

From Jacobus de Voragine, *The Golden Legend*

Here followeth the life of S. Mary Magdalene, and first of her name.

Mary is as much to say as bitter, or a lighter, or lighted. By this be understood three things that be three, the best parts that she chose. That is to say, part of penance, part of contemplation within forth, and part of heavenly glory. And of this treble part is understood that is said by our Lord: Mary hath chosen the best part, which shall not be taken from her. The first part shall not be taken from her because of the end, which is the following of blessedness; the second because of continuance, for the continuance of her life is continued with the contemplation of her country. The third by reason of perdurableness; and forasmuch as she chose the best part of penance, she is said: a bitter sea, for therein she had much bitterness. And that appeared in that she wept so many tears that she washed therewith the feet of our Lord. And for so much as she chose the part of contemplation withinforth, she is a lighter, for there she took so largely that she spread it abundantly. She took the light there, with which after she enlumined other, and in that she chose the best part of the heavenly glory, she is called the light. For then she was enlumined of perfect knowledge in thought, and with the light in clearness of body. Magdalene is as much as to say as abiding culpable. Or Magdalene is interpreted as closed or shut, or not to be overcome. Or full of magnificence, by which is showed what she was tofore her conversion, and what in her conversion, and what after her conversion. For tofore her conversion she was abiding guilty by obligation to everlasting pain. In the conversion she was garnished by armour of penance. She was in the best wise garnished with penance. For as many delices as she had in her, so many sacrifices were found in her. And after her conversion she was praised by overabundance of grace. For whereas sin abounded, grace overabounded, and was more, etc.

Of Mary Magdalene.

Mary Magdalene had her surname of Magdalo, a castle, and was born of right noble lineage and parents, which were descended of the lineage of kings. And her father was named Cyrus, and her mother Eucharis. She with her brother Lazarus, and her sister Martha, possessed the castle of Magdalo, which is two miles from Nazareth, and Bethany, the castle which is nigh to Jerusalem, and also a great part of Jerusalem, which, all these things they departed among them. In such wise that Mary had the castle Magdalo, whereof she had her name Magdalene. And Lazarus had the part of the city of Jerusalem, and Martha had to her part Bethany. And when Mary gave herself to all delights of the body, and Lazarus entended all to knighthood, Martha, which was wise, governed nobly her brother's part and also her sister's, and also her own, and administered to knights, and her servants, and to poor men, such necessities as they needed. Nevertheless, after the ascension of our Lord, they sold all these things, and brought the value thereof, and laid it at the feet of the apostles. Then when Magdalene abounded in riches, and because delight is fellow to riches and abundance of things; and for so much as she shone in beauty greatly, and in riches, so much the more she submitted her body to delight, and therefore she lost her right name, and was called customably a sinner. And when our Lord Jesu Christ preached there and in other places, she was inspired with the Holy Ghost, and went into the house of Simon leprous, whereas our Lord dined. Then she durst not, because she was a sinner, appear tofore the just and good people, but remained behind at the feet of our Lord, and washed his feet with the tears of her eyes and dryed them with the hair of her head, and anointed them with precious ointments. For

