



## Extravagant devotion

***"Mary took about a pint of pure nard, an expensive perfume; she poured it on Jesus' feet and wiped his feet with her hair. And the house was filled with the fragrance of the perfume."***

**(John 12:3)**

Everyone knew what Jesus had done in Bethany — raising Lazarus from the dead — and that the Sanhedrin had decided to kill him. If anyone knew where Jesus was, they had to report it, and they'd arrest him. But John says Jesus made a conscious decision to go the Bethany at just that time, because the Passover had almost arrived. And there he didn't keep a low profile. A dinner was given in Jesus' honour.

In that time, people reclined at a table on couches, with their heads toward to the table and their feet stretching out behind them. Jesus would've been lying that way when Mary took about a pint of pure nard, poured it on Jesus' feet, and wiped his feet with her hair. John also makes special mention that the smell of the perfume filled the house. Why does he mention that? Half a liter is a lot of perfume, and this would have been fairly concentrated, so when she poured it out, the aroma filled the house. It would've been almost overwhelming.

John wants us to have a sense of what Mary was saying by what she did. That perfume cost a year's wages for a labourer. Mark says that that bottle of perfume was worth more than 300 denarii, almost a year's wages for a labourer: \$20,000.00 in our time. She broke the bottle, and poured out every drop of the perfume on Jesus.

And then she did something no decent woman would ever do in that culture: she let her hair down in public. That was considered an act of intimacy, a thing done in private. It's what the sinful woman had done in Luke 7. Jesus said her sins, which were many, were forgiven, for she loved much. And now Mary was doing the same thing. She was overwhelmed and overflowing with love for him.

Can we imagine how she felt? Can we even begin to understand her inexpressible joy and happiness? We haven't had Jesus in our homes, and we haven't had a brother raised from the dead by Jesus. But we know that he laid down his life for us. We don't all have to do what Mary did. In fact, we can't. But we should reflect on this deep love, this act of devotion, and see the beauty of it. And ask the Holy Spirit to make us love Jesus the way Mary did. This is extreme worship, extreme love. She was so overcome with joy in Jesus that she made a spectacle of herself, emptied herself to express her love.

And when John says, *"The house was filled with the fragrance of the perfume,"* he's saying that the overpowering aroma was an expression of the extravagance of this act of love. That's how Paul spoke about the gifts he received from the church in Philippi:

*"They are a fragrant offering, an acceptable sacrifice, pleasing to God."*

**(Philippians 4:18)**

That's the spirit that should bring us to church, that should make us sing, and pray, and give. That's where a life of worship comes from: from this kind of love and joy and thankfulness for the goodness of God in Jesus Christ.

Think how quiet that room must have become! And into this silence there came a harsh, critical voice. Judas Iscariot objected. Why wasn't this perfume sold, and the money given to the

poor? Judas had no idea of what could possibly have made Mary do such a thing. In fact, when Matthew and Mark tell this story, they tell us that when Jesus rebuked Judas for what he said, he made up his mind to betray Jesus. In his account Matthew says that the disciples were indignant about the waste. The other disciples agreed with Judas — they didn't understand Mary's extravagant act of thankfulness either.

Again, this story isn't in the gospels to tell us we should find expensive ways to worship. But Jesus does demand an act of devotion that's even more extravagant: *"Offer me your life. Offer your bodies as living sacrifices."* This story gives us a picture of the kind of devotion and thankfulness that we ought to feel and show toward Jesus. In that respect, this was an absolutely reasonable and appropriate thing for Mary to do, and for us to do. And if we knew Jesus, and looked at Jesus the way she did, we would understand perfectly what made her do it.

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