

# MAGDALENE CHRISTIANITY



## *The Many Faces of Wisdom*

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## THE MANY FACES OF WISDOM

### If you have wisdom

Let those who are wise become wiser still (Proverbs 9:9)

Wisdom cannot be learned. Wisdom is not in books. It is an acquisition given to you by the Holy Ones. It is acquired through much pain and many tears in previous incarnations as well as the present one. If you have wisdom, become wiser still and use that wisdom; don't use your feelings [emotions]. They can often be the *daimon* within you that works through your astral.

Wisdom is not a momentary thing; wisdom is acquired through the ages. It stands on a firm foundation and it cannot be moved. Wisdom sees everything with the same eye, it doesn't fall from high to low, it doesn't judge from left to right; wisdom just sees reality as it is. Then it can act and judge accordingly. Let those who are wise become wiser still.

—Mario Schoenmaker, from his discourses on the *Book of Hebrews*

One goddess was acknowledged by the studious men who embraced philosophical understanding of the ancient mysteries. This was Wisdom. Yet the wisdom goddess would be called by many names and was everywhere active before the philosophers claimed her because the feminine divine is everywhere. She is the wisdom of nature and of heaven.

The Wisdom goddess was already established in Egypt before the age of the pyramids. She was known as Ma'at and her wisdom permeated creation. She was pictured on a pedestal, signifying that she was the foundation of balance, order, righteousness, integrity and justice in the cosmos and on earth.

Ma'at weighed the hearts of the deceased against a feather to ascertain the worth of their deeds while they lived – for an Egyptian's place in the afterlife depended on their alignment with goddess's attributes known as 'ma'at'. Striving to achieve ma'at through good deeds was the primary obligation of every person in all areas of life from the personal to economics and the arts. Even legal justice was based on ma'at and aimed to maintain the goddess's balance and harmony by weighing correctness of deeds rather than looking for guilt or blame.

Ma'at embodies the ideal qualities of wisdom. And because at our stage of the evolution of consciousness we are revisiting the ancient Egypto-Mesopotamian era (see portal 1) it is important right now to rediscover and renew those qualities.

In Egypt Wisdom is also Isis, Hathor and Nut. And she is Cybele in Anatolia, Saraswati in India, Frigg in the Norse lands and Brigid in Ireland. In Greece she is Mother Gaia, Demeter and Athena the wise guardian of the city-state named after her, and she is her Roman counterparts Ceres and Minerva.



*Athena with her companion and symbol, the owl; Louvre Museum. Paris*

She was known as *Hokhmah* by Jews. In the Book of Proverbs, the young man is taught that 'her ways are the ways of pleasantness and all her paths are peace. She is the tree of life to those who take hold of her.' (Proverbs 3:17-18) The student is advised to listen well to her:

Does not wisdom call; does not understanding raise her voice? On the heights beside the way, in the paths she takes her stand; beside the gates in front of the town, at the entrance of the portal she cries aloud ...

'Hear for I will speak noble things, and from my lips will come what is right; for my mouth will utter truth ...' (from Proverbs 8)

In the Greek language Wisdom is *Sophia*. For Philo of Alexandria *Sophia* and *Logos* the Word existed in harmonious balance. *Sophia* played an important role in both pagan and Christian Gnosticism which was inherited by the Cathars and the Medieval troubadours. She was reborn as the goddess *Natura* in the French Cathedral schools. Hildegard of Bingen knew her as *Sapientia*. *Shekinah* was the name given to her by Jewish Kabbalists.

## Muses

The Muses, personifications of Wisdom, were also originally primordial goddesses. Sometimes there are three, intimately connected with sound: one born from the movement of water, another who makes sound by striking the air, and a third who is embodied only in the human voice.

In classical Greece the nine goddesses (3 x 3) of the arts and sciences were known as daughters of Zeus and the Titan goddess *Mnemosyne*, whose name means 'memory'.

