

MAGDALENE CHRISTIANITY



*Towards
the
New Isis*

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TOWARDS A NEW ISIS

Who was Isis?

Mary Magdalene is sometimes seen as the embodiment of the goddess Isis, an idea which resonates because Mary did express the wisdom, healing and nurturing qualities of Isis.

She was not Isis, yet it is pertinent for us to spend time with that goddess when our era mirrors ancient Egypt in the evolution of consciousness. So let's look at the stories that gave rise to her cultic rites and ceremonies. Isis is her more familiar Greek name. Her Egyptian name was Aset, meaning 'throne' and a throne is the ancient goddess's sign. She became symbolic mother of the pharaoh, who was said to embody her son Horus, and in this role, she wore the throne headdress as seen in hieroglyph vignettes on the Old Kingdom's pyramids and on Middle Kingdom coffins.

In the Sun cult of Heliopolis, Isis and her brother Osiris were twins, children of Geb and Nut and they ruled the land together as husband and wife. She had magical healing powers and in return for healing Ra of snake bite she learnt his secret name, giving her great power, which she passed on to Horus.

Stories that evolved about these divine figures gave the Egyptians a picture of a spiritual reality. The most well-known among their numerous myths tells of the killing of Osiris by his dark brother Set, who first hid his body in a chest and threw it in the River Nile and then cut his body into fourteen parts and scattered them widely. Grieving inconsolably, with the help of her sister Nephthys, Isis found her husband's body parts and reunited them. Through her magic powers she was able to become pregnant by him, giving birth to their child Horus, the falcon-headed god.

The deepest esoteric meaning behind this great myth concerns the primal age when the wholly spiritual human archetype was for the first time enclosed in a physical body. This restrictive container, Set's burial chest, revealed to the Egyptians how humanity in taking on a physical form came to experience the earth and its outcome death. Yet Isis through her divine wisdom was able to receive the Sun spirit of her beloved Osiris and imbue her son Horus with this heavenly light.

In the profound ancient Egyptian mysteries, existence was understood to include a spiritual process of dying into another realm. Osiris the Solar Being became god of dying and rebirth. When he passed through death

and his body was found in different places in the earth, the forces of the Spiritual Sun became part of the earth, bringing life to all growing things. The Egyptian initiates probed the mysteries of divine expression in the physical world as an ongoing process of regeneration.

The pharaoh was seen to represent and embody all the people. And this nexus, with Isis anointing and mourning her husband Osiris, was at the heart of Egyptian society organised in relation to the spiritual world.

In the mortuary cults, Osiris in his heavenly realms guarded the afterlife and was the god of the dead. Isis protected the deceased pharaoh on the dangerous journey through the underworld and along the celestial river into the light of the heavens where he became the human Osiris. The new pharaoh became the human Horus the son of Isis and Osiris empowered to rule as a channel of higher powers.

The Egyptians felt the need for the protective love of Isis. Through her qualities as wisdom goddess, star being, protector, maker of magic, healer, lover and mother, she could be found within the other goddesses. This is typified when she wears the wings of Ma'at, the wisdom goddess who brings order and justice to the cosmos.



Tomb painting – Isis wearing her throne headdress and the wings of Ma'at

Three aspects, three depictions exemplify the breadth of her powers. One portrays her with the infant Horus at her breast, offering human beings the

vitality of the earth. Another shows her with the cow horns and solar disc of the mother goddess Hathor. Here she offers the *ankh*, the symbol of spiritual life to the pharaoh as both Osiris and Horus.



Isis (wearing the cow horns of Hathor) offering Osiris the ankh, the key of life – from her temple at Philae

And then she bears the lion's head of Sekhmet, the goddess who depicts life's awesome hidden primal forces. Isis would become one of Egypt's most important deities.

Mighty one, foremost of the goddesses
Ruler in heaven, Queen on earth
All the gods are under her command.

—From an inscription on her Temple at Philae.

Egyptian mysteries evolve

In Egypt in later dynastic times, the reflection of the sun on the moon provided pictures of the cosmic rhythm behind the myth of Osiris-Isis-Horus. Osiris in the coffin was the dark moon, the god lost in cosmic space. The fourteen dismembered pieces of the god's body were revealed in fourteen phases of the moon from the crescent to full when Osiris was made whole again by Isis. The full moon was Osiris active in the earth.

And the fourteen phases from full to new moon pictured the activity of sorrowing Isis who again and again seeks and finds him.

Initiates experienced the wonderful relationship between heaven and earth in this way. With the goddess they mourned the loss of her beloved – and when Isis found him, they could acknowledge the continuing and transformative activity of those spiritual forces at work in their own lives, through their delight in nature, and in the annual flooding of the Nile bringing fertility to the desert. Life and death, the rhythm was cyclical, which is the essence of Mother Nature's activity.

