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The Women Who Followed Jesus: Mary Magdalene, Joanna, and Susanna in the Mission of Jesus (Luke 8:1–3)

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Abstract

The Gospel According to Luke and Acts are distinctive in their overall portrayal of women. Episodes involving women raise important questions concerning their origin and narrative function. The present study examines a well-known passage—the women who followed Jesus (Luke 8:1–3)—in order to address several key issues: who the women mentioned by Luke were, what roles they fulfilled, and, above all, why Luke, unlike the other evangelists, chose to mention them during Jesus' public ministry. A close reading of the passage, attentive to its narrative details, yields interpretive insights that may be obscured by a strictly historical-critical approach.

Keywords

following, Galilee, Jesus, Joanna, Luke 8:1–3, Mary Magdalene, Susanna, women

The Gospel of Luke contains many episodes in which women play central roles or function as primary protagonists.¹ Luke alone narrates the story of Elizabeth and Mary in a carefully composed diptych (Chapters 1–2). He alone refers to the women who followed Jesus during His public ministry (8:1–3), and he alone records the words addressed to the daughters of Jerusalem who lamented as Jesus was led away to be crucified (23:27–31).

The attention given to women in the Gospel becomes increasingly visible in the second volume of Luke's work, the Acts of the Apostles.² Luke mentions women who, together with Mary (1:14), are gathered with the apostles and await the fulfillment of Jesus' promise. After a miraculous release from prison, Peter goes to the house of Mary, the mother of Mark, where the local community was gathered (12:12). Remarkably, Luke even records the name of Rhoda, the maid who opens the door (12:13). Following a vision (16:9), Paul goes to Macedonia, and the first convert on the European continent is a woman named Lydia (16:11–15). According to Acts, Paul had a sister, and her son warned Paul of an imminent plot to kill him (23:16).

To claim that Luke and Acts focus primarily on women would be an oversimplification. In his carefully structured work, Luke devotes comparable attention to passages with both female and male protagonists.³

For example, Luke 2:25–35 portrays Simeon blessing the infant Jesus in the temple of Jerusalem, and this scene is followed by Anna the prophetess in Luke 2:36–38, who “never left the temple.” The cure of a man in the synagogue of Capernaum (4:31–37) is followed by the healing of Simon's mother-in-law (4:38–39).

¹ Modern Lukan scholarship includes numerous studies on women and their roles in Luke–Acts. Among the most important are Witherington 1984; Moloney 1986, 50–74; Grassi 1989, 83–112; Powell 1989, 93–97; Sim 1989, 32–50; D'Angelo 1990, 441–61; Karris 1994, 1–20; Karczewski 2015, 241–53; and Kucharski 2018, 69–96.

² Discussing all the women in the Acts of the Apostles goes well beyond the scope of this article. Nevertheless, it should be noted that Luke mentions more women than any other New Testament author. A few examples suffice: Hellenist widows neglected in the daily distribution (6:1); Sapphira (5:1–11); Tabitha (9:36–43); a slave girl with an oracular spirit (16:16); Damaris (17:34); Priscilla (18:2); the four virgin daughters of Philip (21:9); Drusilla (24:24); and Bernice (25:13, 23; 26:30). Although not all of these figures are portrayed positively, the number of episodes involving women is considerably higher in Acts than in any other New Testament writing.

³ Sometimes, a pericope involving either a man or a woman can be paired with more than one pericope. Paired pericopes do not always occur in immediate proximity.

The raising of the son of the widow of Nain (7:11–17) corresponds to the raising of Jairus's daughter (8:40–42, 49–56). The good deed of the Samaritan who cares for a traveler assaulted by robbers (10:30–37) is mirrored in Martha's reception of Jesus into her home (10:38–42). The healing of a bent-over woman on the Sabbath (13:10–17) corresponds to the healing of a man suffering from dropsy (14:1–6). The commendable actions of Joseph of Arimathea, who buried Jesus' body (23:50–55), are set alongside the presence of the women from Galilee, who play a significant role in the resurrection narrative (24:1–12).