the inhabitants of that region used baths and ointments for the overgreat burning and heat of the sun. And because that Simon the Pharisee thought in himself that, if our Lord had been a very prophet, he would not have suffered a sinful woman to have touched him, then our Lord reproved him of his presumption, and forgave the woman all her sins. And this is she, that same Mary Magdalene to whom our Lord gave so many great gifts. And showed so great signs of love, that he took from her seven devils. He embraced her all in his love, and made her right familiar with him. He would that she should be his hostess, and his procuress on his journey, and he oftentimes excused her sweetly; for he excused her against the Pharisee which said that she was not clean, and unto her sister that said she was idle, unto Judas, who said that she was a wastresse of goods. And when he saw her weep he could not withhold his tears. And for the love of her he raised Lazarus which had been four days dead, and healed her sister from the flux of blood which had held her seven years. And by the merits of her he made Martelle, chamberer of her sister Martha, to say that sweet word: Blessed be the womb that bare thee, and the paps that gave thee suck. But, after S. Ambrose, it was Martha that said so, and this was her chamberer. This Mary Magdalene is she that washed the feet of our Lord and dried them with the hair of her head, and anointed them with precious ointment, and did solemn penance in the time of grace, and was the first that chose the best part, which was at the feet of our Lord, and heard his preaching. Which anointed his head; at his passion was nigh unto the cross; which made ready ointments, and would anoint his body, and would not depart from the monument when his disciples departed. To whom Jesu Christ appeared first after his resurrection, and was fellow to the apostles, and made of our Lord apostollesse of the apostles, then after the ascension of our Lord, the fourteenth year from his passion, long after that the Jews had slain S. Stephen, and had cast out the other disciples out of the Jewry, which went into divers countries, and preached the word of God. There was that time with the apostles S. Maximin, which was one of the seventy-two disciples of our Lord, to whom the blessed Mary Magdalene was committed by S. Peter, and then, when the disciples were departed, S. Maximin, Mary Magdalene, and Lazarus her brother, Martha her sister, Marcelle, chamberer of Martha, and S. Cedony which was born blind, and after enlumined of our Lord; all these together, and many other christian men were taken of the miscreants and put in a ship in the sea, without any tackle or rudder, for to be drowned. But by the purveyance of Almighty God they came all to Marseilles, where, as none would receive them to be lodged, they dwelled and abode under a porch tofore a temple of the people of that country. And when the blessed Mary Magdalene saw the people assembled at this temple for to do sacrifice to the idols, she arose up peaceably with a glad visage, a discreet tongue and well speaking, and began to preach the faith and law of Jesu Christ, and withdrew from the worshipping of the idols. Then were they amarvelled of the beauty, of the reason, and of the fair speaking of her. And it was no marvel that the mouth that had kissed the feet of our Lord so debonairly and so goodly, should be inspired with the word of God more than the other. And after that, it happed that the prince of the province and his wife made sacrifice to the idols for to have a child. And Mary Magdalene preached to them Jesu Christ and forbade them those sacrifices. And after that a little while, Mary Magdalene appeared in a vision to that lady, saying: Wherefore hast thou so much riches and sufferest the poor people our Lord to die for hunger and for cold? And she doubted, and was afraid to show this vision to her lord. And then the second night she appeared to her again and said in likewise and adjousted thereto menaces, if she warned not her husband for to comfort the poor and needy, and yet she said nothing thereof to her husband. And then she appeared to her the third night, when it was dark, and to her husband also, with a frowning and angry visage like fire, like as all the house had burned, and said: Thou tyrant and member of thy father the devil,

with that serpent thy wife, that will not say to thee my words, thou retest now enemy of the cross, which hast filled thy belly by gluttony, with divers manner of meats and sufferest to perish for hunger the holy saints of our Lord. Liest thou not in a palace wrapped with clothes of silk. And thou seest them without harbour, discomfited, and goest forth and takest no regard to them. Thou shalt not escape so ne depart without punishment, thou tyrant and felon because thou hast so long tarried. And when Mary Magdalene had said thus she departed away. Then the lady awoke and sighed. And the husband sighed strongly also for the same cause, and trembled.

And then she said: Sir, hast thou seen the sweven that I have seen? I have seen, said he, that I am greatly amarvelled of, and am sore afraid what we shall do. And his wife said: It is more profitable for us to obey her, than to run into the ire of her God, whom she preacheth. For which cause they received them into their house, and ministered to them all that was necessary and needful to them. Then as Mary Magdalene preached on a time, the said prince said to her: Weenest thou that thou mayst defend the law that thou preachest? And she answered: Certainly, I am ready to defend it, as she that is confirmed every day by miracles, and by the predication of our master, S. Peter, which now sitteth in the see at Rome. To whom then the prince said: I and my wife be ready to obey thee in all things, if thou mayst get of thy god whom thou preachest, that we might have a child. And then Mary Magdalene said that it should not be left, and then prayed unto our Lord that he would vouchsafe of his grace to give to them a son. And our Lord heard her prayers, and the lady conceived. Then her husband would go to S. Peter for to wit if it were true that Mary Magdalene had preached of Jesu Christ. Then his wife said to him: What will ye do sir, ween ye to go without me? Nay, when thou shalt depart, I shall depart with thee, and when thou shalt return again I shall return, and when thou shalt rest and tarry, I shall rest and tarry. To whom her husband answered, and said: Dame, it shall not be so, for thou art great, and the perils of the sea be without number. Thou mightest lightly perish, thou shalt abide at home and take heed to our possessions. And this lady for nothing would not change her purpose, but fell down on her knees at his feet sore weeping, requiring him to take her with him. And so at last he consented, and granted her request. Then Mary Magdalene set the sign of the cross on their shoulders, to the end that the fiend might not empesh ne let them in their journey. Then charged they a ship abundantly of all that was necessary to them, and left all their things in the keeping of Mary Magdalene, and went forth on their pilgrimage. And when they had made their course, and sailed a day and a night, there arose a great tempest and orage. And the wind increased and grew over hideous, in such wise that this lady, which was great, and nigh the time of her childing, began to wax feeble, and had great anguishes for the great waves and troubling of the sea, and soon after began to travail, and was delivered of a fair son, by occasion of the storm and tempest, and in her childing died. And when the child was born he cried for to have comfort of the teats of his mother, and made a piteous noise. Alas! what sorrow was this to the father, to have a son born which was the cause of the death of his mother, and he might not live, for there was none to nourish him. Alas! what shall this pilgrim do, that seeth his wife dead, and his son crying after the breast of his mother? And the pilgrim wept strongly and said: Alas! caitiff, alas! What shall I do? I desired to have a son, and I have lost both the mother and the son. And the mariners then said: This dead body must be cast into the sea, or else we all shall perish, for as long as she shall abide with us, this tempest shall not cease. And when they had taken the body for to cast it into the sea, the husband said: Abide and suffer a little, and if ye will not spare to me my wife, yet at least spare the little child that cryeth, I pray you to tarry a while, for to know if the mother be aswoon of the pain, and that she might revive. And whilst he thus spake to

