepulture [burial, grave, tomb]."<sup>1</sup>

### Rabbouni

Rabbouni is the Aramaic for "teacher." Aramaic was widely spoken in first-century Palestine. It is a variation of "rabbi" which is more commonly used in the Gospels. This is the only instance of "rabbouni" in John which may indicate a more personal use by Mary.

### Ascended

"Ascended" means to go up and be where God was understood to be located.

### He said these things to her!

The risen Jesus commissions Mary to tell his disciples that he is risen. She is the first to be given this apostolic commission. It was unprecedented in the history of Israel for a woman to be appointed as a divine messenger.

---

<sup>1</sup> C.K. Barrett, *The New Testament Background: Selected Documents* (New York: Harper & Row, 1961), 15.