All four Gospels mention women—some of them by name—who were present at Christ's crucifixion on Golgotha (Matt 27:55–56; Mark 15:40–41; Luke 23:49; John 19:25). Matthew (27:55) and Mark (15:41) also state retrospectively that these women had followed Jesus from Galilee. All four Gospels likewise confirm that women were present at Jesus' empty tomb (Matt 28:1–8; Mark 16:1–8; Luke 24:1–12; John 20:1).

The Gospel passages that explicitly mention women following Jesus and witnessing His suffering and resurrection should be read alongside Luke's summary in 8:1–3, which reads:

Afterward He journeyed from one town and village to another, preaching and proclaiming the good news of the kingdom of God. Accompanying Him were the Twelve, and some women who had been cured of evil spirits and infirmities, Mary, called Magdalene, from whom seven demons had gone out, Joanna, the wife of Herod's steward Chuza, Susanna, and many others who provided for them out of their resources.

Although Luke is not the only evangelist to mention women who followed Jesus from Galilee, he alone refers to them during Jesus' public ministry. In other words, he is the only evangelist who does not rely on a retrospective notice but preserves, within the narrative of Jesus' Galilean activity, the memory of several women who followed Him from the beginning of his public ministry. Three questions therefore arise: who were these women, what role did they play, and, above all, why did Luke, unlike the other evangelists, mention them at this point in Jesus' public ministry?

1. Textual Nuances

Luke's brief reference to the women following Jesus in 8:1–3 is not self-evident. Several textual problems require attention. First, it is unclear whether the phrase καὶ ἕτεραι πολλαί (“and many others”; 8:3) refers to other women healed by Jesus or to a distinct group of women who followed Him without having been healed by Him. If the first possibility were correct, one would have to assume that, according to Luke, Jesus was accompanied and served exclusively by women who had previously been ill or possessed. The narrative's logic suggests that it is more probable that Luke associates healing only with the three women named in the passage. The adjective ἕτερος supports this interpretation. In general, it denotes another element; more specifically, it can refer to something different in kind or class from what precedes.⁴ It is therefore more likely that the phrase ἕτεραι πολλαί refers to a group of women other than those named, who had been freed from evil spirits and illnesses.

Second, it is unclear who constituted the support group. In other words, scholars continue to debate whether the phrase αἰτινες διηκόνουν αὐτοῖς (“who provided for them”; 8:3) refers to all the women—both those named and those unnamed⁵—or only to the latter group, namely, ἕτεραι πολλαί.⁶ Here, too, the Greek syntax is not unequivocal. Nevertheless, just as it is unlikely that Jesus was accompanied exclusively by women who had been ill or possessed, it is equally unlikely that he was surrounded exclusively by wealthy women.⁷

⁴ Danker 2000, s.v. “ἕτερος”; (Popowski 2008, 2081). Thayer (1961, s.v. “ἕτερος”) likewise defines the term as “another,” that is, one different in nature, form, class, or kind; the synonym is ἄλλος.

⁵ Some modern translations of the Bible understand the syntagma in this way. For example, the German translation *Einheitsübersetzung der Heiligen Schrift* reads: “Sie alle sorgten aus ihren eigenen Mitteln für Jesus und den Kreis der Zwölf.”

⁶ See, for example, the modern English translation known as *The Message*: “There were also some women in their company who had been healed of various evil afflictions and illnesses: Mary, the one called Magdalene, from whom seven demons had gone out; Joanna, wife of Chuza, Herod's manager; and Susanna—along with many others who used their considerable means to provide for the company.”

⁷ Keener (2014, 200) suggests that this is not merely possible but probable. In his view, “upper-class families had more mobility.”

