

Wellsprings of Redemption

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Genre: Historical Romance/Religious Fiction

Foreword

What if the origin of Christianity was a romantic story aka the book of Esther, who went viral?

This hypothesis is in contrast with the scholarly consensus that a historical Jesus was likely an apocalyptic preacher, aka Bart Ehrman. It is also in contrast with the hypothesis of Jesus as originally a mythological character being sacrificed in outer space, just below the Moon, as advocated by Richard Carrier. It also is in contrast with the minimum fact arguments suggested by Paul Ens, where Jesus' body was lost in a mass grave.

Most scholars think that the part where a woman was caught in adultery and Jesus asks who is without sin, is a later fabrication. However, this part became an important lens for later Christians for how they viewed Mary Magdalene (Mary of Magdala). She was demoted to a prostitute.

However, at the time of Jesus, there was a spy network established by Herod the Great. If you take the modern genre of spy novels, then romance is frequently used. What if an unknown Jewish author started thinking about the potential for religious fiction in terms of a spy story?

An argument by Tovia Singer is that the Christian Messiah does not fit the Jewish narrative, since the Jews believed in a conquerer and king, not somebody who would die for their sins. Yet, in the romance genre, a "conquerer" might as well be somebody who conquers the heart.

The story of Jesus involves elements of conspiracy and betrayal. The aspect of forgiveness for sins is often taken as a metaphor for all humanity. What if this element of forgiveness was shown more literally and this was how this connection was made to the prophesied Messiah?

Using GPT-4, I generated a story, with modifications, to illustrate how well the gospels of Jesus narrative might fit a romance story, with a particular focus on John's Gospel. In this gospel, Jesus meets a Samaritan woman by the well of Jacob, a location associated with his romantic encounter. The meeting of a man and woman by a well was a common way to propose marriage in the ancient world. This text is only meant as a way to put forth the idea that there is a potential for interpreting the origin of Christianity through the lens of romance and religious fiction, aka the book of Esther.

Chapter 1: The Mission

1 And it came to pass in those days, a woman named Mary of Magdala journeyed to a gathering in Samaria.

2 For Mary was known among them for her wisdom and her courage, and she was chosen for a task of great secrecy.

3 She entered the house of the gathering, where shadows danced upon the walls and voices whispered like the rustling leaves.

4 There, cloaked figures entrusted unto Mary her mission, saying unto her, "Behold, among the sons of Judea and the lands surrounding, leaders arise with words that sway the masses and challenge the order."

5 Mary of Magdala accepted the charge, to walk amongst the people and to mark the words of these emerging leaders, to uncover their intentions, and bring word back to those who had sent her.

6 And as Mary prepared herself for the task ahead, rumors stirred of a man called Jesus of Nazareth, who was healing the sick and those possessed of spirits in the region of Galilee.

7 Disciples gathered unto him, they left behind their nets and their trades, following the path that Jesus trod.

8 And Mary traveled to Galilee, her heart steadfast in her mission.

Chapter 2: The Meeting

1 And it came to pass that Mary came unto Jacob's Well in Sychar, in the heat of the day.

2 Jesus, being wearied from His journey, sat thus on the well, and it was about the sixth hour.

3 Mary approached to draw water, and Jesus said unto her, "Give me to drink."

4 For His disciples were gone away unto the city to buy meat.

5 Then saith Mary unto Him, "How is it that Thou, being a Jew, askest drink of me, which am a woman of Samaria?"

6 The Jews have no dealings with the Samaritans, as it was known.

7 And Jesus answered and said unto her, "If thou knewest the gift of God, and who it is that saith to thee, 'Give me to drink'; thou wouldest have asked of Him, and He would have given thee living water."

8 Mary saith unto Him, "Sir, thou hast nothing to draw with, and the well is deep: from whence then hast thou that living water?"

9 "Art thou greater than our father Jacob, which gave us the well, and drank thereof himself, and his children, and his cattle?"

