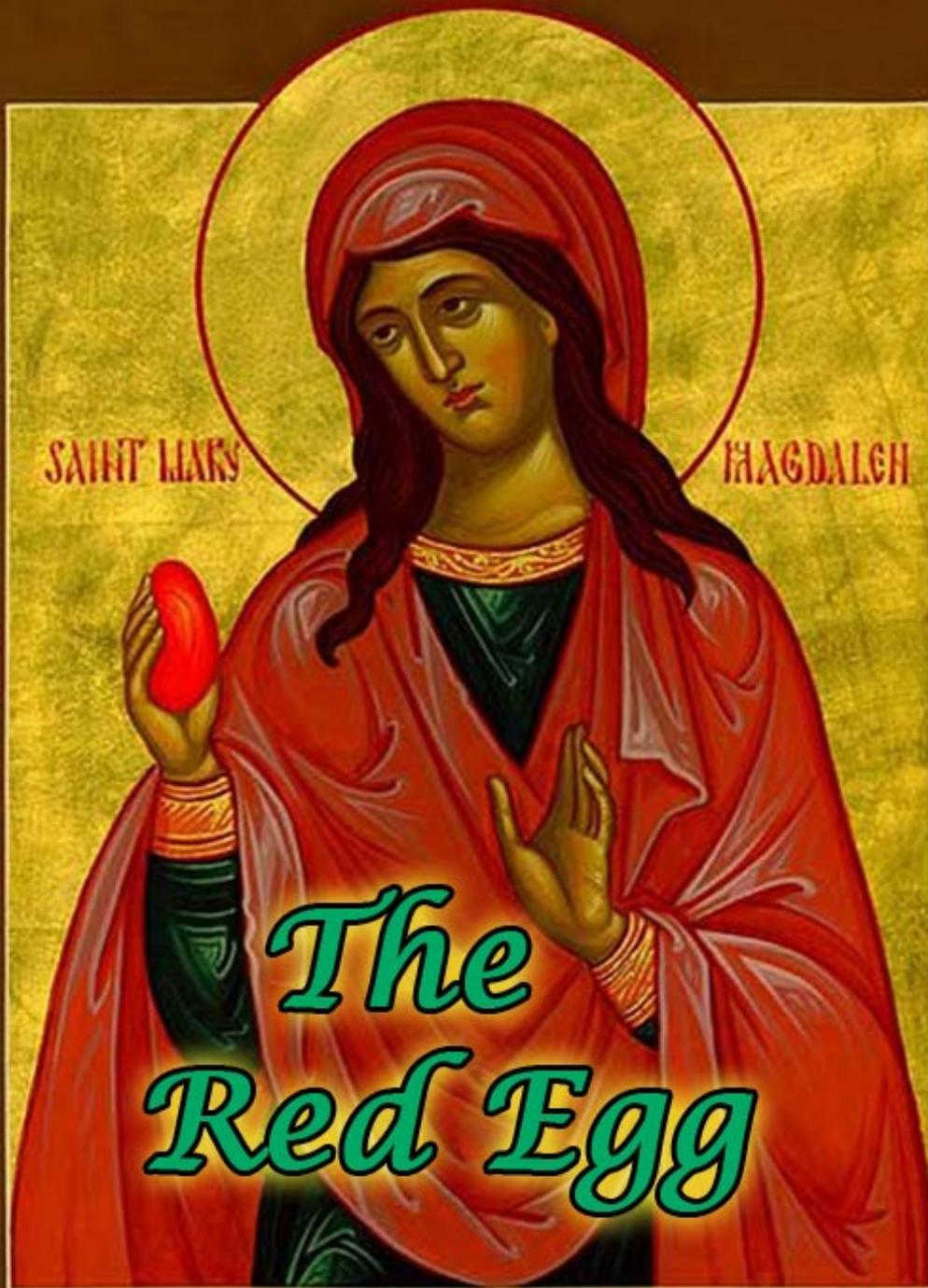


MAGDALENE CHRISTIANITY



HELEN MARTINEAU

THE RED EGG

The sign of the egg turning red

One of the attributes associated with Mary Magdalene is a red egg, which she holds in many of her images, especially in the icons of the Eastern Orthodox church. Attempts to explain this gave rise to some fanciful legends.

One such story: After the ascension of Jesus into heaven, the Magdalene – a wealthy woman of some importance – boldly presented herself to Emperor Tiberius Caesar in Rome to proclaim the resurrection of Jesus Christ. She carries an egg to illustrate her message. Holding the egg out to him, she exclaimed for the first time what is now the universal Easter proclamation among Christians, ‘Christ is risen from the tomb!’

