

# SAINT THOMAS CHURCH

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*Fifth Avenue · New York City*

**Sunday, August 20, 2023**

Saint Mary the Virgin

**Solemn Eucharist and Procession to the  
Shrine of Our Lady of Fifth Avenue**

11 a.m.

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A Sermon by

The Rev. Prisca Lee-Pae, *Associate for Pan-Asian Ministry*

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## **The Question of our Soul's Songs**

We, St. Thomas Church, have a special love for music. As Henry Wadsworth Longfellow says, "Music is the universal language of mankind," music is a significant form of art to express human emotions, thoughts, memories, etc. In some ways, I think we used to enjoy it more actively in the past than we do now, and it's sad that music is losing its place in modern life, which was once a part of the daily lives of all ordinary people, musically talented or not. When farmers plowed their fields, when they sowed seeds and planted seedlings, when fishermen hauled in their nets, they used to sing alone or together. When there was a funeral in the neighborhood, the people carrying the casket sang and the people who followed them sang together.

They sang when they banged their washing bats by the stream and banged their iron bats. They sang as they put their babies to bed. Koreans sang even as they rubbed their children's sore tummies. My grandparents were especially fond of singing. When something good happened to the family, they would start singing spontaneously. The day I brought my fiancé to them to introduce, they were so happy that they sang in a duet beautifully.

Mary's song of praise was an expression of joy, unspeakable, overwhelming joy.

A few days after Mary was announced by an angel that she would conceive the Son of God, she set out and went with haste to visit Elizabeth. And she confirmed Mary as "the mother of the Lord." Affirmed that the unbelievable thing that has happened to her, that she has conceived a baby, is a blessed thing, Mary sings of her joy. And her song makes it clear who she is and who the God she professes to be her Lord is.

She is a soul that magnifies the Lord, a soul whose spirit rejoices in God her savior, and a soul that is called blessed by all generations for God has looked with favor on the lowliness of God's servant.

The Lord she confesses is holy, scatters the arrogant, pulls down the mighty, sends the rich away empty, but exalts the lowly, fills the hungry and takes the hand of Israel. She starts her song as "servant of the Lord" but soon it turns into the song of Israel. As the representative she is singing that the mercy shown to her reflects and exemplifies the mercy shown to the people. What God has done for Mary anticipates what God will do for the poor, the powerless, and the oppressed. It is the triumph of God's purpose for all people everywhere. However, not everyone lives the blessed life of this triumph.

We know very well what kind of life Mary lived. She gave birth to Jesus in a stable and fled to Egypt to avoid Herod who tried to seek and kill her baby and then return to Nazareth in Galilee. She had to travel with an infant when traveling in those days was harsh and risky. She had the joy of raising a wise son who was favored by God and people, but also, she had to watch her son's suffering and death on the cross with

heartbreak as if being pierced by a sharp sword, just as Simeon had prophesied. As Mary reveals in her song, she lived her best life as a servant of the Lord to be used to fulfill God's promise of mercy.

Jesus' Sermon on the Mount, beatitudes resembles the song of his mother Mary. He proclaimed blessed the poor, the sorrowful, the meek, the hungry and thirsty for righteousness, and the merciful. The eternal promise of mercy that Mary sang was fulfilled through the life, death, and resurrection of Jesus, and now we are gathered here to confess it.

It is the faith of Christians to believe that God's establishing justice and mercy will be accomplished on this earth at this moment, and to hope that it will be fulfilled through our lives.

In Matthew's Gospel, Jesus made it clear twice. "I desire mercy, not sacrifice." We must remember that we are not gathered here at this moment for the sacrifice.

We are here to affirm who we are and what kind of song we are called to sing through our lives.

We are here to proclaim it because the question of our identity and the question of our soul's songs cannot be answered apart from God's people, faith community.

And then, we go out into the world and live a life that bears witness to God's justice and mercy. God has called us to a blessed life in which God's justice and mercy is witnessed through the life of each and every one of us.

Blessed are you who believe that the Lord would fulfill God's promises to you!