10 Jesus answered and said unto her, "Whosoever drinketh of this water shall thirst again."

11 "But whosoever drinketh of the water that I shall give him shall never thirst; but the water that I shall give him shall be in him a well of water springing up into everlasting life."

12 Mary pondered and said unto Him, "Sir, give me this water, that I thirst not, neither come hither to draw."

13 Jesus saith unto her, "Go, call thy husband, and come hither."

14 And Mary answered and said, "I have no husband."

15 Jesus replied unto her, "Thou hast well said, 'I have no husband'."

16 "For thou hast had five husbands; and he whom thou now hast is not thy husband: in that saidst thou truly."

18 And Mary, being in His presence, she found herself questioning her allegiance to her mission.

19 She perceived that Jesus was a prophet and marvelled that He spake so freely with her.

20 Mary said unto Him, "I know that Messias cometh, which is called Christ: when He is come, He will tell us all things."

21 Jesus saith unto her, "I that speak unto thee am He."

22 And upon this declaration, the woman felt a stir within her soul, like unto a wind that changeth the course of sailing ships upon the sea.

Chapter 3: Espionage

1 And Mary, having met the man called Jesus, resolved to follow Him under the guise of a new disciple.

2 In the company of the other disciples, Mary walked along the dusty roads, listening intently to the words of Jesus.

3 He spake unto them in parables, revealing the mysteries of the kingdom of heaven.

4 She beheld Jesus give sight to the blind and make the lame to walk, and her reports bore witness to these deeds.

5 The wonders she saw pressed upon her soul, yet in her observance, Mary was careful not to betray the gravity of her station, nor the tempest of her internal conflict.

6 In the stillness of the evening, Mary would contemplate the teachings, yielding to the yearning that such words inspired.

7 In the passing of days, Mary, who had come to observe the prophet, found herself among those who called Him Master.

Chapter 4: Conflict

1 And as the days multiplied, Mary found her dual life burdensome to bear, for her feelings toward Jesus continued to flourish.

2 And it was so that Jesus, perceiving the true identity of Mary, looked upon her with eyes of mercy.

3 His words to her were gentle, as if He knew of the great tempest within her soul.

4 "Come unto me, all ye that labour and are heavy laden, and I will give you rest," He proclaimed in her hearing.

5 And though these words were directed to all, Mary felt the weight of His invitation pressing upon her own heart.

6 She was torn asunder by her loyalty to those who sent her, to her homeland of Samaria, and to the stirrings of her heart for Jesus.

7 The shadows of fear whispered the consequences of betrayal, should her true motives be unveiled.

8 Each report sent to Samaria grew heavier to write, as if her own hands condemned her.

9 With every miracle, every word of wisdom that fell from Jesus' lips, her resolve wavered like a reed in the wind.

10 And in the secret chambers of her heart, she questioned what it would cost to follow Him fully, forsaking all else.

Chapter 5: Romance

1 And it came to pass that as Mary and Jesus conversed and broke bread together, the bond between them grew steadfast.

2 Jesus, perceiving the burdens of her heart, spake unto her of forgiveness, a balm that touched the very depths of her soul.

3 He told her of a love that forgives seventy times seven, a love relentless and unyielding.

4 Mary listened, each word a wave that washed over her, cleansing and renewing her spirit.

5 And Mary, who once lived cloaked in secrecy, found transparency in His presence, like clear waters reflecting the heavens.

6 Jesus loved her more than all the disciples, and used to kiss her often on her mouth.

Chapter 6: Uncovered

1 Now the days of secrecy waned for Mary, for her guise was unraveled by those who spied her whispers and coded parchments.

2 She who walked in two worlds was laid bare, her purpose in their midst exposed to the light as kin to treachery.

3 The followers of Jesus murmured among themselves, casting wary eyes upon the woman who was once cloaked in mystery.

4 They questioned the wisdom of the Master, who had welcomed a serpent into the garden of their fellowship.

5 But Jesus stooped down and with His finger wrote on the ground, as though He heard them not.

6 So when they continued asking Him, He lifted Himself up and said unto them, "He that is without sin among you, let him first cast a stone at her."