The emperor, mocking her, said that Jesus had no more risen than the egg in her hand was red. Immediately, the egg turned red as a sign from God of the Holy Blood and illustrating the truth of her message. Tiberius then heeded her complaints about the Procurator Pontius Pilate condemning an innocent man to death, and had Pilate removed from Jerusalem under imperial displeasure (which did happen because of Pilate’s general brutality).

A prayer on an ancient Greek parchment in the monastery library of Saint Athanasius near Thessalonica includes the words:

The holy equal of the Apostles Mary Magdalene first showed believers the example of this joyful offering.



The joyful offering refers to the painted paschal eggs Orthodox worshippers give to one another on Easter Sunday, which is in part derived from the story of her meeting with the Emperor Tiberius.

As on earth so it is in heaven

That legend has a deeper level. The egg is a universal symbol of potentiality, gestation and birth, of human beings, all creatures and of the earth's rebirth at springtime, a singular event and a continuity. In such a process the power of the feminine spirit is always present. Even in non-religious contemporary cultures, something of this remains when we call our planet Mother Earth or Gaia after the primordial Greek goddess. More than the physical planet, 'she' is a powerful presence enfolding all life in her mighty arms.

Mary Magdalene presents the gift of the goddess to Caesar. In biblical symbolism she holds the world-egg that is incubated by the goddess of creation. In the Bible, the Genesis creation seems truncated, although the Hebrew language was pictorial enabling an expansion of meaning with echoes of other creation epics.

Mary lived at a time when the idea of the deity as a ruling patriarch had gained prominence (its grip would go on to be almost immovable). Yet from time immemorial humans have pictured divine beings as heavenly counterparts of humanity – male and female; as on earth, so it is in heaven – even among the Hebrews in Caanan.

In Solomon's Temple at Jerusalem, the votive statue of Asherah Queen of Heaven and her ecstatic rites had a place for over two hundred years before king Josiah's religious reforms in the seventh century BCE. According to 2 Kings and 2 Chronicles, the reforms included banishing all 'foreign' deities – the Baals and the Asherahs – from the Temple and desecrating their sanctuaries across the land.

Babylonian armies destroyed Jerusalem and the Temple in the sixth century BCE, exiling its leaders and scholars to Babylon. After around seventy years the exiles were permitted to return. That was when the scribe Ezra began to consolidate the religion that would become Judaism. He respected ancient knowledge, however, and despite the religion being patriarchal, feminine powers remained thinly disguised throughout the Hebrew Bible.

Hebrew goddesses – for example Eve, *Havvah*, 'the Mother of All Living', who had her origins in the Egyptian sky goddess Nut; and Sarah, who had her beginnings as a 'laughing goddess' like Aphrodite – were turned into biblical women of legend.

And here is the goddess Wisdom known as *Hokhmah* in the Book of Proverbs, active alongside the creator,

‘...before the beginning of the earth’ (8:23). And, ‘When he marked out the foundations of the earth, then I was with him like a master builder, and I was daily his delight.’ (v. 29-30)

Echoes of the archetypal goddess lingered in Greek translations of the Hebrew. In the first century CE, Jewish philosopher Philo of Alexandria was aligning the Torah with Greek philosophy. As in Proverbs, he described *Sophia* as the inseparable counterpart of *Logos*.

And here she is ordering and vitalizing creation in the Book of the Wisdom of Solomon (7:27; 8:1), written in the second century, also in Alexandria, Egypt.

And while remaining in herself, she renews all things ...
She reaches mightily from one end of the earth to the other
And orders all things well ...

In rabbinic literature the feminine spirit could still be found. She is called *Shekhinah* and is the manifestation, the *ruach* or breath of God in the living world as this passage from the Talmud makes clear:

If two sit together and the words between them are of the Torah, then the Shekhinah is in their midst. (Mishnah Avot 3.2)

Living language abstracted and neutralized

Wisdom as a goddess was lost in Latin and later English Bible translations, the languages of the Western church – and wisdom became a value. These are abstract languages that dilute or erase the evocative pictures of the Hebrew.

The story of creation has been drastically simplified and glossed over by translations. In the first chapter of Genesis the Hebrew word *elohim* is translated as God, although it is a plural noun and not specifically gendered. *Elohim* is sometimes used for a goddess, as in 1 Kings 11:5 ‘Ashtoreth the elohim’.