Here they are:

***Calliope***, muse of epic poetry and eloquence; ***Polyhymnia***, muse of sacred poetry; ***Erato***, muse of lyric & love poetry; ***Euterpe***, muse of song and music; ***Melpomene***, muse of tragedy; ***Thalia***, muse of comedy; ***Terpsichore***, muse of dance; ***Clio***, muse of history; ***Urania***, muse of astronomy;

The Muses are the guardians of the sacred Hippocrene Spring of inspiration and imagination. They may have lost their individual personalities, but they are widely accepted as abstractions and as such have been sources of inspiration for all creative activities, up until and including the present day. To 'drink from the Hippocrene Spring' is still to imbibe the spiritual source of creativity.

## Sophia and the Virgin Mary

*Sophia*-Wisdom is represented in Christianity by the Virgin Mary. In story she is the young pregnant woman riding on a donkey to Bethlehem to give birth in a stable because there was no room in the inn. Beautiful songs have been created around this image. *Silent Night* and the medieval *Coventry Carol* come immediately into my thoughts. And stories have elaborated on the biblical tale. There's *The Small One* the poignant fable of a boy and his beloved donkey that carried Mary, enabling boy and beast to witness the wondrous events around the birth of Jesus. As told (not crooned) by Bing Crosby it is still popular on YouTube. The holy mother with her child is such a potent figure, resonating through time even when Christmas has been so commercialised. Hearts still soften during

televised ‘Carols by Candlelight’ when the camera sweeps gently over mothers and their sleeping babes.

Mother Mary was a physical woman and that was necessary for Jesus to be born. Yet there’s more. She was imbued with the holy spirit Sophia, the divine Mother principle, while overshadowing her was the power of the Most High, so that the Son principle, the cosmic I, or Christ, would come forth in her son.

The wise ones knew that this world changing event required a pure-hearted woman carefully prepared lifetime after lifetime. Young Mary was among the special girls who had been chosen as potential mothers. Archangel Gabriel announced to Mary that she was the ‘favoured one’ to bear the holy child. The story goes that she was confused, not yet being formally wed. But...

the angel said to her, ‘The Holy Spirit will come upon you, and the power of the Most High will overshadow you.’ (Luke 1:33)



*‘The Annunciation’ by Andrea del Verrocchio and his apprentice Leonardo da Vinci*

Spirit has no care for worldly rules. And there was no judgement from the first Christians about whether or not she was a virgin. The higher reality was what mattered to them and Wisdom was alive in their hearts.

It became important to the church, however, that Mary didn’t have sex with her husband and was a virgin, perpetually – for sex was associated with original and ongoing sin. Her virginity was assumed, and translations of the Gospels have followed this meaning. Its origin comes from the prophecy in Isaiah 7:14, ‘Behold, a virgin shall conceive, and bear a son,

and shall call his name Immanuel.’ The Hebrew word used is *almah*, and this signifies a girl of childbearing age, not necessarily a virgin.

The doctrine of the assumption of Mary emerged in the early Christian centuries, based on her soul’s unsullied purity (unlike the rest of us). This says that she was taken up, body and soul to heaven to dwell with the divine Trinity. The doctrine was only made official in the catholic church in 1950. What people should believe was important for church cohesion.

Meanwhile Mother Mary had long been merged with the wise goddesses, especially Egyptian Isis. Like her she gained titles: *Theotokis* (God Bearer); Mother of Divine Grace; Gate of heaven; Morning Star; *Stella Maris* (Star of the Sea); Mystical Rose; Ark of the Covenant; Queen of Heaven; Fount of Wisdom.

Isis and Mary, divine mothers, sources of Wisdom and Queens of Heaven. Here is Isis, as mother wearing the headdress of Hathor, holding Horus her divine son on her knee; and in Chartres Cathedral, the Black Madonna and her son Jesus is in a similar iconic front view pose, which is called ‘the Throne of Wisdom’.



