

*A Servant Church*  
**SAINT MATTHEW**  
AFRICAN METHODIST EPISCOPAL CHURCH  
*God's Love for God's People*

336 Oakwood Avenue, Orange, New Jersey 07050  
REV. MELVIN E. WILSON, PASTOR/TEACHER

**WORSHIP SCHEDULE:** Sunday 9:00 a.m. | Zoom/Facebook Live  
**PASTOR'S BIBLE STUDY:** Tuesday 6:30 p.m. (Weekly)  
**WOMEN/MEN BIBLE STUDY:** 2nd Saturdays 9:00 a.m. | ASK - 4th Sat.  
**YOUNG ADULT BIBLE STUDY:** 2nd/4th Saturdays 11:00 a.m.

## The Woman With The Alabaster Jar 8 March 2022

The Alabaster Box by CeCe Winans

*The room grew still as she made her way to Jesus  
She stumbles through the tears that made her blind  
She felt such pain, some spoke in anger  
Heard folks whisper, "there's no place here for her kind"  
Still on she came through the shame that flushed her face  
Until at last, she knelt before His feet  
And though she spoke no words, everything she said was heard  
As she poured her love for the Master, from her box of alabaster.*

### INTRODUCTION

Between Ash Wednesday and Easter, many Christians observe a 40-day period (excluding Sunday's), known as Lent. According to [Merriam-Webster](#), Lent means "the 40 weekdays from Ash Wednesday to Easter observed by the Roman Catholic, Eastern, and some Protestant churches as a period of penitence and fasting." Christians honor the 40 days and nights following Christ's baptism when He went into the wilderness without water and food and was tempted by Satan. During that time, Christ did what we do today when we fast: wrestle with temptation.

It is a solemn drama in which Christians are to prepare themselves, through fasting and prayer, to accompany Christ in the events of Holy Week, including His betrayal, His crucifixion, His death, and His resurrection.

### TIMELINE

Note there is no biblical reference to Ash Wednesday or Lent (meaning spring season). Lent, the solemn six-week period of fasting and penitence, starts with Ash Wednesday — this year on March 2 — and ends a day before Easter (April 17 this time) which celebrates the resurrection of Jesus Christ from the dead.

### History and significance

Lent follows the liturgical calendar, and so, the date changes each year. It begins with Ash Wednesday when people head to church for a special service. The clergy

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shares a sermon that is reflective in nature and centered around confession. At the end of it, his/her dips a finger in ash and applies it on their forehead, saying, "From dust you came and to dust you shall return." The ash represents mortality as well as sinfulness. The ashes are typically prepared by burning palm branches in a cross pattern during Palm Sunday in the preceding week.

The story behind it is that Jesus left for the desert to prepare His soul for an intense three-year period of healing people, preaching, and ministering, and was ultimately crucified by the Roman empire and religious leaders.

The last week, Passion Week, of Lent repeats, step by step, the central drama of Christianity. It begins on Palm Sunday, marking Jesus' entry (Triumphant Entry) into Jerusalem when He was hailed by the populace, who spread palm branches before Him, the long-expected redeemer. In churches throughout the world, palm branches are distributed, and in some places often followed by a procession holding high the palms of victory and hope.

On Thursday (Maundy Thursday) of Holy Week, many churches observe the "Last Supper" of Jesus with His disciples. It will be the last time the elements of bread and wine can be consecrated until Easter (Resurrection) Sunday.

On Good Friday, many churches observe a three-hour vigil from noon until three p.m., the hours Christ hung on the cross before His death.

### **PERFUMES AND ANOINTING OILS**

Perfumes, fragrances, and anointing oils were used as an aphrodisiac (Song of Solomon 1:12-13), some were sacred and used only by priest (Exodus 30:22-33), some served for hygienic purpose before soap and shampoo, were medicinally used to massage patients (James 5:14) and athletes, and embalming the dead (John 19:39-40).

Spikenard or nard is mentioned in Mark 14:3, John 12:3, and Song of Solomon 14:13. It has been shown to instill relaxation, heart openness, and spiritual connection. It can be used to relieve emotional tension, heal multiple physical ailments, and uplift ones spirits.

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The primary purpose of anointing with the holy anointing oil however was to sanctify, to set the anointed person or object apart as "holy" (Exodus 30:29).

The attention the New Testament gives to these ointments reflects something of the value of the culture of that time.

### ALABASTER

What does alabaster symbolize? Alabaster symbolize **purity**, the whiter the stone the better. Encourages feelings of peace and calmness and can be used to combat stress, heal arguments, or calm an angry household. A protective stone, especially for babies, children, and anyone innocent at heart. Alabaster stone was one of the materials used in constructing the temple that Solomon built for the Lord (1 Chron. 29:2).



