

Messiah's Anointing

The names by which the Bible usually refers to God-the-Son - i.e. the Messiah in Hebrew, and the Christ in Greek, both of which mean “the one who is anointed with oil” or “the anointed one,” memorialize this event. We are reminded of Messiah’s anointing every time that we refer to the Lord and Savior of Mankind as the Promised Messiah or Christ.

Anointing is usually accomplished with a drop of oil that is placed on the forehead of the anointed one. Here, however, the woman performing the anointing dumped the oil on Messiah’s head, and it must have covered not only His head, but His face, neck, and shoulders as well. She doused Messiah with the oil.

Immediately after this event, Messiah said to His disciples: “Verily I say unto you, Whosoever this gospel shall be preached throughout the whole world, this also that she hath done shall be spoken of for a memorial of her” (KJV Mark 14:9). Not only was Messiah indicating His approval of the woman’s action and the degree to which it would be recognized in the future, but He was also underlining the importance of her anointing. This anointing was not just about her gesture. It is an essential part of Messiah’s Gospel. He was implying, “Pay attention here!”

This anointing of Messiah is (a) prophesied in Daniel 9:24 and (b) mentioned in all four Gospels (Matthew 26:6-13, Mark 14:3-9, Luke 7:36-50, and John 12:1-8), all of which can be found in the Appendix below), but only three Gospels (Matthew, Mark, and John) place it in Bethany.

The only date which the Scriptures give us for Messiah’s arrival in Bethany on His way to Jerusalem can be found in John 12:1, which states: “*Then Jesus six days before the passover came to Bethany...*,” which is of interest to us because Bethany is the location of the anointings in Matthew, Mark, and John. In the Jewish Calendar, Passover always fall on Nisan 14, so Messiah arrived in Bethany on Nisan 8.

At this point, the four passages need to be examined carefully, because they contain significant details which many people miss, and which do not all agree with one another.

- Matthew’s account indicates that an anointing (a) in the home of Simon the Leper, which was located in Bethany, was performed by (b) “a woman” using (c) ointment that she carried in (d) an alabaster box and applied to (e) Messiah’s head.
- Mark’s account indicates that an anointing (a) in the home of Simon the Leper, which was located in Bethany, was performed by (b) “a woman,” using (c) ointment that she carried in (d) an alabaster box and applied to (e) Messiah’s head.

- Luke's account indicates that an anointing (a) in the home of Simon the Pharisee, which I surmise was located in Jerusalem, was performed by (b) “woman in the city, which is a sinner” (clearly a street-walker or prostitute) using (c) ointment that she carried in (d) an alabaster box and applied to (e) Messiah's feet.
- John's account indicates that an anointing (a) in a home that was located in Bethany and probably belonged to Simon the Leper because Judas Iscariot is identified as “Simon's son” and was performed by (b) a woman called “Mary” in the KJV Bible using (c) ointment that (d) weighed a pound and she applied to (e) Messiah's feet.“

There is some controversy over the actual name of the woman who performed the anointing.. As you can see, Matthew and Mark identify her as “a woman” and John identifies her as “Mary.” Elizabeth Schrader argues that she was actually named “Martha” in the early manuscripts of John's Gospel because there was an attempt in the Roman Church to downplay Martha's role in Messiah's life in His final days.¹ That makes some sense to me, not only for the reasons Schrader gives in her argument, but because John indicates that Lazarus was present and that his sister Martha served the supper and could easily have performed the anointing immediately after the meal. Moreover Lazarus's sister Mary does not appear in the other passages that describe the even in Bethany.

A third alternative is Mary Magdalene. Although she is not identified as such in any of the four passages, the Church has usually attributed Messiah's anointing to Mary Magdalene, who was a Jewish woman from Magdala, which was located on the western shore of the Sea of Galilee. Messiah delivered her from seven demons.¹ She then (a) became one of His disciples, (b) supported him financially, indicating that she was probably wealthy,² (c) traveled with Him extensively,³ (d) witnessed His crucifixion⁴ and burial,⁵ (e) visited the empty tomb early Sunday morning,⁶ (f) saw two angels sitting in the tomb,⁷ (g) encountered the risen Lord,⁸ and finally (h) reported to the disciples that she had seen the risen Lord.⁹ She is my choice as well.

There is also some confusion about another detail – that is where on Messiah's body was the oil applied. Matthew and Mark say that it was applied to Messiah's head, but John says that it was applied to Messiah's feet. I don't know how to reconcile this discrepancy. Perhaps she anointed His head *and* His feet.

¹ Mark 16:9.Luke 8:1-2.

² Luke 8:2-3.

³ I have not found a direct record of her doing so, but it is implied by the many biblical references to her.

⁴ Matthew 27:56. Mark15:41, John 19:25..

⁵ Matthew 27:61, Mark 15:47.

