

# SAINT THOMAS CHURCH

*Fifth Avenue · New York City*

**Sunday, December 22, 2024**  
The Fourth Sunday Of Advent

**Solemn Eucharist**  
11:00 am

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A Sermon by  
The Rev. Matthew Moretz

on

Luke 1:39-45

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## Magnificat Fire

Mary was a girl, young and small, from a village that could be swallowed by the dust and never missed. Nazareth. The name carried no weight then, just a whisper of a place where time had settled like silt in the cracks of the world. Yet she sang a song that bent the arc of time, that wound through deserts and oceans and the lives of men, until it found us here. The Magnificat. It is not a hymn of soft joy. It is a fire, an upheaval, the kind of truth that scorches the earth to make it fertile again.

She sang it in the house of Elizabeth. Her cousin, her shelter, her one mirror in a world that would not see her. Elizabeth was a woman of years, her life carved with the slow, deliberate strokes of waiting. Wife to Zechariah, the High Priest, she bore the weight of silence and the desolation of her people at that time, a life shaped by unanswered prayers. Yet she became to Mary a refuge, a living sanctuary where the impossible was believed. In her, Mary found not just a cousin but a witness, a soul who could hold the strangeness of God's work without flinching. Elizabeth's joy was a balm, her words a blessing, her home a place where Mary's fragile courage could take root and grow. Together, they stood as two flames against the gathering dark, their faith an answer to the world's disbelief.

Imagine Mary there, trembling from the weight of the angel's words, a girl still learning the contours of courage. Elizabeth, her own soul stretched and filled by grace, greeted her with the kind of welcome that breaks open the heart.

"Blessed are you among women," she said, and her voice was a balm. Even the child in her womb, a prophet waiting to be born, leapt at the sound of Mary's voice. For a moment, there was sanctuary. For a moment, Mary's courage was met with understanding, and the world seemed to tilt toward something good.

But Mary's joy was no soft thing. It was hewn from the knowledge of risk. The roads of Nazareth were not kind to women with stories too strange to be believed. An unexplained pregnancy was a brand, a mark that burned hot with the scorn of her neighbors. There was Joseph, his own yes trembling like a reed in the wind, his protection the thin line between her and ruin. Without him, she might have been lost before her child drew breath.

And yet, even this was not the greatest cost of her yes. That lay ahead, in the years that Simeon's prophecy shadowed like a vulture. "A sword will pierce your own soul," he said, and the words lodged

deep. She bore her son not just into life but into death, into the rejection of the world. And yet, she poured into him a vision of God's justice that could not be silenced. The mighty cast down, the lowly raised, the hungry filled, the proud left empty. Her song was a map, and he would follow it to its end.

The Magnificat is not a song of sweetness. It is a hymn to upheaval. Mary does not whisper of a God who consoles. She proclaims a God who overturns. Her words are a hammer, breaking apart the world as it is to reveal what it could be. And what does it mean to magnify the Lord? Not to enlarge, as with a glass, but to make space. To step aside and let God's will rush in like a flood, let it fill the cracks and wash away the debris of our plans.

Mary is the first to do this, the first to let God's purpose take root in her flesh and spirit. Her yes is not submission. It is transformation. In surrendering to God, she finds the fullness of herself. This is the paradox we cannot escape: to give ourselves away is to find who we truly are.

Rowan Williams, in preaching on Mary's song, declared: "A magnifying glass is also a burning glass. Mary gave birth to a child who would one day say that he had come to cast fire upon the earth. In magnifying the Lord, she gives room for the Spirit to descend, to come upon her, to work in every moment of the life of her Son, to fall upon the disciples in tongues of fire. When God is given room, the Spirit begins to burn, to consume what holds us back from our own joy. We are called to look beyond the immediate danger to the longer hope and possibility that Our Lady's words speak of, to the promise that by the fiery Spirit of Mary's Son the face of the earth may be renewed and the glory of God's children revealed."

For centuries, we have looked to her, this girl from nowhere, this mother of everything, and her song still calls to us. It does not let us rest. It bids us to make room, to become vessels for the God who upends our lives and our world. It calls us to magnify the Lord, to let the fire of the Spirit burn through all that is false in us, to let it renew what is left.

Mary's song is not just hers. It is ours, if we will take it up. It is the cry of the poor who will be lifted, the hunger that will be filled, the pride that will crumble like ash. It is the fire that consumes and refines. The Spirit that overshadowed Mary hovers still, waiting to ignite, to set the world ablaze with the justice and love of God. And we, like her, are called to carry it, to let it burn, until the light cannot be ignored.

May we, like Mary, become vessels wide and deep, letting the presence of God pour in until it overflows. May we carry that light, fierce and unyielding, into the dark corners of a weary world. And in doing so, may we magnify the Lord—not with noise, not with spectacle, but with the quiet, steady flame of lives given over to something greater. Amen.