As The Greek word translated “alabaster box” in the KJV, as well as “flask,” “jar” and “vial” in other translations, is *alabastron*, which can also mean “perfume vase.” Ointments, oils, and perfumes used to be put in vessels made of alabaster to keep them pure and unspoiled. The boxes were often sealed or made fast with wax to prevent the perfume from escaping. Alabaster was a beautiful substance and strong enough to keep the oil or perfume completely contained until the time of its use.<sup>1</sup>

“These boxes were made from a stone found near Alabastron in Egypt...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.” The dictionary goes on to share that the breaking of the box and perfume would have been very costly<sup>2</sup>.

<sup>1</sup> <https://www.gotquestions.org/alabaster-box.html>

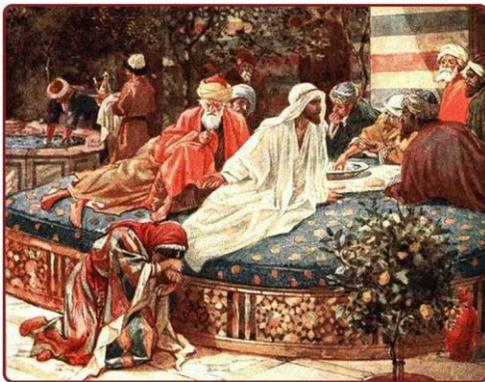
<sup>2</sup> <https://www.biblestudytools.com/bible-study/topical-studies/what-is-the-spiritual-significance-of-an-alabaster-box.html>

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*So I've come to pour my praise on Him  
Like oil from Mary's alabaster box  
So don't be angry if I wash His feet with my tears  
And I dry them with my hair, hmm  
'Cause you weren't there the night He found me  
You did not feel what I felt  
When He wrapped His love all around me and  
You don't know the cost, not of this oil  
In my alabaster box.*

### SACRED TEXT

Spoiler Alert: Did you know in the story about the Alabaster Jar that there are three different stories, three different women, with events occurring at three different times?



*Luke 7:36-50 (NIV)<sup>3</sup>*

<sup>36</sup> When one of the Pharisees invited Jesus to have dinner with him, he went to the Pharisee's house and reclined at the table. <sup>37</sup> A woman in that town who lived a sinful life learned that Jesus was eating at the Pharisee's house, so she came there with an alabaster jar of perfume. <sup>38</sup> As she stood behind Him at his feet weeping, she began to wet His feet with her tears. Then she wiped them with her hair, kissed them and poured perfume on them. <sup>39</sup> When the Pharisee who had invited him saw this, he said to himself, "If this man were a prophet, he would know who is touching him and what kind of woman she is—that she is a sinner." <sup>40</sup> **Jesus answered him, "Simon, I have something to tell you."** "Tell me, teacher," he said. <sup>41</sup> **"Two people owed money to a certain moneylender. One owed him five hundred denarii,<sup>[a]</sup> and the other**

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<sup>3</sup> Note: Chronologically this was the first incident of Jesus and a woman with an alabaster jar. It was a selfless act that was not connected to His burial.

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fifty. <sup>42</sup> Neither of them had the money to pay him back, so he forgave the debts of both. Now which of them will love him more?" <sup>43</sup> Simon replied, "I suppose the one who had the bigger debt forgiven." **"You have judged correctly,"** Jesus said. <sup>44</sup> Then he turned toward the woman and said to Simon, **"Do you see this woman? I came into your house. You did not give me any water for my feet, but she wet my feet with her tears and wiped them with her hair. <sup>45</sup> You did not give me a kiss, but this woman, from the time I entered, has not stopped kissing my feet. <sup>46</sup> You did not put oil on my head, but she has poured perfume on my feet. <sup>47</sup> Therefore, I tell you, her many sins have been forgiven—as her great love has shown. But whoever has been forgiven little loves little."** <sup>48</sup> Then Jesus said to her, **"Your sins are forgiven."** <sup>49</sup> The other guests began to say among themselves, **"Jesus said to the woman, 'Your faith has saved you; go in peace.'"** Who is this who even forgives sins?" <sup>50</sup>

*Matthew 26:6-13 and Mark 14:3-9 (NIV)*

While Jesus was in Bethany in the home of Simon the Leper, (Mark says, "now the Passover and the Feast of Unleavened Bread were only two days away" - Lenten connection) <sup>7</sup> a woman (unnamed) came to Him with an alabaster jar of very



expensive perfume, which she poured on His head as He was reclining at the table. When the disciples saw this, they were indignant. "Why this waste?" they asked. <sup>9</sup> "This perfume could have been sold at a high price and the money given to the poor." <sup>10</sup> Aware of this, Jesus said to them, **"Why are you bothering this woman? She has done a beautiful thing to me. The poor you will always have with you,[a] but you will not always have me. When she poured this perfume on my body, she did it to prepare me for burial. Truly I tell you, wherever this gospel is preached throughout the world, what she has done will also be told, in memory of her."**

*John 12:1-8 (NIV)*

Six days before the Passover (Lenten connection), Jesus came to Bethany, where Lazarus lived, whom Jesus had raised from the dead. <sup>2</sup> Here a dinner was given in

