

Chapter 9
Lesson Plan Enrichment Ideas
Unlikely Witness
Jesus and Mary Magdalene

Warm Up

Recall a time when someone's personal testimony had an impact on you. It could have been given in an advertisement, a personal recommendation, or someone just sharing their experience. What aspects of the testimony compelled you? How was it helpful?

Things to teach for enrichment

1. Mary was given a unique insight when she returned to the tomb in 20:11-12. "She saw two angels in white sitting, one at the head and one at the feet, where the body of Jesus had been lying." The position of these angels was no accident. It sent a clear message: Jesus' death provided atonement for mankind.

The Mercy Seat:

In Exodus 25:10-22, God instructed the Israelites to make the Ark of the Covenant which would be housed in the Holy of Holies of the Tabernacle. He called the cover of this vessel the *Mercy Seat*. It had a cherub (angelic figure) positioned at each end. He told His people (v. 22): "There I will meet with you; and from above the mercy seat, between the two cherubim which are upon the ark of the testimony..." It was there on the Mercy Seat, that once a year, on the Day of Atonement, the blood of the sacrificed Passover lamb was sprinkled. The sins of Israel were passed over, covered by the life-blood of the Lamb.

In Romans 3:25, Paul calls Jesus by the same Greek word for Mercy Seat (translated as *propitiation* in the NASB). *Jesus was the mercy seat*. In Hebrews 9, the writer describes the Ark of the Covenant: "...covered on all sides with gold... and above it were the cherubim of glory overshadowing the mercy seat... through His own blood, [Christ] entered the holy place once for all, having obtained eternal redemption...having been offered once to bear the sins of many." (Hebrews 9:4, 5, 12, 28)

This gives a bigger meaning to the two angels seated where the body of Jesus had been: one at the head and one at the feet. It clearly depicts Jesus as the Mercy Seat. But this time, the atonement was effectual for eternity. As Hebrews states, it was an offering made once for all time. Jesus' sacrifice was eternally effective and complete.

2. It is significant that the first people chosen to witness the resurrection were women. This is ironic, since Jewish law pronounced women as ineligible to witness (M. Rosh Ha-Shanah I.8) The Jewish historian Josephus wrote "The law about an oath of witness applies to men but not to women." (*Antiquities* IV. Viii. 15, Num. RabbaX, 159b; TJ *Yoma* VI.2.)

Even the apostles, who had heard Jesus' plan to be crucified then raised from the dead from His own mouth several times over, did not believe the women. Luke 24:11 tells us "these words appeared to them as nonsense, and they would not believe them." Mary Magdalene's word and first-hand experience did not convince them, either. Mark 16:11: "When they heard that He was alive and had been seen by her, they refused to believe it." Paul does not even mention the women in his list of resurrection witnesses in 1 Corinthians 15:4-8. Perhaps he knew the reaction that would surely follow?

Having women be the primary witnesses to the resurrection was a potential embarrassment to the early Church, in view of the societal prejudice against the validity of a women's testimony. Therefore, the early Church would never have invented this detail. It can only be explained that it was related to the world because it was the truth.

Why do you think God chose to have women be the first eyewitnesses? Remember: Jesus did His first miracle at the request of Mary! Do you think God's choice of women to play key roles in these especially important moments has possible implications as to how He planned to use women in His kingdom?

3. Fear is an important element to the resurrection story. What the women saw and heard shook them to their core. Mark tells us the women "went out and fled from the tomb, for trembling and astonishment had gripped them; and they said nothing to anyone, for they were afraid."

At an earlier revelation, Peter, James, and John responded to what they saw at the Transfiguration in much the same way: "For he did not know what to answer, for they became terrified." (9:6) After Jesus calmed the storm, Mark tells us the disciples "became very much afraid and said to one another, 'Who then is this, that even the wind and the sea obey Him?'" People who witnessed the exorcizing of a demon in Gerasenes "became frightened." (Mark 5:15) The hemorrhaging woman was afraid when she was healed (Mark 5:33).

Is fear an appropriate response to seeing God at work? Why do you think revelations of God so fear-inspiring?

4. We wonder at God's choice to use us to build His kingdom. We are weak, can lack commitment, and often our tongues get us into trouble. How can God use such faulty vessels?

Read 1 Corinthians 1:27 and 2 Corinthians 12:7-10. Paul saw the frailty in his person, and admitted he himself was nothing impressive: "For they say, 'His letters are weighty and strong, but his personal presence is unimpressive and his speech contemptible.'" The power is not in the messenger. The power is in the message.

5. Compare the resurrection accounts of Lazarus and Jesus. What was the same? What was different?

<p style="text-align: center;">Lazarus <i>John 11:1-46</i></p>	<p style="text-align: center;">Jesus <i>Matthew 28:1-15; Mark 16:1-11; Luke 24:12; John 20:1-18</i></p>
<p>Died of illness</p> <p>Dead in the tomb 4 days</p> <p>Professional mourners, family and friends gathered Stone commanded to be removed</p> <p>Jesus commands the dead to “come forth”</p> <p>Lazarus appears at the entrance to the tomb, still wrapped in grave cloths. He had to be unbound by others. Mourners all witnessed the resurrection People saw and believed</p>	<p>Died of crucifixion; brutal torture, beating, disfigurement</p> <p>Dead 3 days After a hasty burial, body left alone. No funeral procession or public mourning allowed.</p> <p>Stone moved away from the entrance of the tomb</p> <p>An empty spot remained where Jesus’ body once lay. His grave clothes were lying there, and the head-cloth rolled up in a place by itself.</p> <p>Angels present. Guards gave testimony. Women the first to witness the empty tomb, followed by Peter and John.</p> <p>John saw the empty tomb and believed</p>

What insights do these contrasting details give you into the resurrection of Christ?

6. Jesus tells Mary to “go and take word to my brethren.” It is the first time he calls the disciples His *brothers*. Why do you think this is? How did the resurrection impact the relationship between Jesus and His disciples? (See Ephesians 1:3-12.)