

The Feast of St. Mary Magdalene CONT.

The cult of Mary Magdalene as the repentant prostitute has been a great gift to artists through the ages and some of the greatest painters like Leonardo Da Vinci and Titian have painted her so beautifully as both strongly spiritual and sensual. That's only the beginning. The cult of Mary Magdalene developed a Magdalene narrative in many directions and with many various symbols to tell her story and a goodly number of motifs emerging from the developing narrative. The various motifs have included Mary Magdalene as: sinner/seductress; penitent; anointer; weeper; witness; preacher; contemplative; reader; patron and feminist icon.

This year has seen the publication of two new studies of Mary Magdalene: *Mary Magdalene: A Cultural History* by Philip C. Almond and *Mary Magdalene: A Visual History* by the art historian Diane Apostolos-Cappadona. Almond's book is an excellent source for exploring the history and the development of the enigma of Mary Magdalene. Apostolos-Cappadona's book explores how this enigma has been presented in the visual arts over the centuries.

Thinking afresh about Mary Magdalene as her annual feast comes to us this July, the image of Mary Magdalene as *preacher* particularly fired my imagination. Who else would be better gifted to preach the Gospel than this woman who followed Jesus on all his journeys and who was the first to see the Risen Lord? In a review of the two new books cited above, the reviewer drew attention to the record or legend that in 1279, when the body of Mary Magdalene was found in the chapel of Saint-Maxime in Provence, it was observed that a fennel branch was growing from her throat-- a symbol of how the word of this apostle to the apostles had taken root.

The Lord is glorious in his saints: O come, let us adore him. Amen.

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