



Song of the Magdalene

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The story of a teenage Mary Magdalene -- here called Miriam -- is finally told....

When the world goes dark and her mind explodes within her, Miriam's future is shattered. In ancient Israel such seizures make her unclean. If anyone finds out about them, she will be an outcast.

Only Abraham -- the son of Hannah, her caretaker -- shares her secret. Abraham, too, is afflicted -- a perfect mind in an imperfect body -- and to the villagers he is an idiot.

To Miriam he is a savior....

Song of the Magdalene Details

Date : Published May 1st 2004 by Simon Pulse (first published October 1st 1996)

ISBN : 9780689873966

Author : Donna Jo Napoli

Format : Paperback 256 pages

Genre : Historical, Historical Fiction, Young Adult, Fiction, Religion, Teen, Fantasy

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Belle says

3.7 stars. The story was definitely touching, but lacked the urgent pacing that would have made it impossible to put down. Characterizations were vibrant even though I always want more depth than the average-length novel can support. I wasn't sure how Jesus of Nazareth would enter into the story once I realized that Mariam was meant to be Mary Magdalene. I know that some people's theory is that Jesus was married to Mary Magdalene. I was honestly relieved that this book didn't take on that speculation. It has a great, meaty amount of complexity as it is and anything more could have tipped it into Overstimulation Zone. It had just enough stimulating ideas woven in, never detracting from the entertainment value. I appreciated how respectfully the author treated Christ and any of the elements of the story that tied in to him.

Having knowledge of the Jewish community, customs, and history enriched this story significantly. I was thoroughly immersed in the setting and texture of Roman Judea. A look at the world of the first Jews to follow Christ.

Melissa says

A solid story by Donna Jo Napoli. I liked several of her works (particularly Sirena and Hush).

I found this story engaging, but not in the I have to read it all in one sitting way. It starts very slow and doesn't really ever pick up the pace. There is a lot going on and some of the imagery is great.

It was great to have characters that were disabled and it was interesting to read more into the lore, but the story dragged at places. I'm not 100% sure why it felt that way to me, but it was an issue.

If you like this author it was a solid addition to her lineup, but not something to write home about. If someone recommended this author to you this is not the book to start with.

Lorraine says

"I was on the road toward a man named Jochanan who baptized prostitutes. It had to be the same Jochanan I heard of in Dor. The man who called for repentance and welcomed the dregs of society. So this Jochanan baptized the people who came to him. As though their purification was as drastic a change in life as a pagan's undergoing conversion. This Jochanan was dramatic. An extremist. I understood the forces that made one become an extremist. My step quickened." (p. 204)

How did the Magdalene become? Napoli imagines a road on which a young girl of nine from a wealthy family, whose parents had married for love, travels to become a follower of Joshua, the one we call Jesus today. Magdala. Jericho. Jerusalem. Qumran. Capernaum.

This was a world where men took second wives, and women could not sing in temple. But Miriam is taught the song of songs by her childhood lover, one who would be outcast in other circumstances, due to his

deformity. This is a world of demons, of magic, of a sere landscape full of great beauty. This is the world usurped by the Romans. Great losses are her lot--her lover, her baby, her family, her good name. Thus, she travels . . . to what seems a logical conclusion.

Stylized. Fraught. Stunning visual descriptions of the ancient landscape. This is a very intense tale!

Catherine Miller says

Donna Jo Napoli is one of my favorite children's authors. This book is for the tween on reader (probably 12 year old up) and was very enthralling. It tells the story of Mary Magdalene from childhood on, and is a wonderful historical fiction. I love books that challenge you to change your perspective on what really happened. I couldn't put it down!

Ella says

Why is there a painting of Proserpina on the cover? Dante Gabriel Rossetti did plenty of gorgeous Mary Magdalene paintings; couldn't the cover designers have used one of those? I love this book though. I've read it at least five times and always sobbed. I'm not religious in any sense, but I love this book. Maybe it's the writing, maybe it's the story, maybe it's the characters, or maybe it's just the emotional resonance. I recommend this to my friends on a regular basis, with the admonition that if they don't cry, their heart is a great big lump of stone. (But then, I get kind of irritatingly overemotional about many things, mainly the Montmaray Diaries, French biodramas, Sword Art Online, and Fullmetal Alchemist. And Les Misérables. So take my warning of tearfulness with a grain of salt.)

Rebecca says

I don't know what it was about this book that alienated me. I expected to love this book. I really enjoyed The Magic Circle by the same author, and the Magdalene is my favorite saint. So why wouldn't I enjoy a book purporting to be her story before she met Jesus? It was well-written, thoughtful, and original. Miriam is an intelligent and resourceful girl who appears to have epilepsy, or something similar, but this was during a time when "fits" were thought to be caused by demonic possession, so she hides it. She loves Abraham, who has something along the lines of cerebral palsy and is thought to be an idiot. It's much more comfortable to assume that someone with CP isn't entirely there. Normally, seeing the barbaric way societies treat women and the disabled makes me about as angry as the author intends her audience to be, but it doesn't alienate me from the work. But for some reason, I just couldn't get emotionally anywhere near this girl from Magdala.

