

Fifth Sunday in Lent – Passion Sunday – Gospel of John, chapter 12, verses 1 – 8:-

There has always been some discussion as to relationship between the different accounts of the anointing of the feet of the Lord Jesus in the four Gospels. Matthew 26, verses 6 – 13 and Mark chapter 14, verses 3 – 9 can be describing the same occasion as John chapter 12. However there are some differences in the account in Luke chapter 7, verses 37 – 50. It occurred earlier in the Lord's ministry while John the Baptist was in prison and Jesus himself in Galilee. The woman in Luke's account is described as 'a sinner' which does not fit what we know of Mary of Bethany!

John chapter 12, verse 1:-

If we take the dating according to this Gospel, the Passover that year was kept on the Friday/ Saturday of Holy Week – Friday being the Day of Preparation when the Passover lambs were killed (see Gospel of John chapter 19 verse 14 and verse 31). The Lord Jesus then arrived in Bethany on the Saturday evening before 'Palm Sunday'.

Verse 2:-

We should already be familiar with the household at Bethany which lies about one mile east of the summit of the Mount of Olives. The two sisters, Martha and Mary are described in Luke chapter 10 verses 38 – 42. In that account Martha is described as being concerned with household duties while Mary is devout, sitting at the feet of the Lord Jesus and listening to his teaching. We meet them again in John's Gospel chapter 11. Note that the house itself did not have to be that of Martha and Mary (rather the house of 'Simon the leper'). The neighbours would help each other in their reception and welcome of an honoured guest! Martha served! Lazarus was also present, seated at 'the high table'.

Verse 3:-

Spikenard is oil from a plant grown in India It would be costly as an import into Palestine. The weight given, "a *litra*", was twelve ounces. Mary is always associated with the feet of the Lord Jesus – Luke chapter 10 verse 39 and the Gospel of John chapter 11, verse 32. The house would be 'open plan' maybe consisting of one large room. The fragrance of the perfume spread throughout the living quarters – maybe echoing the words of the Lord Jesus in the other Gospels' versions: this act would be told as a memorial of the woman. The fragrance of the act would have a wide distribution and a lasting effect.

Verses 4 – 6:-

Judas estimated the value of the Nard at three hundred denarii = three hundred days wages for a labourer. Here in the Gospel of John, Judas is named as a thief who 'had his hand in the cash box'!

Verses 7 – 8:-

The Lord Jesus cuts short the criticism. "*Let her alone. . . .*". It appears from the other Gospels that Judas, stung by this rebuke, slipped out and bargained with the chief priests to betray the Master. The Lord Jesus saw in Mary's act a deep significance. It was in anticipation of the Lord's death. In contrast to many who believed in a general way, the faith of Mary included the work of the Saviour – His death on the cross!