In sum, the Greek syntax of Luke 8:3 leaves open two related questions: whether all or only some of the women had been healed, and whether the named women or only the unnamed women ministered to the group following Jesus.⁸

2. The Identity of the Women Following Jesus

The first woman mentioned by Luke in 8:2–3 is Mary. Her prominent position in this list is most likely due to her later role in the early church and to her special place in the resurrection narratives (Karczewski 2015, 246). Luke specifies that this Mary is called “Magdalene” (the Greek text reads ἡ καλουμένη Μαγδαληνή).⁹ This designation derives from Magdala, the town from which she originated, located near Tiberias on the Sea of Galilee. The addition “Magdalene” was most likely necessary because the name Mary was widely used (Plummer 1928, 215–16).¹⁰ Notably, all four Gospels refer to her as Mary Magdalene and identify her, most significantly, as a witness to Christ’s resurrection (cf. Matt 27:56; Mark 15:40; Luke 24:10; John 20:1). The use of the designation Μαγδαληνή to distinguish her from other figures bearing the same name may suggest that she was unmarried. Had she been married, the names of her husband or children would likely have been used to distinguish her from the many other women named Mary. Mary’s origin is not the only information Luke provides. The evangelist also reports that seven evil spirits had gone out from her. Possession by seven demons indicates a particularly severe condition.¹¹ It does not, however, necessarily denote demonic possession; it may also refer to a serious physical illness. In antiquity, many illnesses were attributed to demonic causes.¹² One need not look beyond Luke’s own narrative for confirmation of this

⁸ Narrative criticism acknowledges the intentional use of ambiguous terms. This procedure, known as double entendre or misunderstanding, consists in using an ambiguous word or phrase, usually with two meanings, to create bewilderment or misunderstanding in the reader, which is then resolved either by Jesus or by the narrator (Resseguie 2005, 64–67).

⁹ Numerous studies address Mary Magdalene and her role in the early church. Among recent studies, Kucharski 2021 deserves mention.

¹⁰ The name Mary was common in the first century, including in the New Testament. Its popularity was probably enhanced by Mariamne I, the Hasmonean wife of Herod the Great.

¹¹ Many modern authors interpret the reference in this way; see, among others, Marshall 1978, 316; Green 1997, 320; Bovon 2002, 301; and Mickiewicz 2012, 411–12.

¹² According to Ernst (1993, 315), “die Zurückführung des medizinischen Phänomens auf dämonische Verursacher entspricht dem antiken und biblischen Denken.” Similarly, Crimella

belief. In describing the healing of a woman in the synagogue on the Sabbath (13:10–21), Luke states that Satan had imprisoned—or, literally, “bound”—her for eighteen years. Although demonic possession may refer to physical illness, it cannot be excluded that, in the case of Mary Magdalene, Luke did intend actual demonic possession (see 11:26).¹³

The next woman mentioned by Luke is Joanna, wife of Chuza. Whereas Mary was a common name, Joanna was not as common. Biblical scholars usually interpret this name etymologically as “God is merciful” (Lagrange 1921, 235; Bosak 2002, 391; Rajkumari 2008, 342). As in the case of Mary Magdalene, Luke provides additional information about Joanna. Her husband, Chuza, is described by the term ἐπίτροπος, which may be translated as “steward,” “administrator,” or “overseer.”¹⁴ Regardless of the precise translation, the term denotes a person of relatively high social status who was trusted by his master.¹⁵ In Chuza’s case, that master was Herod Antipas, an important political figure. Joanna therefore appears to have been the only woman in the group who likely enjoyed elevated social standing and, by implication, a degree of wealth and influence. Although Joanna was married, she apparently traveled with Jesus’ group away from her husband. Beyond his name and position, Luke tells his readers nothing more about Chuza.¹⁶

The third woman mentioned by name is Susanna. Although her name can be translated as “lily”—a beautiful and fragrant flower—this figure remains largely in the background. Susanna does not appear again in the Gospels, nor has early Christian tradition preserved additional information about her. Although the Biblical tradition is scarce, some biblical scholars draw broader conclusions. They suggest, for example, that Susanna must have been well known in the early

(2015, 237) observes that “nell’antichità si riconosceva in ogni debolezza la manifestazione di qualche realtà superiore.”

¹³ According to de Boer (2002, 149), Mary of Magdala was “totally possessed and subsequently completely healed.”

¹⁴ Danker 2000, s.v. “ἐπίτροπος.”

¹⁵ This term appears in the Second Book of Maccabees (11:1; 13:2; 14:2), where it refers to Lysias, who, by appointment of Antiochus Eupator, was in charge of the affairs of the kingdom (see 2 Macc 10:11). According to 1 Macc. 3:32–33, Lysias was a renowned man of royal descent. Antiochus IV Epiphanes entrusted him with the affairs of the kingdom and the upbringing of Antiochus Eupator’s son. See Lust 2003, s.v. “ἐπίτροπος.”