⁶ Matthew 28:1, Mark 16:1,9,10.

⁷ John 20:11-12.

⁸ John 20:14.

⁹ John 20:18.

The event that is described in Luke's Gospel is clearly different from the event in Bethany. The woman who anointed Messiah in Bethany was clearly part of His entourage and would not – at least at that point – have been described as a street-walker or the equivalent. In fact, characterizing (a) her washing of His feet with her own tears, (b) her wiping His feet with her hair, and (c) her pouring oil on his feet as 'anointing' seems inappropriate to me.

Appendix

KJV Matthew 26:6-13 - 6 Now when Jesus was in Bethany, in the house of Simon the leper, 7 There came unto him a woman having an alabaster box of very precious ointment, and poured it on his head, as he sat at meat. 8 But when his disciples saw it, they had indignation, saying, To what purpose is this waste? 9 For this ointment might have been sold for much, and given to the poor. 10 When Jesus understood it, he said unto them, Why trouble ye the woman? for she hath wrought a good work upon me. 11 For ye have the poor always with you; but me ye have not always. 12 For in that she hath poured this ointment on my body, she did it for my burial. 13 Verily I say unto you, Wheresoever this gospel shall be preached in the whole world, there shall also this, that this woman hath done, be told for a memorial of her.

KJV Mark 14:3-9 – 3 And being in Bethany in the house of Simon the leper, as he sat at meat, there came a woman having an alabaster box of ointment of spikenard very precious; and she brake the box, and poured it on his head. 4 And there were some that had indignation within themselves, and said, Why was this waste of the ointment made? 5 For it might have been sold for more than three hundred pence, and have been given to the poor. And they murmured against her. 6 And Jesus said, Let her alone; why trouble ye her? she hath wrought a good work on me. 7 For ye have the poor with you always, and whensoever ye will ye may do them good: but me ye have not always. 8 She hath done what she could: she is come aforehand to anoint my body to the burying. 9 Verily I say unto you, Wheresoever this gospel shall be preached throughout the whole world, this also that she hath done shall be spoken of for a memorial of her.

KJV Luke 7:36-50 – 36 And one of the Pharisees desired him that he would eat with him. And he went into the Pharisee's house, and sat down to meat. 37 And, behold, a woman in the city, which was a sinner, when she knew that Jesus sat at meat in the Pharisee's house, brought an alabaster box of ointment, 38 And stood at his feet behind him weeping, and began to wash his feet with tears, and did wipe them with the hairs of her head, and kissed his feet, and anointed them with the ointment. 39 Now when the Pharisee which had bidden him saw it, he spake within himself, saying, This man, if he were a prophet, would have known who and what manner of woman this is that toucheth him: for she is a sinner. 40 And Jesus answering said unto him, Simon, I have somewhat to say unto thee. And he saith, Master, say on. 41 There was a certain creditor which had two debtors: the one owed five hundred pence, and the other fifty. 42 And when they had nothing to pay, he frankly forgave them both. Tell me therefore, which of them will love him most? 43 Simon answered and said, I suppose that he, to whom he forgave most. And he said unto him, Thou hast rightly judged. 44 And he turned to the woman, and said unto Simon, Seest thou this woman? I entered into thine house, thou gavest me no water for my feet: but she hath washed my feet with tears, and wiped them with the hairs of her head. 45 Thou gavest me no kiss: but this woman since the time I came in hath not ceased to kiss my feet. 46 My head with oil thou didst not anoint: but this woman hath anointed my feet with ointment. 47 Wherefore I say unto thee, Her sins, which are many, are forgiven; for she loved much: but to whom little is forgiven, the same loveth little. 48 And he said unto her, Thy sins are forgiven. 49 And they that sat at meat with him began to say within

themselves, Who is this that forgiveth sins also? 50 And he said to the woman, Thy faith hath saved thee; go in peace.

KJV John 12:1-8 - *1 Then Jesus six days before the passover came to Bethany, where Lazarus was which had been dead, whom he raised from the dead. 2 There they made him a supper; and Martha served: but Lazarus was one of them that sat at the table with him. 3 Then took Mary a pound of ointment of spikenard, very costly, and anointed the feet of Jesus, and wiped his feet with her hair: and the house was filled with the odour of the ointment. 4 Then saith one of his disciples, Judas Iscariot, Simon's son, which should betray him, 5 Why was not this ointment sold for three hundred pence, and given to the poor? 6 This he said, not that he cared for the poor; but because he was a thief, and had the bag, and bare what was put therein. 7 Then said Jesus, Let her alone: against the day of my burying hath she kept this. 8 For the poor always ye have with you; but me ye have not always.*

¹ <https://www.baylor.edu/content/services/document.php/199647.pdf> and <https://today.duke.edu/2019/06/mary-or-martha-duke-scholars-research-finds-mary-magdalene-downplayed-new-testament-scribes>