them, the shipmen espied a mountain not far from the ship. And then they said that it was best to set the ship toward the land and to bury it there, and so to save it from devouring of the fishes of the sea. And the good man did so much with the mariners, what for prayers and for money, that they brought the body to the mountain. And when they should have digged for to make a pit to lay the body in, they found it so hard a rock that they might not enter for hardness of the stone. And they left the body there lying, and covered it with a mantle; and the father laid his little son at the breast of the dead mother and said weeping: O Mary Magdalene, why camest thou to Marseilles to my great loss and evil adventure? Why have I at thine instance enterprised this journey? Hast thou required of God that my wife should conceive and should die at the childing of her son? For now it behoveth that the child that she hath conceived and borne, perish because it hath no nurse. This have I had by thy prayer, and to thee I commend them, to whom I have commended all my goods. And also I commend to thy God, if he be mighty, that he remember the soul of the mother, that he by thy prayer have pity on the child that he perish not. Then covered he the body all about with the mantle, and the child also, and then returned to the ship, and held forth his journey. And when he came to S. Peter, S. Peter came against him, and when he saw the sign of the cross upon his shoulder, he demanded him what he was, and wherefore he came, and he told to him all by order. To whom Peter said: Peace be to thee, thou art welcome, and hast believed good counsel. And be thou not heavy if thy wife sleep, and the little child rest with her, for our Lord is almighty for to give to whom he will, and to take away that he hath given, and to reestablish and give again that he hath taken, and to turn all heaviness and weeping into joy. Then Peter led him into Jerusalem, and showed to him all the places where Jesu Christ preached and did miracles, and the place where he suffered death, and where he ascended into heaven. And when he was well-informed of S. Peter in the faith, and that two years were passed sith he departed from Marseilles, he took his ship for to return again into his country. And as they sailed by the sea, they came, by the ordinance of God, by the rock where the body of his wife was left, and his son. Then by prayers and gifts he did so much that they arrived thereon. And the little child, whom Mary Magdalene had kept, went oft sithes to the seaside, and, like small children, took small stones and threw them into the sea. And when they came they saw the little child playing with stones on the seaside, as he was wont to do. And then they marvelled much what he was. And when the child saw them, which never had seen people tofore, he was afraid, and ran secretly to his mother's breast and hid him under the mantle. And then the father of the child went for to see more appertly, and took the mantle, and found the child, which was right fair, sucking his mother's breast. Then he took the child in his arms and said: O blessed Mary Magdalene, I were well happy and blessed if my wife were now alive, and might live, and come again with me into my country. I know verily and believe that thou who hast given to me my son, and hast fed and kept him two years in this rock, mayst well re-establish his mother to her first health. And with these words the woman respired, and took life, and said, like as she had been waked of her sleep: O blessed Mary Magdalene thou art of great merit and glorious, for in the pains of my deliverance thou wert my midwife, and in all my necessities thou hast accomplished to me the service of a chamberer. And when her husband heard that thing he marvelled much, and said: Livest thou my right dear and best beloved wife? To whom she said: Yea, certainly I live, and am now first come from the pilgrimage from whence thou art come, and all in like wise as S. Peter led thee in Jerusalem, and showed to thee all the places where our Lord suffered death, was buried and ascended to heaven, and many other places, I was with you, with Mary Magdalene, which led and accompanied me, and showed to me all the places which I well remember and have in mind. And there recounted to him all the miracles that her husband

