

Midweek Lent – St. Matthew 26:6-13  
March 26, 2025 | Saude, Jerico, & Redeemer Lutheran Churches  
April 2, 2025 | King of Grace Lutheran Church, Waukon

## *Holy Week Prophecies: Prepared for Burial*

### **In Nomine Iesu**

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#### **St. Matthew 26:6-13**

Now when Jesus was at Bethany in the house of Simon the leper, a woman came up to Him with an alabaster flask of very expensive ointment, and she poured it on His head as He reclined at table. And when the disciples saw it, they were indignant, saying, “Why this waste? For this could have been sold for a large sum and given to the poor.” But Jesus, aware of this, said to them, “Why do you trouble the woman? For she has done a beautiful thing to Me. For you always have the poor with you, but you will not always have Me. In pouring this ointment on My body, she has done it to prepare Me for burial. Truly, I say to you, wherever this gospel is proclaimed in the whole world, what she has done will also be told in memory of her.” <sup>(ESV)</sup>

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O Lord Jesus Christ, our merciful Savior, grant, we humbly ask You, that our souls may be profited by devout meditation on Your holy Passion. Fill our hearts with Your Holy Spirit, that, like [the woman at] Bethany, we may with a humble and contrite heart seek and find comfort in Your love, and present to You as an acceptable offering the willing service of our lives.... Bless us through the remembrance of Your Passion, for Your holy name’s sake, who lives and reigns with the Father and the Holy Spirit, ever one God, now and forever. Amen. (*The Lutheran Liturgy*, p. 106)

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In Christ Jesus, who was anointed to be our Substitute, our Savior, dear fellow redeemed:

Today’s reading introduces us to a woman at a house in Bethany, where Jesus was the honored guest at a meal. She is not named in Matthew’s Gospel or in the parallel account from the Gospel of Mark (14:3-9). But she is named in the Gospel of John (12:1-8). This woman was Mary, the sister of Martha and Lazarus. The three siblings lived in Bethany, and they were in a festive mood. Jesus had recently come to see them four days too late after Lazarus had died. But Jesus promptly called Lazarus out of his tomb alive and well. This formerly dead man was now reclining at the same table as Jesus.

Mary approached Jesus carrying “*an alabaster flask of very expensive ointment.*” The ointment was made of scented oil from a spikenard plant, and it was of the highest quality. In the parallel accounts, we hear the disciples’ estimate that the flask of oil was worth three hundred denarii which was about one year’s wages. It’s difficult to imagine spending one year’s wages on a bottle of perfume or cologne or any kind of oil. Could it be that Mary had purchased it for the burial of her brother, but never had the opportunity to use it?

Now she brought it to Jesus, the Savior of her brother and of the world, and she poured it over His head. St. John tells us she poured some on His feet also and wiped His feet with her hair (12:3). As the fragrance of the ointment filled the house, the disciples “caught wind” of what was going on. They recognized how costly the product was, and they criticized Mary with

Judas Iscariot leading the charge: *"Why this waste? For this could have been sold for a large sum and given to the poor."*

They seemed to have a good argument. After all, Mary could have just used *some* of the ointment. And besides, Jesus hadn't asked her for this. Perhaps He was even annoyed by it. Those thoughts were put to rest when Jesus stepped up boldly in her defense. He gave several reasons why they should not trouble Mary. First, she had done a beautiful thing to Him, an act of love and devotion from the heart. Second, they always had the poor with them, but they would not always have Jesus. Third, she had done this to prepare Jesus' body for burial.

It's hard to say if Mary thought she was preparing Jesus for burial. I expect that the last thing she wanted was for her Lord to die and be buried. But Jesus gave this as the rationale for her faithful act. He was going to die. He had told this to His disciples multiple times. The fact that Jesus brought it up at this time was a sign that His death was quickly approaching.

Matthew records the anointing of Jesus just before his account of Jesus eating the Passover meal with His disciples and instituting His Supper on the Thursday of Holy Week. But it is clear that the placement of this account is topical instead of chronological. Just before he writes about the anointing of Jesus, he mentions the chief priests and the elders plotting to arrest Jesus and kill Him. Then he tells of Mary anointing Jesus and being criticized for it, especially by Judas. Then Matthew reports that Judas went to the chief priests and asked what they would give him if he betrayed Jesus to them. Matthew makes it clear that Mary's so-called "wasteful" anointing of Jesus was a catalyst for greedy Judas to plan how to betray Jesus.

The anointing of Jesus actually happened the day before Palm Sunday (Joh. 12:1) as a preview of what was coming that week. Jesus was anointed for His burial and then made His way from Bethany to Jerusalem where He would be crucified. How long did the fragrance of the ointment linger on Jesus? Almost certainly through the next day when He rode into Jerusalem on a donkey. Then likely into Monday when He cleared the temple of the buyers and sellers. Perhaps all through the week, this scent could have been detected in Jesus' hair.

Could the fragrance have gotten stronger again when Jesus sweat drops of blood in the Garden of Gethsemane, or when the crown of thorns brought out blood from multiple wounds in His head? Could Joseph and Nicodemus smell the fragrance when they brought His lifeless body down from the cross? Yes, this ointment was applied in advance for His burial. Jesus had to die. There was no other way. He had to go to the cross to save you. He had to be laid in a dark tomb with the entrance sealed.

The unbelieving world operates as though Jesus is still dead. Millions upon millions go through their day and conduct their business with no thought about Jesus' sacrifice for them and no expectation of His return. To the unbelieving world, any devotion to Jesus in time, treasures, and talents is wasteful.

"You're wasting your money if you give it to the church!" they say. "Don't you know how often church funds have been misused for personal gain? Much better to give it to the people who actually need it, like the poor." "You're wasting your time by listening to the words of a God you have never seen. And if Christians are supposed to have a better life, there are an awful lot of hypocritical and miserable Christians." "Why spend the best years of your life denying what

you really want to do because some old book says you should? Why limit yourself? You only live once.”

These criticisms have an effect on us. I’m guessing that most if not all of you have had the experience of people looking at you funny when you tell them you go to church—if not outright ridiculing you for doing so—and with the pressure on, you acted like church was not really so important to you. Possibly you have thought that your life would be easier or more enjoyable if you weren’t a Christian. Maybe you have wondered if you have gotten as much out of Christianity as you have put into it, and the question came to mind, *“Is this all just a waste?”*

If anyone had reason to ask that, it was Jesus as He felt the whip tear at His back, the thorns cut into His skull, and the nails pierce His hands and feet. But His suffering was much worse than that. He carried the weight of the whole world’s sin on Himself. He suffered the eternal punishments of hell for wrongs He never committed. He felt forsaken by the very Father who sent Him to do this work.

But Jesus did not consider this a waste. He did not consider pouring out His holy blood for your sins a waste. He willingly, purposely, wholeheartedly did this for you. He did not waver. He did not turn back. He did not shrink from this terrible task that only He could do, and that He had to do alone.

He doesn’t hold His suffering and death against you. In fact, He is constantly making note of the beautiful things you do for Him. What things are these? Whatever you do in faith out of love for those around you, He counts as having been done for Him (Mat. 25:40). He regards it in the same way as the great gift Mary gave Him for His burial.

*“Truly, I say to you, wherever this gospel is proclaimed in the whole world, what she has done will also be told in memory of her.”* And so it is. Jesus’ prophecy is fulfilled today and every time we hear this Gospel. We are still hearing about Mary’s beautiful act of devotion. Her faithful gift and Jesus’ response to it points us to His saving work, that He was crucified, died, and was buried to win for us eternal life. *Thanks be to God! Amen.*

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