¹⁶ Godet (1865, 513–14) identified Chuza in Luke with the royal official who, after the miraculous healing of his son, believed together with his entire household (see John 4:46–53). This hypothesis, however, has not been universally accepted.

Christian community, or at least in the community to which Luke addressed his Gospel. Apparently, like Mary Magdalene, Susanna was unmarried and had no children or immediate family (Sim 1989, 36). The evangelist says nothing about her husband or children, as he does, for example, in the case of Joanna or of Mary, the mother of James (see Luke 24:10).

Alongside the three women listed by name, Luke mentions many other unnamed women who also followed Jesus. A close reading of the Passion narrative provides two further names of women who followed Jesus from Galilee. The first was Mary, the mother of James¹⁷ and Joseph (Joses); the second was the mother of the sons of Zebedee, or Salome (see Matt 27:56 and Mark 15:40). Strikingly, Luke notes the presence of Mary, the mother of James, at the resurrection (see Luke 24:10), mentioning her together with Mary Magdalene and Joanna in place of Susanna.

3. The Role of the Women Following Jesus

Luke defines the role of the women who followed Jesus during his public ministry in Galilee with relative precision. He states that the women *διηκόνουν αὐτοῖς*¹⁸ *ἐκ τῶν ὑπαρχόντων αὐταῖς* (“provided for them out of their means”; 8:3).

The verb *διακονέω* used here means “to minister to” or “to serve someone” (cf. Luke 22:27). It may also denote “caring for someone or something”

¹⁷ Mark notes that James was called “the younger” (*ἡ Ἰακώβου τοῦ μικροῦ*). This figure should not be identified with James the son of Alphaeus, traditionally called James the Less, one of the Twelve (see Matt 10:2–3 / Mark 3:17–18 / Luke 6:14–15), but rather with one of Jesus’ relatives. According to Mark’s account, Jesus’ relatives were named James, Joses, Judas, and Simon (see Mark 6:3). If the younger James, son of Mary, mentioned here is the same James who led the Jerusalem church community, then this reference concerns a prominent figure in Acts (cf. Acts 12:17; 15:13; 21:18). Paul referred to him as one of the pillars of the Jerusalem Church (see 1 Cor 15:7; Gal 1:19). It is therefore possible that, in the resurrection narrative (see Luke 24:10), Luke consciously replaces Susanna with the mother of one of the most prominent figures in the emerging community of believers in Jesus. This hypothesis, however, is not without problems. The identification of the younger James, son of Mary, with James, the pillar of the Jerusalem church, is not as evident as it might appear.

¹⁸ Some manuscripts (Ⲙ A L Ψ f¹ 33. 565. 579. 1241. 2542 pm it vg^{cl} sy^h co; Marcion) have αὐτῷ (“him”) in place of αὐτοῖς (“them”). Metzger (1994, 120–21) notes that “the plural is supported by good representatives of the Alexandrian and the Western text-types; the singular (compare Mt 27:55; Mk 15:41) appears to be a Christocentric correction, due perhaps to Marcion.” Similarly, Nolland 1989, 363.

(cf. 2 Cor 3:3), “doing a favor,” or “helping someone” (cf. Matt 25:44), and, in a more technical sense, “performing the ministry of a deacon” (cf. 1 Tim 3:10; Popowski 1997, 128).¹⁹ The verb appears thirty-seven times in the New Testament, eight of them in the Gospel of Luke (see 4:39; 8:3; 10:40; 12:37; 17:8; 22:26–27 [three times]) and twice in the Acts of the Apostles (see 6:2; 19:22). Almost all its occurrences in Luke–Acts indicate table service; the only exception is Acts 19:22, where the participle διακονούντων designates Timothy and Erastus as Paul’s co-workers. The cognate noun διακονία denotes the “performance of service” or “assistance” in Luke’s Gospel (see 10:40), whereas in Acts it assumes additional meanings. Thus, διακονία can mean “serving at table” (see Acts 6:1), refer to the apostles’ ministry of preaching the word (see Acts 1:17, 25; 6:4; 20:24; 21:19), or denote ministry in the sense of providing material assistance (see Acts 11:29; 12:25).

