



Bright Dark Madonna

Elizabeth Cunningham

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At last-Elizabeths Celtic Mary Magdalen has a close encounter with Paul of Tarsus and the outspoken Maeve and the prolix apostle do not see eye to eye. To readers of the first two volumes of *The Maeve Chronicles* this will not come as a surprise.

Although each book of this trilogy stands alone its useful to know that *The Passion of Mary Magdalen* ended with the death and resurrection of Jesus of Nazareth and a double apotheosis in the tomb. As *Bright Dark Madonna* opens Maeve is a pregnant widow. James and the other founders of what will become the Christian religion don't like her very much-maybe they're jealous of her. They are determined that she will bear a son and that they will raise the child. Maeve runs away to her temple/whorehouse in Magdala where she gives birth to Sarah a dark-skinned baby with her fathers golden eyes. As the story continues Maeve the baby and Ma-better known as the Blessed Virgin Mary Mother of God Star of the Sea etc.-are threatened again by the patriarchal *ecclesia* and so they escape to Asia Minor settling in Galatia which had been settled five centuries earlier by Celts. The three live alone and Maeve and Mary become known as healers. Enter a small ugly man beaten and wounded nearly dead. This is the Apostle Paul; as the Bible relates his preaching earned him endless punishments. Maeve heals him. But her daughter now age twelve is attracted to his preaching. Sarah runs away.

Although *The Passion of Mary Magdalen* and *Bright Dark Madonna* are partly based on the Synoptic Gospels the Acts of the Apostles and Pauls letters Cunninghams work is neither history nor theology. She has done her homework. Nearly all of Pauls dialogue is taken from the Bible. She has walked where Jesus walked and visited the Holy Land Ephesus and southern France which is where Maeve and Sarah who becomes a pirate end up. But Maeves story has not ended. As the novel concludes she is thinking of her first daughter born in *Magdalen Rising* who was raised by the Iceni tribe in Britain. Cunninghams fourth volume is on its way.

BARBARA ARDINGER (April 13, 2009)

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