

# SAINT THOMAS CHURCH

*Fifth Avenue · New York City*

**Friday, May 31, 2024**

The Visitation of the Blessed Virgin Mary

**Solemn Eucharist and interment of the Ashes of**

**Elizabeth Burr**

5:30 pm

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A Sermon by

The Rev. Canon Carl Turner, *Rector*

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## A Life Characterized by Joy



*The Rev. Canon Carl  
Turner, Rector of Saint  
Thomas Church Fifth  
Avenue*

Archbishop Michael Ramsey once said: *“Mary gives us a pattern of Christian Living which echoes our own calling and our own journey with God.”*

I think there is one word that sums up, for me, this beautiful feast of the Visitation of Mary to Elizabeth, and that word is **Joy**. This is not just a joyful feast; it is a feast *about* joy! It is hope-filled and from it comes a great gift – Mary’s Magnificat; her song of praise and defiance. Carrying the Christ Child, Mary does not stand still – she is on the move. We, as Christians, follow in her footsteps, and discover the joy of the presence of the Lord. Her Magnificat we claim as ours, which is why we use it every day in the Church at evening prayer. The Marist Father, Johann Rosten once said, *“Mary’s song is the magna carta of any and all authentic faith experience.”*

First, Mary expresses her gratitude to God:

**My soul doth magnify the Lord, and my spirit hath rejoiced in God my Savior.**

**For he hath regarded the lowliness of his handmaiden.**

Secondly, she gives praise to God:

**For behold from henceforth all generations shall call me blessed.  
For he that is mighty hath magnified me, and holy is his Name.  
And his mercy is on them that fear him throughout all generations.**

Thirdly, she contemplates the contrast between those who have power and those who have none:

**He hath showed strength with his arm; he hath scattered the proud in the imagination of their hearts.**

**He hath put down the mighty from their seat, and hath exalted the humble and meek.**

**He hath filled the hungry with good things, and the rich he hath sent empty away.**

Lastly, she reflects on the fulfilment of the prophecies of the Hebrew Scriptures in the Messiah:

**He remembering his mercy hath holpen his servant Israel, as he promised to our forefathers, Abraham and his seed for ever.**

Her Magnificat is not just a song of praise – this Magna Carta of the Faith is defiant, and looks forward in hope; it is an eschatological song of the Church and, therefore, of all Christians.

So, how appropriate that, today, we remember our dear sister Betty; for there is one word that sums up Betty's life, and it is the same word that describes this feast – **Joy**. It is a lovely thing that Betty shares her name with Mary's cousin. Like her, she waited on the Lord and I remember many, many times I took her Holy Communion and we placed the Blessed Sacrament on a little table next to photographs of those she loved and her beloved Saint Thomas Church. I would always stop at the little French Patisserie shop near her apartment and bring her a box of delicious things and she always made this most wonderful gleeful sound as she opened the box and said "yummy!" The juxtaposition of the Blessed Sacrament, her beloved photographs, and a box of sweet things was so appropriate for Betty.

Over a number of years, Betty gave funds to help repair and renew some of the High Altar furnishings and vestments. She paid for the wooden candlesticks that we use in Lent and for Requiems in memory of her mother. She and Kazie created a new frontal and High Mass Set in gorgeous green and pink silk to work with the beautiful tapestry of angels. I remember taking her samples of fabrics from Watts & Co and she examined them, more than once trying them against herself just in case she could have an outfit made for her! She paid for sets of new copes to beautify our processions. In her estate plans, she has left a sum of money to assist those who cannot afford it to have their ashes interred in the columbarium.

Always joyful (except when presented with a plate of vegetables!), always immaculately and elegantly dressed; she was a force of nature and the life and soul of the party and of our church. I only once upset her, when I announced her age at a birthday celebration with the seniors. "Oh no!" said Linda, "she tells everyone that she is 22 years old!"

Young at heart, playful, faithful, and devoted, the image in the service leaflet sums her up! Betty died just before the lockdown. She could not have the great Requiem she had planned; instead, I said the burial office with two others in Campbell's Funeral Home and we brought her ashes to our urn vault. When I gave her the last rites alongside her nurse, Andrew Hubacher, her long-term carer many years ago, had fortuitously returned to see her. After we had all received holy communion, Andrew suddenly knelt down and started singing the Christmas carol "Away in a manger" and Betty joined in, singing quite loudly, so we all held hands, including the nurse, and sang that carol together. It was the last memory I have of her as she died a few hours later. Her soul magnified the Lord and her spirit rejoiced in God her Savior. May he now look on her lowliness and bring her to glory. Amen.

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