Katherine says

"I sang. Songs of morning and noon and night. Songs of juniper trees and mimosa and dates. Songs of the hawk and the sparrow, of the ox and the camel. Songs of the women working together. Songs of men and women loving one another. Songs of mother and child. And I kept those songs in my mouth, always ready, for there were many souls to heal."

Of all the female figures in the Bible, none is so polarizing, controversial, and surrounded in mystery as Mary Magdalene. Revered by some and reviled by others, no one really knows who the true Magdalene is. For the most part, her name has been dragged in the mud as the whore who washed Jesus's feet and later became one of his most devoted followers. **But how did she get there?** This prequel explores her early life when she was just Miriam of Magdala, the tall, gangly girl who sees visions brought on by seizures with a cripple for a best friend.

Since Mary Magdalene is one of the most controversial figures in history (with not much really known about her), I was interested to see how an author would reimagine her early life. I was especially curious to see how this would be since this book wasn't marketed as specifically Christian fiction and more for the mainstream YA crowd. And it was... OK. It wasn't quite as good as I had hoped, mainly because that after I read it, **I still didn't feel like I had any more insight of who she really was.**

She was still the same mysterious, enigmatic figure of Sunday school lore. I did admire how the author tried to do her research and fill the historical plot holes that were her life. The way the author was magically able to write her own events based on the scant traces of Mary Magdalene in scripture shows what a truly talented and capable writer Donna Jo Napoli is. However, some of these plot points made no sense and really didn't add to the story.

One element that I thought did add to the story quite a lot was the relationship between Miriam and Abraham, son of her family's housekeeper.

"No other cripples were pushed in carts through the midst of crowds. Cripples sat in one place, calling out relentlessly for alms and food.

No other couple was like Miriam and Abraham."

Abraham has what is now known as epilepsy, but back then he was just considered a crippled, insane fool. Despite that, Abraham is extremely intelligent and insightful, though he prefers people don't know that.

"'As long as I'm an idiot, they can bear to have me around. They can tell themselves they are generous of heart and ignore me. But if they know I can see things and understand them, if they know I'm like them inside, it's too much. It's too horrible. They fear it could happen to them. If they know I'm in here, they'll say I'm evil. They'll say it's not me who speaks, but the evil within. They'll fear even more that whatever has possession of my body can leap out and take possession of theirs. My only hope is that they do not see me as a person."

Disabilities weren't recognized or even known back then, so the reactions of the townspeople were accurate, from a historical perspective. Abraham's stoic intelligence perfectly balanced out Miriam's more fiery personality. What should be interesting is to see how readers will interpret their relationship and whether Miriam used him in the end or not. **It's very ambiguous and left for the reader to decide.**

While I admire original retellings, and as far as that was concerned this was solid, I still didn't feel like I got anymore detail about Mary Magdalene than I already knew. Given that the author really didn't have much to work with, she did an admirable job. However, it did little to quench my curiosity.

Kate says

The ending may not quite line up with most Christian beliefs, but it was a well written story.
I really liked Napoli's connection between seizures and demons. It seems quite possible for the time period.

Susan Chapek says

I loved how Napoli gave us a feel for the place and time, of the attitudes and beliefs of the townspeople and the ways in which the principal characters clung to or broke free of those attitudes and beliefs. I loved being in that place so much I read the book in one afternoon.

I would recommend giving it a try, because the two-star rating I give it are a matter of my own taste in these kinds of stories.

[HERE BE SPOILERS]

The latter part of the story did not grab me as much as I'd expected--that is, once she's on the move. I didn't feel that the conclusion was inevitable, so for me the walkabout and ending didn't pack the emotional punch of the earlier love story.

Ivy says

This book was so great! Mary Magdalene is one of those women from history that everyone has heard of, but not a ton is really known about her. This book gave an interesting idea about who she was and what her life could have been. The portrayal of Judaism at that time was really interesting, too. I enjoyed how it was written, as well as the content.

I want to share this book with anyone that might possibly be interested in it. It wasn't hard to read, and yet it still had great ideas.

Language: None that I recognized

Drugs: Nope

Sex: There was a little of this, but it was not graphic or explicit. Also some discussion on it. One scene that involved sex was disturbing, though.

Violence: Talk of stoning, verbal violence, mention of a decapitation, a rape (not graphic), miscarriage/early labor due to that, there is some not pretty stuff in here.

Liz Dunn says

Song of the Magdalene by Donna Jo Napoli is a book about Mary Magdalene before she knew Christ. There are many historical references (names such as Abraham, Hannah, Deborah, all biblical names.) But the author re-names Mary, calling her Miriam. This tells of a young woman's journey through her own historical time.