had seen, and never failed of one article, ne went out of the way from the sooth. And then the good pilgrim received his wife and his child and went to ship. And soon after they came to the port of Marseilles. And they found the blessed Mary Magdalene preaching with her disciples. And then they kneeled down to her feet, and recounted to her all that had happened to them, and received baptism of S. Maximin. And then they destroyed all the temples of the idols in the city of Marseilles, and made churches of Jesu Christ. And with one accord they chose the blessed S. Lazarus for to be bishop of that city. And afterward they came to the city of Aix, and by great miracles and preaching they brought the people there to the faith of Jesu Christ. And there S. Maximin was ordained to be bishop. In this meanwhile the blessed Mary Magdalene, desirous of sovereign contemplation, sought a right sharp desert, and took a place which was ordained by the angel of God, and abode there by the space of thirty years without knowledge of anybody. In which place she had no comfort of running water, ne solace of trees, ne of herbs. And that was because our Redeemer did do show it openly, that he had ordained for her refection celestial, and no bodily meats. And every day at every hour canonical she was lifted up in the air of angels, and heard the glorious song of the heavenly companies with her bodily ears. Of which she was fed and filled with right sweet meats, and then was brought again by the angels unto her proper place, in such wise as she had no need of corporal nourishing. It happed that a priest, which desired to lead a solitary life, took a cell for himself a twelve-furlong from the place of Mary Magdalene. On a day our Lord opened the eyes of that priest, and he saw with his bodily eyes in what manner the angels descended into the place where the blessed Magdalene dwelt, and how they lifted her in the air, and after by the space of an hour brought her again with divine praisings to the same place. And then the priest desired greatly to know the truth of this marvellous vision, and made his prayers to Almighty God, and went with great devotion unto the place. And when he approached nigh to it a stone's cast, his thighs began to swell and wax feeble, and his entrails began within him to lack breath and sigh for fear. And as soon as he returned he had his thighs all whole, and ready for to go. And when he enforced him to go to the place, all his body was in languor, and might not move. And then he understood that it was a secret celestial place where no man human might come, and then he called the name of Jesu, and said: I conjure thee by our Lord, that if thou be a man or other creature reasonable, that dwellest in this cave, that thou answer me, and tell me the truth of thee. And when he had said this three times, the blessed Mary Magdalene answered: Come more near, and thou shalt know that thou desirest. And then he came trembling unto the half way, and she said to him: Rememberest thou not of the gospel of Mary Magdalene, the renowned sinful woman, which washed the feet of our Saviour with her tears, and dried them with the hair of her head, and desired to have forgiveness of her sins? And the priest said to her: I remember it well, that is more than thirty years that holy church believeth and confesseth that it was done. And then she said: I am she that by the space of thirty years have been here without witting of any person, and like as it was suffered to thee yesterday to see me, in like wise I am every day lift up by the hands of the angels into the air, and have deserved to hear with my bodily ears the right sweet song of the company celestial. And because it is showed to me of our Lord that I shall depart out of this world, go to Maximin, and say to him that the next day after the resurrection of our lord, in the same time that he is accustomed to arise and go to matins, that he alone enter into his oratory, and that by the ministry and service of angels he shall find me there. And the priest heard the voice of her, like as it had been the voice of an angel, but he saw nothing; and then anon he went to S. Maximin, and told to him all by order. Then S. Maximin was replenished of great joy, and thanked greatly our Lord. And on the said day and hour, as is aforesaid, he entered into his oratory, and saw the blessed Mary Magdalene

standing in the quire or choir yet among the angels that brought her, and was lift up from the earth the space of two or three cubits. And praying to our Lord she held up her hands, and when S. Maximin saw her, he was afraid to approach to her. And she returned to him, and said: Come hither mine own father, and flee not thy daughter. And when he approached and came to her, as it is read in the books of the said S. Maximin, for the customable vision that she had of angels every day, the cheer and visage of her shone as clear as it had been the rays of the sun. And then all the clerks and the priests aforesaid were called, and Mary Magdalene received the body and blood of our Lord of the hands of the bishop with great abundance of tears, and after, she stretched her body tofore the altar, and her right blessed soul departed from the body and went to our Lord. And after it was departed, there issued out of the body an odour so sweet-smelling that it remained there by the space of seven days to all them that entered in. And the blessed Maximin anointed the body of her with divers precious ointments, and buried it honourably, and after commanded that his body should be buried by hers after his death.

Hegesippus, with other books of Josephus accord enough with the said story, and Josephus saith in his treatise that the blessed Mary Magdalene, after the ascension of our Lord, for the burning love that she had to Jesu Christ and for the grief and discomfort that she had for the absence of her master our Lord, she would never see man. But after when she came into the country of Aix, she went into desert, and dwelt there thirty years without knowing of any man or woman. And he saith that, every day at the seven hours canonical she was lifted in the air of the angels. But he saith that, when the priest came to her, he found her enclosed in her cell; and she required of him a vestment, and he delivered to her one, which she clothed and covered her with. And she went with him to the church and received the communion, and then made her prayers with joined hands, and rested in peace.

