

WAITING FOR THE LIGHT

A Joyful Noise

Luke 1:39-56

December 14, 2025

Have you seen Leonardo Da Vinci's stunning depiction of this most pivotal conversation in all of scripture? Mary sits outdoors, one hand turning the page of her book, the other lifted toward the messenger, Gabriel. Is she greeting this strange visitor and his announcement? Or, is she protesting? "Wait. Halt. Stop. None of this makes any sense."

Meanwhile, Gabriel kneels before her, birdlike wings at rest after the long flight from the high heavenly places. His head is slightly bowed. His eyes are lifted. And beyond them, a contrast of light and shadow, the humble majesty of a God whose glory needs no temple.

The angel, with all of creation, waits for Mary's answer. It is a picture of wonder. All of human history—salvation, redemption—hinges on the response of one young woman.

Mary gives us a song. A joyful noise. Those who find courage sing, and those who sing find courage to endure. Come what may.

Picture the scene: two women, both unexpectedly pregnant, meet in the hill country of Judea. Elizabeth is old—long past childbearing. Mary is young—unmarried, vulnerable, at risk. Mary walks through the door. The baby in Elizabeth's womb leaps with joy before language, recognition before sight. Elizabeth speaks on her son's behalf, "Blessed are you among women!"

And then Mary opens her mouth. She does not offer an explanation or a protest. She doesn't question or calculate the risks. Mary sings. And her song is defiance in a world stacked against her and countless others like her.

Mary, this peasant girl from Nazareth, will soon bear a baby into a cruel reality. The truth is, she has nothing.

No resources. No protection. No plan. Herod sits secure on the throne. Rome's boot presses down. And Mary? Mary sings: *My soul magnifies the Lord, and my spirit rejoices in God my Savior.*

She sings of a God who scatters the proud and brings down the powerful. A God who fills the hungry and sends the rich away empty. This is no birth announcement. It is the revelation of a new kingdom. Every tyrant should tremble at the news. A new day is dawning.

Mary sings for parents who fear the future. Mary sings for children who dread the coming of the night. Mary sings for every person told their life does not matter. The Magnificat is their song.

But listen—none of it has happened yet. Mary sings the future into being. As she sings, the proud are not scattered. They are centered. The hungry, still hungry. The poor crushed beneath the weight. The powerful see no end of their authority in sight. Nothing has changed.

Everything has changed. Because Mary's song bends time. She thanks God for doing what has not yet come to pass. She rejoices ahead of schedule. Call it *preemptive joy*.

Happiness waits for the tide to turn and the circumstances to change. But joy does not delay. Joy is defiant. Joy stares down the broken brutality of the world and refuses to let it have the final word.

Preemptive joy goes further still. Preemptive joy starts the victory song while the battle still rages on. Mary doesn't just feel this joy. She sings it. Because joy that stays inside eventually suffocates. Joy needs breath, needs sound, needs melody. So of course she sings.

If God is with her, who can stand against her? Hers has always been the story of the faithful. Mary's words echo her ancestor Hannah's ancient song of praise for her son, Samuel: *My heart exults in the Lord; my strength is exalted in my God.*

And now Mary, centuries later, adds her verse to the unending hymn of people crushed but not defeated. Her joy is patient. It is persistent. It is undaunted. It is the tenacious joy of those who trust that empires will rise and fall, but the grace of God is relentless. God's power is eternal.

And you know what? I've witnessed this kind of joy—not the polite happiness of the holidays, but the defiant, resonant kind of joy. The kind of joy that points to what is true. I've witnessed it.

It happens after funerals. The family has walked through the valley of death's shadow. The service has ended. We gather, and at first, there is this hushed reverence. Grief hangs in the room, as thick as fog. People hold their plates and their coffee mugs and speak in whispers. But then, out of nowhere, a laugh. Someone remembers a story, a cherished moment spent together, a terrible joke he used to tell. Laughter spreads like light.

Earlier this year, in the spring, I watched a widow laugh until tears streamed down her face. It was this joyful noise of grief and gratitude so tangled together, they were impossible to separate. And when she caught my eye, she wiped her cheek and said out loud, "He would have loved this."

Joy—uninvited, irrepressible, unashamed. Joy.

Last week, members of our church staff traveled across the city to sing Christmas carols. My group visited two men in a memory care unit in Carmel. Their rooms happen to be next to each other. One was wheeled into the room of the other so they could sit together. As we sang, I saw their lips moving. They were mouthing the words of familiar Christmas carols. Memory is fading, but the rhythm remains. When we finished, they whispered their thanks. By evening, our visit would be gone from their minds, but we made a joyful noise anyway. And it mattered.

Somewhere tonight, not far from here, a mother will rock her child in a cold room. A draft blows under the door. She has no resources, no plan, no answers for the morning. And yet, she hums a lullaby against the cold, pressing her cheek against the baby's head to let the vibration of the tune settle the child's fear. And that song will carry more warmth than temperature. It's all she has. And so she sings.

Singing is how the faithful endure. They do not sing because the night is over. They sing to push back the darkness. They sing of a promise so certain, it has already been kept. Mary's song belongs to them. And to us.

Because God can do it again. God is still composing. Crisis and cruelty grip our collective conscience. Grief multiplies; the vulnerable vanish; the powerful yawn. But today, we add our verse. We make a joyful noise. It's how we fight back, hold fast, keep faith.

Back to that scene: all creation waiting in wonder for Mary's answer. She opens her mouth, and in her song, the future is rewritten. To sing of what God has done is to announce what God will do. Yes, the world is still weary. The powerful cling to their thrones. The hungry wait. Creation itself groans. And the Church keeps on singing.

Let the powerful call it foolish. Let the cynics say nothing can change. After all, Mary sang when nothing had changed. We sing because she did. We sing because joy is the only language tyranny cannot control.

We sing ahead of the rescue. We sing the future into being. Add your verse to the unfinished hymn. This is how the faithful endure. This is how empires fall. This is how God comes.

Magnify the Lord. Make your joyful noise. Let every tyrant tremble. Let every heart prepare him room. Amen.