In English, verse 1 of Genesis starts with ‘In the beginning’ (*bereshith*), a general, non-specific term. When those Hebrews of old heard the creation story read to them, every word and every letter evoked a picture. *Bereshith* evoked a seed-head, and by association the archetypal world-egg. And it was from within this world-egg, fertilised by the masculine divine aspect, that the heavens and the earth were to be born. Then verse 2 states that ‘the spirit (*ruach*) of God (*elohim*) was moving over (*m’rachephet*) the face of the waters’ – *m’rachephet* can be translated as ‘brooded like a bird’, which captures something of the original imagery.

M'rachephet brought forth an imaginative picture of a female bird on a nest, warming her eggs, brooding – a word originally associated with incubation (we still hear of a hen being 'broody' and a 'brood mare') – although this was never a literal bird; it was the blood red spiritual power of heat. The profound story of creation includes a feminine aspect of deity radiating this power, warming the archetypal world-egg, and hatching creation.

The feminine noun *shekhinah*, from a root word meaning, 'dwell' or 'settle' was also used for nesting birds. This focused an alert reader towards the brooding spirit as a key aspect of creation.

Wisdom, the Word and the incarnation



Medieval and modern images of the Holy Spirit as a dove are placed within a sphere – an echo (possibly unconscious) of the divine feminine brooding over the world-egg

Wisdom-Sophia is present as she must be when Jesus is baptized in the River Jordan. A holy spirit hovered over him like a dove, the bird sacred to several goddesses. This feminine image of the spirit directly references the goddess of primal creation. It begins a story that is not about churches or doctrines but rather a spiritual reality.

Why did Jesus die during the feast of the Passover that was also a fertility festival? The church called his death and resurrection Easter, aligning it with the fertility ritual of the goddess Oestra (from which we get 'oestrus') and the springtime cycle of rebirth from the earth womb.

Azra and Seren Bertrand make the connection:

If we understand Christ to mean 'Living Light' and the tomb to mean a Womb – we can see the life-affirming proclamation of the rebirth of the Living Light in the eternal cycles of the Great Womb. The power of life and fertility has risen again!

—*Womb Awakening: Initiatory Wisdom from the Creatrix of All Life*

In other words, Easter is a recurring event in the earth and the spiritual worlds. Yet what took place at Golgotha was also unique.

If you could have viewed earth from the Moon or Mars on that day in the first century, you would have seen a change in our planet and its atmosphere, when on the cross at Golgotha Jesus 'gave up his spirit' and his blood filled with the Christ spirit flowed down into the earth. All the spiritual realms were involved in this extraordinary event. And flowing into all was the divine Word, the Living Light, the power of love.

The Spirit of cosmic Wisdom was there too, inseparable from the Word. Her rebirth within the 'eternal cycles of the Great Womb' did occur as a singular event when she was reunited with her counterpart, the Wisdom of the earth, Natura, Gaia.

'Christ is risen from the tomb,' says Mary Magdalene as she holds up the egg to proclaim a new creation. Rebirth has happened. The soul of the world embraces her divine sister. And it does indeed continue. Love and Wisdom are present now in the invisible etheric embracing the earth like a magical cloak. Christ is the spirit of the earth.

Towards our spiritual Self

Humanity has been offered a powerful privilege. Despite our reluctance, the divine I AM, the spirit of Christ awaits its birth as our true Self, the I AM personalised in us. Most of humanity hasn't grasped it yet. And the fact that humans have an independent 'I' consciousness means that we must choose – to live according to our spiritual self; or we can continue to live according to the unresolved lower self. That has been our habit for so long we feel it is normal – 'it's just human nature,' we say as we desire, envy, fear, resent and judge. Yet this normal means we work against the evolutionary and revolutionary force of the Christ spirit. The damage we still do to the earth and one another is because we trail way behind the spiritual vanguard.

As St Paul wrote in Romans 8: 19, 'For the creation waits with eager longing for the revealing of the children of God.' We are potentially 'the children of God' and it's up to each one of us to make our own repairs to the broken link in the mighty spiritual chain between heaven and earth.

Then, 'the creation itself will be set free from its bondage to decay and obtain the glorious liberty of the children of God.' (v 21)

Such a beautiful and deep mystery lives in Mary Magdalene's egg. She experienced the Christ Mystery first-hand, and she will be the ideal person to lead us into its depths – a woman reminding us that the Mystery cannot be understood without the divine, and human, feminine.

Now it is time to see what the world has made of Mary the high initiate. For she lived on in memory and in legend. Her legends have been viewed and interpreted through the eyes of different centuries and ages. They continue to be renewed and it remains important to look at the legends she evoked because even now she walks among us. I believe Mary Magdalene's experiences are especially relevant today. Whether we are male or female we can follow her pioneering trail as we undergo a seismic shift towards a new age.