

John 12:3

Authorized King James Version (KJV)

Then took Mary a pound of ointment of spikenard, very costly, and anointed the feet of Jesus, and wiped his feet with her hair: and the house was filled with the odour of the ointment.

Analysis

Mary anoints Jesus' feet with expensive spikenard (pure nard), then wipes them with her hair. The act is extravagant worship—the oil cost a year's wages (v. 5). Feet-anointing was servant's work; using hair was radical humility. Mary's act demonstrates love beyond calculation, worship beyond propriety. The fragrance filling the house symbolizes worship's impact—genuine devotion affects everyone present. This anointing fulfills Jesus' prediction (Matt 26:13) and previews His burial preparation. Mary grasps what others miss: Jesus' imminent death.

Historical Context

Spikenard imported from the Himalayas was extremely costly. Women's unbound hair was considered intimate, making Mary's act shocking. Her behavior demonstrates devotion transcending cultural propriety.

Related Passages

1 Corinthians 13:4 — Characteristics of love

John 15:13 — Greatest form of love

Study Questions

1. What does Mary's extravagant worship teach about appropriate response to Christ's grace?
2. How does her prophetic anointing demonstrate spiritual insight others lacked?
3. In what ways does genuine worship affect those around us?

Interlinear Text

ἡ οὖν Μαρία λαβοῦσα λίτραν μύρου νάρδου
G3588 Then Mary took a pound of ointment of spikenard
G3767 G3137 G2983 G3046 G3464 G3487

πιστικῆς πολυτίμου ἥλειψεν τοὺς πόδας τοῦ Ἰησοῦ καὶ
G4101 very costly and anointed G218 G3588 feet G3588 of Jesus and
G4186 G2359 G846 G4228 G2424 G2532

ἐξέμαξεν ταῖς θριξὶν αὐτοῦ τοὺς πόδας αὐτοῦ ἡ δὲ
wiped G3588 hair his G3588 feet his G3588 and
G1591 G2359 G846 G4228 G846 G1161

οἰκία ἐπληρώθη ἐκ τῆς ὄσμῆς τοῦ μύρου
the house was filled with the odour of ointment
G3614 G4137 G1537 G3588 G3744 G3588 G3464

Additional Cross-References

John 11:2 (Parallel theme): (It was that Mary which anointed the Lord with ointment, and wiped his feet with her hair; whose brother Lazarus was sick.)

Luke 7:46 (Parallel theme): My head with oil thou didst not anoint: but this woman hath anointed my feet with ointment.

John 11:32 (References Jesus): Then when Mary was come where Jesus was, and saw him, she fell down at his feet, saying unto him, Lord, if thou hadst been here, my brother had not died.

John 11:28 (Parallel theme): And when she had so said, she went her way, and called Mary her sister secretly, saying, The Master is come, and calleth for thee.

Song of Solomon 1:3: Because of the savour of thy good ointments thy name is as ointment poured forth, therefore do the virgins love thee.

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