

**The Rev. Luke Selles**  
**The Great Vigil of Easter**  
**Church of St. Martin-in-the-Fields**  
**4 April 2026**

“But the angel said to the women, “Do not be afraid; I know that you are looking for Jesus who was crucified. He is not here; for he has been raised.” In the name of One, Holy, and Undivided Trinity: Father, Son, and Holy Spirit. Amen.

St. Martin’s, the Lord is risen. The Lord is risen indeed: Alleluia, alleluia!

On this sacred night, we remember the events of salvation history, stories of God’s faithfulness, God’s revelation, God’s breaking into our human reality: from God’s movement over the waters at Creation, to the deliverance and birth of a new people at the Red Sea, to the prophecies of God’s deliverance of God’s people from exile, when peace and joy shall flourish. Throughout this history, this grand story, God speaks and God acts – not only through people – but through the created order. God, the God who created the universe at the beginning of time, bends reality, to deliver, to save God’s people: a bush that burns but is not consumed; dry bones that become living flesh; the waters of a sea parted down the middle; and an earthquake that remakes reality.

Our lesson from Matthew’s Gospel reports a “great earthquake” at the proclamation of Jesus’ resurrection – the second earthquake in the narrative. Just a chapter before, at the moment of Jesus’ last breath, the Temple curtain, the sign of God’s presence in the holy of holies, splits in two, and the earth itself quakes – opening tombs as “many bodies of saints who had fallen asleep were raised.” And in the midst of this, the Roman Guard stationed at the cross, the men, the instruments of the Roman Empire who have just executed Jesus as an enemy of the state, are terrified, shaken to their core. They declare, “Truly, this man was the Son of God.”

We are told after this that the chief priests and Pharisees go to Pilate as they anticipate that Jesus’ followers will take his body and stage a false resurrection in keeping with Jesus’ prophecy that he would rise again on the third day. And so another Roman Guard is posted, now at the tomb. The Empire doubles down. The male disciples scatter. All that are left at the beginning of our Gospel lesson are the women: in this story, the two Marys, Mary called Magdalene, and “The Other Mary,” which the text identifies in Chapter 27 as the mother of James and John, the Sons of Zebedee, members of Jesus’ inner circle of disciples. Perhaps remembering his prophecy, these women go alone

to Jesus' guarded tomb to see, to remember, on the third day. Two unarmed women against a guard of Roman soldiers.

Yet, "suddenly there was a great earthquake" – an angel, a divine messenger, breaks into human reality – and the Roman Guards collapse in terror, becoming "like dead men." But the women, also afraid, hear the angel's message and receive his commission – to spread the good news that Jesus is risen from the dead. On their way to the other disciples, they run into Jesus himself. Jesus greets them, saying "chairó," which most closely translates to "rejoice," or "delight in God's grace." The women respond with worship. Jesus gives them a word of comfort and then urges them on to declare the news to his "brothers," the male disciples.

There is an echo here to Israel's deliverance at the Red Sea – it is Miriam, the prophet and sister of Moses and Aaron, who leads the people in rejoicing once they are safely ashore. At the resurrection, it is the Marys, Mary being the Aramaic version of the name Miriam, who are commissioned as the first heralds of the resurrection. God has acted decisively, delivering God's people, and flipping reality on its head. The Roman Guard and the Empire they represent collapse; their claim of power over death is void, the ground itself they stand on shaken. And it is the women who leave the place of dead transformed into life victorious, proclaiming the grace of God's deliverance. Like the guards, the women are afraid, but it is joy – and purpose – that moves them – moves them from fear to worship and then out into the world.

St. Martin's, the Lord is risen. And we who have faith in this witness, the witness of the Marys at the tomb, are raised here, now, into new life. Empire, death, sin, fear have no claim on us: we too are transformed and called to move out into the world, with joy and loving purpose to share the good news: God has acted, and we are set free. Alleluia, Alleluia. Amen.