Eventually the journey of Osiris came to be associated with every soul in the afterlife. And through Isis, just as she found her lover, so participants in her mysteries hoped to find Osiris in that realm between death and rebirth. They prayed to beloved Isis to be their guide through the underworld and onward to the god dwelling with the spiritual sun. Isis cults would become one of the Greco-Roman mysteries and would continue well into the Christian era.

The Greeks carried the eternal truths portrayed in myth of Isis and Osiris forward in their myth of Demeter and Persephone and in the secret rites of the Eleusinian mysteries. Although often seen as representing agricultural cycles, these mysteries were also concerned with the journey in the world beyond death and into rebirth. And there is another layer to the myth of Isis-Osiris-Horus. The Egyptian initiates understood that it pointed to the future.

The new Osiris

The evolution of Western civilization has been profoundly influenced by Egyptian myths via the Greeks. Still, we need to look at the ancient Egyptian mysteries with fresh eyes. Our lives have changed, our consciousness has changed, and it is impossible to recreate their depth. Yet our age mirrors the Egyptian in a specific way.

The Egyptian starting point was spirit, and they were coming to know its expression in the physical world through deepening the experience of their senses. Their lively paintings of plants and animals celebrated this new knowledge, while rituals such as mummification were about maintaining links with the physical body in the spiritual afterlife. Today humanity is at the very beginning of a return path from the material world we know so well because it is born from sense experience towards a true comprehension of spiritual activity in everything physical.

Gradually over many thousands of years there has been increasing comprehension of the physical world and a diminishing consciousness of the spiritual. By the first century, as the Roman empire grew, the ancient

mysteries were still being practised, and Isis worship had spread throughout the Mediterranean and beyond. Evidence of her veneration has been found in lands as far apart as England and Iraq. But as the rites became part of popular culture, they began to lose their potency as the picturing of a continuing journey between life and death.

In crowded public enactments of the Isis legend, especially in Egyptian-Roman centres like Alexandria, there would be participants in their hundreds loudly weeping and wailing on behalf of Isis for her brother-spouse. They hoped to be 'born again' as Horus the son of Isis without waiting for the transition marked by death. The seeds were being sown for a materialistic 'this life only' consciousness. The ancient sanctuaries would in subsequent centuries be abandoned or destroyed while the ability to perceive activity in the spiritual realms retreated.

Yet at this low point the way was to be opened through the Osiris archetype, the Christ, entering the stage of world history and incarnating in the being of the chosen individual. This is the meaning behind the message of Archangel Gabriel to Mother Mary that she would give birth to 'the son of the Most High'. In and through the holy blood of Jesus at his death, Christ-Osiris would enter the soul aura of Mother Earth. This means that this impulse of love from the divine realms is available for us. It is in our souls, waiting.

How we lost Isis

But what of Isis? She speaks: I am what was, what is, and what will be. No mortal has yet raised my veil. If we can find Isis, if we can lift her mourning veil, her divine wisdom will reunite with this mighty spirit in our soul and the spiritual self will come alive in our thoughts and deeds.

Isis, goddess of wisdom, and of many names, was present with the angels when they spoke to the shepherds guarding their sheep in the fields near Bethlehem. These shepherds still had the visionary imagination to experience her, as did John the Baptist at the baptism of Jesus. But slowly she disappeared. Thus, some gnostic philosophers described her as fallen Sophia longing to return to her heavenly home. She re-emerged as an object of veneration in the Middle Ages as Mother Mary with the infant Jesus on her knees. But through our materialism we have lost her. We have cast her out. It's as if we see only the darkened moon.

This age as a mirror of the Egyptian offers clues to how we have cast her out. Isis, Queen of Heaven is veiled to us because of a reductionist materialism that never existed when the Egyptians were deepening their understanding of the physical-spiritual relationship in their investigations of the natural world and the secrets of birth, death and rebirth.

For them art was about expressing the harmony of heaven and earth through inspired creative activity. We are losing this connection. In ancient Egypt science was dedicated to discovering the divine in all that lives. That has been lost.

Humanity may be on the evolutionary 'return journey' to spirit, but it is the mightiest of challenges. Through the overweening obsession today with the physical, and with mechanical, mercenary explanations of existence, the moral meaning of the ordered cosmos retreats. Unlike in ancient Egypt, materialistic science battles with anything meta-physical. We lose the truth about spirit and matter, that they are interwoven. We mass produce or 'grow' animals as food products; we pollute and destroy and use up physical resources for material and economic ends only – and play havoc with what lives through matter.