In the time of Charles the great, in the year of our Lord seven hundred and seventy-one, Gerard, duke of Burgundy might have no child by his wife, wherefore he gave largely alms to the poor people, and founded many churches, and many monasteries. And when he had made the abbey of Vesoul, he and the abbot of the monastery sent a monk with a good reasonable fellowship into Aix, for to bring thither if they might of the relics of S. Mary Magdalene. And when the monk came to the said city, he found it all destroyed of paynims. Then by adventure he found the sepulchre, for the writing upon the sepulchre of marble showed well that the blessed lady Mary Magdalene rested and lay there, and the history of her was marvellously entailed and carved in the sepulchre. And then this monk opened it by night and took the relics, and bare them to his lodging. And that same night Mary Magdalene appeared to that monk, saying: Doubt thee nothing, make an end of the work. Then he returned homeward until he came half a mile from the monastery. But he might in no wise remove the relics from thence, till that the abbot and monks came with procession, and received them honestly. And soon after the duke had a child by his wife.

There was a knight that had a custom every year to go a pilgrimage unto the body of S. Mary Magdalene, which knight was slain in battle. And as his friends wept for him lying on his bier, they said with sweet and devout quarrels, why she suffered her devout servant to die without confession and penance. Then suddenly he that was dead arose, all they being sore abashed, and made one to call a priest to him, and confessed him with great devotion, and received the blessed sacrament, and then rested in peace.

There was a ship charged with men and women that was perished and all to-brake, and there was among them a woman with child, which saw herself in peril to be drowned, and cried fast on Mary Magdalene for succour and help, making her avow that if she might be saved by her merits, and escape that peril, if she had a son she should give him to the monastery. And anon as she had so avowed, a woman of honourable habit and beauty appeared to her, and took her by the chin and brought her to the rivage all safe, and the other perished and were drowned. And after, she was delivered and had a son, and accomplished her avow like as she had promised.

Some say that S. Mary Magdalene was wedded to S. John the Evangelist when Christ called him from the wedding, and when he was called from her, she had thereof indignation that her husband was taken from her, and went and gave herself to all delight, but because it was not convenable that the calling of S. John should be occasion of her damnation, therefore our Lord converted her mercifully to penance, and because he had taken from her sovereign delight of the flesh, he replenished her with sovereign delight spiritual tofore all other, that is the love of God. And it is said that he ennobled S. John tofore all other with the sweetness of his familiarity, because he had taken him from the delight aforesaid.

There was a man which was blind on both his eyes, and did him to be led to the monastery of the blessed Mary Magdalene for to visit her body. His leader said to him that he saw the church. And then the blind man escried and said with a high voice: O blessed Mary Magdalene, help me that I may deserve once to see thy church. And anon his eyes were opened, and saw clearly all things about him.

There was another man that wrote his sins in a schedule and laid it under the coverture of the altar of Mary Magdalene, meekly praying her that she should get for him pardon and forgiveness, and a while after, he took the schedule again, and found all his sins effaced and struck out. Another man was holden in prison for debt of money, in irons. And he called unto his help oftentimes Mary Magdalene. And on a night a fair woman appeared to him and brake all his irons, and opened the door, and commanded him to go his way; and when he saw himself loose he fled away anon.

There was a clerk of Flanders named Stephen Rysen, and mounted in so great and disordinate felony, that he haunted all manner sins. And such thing as appertained to his health he would not hear. Nevertheless he had great devotion in the blessed Mary Magdalene and fasted her vigil, and honoured her feast. And on a time as he visited her tomb, he was not all asleep nor well awaked, when Mary Magdalene appeared to him like a much fair woman, sustained with two angels, one on the right side, and another on the left side, and said to him, looking on him despitously: Stephen, why reputerest thou the deeds of my merits to be unworthy? Wherefore mayst not thou at the instance of my merits and prayers be moved to penance? For sith the time that thou beganest to have devotion in me, I have alway prayed God for thee firmly. Arise up therefore and repent thee, and I shall not leave thee till thou be reconciled to God. And then forthwith he felt so great grace shed in him, that he forsook and renounced the world and entered into religion, and was after of right perfect life. And at the death of him was seen Mary Magdalene, standing beside the bier with angels which bare the soul up to heaven with heavenly song in likeness of a white dove. Then let us pray to this blessed Mary Magdalene that she get us grace

to do penance here for our sins, that after this life we may come to her in everlasting bliss in heaven. Amen.