

## Background Information on Jn 20



In John 20 the reader finds three different people with three very different responses to the realization of the empty tomb. First, the unnamed disciple, who all theologians throughout history think to be St John the Apostle, believes immediately that Jesus rose from the dead (see Jn 20:8). Second, St Mary Magdalene, who believed after hearing the Lord's voice say her name (see Jn 20:16). Thirdly, St Thomas, who did not believe until he actually saw and touched the wounds on Jesus's resurrected body (see Jn 20:28). There are three different ways of ascent to supernatural faith at work here that correspond to three different "motives of credibility." "Motive of credibility" is a term used to describe supernatural signs that manifest God's action. Let's investigate each briefly.

Let us begin with St Thomas, who needed the "miracle" motive of credibility to rise to supernatural faith. Miracles are found throughout Scripture and throughout Church history as examples of aides to help one make the act of supernatural faith. God knows that some people need this in order to believe the gospel and act according to it. Nevertheless, rising to the heights of holiness requires more than merely seeing a miracle. Jesus Himself declares to Thomas "You have believed because you have seen me. Blessed are those who have not seen and yet believe" (John 20:29). Two people who did not need the miracle of seeing Jesus are Mary and John.

In Mary's case, the motive of credibility is "reason of the heart." Essentially this mode recognizes the truth that love, and contrition disposes one towards faith. The humble penitent Mary Magdalene loved Jesus so much. The more one loves, the easier it is to hear God's voice and ascend to His way.

Lastly, St John did not need to see or hear God's voice. All John needed was to see the empty tomb to believe Jesus rose from the dead because he had supernatural wisdom. He believed because of the credible motive that is the wisdom of Revelation, especially the wisdom displayed in the glorification of Jesus on the cross. St John was the only apostle that had the bravery to stay with Jesus at His death. There he witnessed Jesus suffer an unimaginable agony physically, mentally, and emotionally. He most certainly believed that Jesus would rise from the dead immediately after His death. I think the empty tomb was just the icing on the cake for him.