In Luke 8:3 the verb διακονέω appears in the imperfect tense—expressing continuous, repeated, or ongoing action in the past—and describes various services and forms of assistance provided to Jesus and the Twelve. This service usually meant hospitality and the provision of meals; it did not necessarily imply financial support. Nevertheless, Luke further specifies the service provided by these women. He adds that their service came ἐκ τῶν ὑπαρχόντων αὐταῖς, which may be translated literally as “from what belonged to them.” This wording implies that some of the women who followed Jesus may have been well-to-do and able to offer material support. It would also mean that they had access to their possessions and could dispose of them without constraint from their fathers, husbands, or other members of their immediate families. In the Second Temple period, this was not always the case (Cohick 2013, 179–87). At this point, therefore, one should at least consider the possibility that the noun τὰ ὑπάρχοντα, as used here, may refer to more than wealth or possessions. Since its basic meaning is “things at someone’s disposal,” Luke’s phrase may be understood in a broader sense than is usually rendered.²⁰

¹⁹ See also Danker 2000, s.v. “διακονέω.”

²⁰ Almost all current New Testament translations render the noun τὰ ὑπάρχοντα as wealth, goods, or possessions. For example, the Polish Biblia Tysiąclecia has “ze swego mienia”; La Bible de Jérusalem, “de leurs biens”; Bibbia CEI, “i loro beni”; Einheitsübersetzung der Heiligen Schrift, “was sie besaßen”; and Sagrada Biblia CEE, “con sus bienes.” Some modern translations allow the syntagma to be understood more broadly; see, for example, the *New American Bible*, “out of their resources.” It is worth noting that the Vulgate translates “de facultatibus suis,” whereas the Peshitta has ܡܠܬܬܐܝܗܘܢ (“their possessions”).

Some of the women who followed Jesus may have contributed only their time and abilities. Not all could have supported Jesus and his disciples financially. Contrary to what some modern scholars have proposed, in this particular passage Luke does not present women as collaborators in the proclamation of the good news (Muoneke 1993, 163–80; Kucharski 2018, 69–96). Luke writes that Jesus traveled through villages and cities proclaiming the gospel of the kingdom of God, accompanied by the Twelve and the women. Here, the evangelist uses the preposition σύν, not μετά. Although numerous attempts have been made to identify subtle differences between σύν and μετά (Plummer 1928, 215), research indicates that New Testament usage is relatively fluid and that clear-cut rules are difficult to establish (Blass § 221). In this context, however, Luke appears to portray both the disciples and the women who accompanied Jesus more as companions and witnesses of the journey than as collaborators in the proclamation of the good news. The mission of the Twelve who accompany Jesus begins only in the following chapter (see 9:1–6), and the mission of the seventy-two other disciples begins in chapter ten (see 10:1–12).

4. Why Luke Mentions Women Following Jesus

Having addressed the question of who the women mentioned by Luke were and what roles they fulfilled, an equally complex issue remains: why does Luke mention women who followed Jesus during his public ministry? Several factors make this question particularly significant. First, in light of the religious sensibilities of the period, Jesus' willingness to accept women among his followers was highly unusual. Second, the degree of freedom attributed to these women, who left their homes to join the group of disciples, is at least puzzling. Third, the apparent freedom of some of these women to dispose of their property seems to run counter to the social customs of the period.

