# Reflections on Four Marys (and a Martha)

## *With thanks to the trustees of Mothers’ Union in the diocese of Durham*

## *who developed this resource*

These are four short reflections on women with whom we are probably familiar:

Mary and Martha

Mary the mother of Jesus

Mary Magdalene

Mary Sumner, our founder

The aim of the session is for members to talk, discuss, listen and build up confidence as we meet either in small groups at home or virtually.

It is helpful to have a group leader/facilitator to encourage everyone’s thoughts and to keep the discussion moving to include all four reflections.

If a number of small groups in a branch or a deanery are using this reflection, you could also share the thoughts and ideas between yourselves.

**Mary and Martha**

Martha and Mary were siblings of Lazarus and lived in Bethany, near Jerusalem. We read of them in St. Luke’s Gospel, Chapter 10, verses 38-42.

Mary sat at the Lord’s feet and listened to him, whilst Martha busied herself doing the household chores and other things. It’s a tale of two sisters. One caught up in chores and the other one caught up in listening to the Lord’s teaching.

This can be said of us, both as Christians and as members of Mothers’ Union. Our priority is to serve our Lord and also to serve our families, friends and the wider communities at home and abroad.

Mary didn’t want to waste time doing other things when she had Jesus in her presence. Martha, however, wanted the best welcome for Jesus by her preparations of feeding and household chores.

* Will we choose spending time with our Saviour over our day to day activities and projects?
* Will we sit at Jesus’ feet before we stand to face the world?
* Will we be open to learn from our Lord when distractions of all the things that need to be done scream in our face?

**Mary the mother of Jesus**

Mary was a young girl living in Nazareth and betrothed to a carpenter named Joseph when the angel Gabriel appeared to her. The Bible tells us she was alarmed and asked “How can this be?”

God had chosen Mary and he was with her or surely she could not have accepted her role so wholeheartedly.

Elizabeth, who was awaiting the birth of her own child, recognised Mary’s holiness and her strength when she said “Blessed are you among women” to which Mary replied “My soul glorifies the Lord and my spirit rejoices in God my Saviour.” She bore her child in the humblest way and watched him grow to manhood, following his heavenly Father’s call and performing wonderful works. Mary then watched him being cruelly crucified.

* We are experiencing very difficult times and see the impact of both the Covid-19 virus and the limitations on our daily life that have accompanied this. How can Mary’s strength and endurance in the face of such painful circumstances help and inspire us as we deal with the current situation?

**Mary Magdalene**

Mary Magdalene, the woman who, having been set free from oppressive illness by Christ, became his practical support and faithful follower. Her faithfulness was deeply tested through his death and greatly rewarded at his resurrection.

The fact that she is mentioned in all four gospels means she was very important in the life and ministry of Jesus. She stands out in a time when the testimony of women was not regarded as credible. We are told that she was at the foot of the cross with Jesus' mother when he died, and was the first woman to witness the resurrection. She is said to be the inspiration for the ordination of women in 1983, because although Jesus only appointed men as apostles, she followed him, and after the resurrection, Jesus called her by name, showing that he recognised and valued her.

* What can we learn from Mary Magdalene about being faithful to God in good and hard times?
* What can we learn from Mary Magdalene about sharing the good news of Jesus in the way we lead our lives?

**Mary Sumner, Founder of Mothers’ Union**

Mary was an astute, intelligent woman. She observed unemployment, homelessness, refugees, disease, hunger, domestic/child abuse in society. She formed Mothers’ Union to assist and relieve these atrocities through prayer and social action, offered to everyone and working together with others.

Today, especially during Covid-19 pandemic, we have seen that similar situations have arisen.

* Is the situation worse today than in Mary Sumner’s time?
* What more could Mothers’ Union offer?

Through all these difficulties, our aspiration as Mothers’ Union members is to continue to support, comfort and care for all people, as it has been from the conception of our organisation.

A quote from Mary Sumner’s first address:

*We have great work to do for our husbands, children and our country. We could start a Mothers’ Union, where all classes could unite in faith and prayer, to try and do this work for God. With his help and inspiration we can conquer all difficulties, and raise the Home – Life Of our Nation.*

* What are our thoughts and reflections on what this means to us today?

**A closing prayer**

Lord, give us faith to serve you as we follow in your footsteps,

like Mary and Martha, Mary the Mother of Jesus, Mary Magdalene,

Mary Sumner our founder and all your disciples.

Make us people of faith as we hear your word.

Make us doers of your will with acts of kindness.

Help us each day, Lord, to continue the work of your commission

that we may always act kindly, love mercy and walk humbly with you,

our Saviour and Redeemer.

Amen