

## Wicker Park Lutheran Church

Rev. Jason S. Glombicki

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In today's gospel, we hear one of the most revolutionary hymns in all of Scripture, it's known as the Magnificat. But, too often Mary is domesticated—pictured as meek, mild, and obedient. However, the Mary we encounter in Luke is something far more radical. She is a teenager, unwed, dark-skinned, and living under the occupation of the Roman empire. By all accounts, she should be invisible. She should be powerless. And yet, she dares to sing.

Her song is not a private lullaby but a public proclamation. She declares that God scatters the proud, dethrones the mighty, lifts the lowly, and fills the hungry with good things. Mary's words echo the justice songs of her foremothers—Hannah, Miriam, Deborah, Judith. Each sang of a God who interrupts the world's patterns of power and domination. Each knew that God does not bless the status quo but instead brings about reversals that upend injustice, center the marginalized, and renew creation.

Which is why it matters deeply who Mary was when she sang this song, for her very life gave flesh to the words she proclaimed. If we imagine her as a serene white Madonna, the Magnificat becomes gentle poetry. But when we see her as a poor, unwed teenager in an occupied land, her words burn with defiance. They sound dangerous. They sound like hope against all odds. For, Mary is not only singing about God's past actions—liberating the Israelites, feeding the hungry in the wilderness—she is also singing about her present reality and the future God is bringing. She sings not only for

herself, but for all the lowly, all the oppressed, all those cast aside by systems of power.

And this is where her witness challenges us today. Right now, in our own country, more than 58,000 people are held in immigration detention. Many of them have committed no crime. They are parents, children, siblings, people fleeing violence, persecution, and poverty—people hoping for refuge. Instead, they are locked away in overcrowded facilities, often denied medical care, adequate food and water, and even basic dignity. In fact, at least ten people have died in custody this year alone.

The ELCA has spoken clearly about this. Our social policy resolution entitled “Toward Compassion, Just, and Wise Immigration Reform” calls for humane alternatives to detention—programs that are less costly, more effective, and, above all, more compassionate. When detention is unavoidable, we insist that people must have access to humane standards, legal counsel, and religious expression. But the reality is starkly different. Detention has become an industry, fueled by private corporations and political agendas. And behind the statistics are human lives—lives God calls us to honor.

So, When Mary sings that God lifts up the lowly and fills the hungry, her song resounds with the cries of those in detention today. The Magnificat is sung in the holding cell, prayed in the detention yard, whispered by mothers separated from their children. Her song calls us to remember them as though we were detained with them.

One of the early church’s titles for Mary was *Theotokos*, meaning “God-bearer.” It was meant to honor her role as the mother of Jesus, but her song suggests something deeper. Mary bore God not only in her womb but also

in her witness. She bore God in her bold proclamation of justice. And through baptism, we too are called to be God-bearers. We are called to recognize God's presence in those the world forgets—in the detained immigrant, in the hungry child, in the neighbor struggling for dignity. To be a God-bearer is to partner with God's work: to lift up the lowly, to speak truth to power, and to remember those in prison.

This is not easy. Like Mary, we live in a world where the powerful seem immovable and the lowly seem forgotten. It is tempting to despair. It is tempting to believe that detention camps, border walls, and deportation quotas are inevitable. But Mary teaches us another way. She flexes what we might call the "hope muscle." You see, hope, for her, is not wishful thinking. It is rooted in God's history of liberation, in the memory of promises kept, in the conviction that God's justice will prevail. She remembers how God parted the sea through Moses, how God fed the hungry in the wilderness, how God raised up prophets to challenge kings. And she trusts that God will act again.

Her hope is not passive. It moves her to sing, to proclaim, to bear God's presence into the world. And it calls us to do the same. For, we are invited to flex our hope muscle in the face of today's detention crisis. That might look like using the bulletin insert to advocate for alternatives to detention and more humane treatment when detention is necessary. It might look like volunteering or supporting local ministries that provide food, shelter, or legal aid for immigrants, like our ministry partners at "Illinois Community for Displaced Immigrants." It might look like speaking up when neighbors or colleagues spread fear or misinformation. After all, hope is not abstract—it takes flesh in our actions, just as God took flesh in Jesus through Mary.

You see, Mary's Magnificat is not a relic of the past. It is a living song, echoing in the cries of the detained, the voices of the oppressed, and the calls of the church today. Mary reminds us that God's justice is not comfortable. For, it dethrones the mighty, empties the rich, and lifts up the forgotten. She reminds us that our God is not neutral but takes sides—with the poor, the hungry, the imprisoned, the immigrant. She reminds us that we, too, are God-bearers, called to carry God's presence into a hurting world.

So, on this Feast of Mary, Mother of Our Lord, let us join our voices with hers. Let us proclaim with courage that God scatters the proud and lifts the lowly. Let us remember those in detention as if we were detained. Let us bear God's justice and hope to a world that desperately needs it. For Mary's song is not over. It is still being sung—through us, with us, and for the sake of all. Amen.