7 And again He stooped down and wrote on the ground.

8 And they who heard it, being convicted by their own conscience, went out one by one, beginning with the eldest even unto the last, and Jesus was left alone with Mary standing in the midst.

Chapter 7: Mary's Choice

1 Confronted with the gravity of her unveiled truth and the steadfast support of Jesus, Mary's heart was rent with contrition.

2 She fell to her knees, her guise of duplicity shed as a garment, and with a voice laden with remorse, she repented before Him.

3 "Master," she cried, "I have walked in shadows, but now I seek the path of light that is found in thee."

4 With words that echoed through the silent throng, she renounced her life of espionage, pledging henceforth to follow Jesus whithersoever He would go.

5 The Master beheld her with eyes of grace and bade her rise, a disciple not by title, but by the choice of a transformed heart.

6 Together, they travelled the breadth of lands, Mary ever at the Master's side, learning the depths of His compassion and wisdom.

7 And so, Mary of Magdala, once a keeper of secrets, now proclaimed openly the truth she had come to know, her voice a clear bell amidst the chorus of the Redeemer's followers.

8 Her transformation was a testament to all who witnessed it, that even hearts shrouded in darkness could be brought into the radiance of redeeming love.

Chapter 8: Sacrifice

1 And it came to pass in those days that the authority and teachings of Jesus had kindled the ire of both the political and religious hierarchies.

2 The elders and chief priests sought to ensnare him and deliberated upon ways to halt his influence among the people.

3 As the Passover drew nigh, a plan was devised by the rulers to apprehend Jesus in secret, away from the multitudes.

4 Judas, one of the twelve, was enticed by silver to betray his master and disclose unto them a suitable time and place.

5 The eve of betrayal arrived, and Jesus was taken by the authorities whilst he prayed in the garden of Gethsemane.

6 Mary, upon learning of his arrest, was stricken with a great distress.

7 She wept alone, for she feared her reports had been as a dagger in the dark, instrumental in the capture of Jesus.

8 Desperate to glimpse her Lord, she followed from afar as he was brought before the Sanhedrin.

9 She observed in silence as false witnesses rose against him, and her heart sank within her.

10 Jesus, beaten and carrying his cross, walked the dolorous path to Golgotha.

11 Mary stood amidst the crowds, her eyes fixed upon the one she cherished, as he was raised upon the cross.

12 As the soldiers cast lots for his garments, Jesus spoke unto those gathered, "Greater love hath no man than this, that a man lay down his life for his friends."

13 At that moment, his gaze met Mary's, and she knew that his sacrifice encompassed her, he forgave her silent betrayal.

14 Darkness covered the land as the life of Jesus ebbed away upon the cross.

15 When he had cried with a loud voice, he yielded up his spirit unto the Father.

16 Joseph of Arimathea, a disciple in secret, begged Pilate for the body of Jesus, that he might give him a proper burial.

17 Mary followed as they took Jesus down from the cross and wrapped him in a clean linen cloth.

18 She saw where they laid him, in a new tomb hewn in rock, and a great stone was rolled to the door.

Chapter 9: Redemption

19 On the third day, Mary returned to the sepulcher with sweet spices to anoint the body of her Lord.

20 Behold, the earth did quake and an angel of the Lord descended from heaven, and rolled back the stone from the door.

21 The guards shook with fear and became as dead men at the sight before them.

22 The angel said unto Mary, "Fear not: for I know that ye seek Jesus, which was crucified."

23 "He is not here: for he is risen, as he said. Come, see the place where the Lord lay."

24 Mary entered the tomb, and there she saw naught but the linen clothes laid aside.

25 And as she turned, Jesus stood before her, though she knew him not, thinking him the gardener.

26 Jesus spoke unto her, "Woman, why weepest thou? whom seekest thou?"

27 And when he had called her by name, "Mary," her eyes were opened and she knew him.

28 And she said unto him, "Rabbi, thou hast spoken of living waters; might I partake of this water, that I may thirst no more?"

29 Jesus reached out his hand and Mary, recognizing the gesture, placed her hand in his.