However striking this may appear, the position of women in Jesus' time was far from favorable. In the Jewish environment of the Second Temple period, the presence of women among Jesus' followers was surprising and likely unacceptable to the religious elite (Sim 1989, 32–50). Numerous Biblical and extra-Biblical texts describe the status of women at that time. For example, the Gospel of John, while recounting Jesus' encounter with a Samaritan woman at Jacob's well, notes: "At that time the disciples returned and were amazed that he was talking with a woman" (4:27). The rabbinic tractate Pirkei Avot 1:5 teaches: "Engage not

in too much conversation with women. They said this concerning one's own wife, how much more [does the rule apply] concerning another man's wife. From here, the Sages said: as long as a man engages in too much conversation with women, he causes evil to himself; he neglects the study of the Torah; and, in the end, he will inherit Gehenna."²¹

Despite this generally unfavorable attitude toward women, Luke explicitly mentions women following Jesus in the first part of Jesus' public ministry; that is, during His mission in Galilee (see 4:16–9:50). Strikingly, he mentions them in close proximity to the selection of the Twelve (see 6:12–16). It is possible that the reference to women following Jesus reflects Luke's tendency to present episodes from Jesus' life in pairs. If this is the case, one could go further and suggest that the three women named in Luke 8 correspond to the three prominent apostles—Peter, James, and John—who held a special place among the Twelve and accompanied Jesus at decisive moments, such as the healing of Jairus's daughter (see 8:51) and the Transfiguration (see 9:28). Although this hypothesis is widespread among Biblical scholars, it does not appear to be the only reason Luke mentions women accompanying Jesus.

According to Luke, the first phase of Jesus' public ministry was centered in Galilee. This phase includes episodes that report the rapid dissemination of news about his activity. For example, the account of the healing of the leper is accompanied by a summary describing Jesus' growing fame (see 5:15). The healing of the paralytic was witnessed by Pharisees and scribes who had come from every village of Galilee and Judea and from Jerusalem (see 5:17). A similar crowd—from Judea, Jerusalem, Tyre, and Sidon—awaited Jesus at the foot of the mountain where he had gone to pray before choosing the twelve apostles (see 6:17). Reports about Jesus and his activity even moved a Roman centurion to seek his help for a valued servant (see 7:3). The raising of the widow's son further amplified his reputation. Jesus became the subject of reports not only "throughout Judea" (ἐν ὅλῃ τῇ Ἰουδαίᾳ) but also "throughout the whole region" (πάσῃ τῇ περιχώρῳ). It is therefore unsurprising that even the imprisoned John

²¹ Another equally well-known text, Avot de-Rabbi Natan 2:2, states: "A man should not be alone with (any) woman in an inn, not even with his sister or daughter, for fear of what people will think. He should not talk to a woman in the marketplace, not even with his own wife, much less with another woman, for fear of what people will think. A man should not follow a woman in the marketplace, not even with his own wife, much less with another woman, for fear of what people will think." For further examples, see Strack and Billerbeck 1956, 438.

the Baptist heard about Jesus and his activity. He sent his disciples to inquire about Jesus' identity: "Are you the one who was to come, or should we wait for someone else?" (7:19).²² The rapid spread of news about Jesus is further evidenced by his invitation to the home of Simon the Pharisee (see 7:36) and by the presence of the sinful woman at that meal—another indication of his growing renown. In the latter episode, Luke uses the phrase ἐπιγνοῦσα ὅτι κατάκειται ἐν τῇ οἰκίᾳ τοῦ Φαρισαίου, which may be translated literally as "having learned that he was reclining in the Pharisee's house" (7:37).²³ The use of the participle ἐπιγνοῦσα suggests that Jesus' whereabouts were already widely known.

In light of the preceding analysis, the presence of the women following Jesus—including those who had been healed or exorcised, as well as those who ministered to Jesus and His disciples during their mission and who may have possessed some social and material standing—suggests that Jesus' mission was gaining momentum. A considerable crowd from different places and strata of society was learning about Him. It is therefore unsurprising that news of Jesus and His mission soon reached the court of Herod Antipas and alarmed him (see Luke 9:7–9). In other words, Luke 8:1–3 and its summary, characteristic of the Third Evangelist, clearly show that Jesus preached the kingdom "from city to city;" that is, everywhere.

At this point it is important to recall how Luke begins his account of the women who accompanied Jesus. He writes that Jesus "traveled through cities and villages" (8:1). The Twelve and the women who followed Jesus are therefore not only witnesses to this mission but also evidence that the mission reaches everyone. It extends both to those living on the margins of society—whether because of illness or social exclusion—and to those connected with the court of Herod Antipas. Moreover, the presence of healed women in the group following Jesus further confirms the effectiveness of his ministry. He truly and fully fulfills the mission He announced in the synagogue at Nazareth (see 4:16–30).