I gave this book two stars because the references to biblical names were really driving me crazy. It was interesting to see how the author could portray some of those characters, but I really do have a closed mind when it comes to people from biblical times. I was excited to read this book, but I felt a little let down.

Mohawkgrl says

I enjoyed this novelization of the story of Mary Magdalene prior to meeting Jesus and becoming a follower, however it would have been better had we had a glimpse of what Miriam actually experienced being his only 'female' apostle. I've always been fascinated by the women of the bible and specifically, the Miriams (which I know is a variation of the name, Mary). This is also the reason why I named my only daughter, Miriam.

Perhaps the author will eventually write a sequel? An easy and quick read that I picked up at my school's library.

Maleyah Mcneil says

I loved everything about this book. It is beautifully written and the love between the two characters was something I could almost feel. I picked up this book because it was A free book at my school and now I'm so glad I did. I could not put the book down. I understand why other people might not like it, but to me..it was one of the most beautiful books I've ever read :)

Bg says

Somehow, though this book was very dark and deep, it came out being very romantic and touching. This book is Donna Jo Napoli's version of Mary Magdalene the prequel long before she met Jesus Christ. Her life seems somewhat easy until she falls ill. Later in the story she falls in love with a crippled young man that everyone in his village sees as a pledge and from there her journey to Christ begins.

This book ended very smartly but I won't get that away. And the romance between the young crippled man and herself is very honest and well, romantic. This was a very story. Its almost effortless how Napoli is able to capture the essence of a story and make it her own while staying true to the topic.

Emma says

Song of the Magdalene was donna Jo Napoli's interpretation of Mary Magdalene's life before she appeared in the New Testament. I thought it was very good, but not one of my favorites of Donna Jo Napoli's books. It was a good story of growing up and of love mixed with some history and biblical references. I thought that the history of Mary Magdalene was a good reason for her actions in the Bible, and the story behind why she was being attacked was also interesting. Napoli neither recycled Dan Brown's idea of Mary Magdalene being the wife of Jesus, or the traditional idea that she was a repentant prostitute. I would recommend it to fans of Donna Jo Napoli.

Irma Fox says

This is a very beautiful book! The cover is beautiful, the words are beautiful, it's a great book to read when you want to totally immerse yourself in another world.

For me the main idea throughout the story has to be the oppression of women. In this setting women are not allowed to read, sing, or go anywhere without a veil. Miriam chooses to learn how to read and take an interest in scriptural songs but it's all kept a secret from her father and her village. The only person who knows is Abraham, who is also oppressed because of his disability and the superstitions that those who suffer from any disability are basically cursed. Every time Miriam tries to be free or not observe misguided religious traditions she suffers for it greatly and becomes a pariah. The ending had me on the edge of my seat, it also had me thinking how privileged I am to be raised in a place by a family that encourages me to learn and experience new things, even if they end up humiliating me or being a waste of time, at least I'm allowed to live a life where I can do whatever makes me happy.

Jespera says

>Song of Magdalene by Donna Jo Napoli

Known for her retelling of fairy tales, in this case Napoli takes on the life of Mary Magdalene, of whom Jesus cast out 7 devils is one of the brief mentions of her in the New Testament. The author admits that she had to construct a life for this woman and she starts with her a young girl who has a "fit" and believes that a demon has come into her. Most likely she epilepsy. It is a really interesting look at how people could think in the time period. Miriam, as she is called in the book has a friend who is handicapped and teaches her that her affliction is a disease and not a fault of her own. Yet, he doesn't allow anyone to know that he is not an idiot, because then they would be more afraid of him.

Needless to say some bad things happen to Miriam and she is sent from her home, for her protection even though she is not at fault. We follow her journey to the point when she meets Jesus.

Then the book ends suddenly.

Jacqueline Howe says

This story is set in Ancient Israel --- where customs, traditions, and the way that the people lived and thought are set back in time. Cripples, people with palsy, and seizure disorders were looked upon as being inhabited by demons. Miriam by her life choices faces many hardships. This fictional story --- but possible story--- leads Miriam into becoming Mary Magdalene. The new testament Mary Magdalene that travels with the crowd that surrounds Jesus.

Debi says

It was OK. I wished that the love story could have been a little longer or have more details. And I think there could have been a way better link between the reasons she fell in love with Abraham compared to the conclusion that she falls in love with "Joshua". The reasons were too "between the lines" and I think it could

have been a very sweet tribute to Abraham (and Jesus of course) to imply more of a comparison with those two characters.

I liked how Miriam 'grew' but it could have been developed more. I'd have read 200 more pages.

Linda Finnerty says

Really liked this book - an easy read! Also makes you think how society is so fast to judge someone.
