

Woman Anointing Jesus' Head

Read 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."

This unnamed woman appears in Matthew and Mark. The episode seems to take place after Palm Sunday during what we call Holy Week.

The story takes place in Bethany, a village just outside of Jerusalem. It happens in the home of a former leper [maybe cured by Jesus] named Simon. The woman brings a costly perfume in an alabaster flask.

Alabaster occurs only in the New Testament in connection with the box of "ointment of spikenard very precious," with the contents of which a woman anointed the head of Jesus as he sat at supper in the house of Simon the leper. These boxes were made from a stone found near Alabastron in Egypt, and from this circumstance the Greeks gave them the name of the city where they were made. The name was then given to the stone of which they were made; and finally to all perfume vessels, of whatever material they were formed. The woman "broke" the vessel; i.e., she broke off, as was usually done, the long and narrow neck so as to reach the contents. This stone resembles marble, but is softer in its texture, and hence very easily wrought into boxes.

Spikenard, also called **nard**, **nardin**, and **muskroot**, is a class of aromatic amber-colored [essential oil](#) derived from [Nardostachys jatamansi](#), a [flowering plant](#) of the [valerian](#) family which grows in the [Himalayas](#) of [Nepal](#), [China](#), and [India](#). The oil has been used over centuries as a perfume, a [traditional medicine](#), or in religious ceremonies across a wide territory from India to Europe.

The disciples are shocked at the waste of money but Jesus connected the gesture to his burial. When laid in the tomb Jesus' body was not anointed with perfumes, as was the custom of the day, but quick placed in the cave because the Sabbath was beginning as the sun was setting and no work was to be done on the Sabbath. That's why the women came early Sunday morning to anoint his dead body after the Sabbath was done.

Luke records a similar story but taking place months before. John tells the story of Mary [sister of Lazarus] anointing Jesus' feet on the Saturday evening before Palm Sunday.