

John 20:14

Authorized King James Version (KJV)

And when she had thus said, she turned herself back, and saw Jesus standing, and knew not that it was Jesus.

Analysis

She turned herself back (ἐστράφη εἰς τὰ ὄπισω, *estraphē eis ta opisō*)—perhaps hearing movement behind her, or prompted by the angels' gaze past her. The passive voice may suggest divine orchestration of this pivot point. **And saw Jesus standing** (θεωρεῖ τὸν Ἰησοῦν ἐστῶτα, *theōrei ton Iēsoun hestōta*)—she observes him standing there (perfect participle suggests he'd been there), yet **knew not that it was Jesus** (οὐκ ἤδει ὅτι Ἰησοῦς ἐστιν, *ouk ēdei hoti Iēsous estin*).

Why didn't she recognize him? Tear-blurred vision, dim morning light, and supernatural prevention (Luke 24:16 suggests Jesus sometimes controlled recognition) all contribute. But primarily: she's looking for a corpse, not seeking a risen Lord. Our expectations shape perception—she literally cannot see what she believes impossible. The next verses show recognition comes through relationship (hearing her name, v.16), not just visual evidence.

Historical Context

The verb 'turned back' may indicate she turned from looking into the tomb (where angels sat) to look outside, toward the garden. Garden tombs often had chambers with benches where bodies were prepared before final burial. Jesus standing in the garden fulfills the imagery of Song of Solomon (the seeking bride) and Genesis 3 (the Last Adam in the garden where the first Adam fell). That Mary mistakes him for the gardener (v.15) has theological irony—he is the true Gardener of new creation.

Related Passages

Genesis 1:1 — Creation of heavens and earth

Colossians 1:16 — All things created through Christ

Study Questions

1. How do your expectations about what Jesus should be doing prevent you from recognizing his actual presence?
2. Why does resurrection recognition require more than physical sight—what kind of 'seeing' does it demand?
3. What does Mary's failure to recognize Jesus teach about the resurrection body's continuity and discontinuity with his pre-resurrection body?

Interlinear Text

καὶ ταῦτα εἰποῦσα ἐστράφη εἰς τὰ ὄπίσω καὶ
And thus said she turned herself back And
G2532 G5023 G2036 G4762 G1519 G3588 G3694 G2532

θεωρεῖ τὸν Ἰησοῦς ἐστῶτα καὶ οὐκ ἤδει ὅτι ὁ
saw G3588 Jesus standing And not knew that G3588
G2334 G2424 G2476 G2532 G3756 G1492 G3754

Ἰησοῦς ἐστιν
Jesus it was
G2424 G2076

Additional Cross-References

Mark 16:9 (References Jesus): Now when Jesus was risen early the first day of the week, he appeared first to Mary Magdalene, out of whom he had cast seven devils.

Matthew 28:9 (References Jesus): And as they went to tell his disciples, behold, Jesus met them, saying, All hail. And they came and held him by the feet, and worshipped him.

John 21:4 (References Jesus): But when the morning was now come, Jesus stood on the shore: but the disciples knew not that it was Jesus.

Luke 24:16 (Parallel theme): But their eyes were holden that they should not know him.

Luke 24:31 (Parallel theme): And their eyes were opened, and they knew him; and he vanished out of their sight.