

## The 'Messianic' Anointing of Jesus (Mark 14:3-9)<sup>1</sup>

All four evangelists include a scene where Jesus is anointed by a woman during a meal, but the stories differ.

Luke 7:37-38	John 12:3	Mark 14:3
<p>A woman...sinner... alabaster jar of ointment... Began to bathe <u>his feet</u> with her tears and she dried them with her hair, and she kissed his feet and she anointed them with the ointment...</p>	<p>Mary took <i>a pound</i> of costly ointment made of pure nard, Anointed <u>the feet</u> of Jesus and dried them with her hair</p>	<p>A woman came with an alabaster jar of very costly ointment of pure nard <i>and she broke open the jar and poured the ointment over his head</i></p>

- Scene is set at beginning of the Passion, which emphasizes its connection to Jesus' death.
- New significance is added with anointing the head; in a Hebrew context, this is related to anointing a King.
- By adding a mandate to remember, Jesus' final saying is the interpretive key
- That the anointing is performed by a woman, not a priest poses a serious difficulty
- Her exemplary act underlines the values of discipleship.
- For Mark, it was important to make the incident a living memory, both to recreate the identity of the community and to remind it of its mission.
- The appearance of the word, *mnemosynon*, transforms her act into a fundamental memory.
- At the time the Gospels were written, a 'Christian' cultural memory did not yet exist: they represent an initial effort to form a collective memory, where memories of Jesus were selected, transmitted, and

<sup>1</sup> Santiago Guijarro and Ana Rodriguez (2011). **Biblical Theology Bulletin**, 41(3), 132-143.

elaborated in different contexts. But this process was set in the context of the cultural memory of Israel.

- While the woman’s gesture reproduces the rite of royal anointing it does so in a way that is so radically new -- the rite is redefined. The evangelist has carefully redefined the messianic character of Jesus: Jesus is Messiah, not in power but in suffering.
- She is to be remembered, so while the point of redefining Jesus’ identity is apparent, so is the identity of his followers redefined.

<b>Ancient Accounts of Royal Anointing</b>	<b>Anointing at Bethany</b>
<b>Location</b>	
House of Jesse [David: 1 Sam 16:13] Sanctuary of Gibon [Solomon: 1 Kings 1:33] Temple [Jehoash, kings of Judah]	House of Simon the Leper Mark 14:3
<b>Officiant</b>	
Prophet [Saul, David anointed by Samuel] Priest [Solomon anointed by Zaduk, Jehoash by Jehoida]	Anonymous woman Mark 14:3
<b>Subject</b>	
Candidate for the Throne	Jesus Mark 14:3
<b>Rite</b>	
Take a special container [1 Sam 16:13] With olive oil + additives [1 Sam 10:1] Pour over the head of the candidate [2 Kings 9:3]	Breaks open a perfume & pour it over the head of Jesus Mark 14:3
<b>Witnesses</b>	
People	Guests Mark 14:4
<b>Effect</b>	
Symbolically, the King receives the Spirit of God. Effect is charismatic, bestows new status as leader, with political, social, and military power.	New status: Jesus is Messiah by his passion and death Mark 14:8