The ancient Egyptians knew too that Isis would uphold them through the coming in at birth from the realm of spirit, and the leaving through death and the journey in the underworld where souls must come to terms with the fruits of the life they had lived. Today we desperately need her wisdom.

The Egyptians assumed a continuing inner spiritual life, with preservation of the body after death facilitating the onward journey. We cling to life between birth and death as if this is all there is. We have no feeling for the real nature of the afterlife which is a realm of renewal. A child dealing with terminal illness often remains in touch with the spiritual realms and is more accepting of their transition. But older humans fear death and no longer welcome Isis as the soul's loving guide through the portal. We try to counter death's inevitable approach by preserving ourselves like mummies in still living flesh.

We remember nothing of our lives before birth. We barely recall anything more than brief glimpses of our early years and we rely on websites like Ancestry.com to look beyond this incarnation. Yet memory was once powerful enough to recall who we were in our life in spirit, to commune with the ancestors there and understand the world through those experiences. In so many ways we are impoverished.

The starry sky, the tiny world and us

Our age also mirrors another major culture of the third post-Atlantean era, the powerful Babylonian empire. Initiates in ancient Babylon studied the movement of heavenly bodies in relation to the spiritual forces operative there. Physically they could see far more than we can because of our global light pollution. As well they could 'see' and comprehend the non-physical cosmos and its relation to earthly life with higher senses.

What we have lost is that spiritual understanding. Johannes Kepler was a key figure in the seventeenth century scientific revolution. He is best known for his three laws of planetary motion. Yet this mathematician-astronomer was also an astrologer and behind his study of celestial bodies lay another aim. He strove throughout his life to rediscover the divine harmonic ratios known by the ancients. But science today reduces the universe to calculations and hypotheses about how it began, what it is made of, what kind of physical existence might be possible in other galaxies and how we can colonize other worlds, with no thought of the teeming spirits there.

Modern science and technology have given us the ability to perceive and know many physical wonders not available to the human eye. Advanced telescopes can give us awesome images of deep space. Super microscopes can probe hidden life. Digital tools then enhance the colours to help scientists understand what they see. Interestingly those rich hues also bring us closer to spiritual perception because their source is the astral realm of spirit.

Pictured below are two from the extremes – one a microscopic image of sperm surrounding a human egg; the other the Butterfly Galaxy taken from the Hubble space telescope. And on the cover is an image of a Daphnia Magna – a tiny plankton crustacean.



Finding Isis today - reclaiming what the ancients knew and more

Ancient Egyptians and Babylonians would love our means of discovery. But they would be conscious that all physical forms are the outer shell of the spirit in them.

To raise the veil of Isis today is to discover the new Isis legend and give it life through the power of our imagination. Just as the ancient Egyptians created the first legend of dead and reborn Osiris through imagination,

which is the picturing of spiritual reality, and just as the Babylonians understood the spiritual heavens through imaginative pictures, this is how today we can approach the reality of hidden Isis.

The key lies in our own *experience*. The wisdom of Isis lives in our soul not 'out there' beyond us. Invisible until we dramatically clarify our vision, to find her we must awaken her wisdom and bring more to our feelings of wonder. We need to take hold of all the scientific knowledge we have gained about the physical world of nature, about our bodies and the cosmos, all the amazing *things* discovered through our advanced equipment and materialistic rationality and become conscious of what in this knowledge stimulates us imaginatively and inspires us to penetrate beyond hard matter. That is, we need to expand our thinking and sensing. We need to reclaim what the ancients knew and revitalize it. Then we bring Isis back to life through our own experience of her.

And because we are mirrors of the cosmos, Isis will come to life as our soul wisdom to be reunited with her beloved Osiris, who is not lost and dead. For Osiris is I AM, our inner Christ.

Mary Magdalene was the visionary and loved one who comprehended Osiris active in Christ Jesus, not with the rational mind, but through thinking imbued with love. This is known as the heart position of the mind.

And when she came to Jesus Christ and anointed his feet for burial the reality of Isis overshadowed her. In adoration and sorrow for her teacher as the one dying for the salvation of many, she becomes a living image of weeping Isis to whom Osiris will be restored.

We too can follow the path of Mary, if we learn to imagine Isis of many names, and know her with our higher senses, our spiritual senses. And if through that rich level of cognition, we unveil her, we will know her universal wisdom in a new expression. Surely then we will honour the spirit within the living world as we rediscover how to work with Isis and her beloved Osiris creatively. Then the Christ in us, her Osiris, will open his arms to meet her. This will lead to the way of the *hieros gamos*, in the soul.