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Mary of Magdala ...dancing in the Spirit

based on Acts 2:1-18

by Ralph Milton

from [Is This Your Idea of a Good Time, God?](#)

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The church looks at the events of Pentecost as the birthday of the church. It was certainly quite a party, even though the short description in the book of acts obviously doesn't tell the whole story.

There's no mention of Mary of Magdala but I can't imagine her not being there. She was certainly a major player in the life of the early church.

Here's my imagination of what might have happened,

"Close the window, will you John." There was more than a hint of irritation in Peter's voice. "All that singing out there is getting on my nerves."

"Peter," Mary said gently. "It is, after all, the feast of Pentecost. This is a happy festival. And they don't share our sorrow, Peter." Mary knew the sorrow as well as anyone. She had left her home in Magdala to follow Jesus to Jerusalem. She had watched Jesus wretch out his life on the cross.

"Right! But I don't have to listen to it," Peter snapped. "Any new business?"

Nothing but gloomy silence from the group of men and women gathered there. They had gone through the unpleasant business of choosing a successor to Judas, the man who had betrayed Jesus. Now they had their full quota of 12 men, to match the twelve sons of Israel. Everything was neat and in order. And lifeless.

"So what do we do now?" John wanted to know. "Should we put up a monument or something. People are already starting to forget that Jesus even existed."

"Yeah," Philip agreed, but there was no enthusiasm in his voice. "Maybe we could collect some money and then put up a monument. A statue of Jesus. Or something."

The gloom hung like a damp cloud over the disciples – the women and men who were gathered together – the rag-tag group of people who had known Jesus, who had loved him, who had heard his voice, had felt and seen the hope for a new way of living together in love. And then had watched him die.

Some had seen a resurrected Jesus, but the others didn't really believe their story. Now they were together, a kind of memorial society for Jesus of Nazareth. Somehow it seemed important to stay together, but nobody really knew why.

"It's stifling in here," said Mary. Peter gave her an annoyed look as she got up to open the window. A cool breeze came in, along with the sounds of singing from nearby homes celebrating Pentecost. The breeze cooled Mary's face. That helped a little.

Mary began to sing. She sang an old song she had known since her childhood, a song she had often sung with Mary the mother of Jesus.

*My soul magnifies the Lord,
and my spirit rejoices in God, my Savior...*

She sang quietly at first, humming some of the parts, then louder, and it seemed that as she sang, the breeze from the window became stronger, blowing back her head dress, teasing her hair, lifting her spirit. She sang in a full-bodied contralto, a voice she hadn't used since that terrible day she watched her dearest friend cough and wretch and bleed and die.

*God has helped the servant Israel,
God remembers all the promises,
That were made to Abraham and to Sarah,
And to all their descendants, for ever,
And ever, and ever...*

"Sarah's not in the song. You're changing the words," grumped Peter. Mary grinned at him. "She is now!" she laughed. She hadn't felt herself smile for so long, and it felt so good. She sang the song, with her own new words, all over again, louder than before, and some of the other women joined in. And the next thing they knew, they were dancing.

They were dancing out the pent-up anger and grief and frustration and confusion. They were dancing out the hope, the tiny, fragile hope they still had in spite of all that had happened.

They danced and they sang, and the men at first disapproved, then began to smile, then some of them joined in the singing and the dancing. Even Peter couldn't sustain his grump. Even big, flat-footed Peter danced an awkward, joyful kind of dance and sang loudly off-key.

And the wind picked up and blew hard through the room. They opened other windows, they sang louder and danced their hearts out. Something was happening. Something electric. Something crackling with energy. Something had taken hold of their spirits and was moving them, motivating them.

Faces appeared at the windows. The door was opened. Curious neighbors looked in. Neighbors and their guests who had gathered from everywhere for the feast of Pentecost. They saw the dancing and the singing, and ecstatic, laughter-filled attempts to explain to the neighbors what was happening, when nobody really knew what was happening. There were tears and there was laughter and the dancing got faster and the singing got louder until everyone collapsed into an exhausted, happy heap.

"They're drunk!" sneered one of the neighbors at the door.

"Ooo, no! Not drunk. Not drunk at all," laughed Peter, who in the end had danced as hard and sung as loud as anyone. "At least, not drunk on wine. Sit down folks, and I'll tell you what's going on."

"Do you remember the prophet Joel," he asked. The neighbors nodded. Of course. "Joel prophesied that the Spirit of God would be poured out on all people. 'Your sons and your daughters shall prophesy,' Joel said. And that's what you saw.

"Jesus of Nazareth. Do you remember him? He was killed. He was crucified. But he promised he would send the Spirit again in a new way. Well, this is it, folks. This is IT!"

And Peter began to dance again; to dance and to sing with a slow, awkward, passionate grace, with intensity and power and with a brightness in his eyes that literally sent shivers through the folks standing by.

They tried many times to describe what happened that Pentecost day. Some said they saw tongues of flame dancing over their heads. Others remembered speaking in strange tongues, or singing in strange tongues which everyone seemed to understand. Sometimes they would even get to arguing about what happened that day.

"My friends," Mary would interject when the arguments began. "Does it matter? We know the Holy Spirit came to us that day and filled us with excitement and love and passion. That's the part that's important. The Holy Spirit can come in a hundred different ways to many different people. It doesn't matter how. It only matters that we're open to the Spirit, and that we respond with our lives."

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