

# The Fragrance of Generosity

(A Christmas meditation)

I knew that Mary took a pound of very costly ointment and anointed Jesus for his burial. This story is found in Matt. 26:, Mark 14, and John 12:. I knew that the cost of the ointment was about three hundred days wages and that Judas and the other disciples criticized her for such "waste." I knew that Mary had anointed the head and the feet of Jesus with this ointment, and that the fragrance was so strong that its odour filled the whole house. I knew that wherever the Gospel was to be proclaimed, Jesus wanted the story of this woman's generosity to be told.

It was only this morning, however, that I began to think of the way this woman's gift affected Jesus.

A pound of perfume poured on your head has a lasting influence. Its odour is not easily dissipated. It would soak into your hair and clothing and linger for many days. Mary, as you know, anointed Jesus just before his betrayal, trial, and crucifixion. The influence of her generosity was obviously with him during the most important hours of His earthly life and ministry.

At the last supper, as you know, there was strife among the disciples as to which of them would be the greatest (Lk. 22:24.) It was then that the fragrant Jesus took a basin and began to wash their feet.

Jesus, still radiating the aroma of Mary's gift, entered Gethsemane with an urgent request for help from His disciples. His soul was exceeding sorrowful even unto death. As they slumbered and slept, however, the fragrance of Mary's selfless love buoyed Him up. He could not have escaped from that odour, even had He wanted to. But surely the sweet savour of her insight and generosity must have helped Him during those lonely hours of agony and prayer.

When the soldiers came, the disciples forsook Him and fled. The soldiers too must have noticed the influence of Mary on His life. That lasting fragrance was ever present. It was with him before the high priest and petty kings like Pilot and Herod. It remained when the crown of thorns was placed upon His head and His back was bleeding and raw. When they covered His eyes and demanded that He prophesy which one had beaten Him, the radiant aroma that reflected her love was a constant reminder that someone cared.

The burning of incense, as you know, was an integral part of Hebrew worship. Many times we are told in Scripture that the sacrifices of man arose to heaven as a sweet smelling savour. When the High Priest entered into the Holy of Holies, for example, he was commanded by God to put incense upon the fire before the Lord, that he die not.. The fragrant cloud of this sweet smelling incense covered the mercy seat (Lev. 16:13.)

When Jesus was nailed on the cross, the sweet smell of Mary's ointment was surely still present. That wonderful scent even remained when Jesus was forsaken by God. It was in His nostrils when He breathed a final time. It may have influenced His last conscious thought when He entered into that Holy Place not made by human hands to intercede for the sins of all mankind.

No wonder Jesus was so moved by Mary and her generous gift. The bickering disciples quibbled about the money, but Mary saw something infinitely more valuable than earthly treasure. She anointed Jesus for His burial. She understood what the disciples failed to understand. She saw what they did not see. Peter followed from afar, and John stood forlorn at the foot of the cross, but it seems that the generous Mary did more for Jesus at Calvary than any other.

No one has ever anointed my head with precious ointment, yet I have been a constant recipient of fragrance generosity. From the day of my birth to this present hour I am a debtor. I am indebted to my parents and a long list of others who have sacrificially given to me without the slightest expectation of receiving anything in return. The fragrance of their thoughtful love is ever present. It is with me in the activities of a busy day, and the quietness of a lonely night. It is with me in times of trial and temptation, happiness and cheer.

I am happy to tell the story of Mary's generosity. Jesus has ordained that we do so. May the fragrance of her love, through Jesus, make us also a sweet savour to the world around us.

