

CHRISTIAN BELIEF

Originally from Rome, the couple leaves the city when the Emperor Claudius expels the Jews in 49 AD. They flee to Corinth, where they meet the apostle Paul who helped establish the Christian faith in the town. It appears as if they had already converted to Christianity before this meeting in 50 AD (Acts 18:2).

Priscilla and Aquila are usually described as tentmakers, though this would have been an odd employment in Corinth where there would not have been much call for tents. More than likely they would have been involved in leather work and it is important to note that the biblical text describes both of them as being involved in the business. Paul approaches them about gaining part-time employment so he does not have to burden the church by asking for financial support for his room and board. Paul becomes an employee, friend and tenant, when the couple provide a place for him to live as well. We can assume this is when Priscilla's devotion to Christianity grows. She puts her faith into practice and so her deeds and her words imitate the Christian belief in her heart. She and her husband later go with Paul to Ephesus.

GATHERING PLACE

Priscilla's homes in both Corinth and Ephesus are gathering places for early Christians to hear about and celebrate the faith. Over time, both places become



centres for Christianity, as can be seen by the letters that Paul later writes to each community (Romans 16:3-4; 1 Corinthians 16:19; 2 Timothy 4:19). Paul is so thankful to this couple that he says in his Letter to the Romans: "Greet Prisca and Aquila, who work with me in Christ Jesus, and who risked their necks for my life, to whom not only I give thanks, but also all the churches of the Gentiles." (Romans 16:3-4).

When Apollos, an articulate Jewish Christian preacher from Alexandria who was well educated in the Hebrew Scriptures arrives in Ephesus, Priscilla takes him under her wing. She offers him tutoring in the oral tradition (what the apostles preached about Jesus) and early gospels (what was written about Jesus) to allow him to be an even more effective preacher. Apollos has learned about Jesus from John the Baptist, but he didn't have full knowledge of the Christian Word. The Bible says that Priscilla and Aquila "explained the Way of God to him more accurately" (Acts 18:26). This verse shows that she is a shrewd student of the scriptures and capable of teaching even a respected teacher.

Priscilla and her husband are true lay missionaries in that they helped spread the new Christian faith but are not full-time church workers like Paul and Silas.

Priscilla and Aquila welcomed Paul into their hearts and home, to live with them and work with them making tents. Paul established them in the doctrines of the faith, and they, in turn, taught others such as Apollos. Priscilla was bright, welcoming, and eloquent. Her use of her gifts to cultivate the church in its infancy is an inspiration to us today. ■

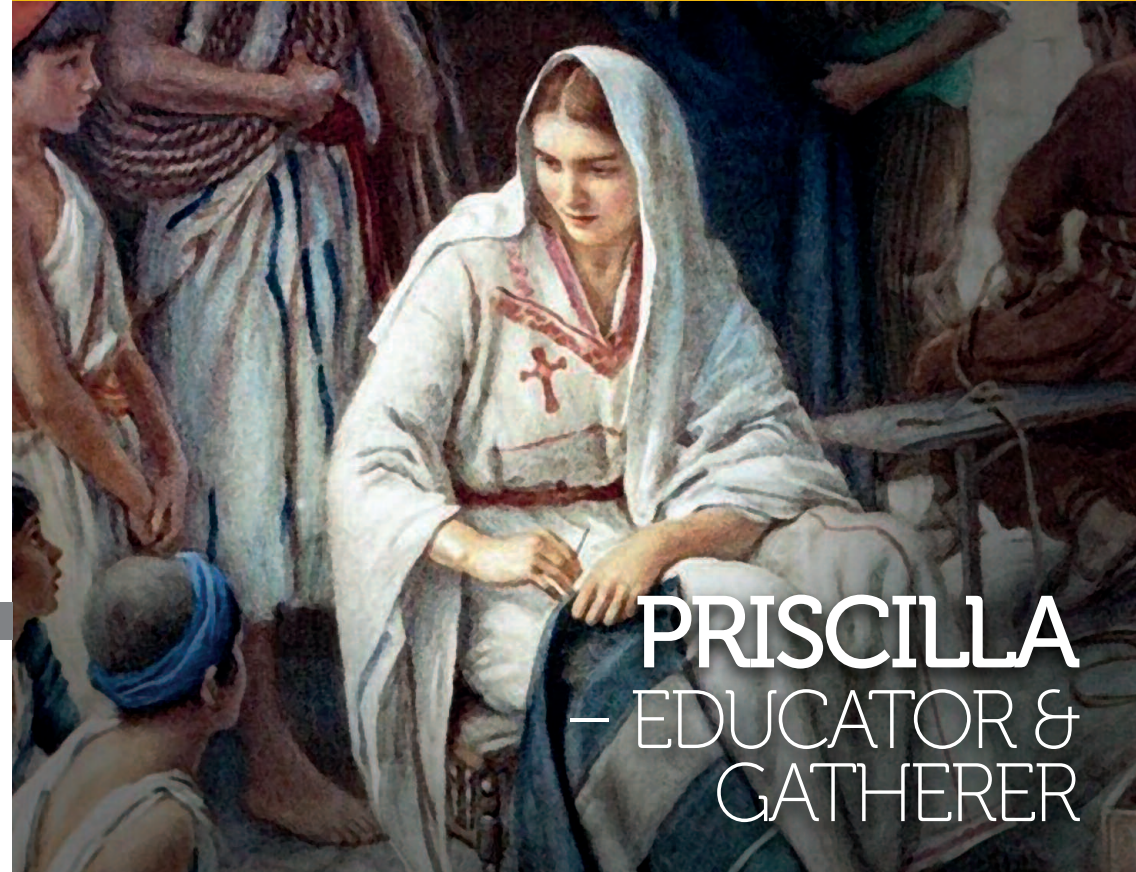
Front cover: "Priscilla"; Illustration in "The Women of the Bible" (c. 1920) by Harold Copping

SoulSpace

SERIES: WOMEN FROM THE BIBLE

Season colour: **WHITE**

In this series, **Máire Byrne** examines key female figures from the Old and New Testaments.



PRISCILLA – EDUCATOR & GATHERER


Today's readings

Dn 7:9-10. 13-14
2 Pt 1:6-19
Mt 17:1-9

GOD'S WORD TODAY

In today's Gospel we're getting a glimpse of something astonishing. As Peter, James and John climb a mountain with Jesus, the appearance of their Lord changes and his face shines like the sun, his clothes a dazzling white.

The true nature of Jesus is being revealed and in case there is any doubt, God the Father speaks from the clouds: 'This is my Son.'

Understandably, the disciples are terrified and the gentle touch of Jesus brings with it some peace and reassurance. I wonder was their first instinct to run down that mountain and never return? If you were to place yourself in this particular scene, how would you have responded? The disciples simply fell to the ground, terrified. Their reaction to what they had seen and heard is an indication of the truth of this event. Jesus is revealed as both human and divine.

Despite the dramatic way this message is revealed to the disciples today, they are consoled by the words of Jesus, 'Do not be afraid.' They look up into the eyes of Jesus and they see their friend.

Priscilla (also called Prisca. Priscilla would have been her nickname and Prisca her formal name) plays a highly important role in the early church as educator and gatherer of early Christians. She and her husband, Aquila, are always mentioned together as a couple (Acts 18:2, 26; Romans 16:3; 2 Timothy 4:19), but three out of five times Priscilla's name is mentioned first. This order is highly uncommon, as a husband's name is usually mentioned first in patriarchal society. The fact is evidence of her influence and her devoted witness to God and early Christianity.

