

	Time	Place	Host	Anointer	Jar	Contents	Where anointed	Manner of anointer	Detractor	Jesus' response	Context
<b>Mt 26:6-13</b>	Two days before Passover	Bethany	House of Simon the Leper	Woman	Alabaster	Very expensive perfume	Jesus' head, "on my body"	Not given	Jesus' disciples	Praises the woman's actions as preparation for his burial	Chief priests plot before; Judas agrees to betray after
<b>Mk 14:1-9</b>	Two days before Passover	Bethany	House of Simon the Leper	Woman	Alabaster	Very expensive perfume, pure nard	Jesus' head, "on my body"	Not given	"Some of those present"	Praises the woman's actions as preparation for his burial	Chief priests plot before; Judas agrees to betray after
<b>Lk 7:36-50</b>	Not given	Not given	House of Simon, a Pharisee	Woman who had led a sinful life	Alabaster	Perfume	Jesus' feet	Weeping, wet his feet with tears, wiped dry with hair	Simon	Compares actions of Simon to those of the woman; tells the woman to go in peace	Pharisees reject God's purpose; Jesus travels & preaches after
<b>Jn 12:1-11</b>	Six days before Passover	Bethany	Not given (Martha serves)	Mary, Martha's sister	Litra jar (about one pint)	Expensive perfume, pure nard	Jesus' feet	Wiped feet with hair	Judas Iscariot	Tells the people to leave Mary alone, "that she may keep it for the day of my burial"	Chief priests plot after

**Are these four accounts the same?** Yes, I think so, because they share too many details in common.

**How can they be harmonized?** The details that keep many interpreters from seeing them all as the same account are **a)** the time given in Matthew and Mark as compared with John, **b)** where the woman pours the perfume in Matthew and Mark as compared with Luke and John, **c)** Jesus' dialogue in response to the anointing in Matthew, Mark, and John as compared with Luke, and **d)** the context of the story especially in Luke, where it does not seem to occur near or during Holy Week (8:1: "*After this*, Jesus traveled about from one town and village to another").

**a)** A close examination of the accounts will reveal that John is speaking more carefully and accurately than all the others when it comes to chronological progression. Matthew gives the time in the account previous to the anointing, but for the account of the

anointing itself, he simply says, “While Jesus was in Bethany...” without any reference to time. Mark’s recording of the time is also in reference to the plotting of the chief priests. In both Matthew and Mark, the actual account of the anointing can be viewed as an aside to explain how the plots of the chief priests came to fruition, namely through Judas, who betrayed Jesus in response to the anointing. John makes this connection very clear. Therefore, if we were to paraphrase, we could say, “Two days before the Passover, the chief priests were looking for a way to kill Jesus. Now, when he had been in Bethany (four days before this)... Then Judas agreed to betray Jesus to them. (That is why they were now plotting with more determination than ever).”

- b) This is the easiest detail to harmonize. Jesus himself says that the woman poured it “on my body,” not just “on my head.” John’s emphasis on feet is not surprising, since he also records Jesus washing his disciples’ feet. He emphasizes her humility and service to Jesus.
- c) Even if we only look at Matthew’s and Mark’s accounts, which are clearly the same even at first glance, we see that *many* people viewed the woman’s action with contempt. It should therefore not surprise us that Jesus had more than one response - including one for his disciples (especially to Judas) and one for his host, Simon.
- d) Just because Luke says he is writing an orderly account (1:3) doesn’t mean that he is always writing in chronological order. Orderly can also mean topically, which fits very nicely here. Luke had just written that the *Pharisees* rejected God’s purpose for themselves and that they had opposed Jesus because he was “a friend of tax collectors and ‘sinners’” (7:30, 34). Luke therefore sees a perfect opportunity to tell the story of a ‘*sinner*,’ Mary, anointing Jesus, which disturbed a *Pharisee*, Simon. As for the “After this” in 8:1, if we view the story of the anointing as an aside, the “After this” makes fine sense as belonging with Jesus’ sermon about John the Baptist in 7:24-35. We must remember not to divide the text up too strictly; the headings are not inspired.

### **Other thoughts**

If all of these accounts are the same, which certainly seems to be the case, then Luke is giving us a glimpse into Mary’s past life. Apparently she had led a sinful lifestyle, most likely in adultery or prostitution. Especially the latter option might help to explain why she was apparently single - even reformed prostitutes had little chance of marriage in Jesus’ day. Her reputation may have been shared by her brother and sister, thus hindering chances of marriage also for them. (That might also make Mary the woman in John 7:53 - 8:11. However, that account seems to take place during Holy Week [cf. Lk 21:37-38], by which time Mary had left her sinful lifestyle.) This also helps to explain why Mary had no trouble giving her rapt attention to Jesus during his earlier visit (Lk 10:38-42); his gospel message was just what she needed to hear.