The application of narrative criticism and close reading²⁴ to Luke–Acts provides another explanation for why Luke mentions women who followed Jesus.

²² According to the Jewish historian Flavius Josephus (*Ant.* 18.5.2 §§ 116–19), John the Baptist was imprisoned and then executed in the fortress of Machaerus in Perea, in present-day Jordan, which was by no means a short distance from the place where Jesus was teaching.

²³ The Greek text reads ὅτι κατάκειται, indicating that the meal was eaten in a semi-reclining position. See Danker 2000, s.v. "κατάκειμαι."

²⁴ Recent years have seen a proliferation of studies introducing readers to narrative criticism (Resseguie 2005; Klósek 2014, 203–42).

Although for the religious elite of first-century Palestine the sight of Jesus surrounded by women may have appeared unconventional, Luke presents women as having a legitimate and integral place among the disciples (Sim 1989, 32–50). In light of Luke's two-volume work (Luke–Acts), it cannot be excluded that the evangelist presents the ministry of women accompanying Jesus as a model for Hellenistic Christian communities, in which influential women of certain social standing often supported the Church and played important roles in the emerging community of believers in Christ. Such roles are exemplified by Lydia of Philippi (Acts 16:14), Priscilla (Acts 18:2; 1 Cor 16:19), and Phoebe (Rom 16:1–2), who served in the church in Cenchreae.²⁵ In recalling the women who performed important ministries in the first communities of believers in Christ, one should also mention Paul's words of gratitude to the Philippians, and probably also to Lydia, who resided there (Phil 4:10–20). It is therefore possible that Luke, writing his Gospel for Greek-speaking communities, reflects the lived realities of Hellenistic Christian communities and presents women's ministry in the early church as deeply rooted in Jesus' own public ministry. If Jesus permitted women to accompany him, He thereby affirmed their full dignity before God and others while also accepting their support and devotion.

Conclusions

In Luke's Gospel, the women who followed Jesus constitute the only group of witnesses to all four events that stand at the foundation of the early Christian confession of faith. In 1 Cor 15:3–5, Paul summarizes the kerygma as follows: "I delivered to you first of all what I also received: that Christ died for our sins in accordance with the Scriptures; that He was buried; that He rose on the third day in accordance with the Scriptures; and that He appeared to Cephas, then to the Twelve."

Luke notes the presence of women at the moment of Jesus' death on the cross (23:49), in agreement with the other Synoptic Gospels. The same group of women who had accompanied Jesus from Galilee also participated in Jesus' provisional burial on the Day of Preparation (23:55). Moreover, it was a group

²⁵ Paul also recalls this practice in his correspondence with the Corinthians, where he asks: "Do we not have the right to take along a Christian wife, as do the rest of the apostles, and the brothers of the Lord, and Cephas?" (1 Cor 9:5).

of women who reported to the apostles what they had heard from the two men in dazzling garments at the empty tomb (24:10).

Mary Magdalene and Joanna are each mentioned by name twice (Luke 8:1–3 and 24:10). It is possible that Joanna, as the wife of an official in the service of Herod Antipas, may have been the source of some traditions related to the tetrarch's court.²⁶ Together with Mary Magdalene, she may therefore be included among the eyewitnesses (οἱ ἂν ἄρχῆς αὐτόπται) referred to in Luke's prologue (1:2). In light of this evidence, the Gospel tradition appears to rely more heavily on the testimony of women than readers often recognize. The presence of women among Jesus' disciples was undoubtedly unusual; the fact that Luke and the other evangelists nonetheless mention it is a significant argument for the historicity and reliability of the tradition.

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²⁶ This is a well-established thesis, and it is almost impossible to list all the authors who defend it. Nevertheless, some may be noted: Bovon 2002, 264; Brown 1997, 266–67; Fitzmyer 1981, 698; and Mickiewicz 2012, 411–12. It is also worth noting that another figure from the tetrarch's close circle appears in Acts 13:1, namely Manaen, who had grown up with Herod the tetrarch (Keener 2013, 1988).

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