## Wisdom the Initiatory guide

Wisdom is like twin sisters, one the queen of the spiritual worlds, and the other the wisdom guiding nature. And because Christ became the spirit of the earth (see *The Red Egg* in Portal 3) divine Wisdom is united with her sister and is also a soul quality in human beings. We can discover Wisdom because she lives in us as a potential. We desperately need her.

In the pre-Christian ancient mysteries, except for the rarest exception, initiation took place within the cult or the religion. There was a path laid out and the steps along the way were followed rigorously. Entrance into the deeper levels would be under the guidance of a hierophant.

The mysteries as they were once practised have passed on. Initiation has changed. Along with the rise of individualism, we must personally and individually undertake the initiatory journey. And it takes place in the world, through experiences and challenges. This is our opportunity to remember Ma'at, and her namesakes, whose wisdom is still available.

Often setting out is triggered by a dramatic wake-up through a life-changing event. Sometimes a feeling of 'divine dissatisfaction' will grow until you know you must act on the longing in your soul. There may even be a moment when you seem to slip out of the ordinary world of time and space to glimpse the fullness of what you can be, and you are drawn to seek this wholeness.

In whatever way you experience the call to action, the path must be entered through a conscious decision to participate in a personal journey of transformation. We discover how to go forward, finding guidelines beyond our familiar world. It's a harder way than of old and a lonely one involving fully delving into the forces of the soul, including the darkness that inevitably lives in us which must be faced and transformed.

But Wisdom is there. She has been encountered over the centuries by countless inner travellers, a beautiful female guide, who also belongs to the higher self. I was fortunate to experience her when I was the protagonist in a psychodrama workshop run by a wise and wonderful woman called Zerka Moreno. The session involved bringing to life archetypal elements of my inner being and giving these roles to other participants.

I thought they were all out, a motley collection of naughty and nice. Then Zerka said to me, 'Is there someone else? Look behind you.' I turned. No one had taken on this role yet sitting on a rock above a stream was a woman, ageless, serene and wearing a long blue gown. It was an imaginal picture (rather than imaginary) and she had a potent reality. Loving feeling flowed from her to me and I gratefully returned her love. This beautiful

woman, who was Wisdom and my finest potential, gave me enormous confidence to go forward at a difficult time in my life.

### **The Wisdom of Mary Magdalene**

And so we come to Mary the Magdalene. Wisdom for us is a worthwhile value, often vaguely described. In Mary Magdalene's time, relationship with the divine feminine had not been completely lost. Wisdom still had beingness, and Mary would have experienced this intuitively as she listened to readings from say, the book of Proverbs, which is all about the getting of wisdom, who for the writer was still a goddess.

The legend that the Magdalene accompanied Mother Mary to Ephesus has a ring of truth because on a mystical level the two women are intertwined as closely as heaven and earth. Christopher Bamford writes:

These two ought to be seen as two faces of a single being. Both are figures of Sophia. Mary is the deep bow, Magdalene, the deep turn.  
— *An Endless Trace: The Passionate Pursuit of Wisdom in the West*, chapter 1.

Mother Mary represents the pure cosmic wisdom in the soul, bowing in acceptance of her divine mission. Mary Magdalene represents the wisdom that comes through the soul's transforming trials in the sense-based world. Hers is the soul that has turned full circle to rediscover its source. If we can know this Mary, she is revealed as a living example for us of the personal initiatory path. This path is not a straight progression; it is an inward and outward moving spiral, in its continuation taking us both deeper and gradually forward.

In the Magdalene, beloved disciple of Jesus and ideal representative of transformation through the Christ come together. She shines as the creative and courageous visionary and a model for all women who still today must walk the maze through a male dominated world. Yet although born from a woman's experience, as woman is mother to us all, what the Magdalene understood is relevant to all seekers. A woman of vision who truly understands, she personifies the living expression of the wisdom that transforms both females and males into fully realised, undivided humanity.

Mary Magdalene represents an all-encompassing spirituality. We cannot restore wholeness until the wisdom she portrays takes up 'her' place in external society and the inner life of the soul.