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Jesus' honor. Martha served, while Lazarus was among those reclining at the table with Him. <sup>3</sup>Then Mary took about a pint<sup>[a]</sup> of pure nard, an expensive perfume; she poured it on Jesus' feet and wiped His feet with her hair. And the house was filled with the fragrance of the perfume. <sup>4</sup>But one of His disciples, Judas Iscariot, who was later to betray Him, objected, <sup>5</sup>"Why wasn't this perfume sold and the money given to the poor? It was worth a year's wages.<sup>[b]</sup>" <sup>6</sup>He did not say this because he cared about the poor but because he was a thief; as keeper of the money bag, he used to help himself to what was put into it. <sup>7</sup>**"Leave her alone," Jesus replied. "It was intended that she should save this perfume for the day of my burial. <sup>8</sup>You will always have the poor among you,<sup>[c]</sup> but you will not always have me."**

*No one knows what you've been through  
I can't forget the way life used to be  
'Cause I was a prisoner to the sin that had me bound  
And I spent my days, poured my life without measure  
Into a little treasure box I'd thought I'd found  
Until the day when Jesus came to me  
And healed my soul with the wonder of His touch  
So now I'm giving back to Him all the praise He's worthy of  
I've been forgiven and that's why  
I love Him so much*

### LESSONS LEARNED

Key words to consider are faith, humility, mercy, grace, and forgiveness. What we can we learn from the women with the Alabaster jars:

- The women with the alabaster jar reminds us that we are only serving one person, one God, it doesn't matter what the world says, what the critics say, or who else is in the room. We are called to worship our King and do His work. (See Deuteronomy 6:4; Matthew 22:37)
- God values our offering; in the grand scheme a bottle of perfume is small. But to her it was costly, and her heart was in the right place. (See Mark 12:41-44)

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- What mattered to the women with the alabaster jar in the Bible is that they were not concerned about what others would say and think about their actions. Their hearts were focused on their King and they wanted to worship and honor Him. (See Psalm 86:12)
- Anointing Jesus as the women with the alabaster jars did was a testament to their great love for Him. It's a wonderful reminder of how our love for Christ should look like. (See Numbers 18:19)
- This story holds a wonderful picture of what a heart of worship looks like for us, it's not a show, it's not bright lights, or loud music, or trying to impress but a heart that fully seeks God and seeks to honor Him. (See John 4:24)

*So I've come to pour my praise on Him  
Like oil from Mary's alabaster box (Mary's alabaster box)  
So don't be angry if I wash His feet with my tears  
And dry them with my hair  
You weren't there the night Jesus found me  
You did not feel what I felt  
When He wrapped His loving arms around me and  
You don't know the, you don't know, you don't know, you don't know (Jesus was there)  
You don't know the, you don't know, you don't know, you don't know  
You don't know the cost of the oil  
In my alabaster box (oh) Come on let's worship Him  
Come on and give Him the glory (hallelujah)"*

### What Is Your Alabaster Jar?

The women with the alabaster jar can teach us so much about love and sacrifice. Anything else? How many of us would bring our most costly possession and give it to our King and Lord? What is your alabaster jar? What part of our lives do we need to honor our God with?<sup>4</sup>

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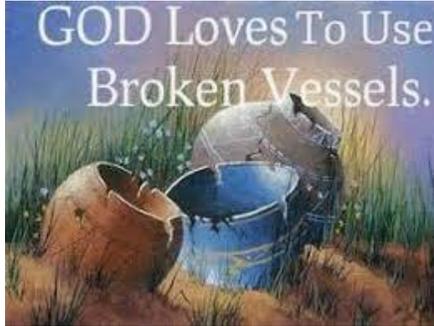
<sup>4</sup> <https://rosevinecottagegirls.com/my-al-abaster-jar/>

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The box, jar represents: our lives, “can come broken like the box before a holy God and surrender to His sacrifice over our sins; giving God our best and our all; Let us be slow to judge the gifts others give to God or to His church. “We can pray that we may we never be stumbling blocks in the way of others who are blessing the heart of God.”<sup>5</sup>

### CONCLUSION

“Have you ever done anything extravagant for Jesus Christ? Have you ever done anything so outrageous for him that other people thought you were foolish? Have you ever been so bold with love that other people have criticized what you did? Some of us have. Maybe it was a long time ago. Whenever it was, it was sweet-smelling aroma offered to God.

The example of Mary (and others) tells me that I am too reserved. I am too often concerned with what others think. I am not loving Jesus as much as I ought. I am too concerned with myself. I need to think more about actions of extraordinary beauty. God has been extravagant with me. He has lavished on me the riches of his grace. He has repeatedly given me things I did not deserve and things I did not appreciate the way I ought. His grace toward me abounds and abounds and abounds. How do I respond to Him who gave His life for me?<sup>6</sup>”

Live and act in such a way that proves Jesus is more important to us than the most important issue on earth!

<sup>5</sup> <https://www.biblestudytools.com/bible-study/topical-studies/what-is-the-spiritual-significance-of-an-alabaster-box.html>

<sup>6</sup> <https://www.gci.org/articles/good-news-in-an-alabaster-jar/>