

**The Start of His Final Week:  
Anointing by Mary  
Looking into the Face of Jesus  
The Life of Christ, 2: Pages 235-241  
Manuscript: Lesson Plan 87**

**Introduction**

The texts for today's lesson are John 11:55—12:1 and Matthew 26:6—13; Mark 14:3—9; John 12:2—11. We will start in John 11; so please turn in your Bibles to John 11.

What kind of gift would you give Jesus? If Jesus were coming to your house, what would you give Him? How do you answer this question? How do you define where you spend your eternity, but in our story for this lesson, a woman was remembered for eternity because of the gift she offered.

This is a major transition time in the life of Christ. Let us set up this transition because we are now in the final week of Christ's life. This is significant because it seems that everything in the past three years of Christ's ministry has led to this section—the final days of His ministry.

We have followed Jesus' steps that last three years chronologically all the way up to the final eight days, and we have only covered approximately 65% of the Gospel Accounts. It seems that everything that we have been learning about was to prepare us for this moment. We need to be reminded of the context. In the last lesson, Jesus was in/around Jericho. He has traveled to Bethany. He will spend the rest of His life on earth in and around Jerusalem.

**Arrival in Bethany (John 11:55—12:1)**

Let us begin by looking at His arrival in Bethany in John 11:55—12:1 (read). Large crowds were coming to Jerusalem (John 11:55b). Ceremonial cleansings were required before spiritual occasions (Exodus 19:10, 11; 2 Chronicles 30:13—20). The purifying rituals could take days, especially when such large crowds were there. Those who could come early to make sure they were cleansed and could participate in the Passover. So the large crowds mentioned were pilgrims who came a week early to performing this ceremonial cleansings. The crowds, though, also had some thoughts and questions (John 11:56, 57). John gives us clear picture of environment around Jerusalem since Jesus left after raising Lazarus from the dead just weeks earlier. The crowd was even wondering if Jesus would come. The chief priest and Pharisees made it clear that they were looking for Jesus to arrest Him.

Notice the chronology of events (John 12:1). We are "six days before the Passover" (John 12:1). The Passover meal was eaten the fourteenth day of the first month of the Jewish sacred calendar. During this year, the date apparently fell on Friday, that is, the day before the Sabbath (John 19:31).

**Mary Anoints Jesus at Bethany**

We want to look at two of the three accounts. Let us begin by reading John 12:2—11 (read). Now turn in your Bibles to Mark 14:3—9 (read).

It seems John gives us the chronological account. Notice that the accounts in Matthew and Mark are given later in the book, right before the betrayal of Judas; there is probably a reason for that. Matthew and Mark go from His trip to Jericho to the triumphal entry, and John gives us context when these events happened (see John 12:12; "the next day"). This account is also not to be confused with the time a "sinful woman" anointed Jesus' feet in Luke 7:36-50.

"They" prepared a dinner for Jesus (John 12:2). We are not certain who "they" are. Mark tells us that they were at Simon the leper's home. Notice that Martha was still doing the serving even though it was not at her home (John 12:2). Simon could have been the father of Mary, Martha, and Lazarus. "They" could have been the village people (more than just Martha's family). Either way, it was to honor Jesus and Lazarus (John 12:2, 9).

At some point during the meal, Mary's anointing of Jesus takes place. Mary took a jar of nard and "broke the vessel" (Mark 14:3) and began to anoint the Lord (John 12:3). It is said that when they would anoint those who were dead with ointment and would leave the bottle to show that no expense had been spared. Mary did not just pop the top and let a few drops to fall; there was no holding back in her expression of love and appreciation.

Nard was an expensive rose-red ointment imported from far-off India that came from a rare plant; it was commonly used to prepare bodies for burial. Also worthy of note is that the nard was in a vial of Alabaster—costly white marble imported from the west of Egypt. Mark says that Mary anointed His head (Mark 14:3) while John says she anointed His feet (John 12:3a). He was anointed from "head to toe." She wiped His feet with her hair, and the whole house filled with the fragrance (John 12:3b).

Mary's actions were, likely, intended to honor Jesus. However not everyone saw it as such and Mary was criticized (John 12:4-6). John specifically calls out Judas, and Mark says that there were others who seemed to also criticize. The estimated value of the nard was 300 denarii. A denarius was a day's wage for a common worker. We are talking about a year's pay for a common man; this ointment was worth thousands of dollars.

Why did Judas stir up this criticism? John 12:6 says that it was because he was a thief. This may be why Matthew and Mark waited to tell this story. They may have waited to help explain Judas' treachery.

Jesus' response, however, deflects the criticism (John 12:7, 8). Jesus discussed the great deed and explained that she had prepared His body for burial (Mark 14:8). Mary probably did not understand the symbolism. But Jesus knew that, in just a few days, He would be crucified and buried.

Mary's act of love will be remembered whenever the gospel is preached. Remember what Jesus said in Mark 14:9, ". . . wherever the gospel is preached in the whole world, what this woman has done will also be spoken of in memory of her." David Roper, in the Truth for Today Commentary, wrote, "The fragrance of the broken alabaster box not only filled a house in Bethany, but it has also filled the world."

Word spread that Jesus and Lazarus were at the feast and the crowds come (John 12:9-11). Notice the leaders wanted to kill Lazarus too (John 12:10). Why? His only "crime" was walking around when he should have been lying in a tomb! They wanted to because many of the Jews were believing in Jesus due to the great

miracle of raising Lazarus (John 12:11). The crowds wanted to see the evidence of this great miracle for themselves.  
The crowds also might have wanted to see what would happen next. They were surprised Jesus was there. They all knew the leaders wanted Him dead.

### **Conclusion**

This lesson's main purpose was to help us understand where we are in the life of Christ. But we can still learn from this lesson. Mary sacrificed a valuable position for Jesus. Mary did not hold back when trying to show her love and gratitude. Mary took advantage of an opportunity to glorify Christ.  
Hopefully each of us realize that we will be called upon to make a sacrifice to show our love and gratitude for Christ and to bring Him glory. May we, like Mary, be ready and willing when the time comes.

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