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Saint Joanna the Myrrh Bearer

Feast Day: May 24



A Female Disciple of Christ

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*On May 24, we celebrate the feast day of **Saint Joanna the Myrrh bearer** (also known as Johanna, Junia, and Jessica). Saint Joanna is remembered as one of the female disciples of Jesus, and is one of the women recorded as accompanying Jesus and the twelve disciples in the Gospel of Luke: "...Mary (called Magdalene) from whom seven demons had come out; Joanna the wife of Chuza, the manager of Herod's household; Susanna; and many others. These women were helping to support them out of their own means" (Luke 8:2-3).

Joanna is also recognized as one of the women who went to prepare Jesus' body after His crucifixion (thus, the title "myrrh bearer"), only to find the tomb empty, and later recount the words of the "*men in clothes that gleamed like lightning*" to Peter and the disciples.

On the first day of the week, very early in the morning, the women took the spices they had prepared and went to the tomb. They found the stone rolled away from the tomb, but when they entered, they did not find the body of the Lord Jesus. While they were wondering about this, suddenly two men in clothes that gleamed like lightning stood beside them. In their fright the women bowed down with their faces to the ground, but the men said to them, "Why do you look for the living among the dead? He is not here; he has risen! Remember how he told you, while he was still with you in Galilee: 'The Son of Man must be delivered into the hands of sinful men, be crucified and on the third day be raised again.'" Then they remembered his words.

When they came back from the tomb, they told all these things to the Eleven and to all the others. It was Mary Magdalene, Joanna, Mary the mother of James, and the others with them who told this to the apostles (Luke 24:1-10).

Saint Paul, in his epistle to the Romans, further references Saint Joanna (under the name Junia), suggesting that Paul recognized the importance of women leaders in the Church, offering encouragement and support of her mission, and emphasizing that her faith preceded his own:

Greet Andronicus and Junia, my relatives who have been in prison with me. They are outstanding among the apostles, and they were in Christ before I was. (Romans 16:7)

Saint Chrysostom said of Joanna, "Think what an encomium it was to be considered notable among the apostles. They were distinguished by their works and achievements. Bless me, how great the philosophy of this woman to be counted worthy to be addressed also as one of the apostles! But the praise did not stand still here, but again he praises them, saying, 'They have been in Christ before me!'"

Given her position as wife of the manager of Herod's household, Easter holy tradition suggests that Saint Joanna rescued the head of Saint John the Baptist, following his martyrdom, preserving his relics and giving them a proper, pious burial.

The life and service of Saint Joanna reminds us that all are equal in the eyes of the Lord—men and women alike-- and all have their gifts of service to provide. Joanna, a wealthy member of the court of Herod, gave up her position to live with and follow Christ, ministering to him with her own money, and living with Him in poverty. Her leadership in the Church, as an early apostle of Christ, and the respect given to her by Saint Paul in his letter to the Romans, tells us of her great faith and holiness. We look to Saint Joanna to remind us of our own call to service, sacrifice, and faith, each in our own way!

*(excerpted from: www.zimbio.com)