

Coffee To Go | Fourth Sunday of Advent | Year C

SUMMARY KEYWORDS

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SPEAKERS

Blake Smith, Karin Peter

Karin Peter 00:26

Welcome to Coffee to Go where we center ourselves in the scriptures, seasons and holy days of the Christian tradition. I'm Karin Peter, here with Blake Smith, and as always, we welcome you on the journey. So, we are in the last week of Advent, which is a season in which we wait in expectation for the coming light into the world in the form of the infant Jesus. During this time, we've been anticipating and spiritually preparing for the arrival of Jesus, and it is through scriptures and symbols and hymns in the time of Advent that we begin to focus on Christ's birth, rather than some of the frenzy that happens this close to Christmas. So, we began Advent four weeks ago, and it will conclude on Christmas Eve, and then on Christmas Day, you can put a fifth candle in the middle of your Advent wreath and light that candle as the Christ candle, to observe all the Advent candles and the Christ candles burning on Christmas Day. So our question, as usual, is, where is Jesus this week? Well, he's sort of in this story, I think so. Actually, we are hanging out with Mary, and Mary is heading to the hills to spend some time with her older cousin, Elizabeth, and this is where we find a passage in in the text called Mary's song, or the Magnificat, which is a song of praise, probably used as a hymn and sung by early Christians who gathered together in worship. So let's, let's hear about this, Mary's trek to the hills and her song.

Blake Smith 02:17

Alright. And another, just quick note is, if you're checking out the lectionary, you might note that this year, in the Advent season, a couple of the Sundays, there are actually two passages from Luke used in the lectionary scriptures. And today we're going to actually read both of them. They are concurrent scriptures. One is the first chapter of the 39th through the 45th verse, and then there is this Magnificat that Karin has mentioned, which is the 46 through the 55th, and we're going to read all of that.

In those days, Mary set out and went with haste to a Judean town in the Hill Country, where she entered the house of Zechariah and greeted Elizabeth. When Elizabeth heard Mary's greeting, the child leapt in her womb, and Elizabeth was filled with the Holy Spirit and exclaimed with a loud cry, "Blessed are you among women, and blessed is the fruit of your womb. And why has this happened to me, that the mother of my Lord comes to me, for as soon as I heard the sound of your greeting, the child in my womb leapt for joy. And blessed is she who believed that there would be a fulfillment of what was spoken to her by the Lord. And Mary said, "My soul magnifies the Lord, and my spirit rejoices in God,

my Savior, for he has looked with favor on the lowly state of his servant. Surely from now on, all generations will call me blessed, for the Mighty One has done great things for me and holy is his name. Indeed his mercy is for those who fear him. From generation to generation, he has shown strength with his arm. He has scattered the proud in the imagination of their hearts. He has brought down the powerful from their thrones and lifted up the lowly. He has filled the hungry with good things and sent the rich away empty. He has come to the aid of his child Israel, in remembrance of his mercy, according to the promise he made to our ancestors, to Abraham and to his descendants forever."

So, why does this matter? There are some of our listeners who might even know of a similar occurrence of a young, pregnant woman, unmarried girl, who gets sent by their relatives into the hill country until the baby is born, and it is, and I use air quotes here, safe to bring her back. And by safe, I mean not threatening to their reputation. And this has taken place 1000s of times, and unfortunately, I have to say that I think it still takes place in some places. We don't know if Mary was sent in shame or for family support or out of a sense of joy, but let's just name it as an unmarried, pregnant girl's long trek out of town.

Karin Peter 05:26

This is one of my favorite passages, because the whole idea of she went to the hill country. She was young, unmarried, and she went up there. So, the first time I preached this, I lived in Arkansas in the hills, right? I mean, and a daughter from a prominent church family in town got pregnant, and they sent her to the family in the hills. They sent her to an aging aunt in the hills to stay there and have her child and then come back. It was so unbelievable that that was after all this time.

Blake Smith 06:06

Yeah, now Mary and Elizabeth's joyful reunion is counter to this depressing trek to the hills. I mean, you think about a young girl literally being sent away because of the embarrassment that she might cause, or because people are uncomfortable with it. It's not exactly a joyous occasion, but in this meeting, this reunion between Mary and Elizabeth, we see the counter to that, and that is where two women take a scandalous situation and encase it in pure joy. Elizabeth immediately recognized the divine encounter. I mean, she says that the baby in her womb becomes joyous, leaps with joy as the hope-filled miracle is experienced. And this is without words having even been said, this is just Mary arriving. And so, these two women, one young and one old, who are both without political or social or religious or economic power, they're out in the hills, they're away from the urban center, and they are celebrating God's love and preference for the poor and oppressed. Mary sings praise to God who, as she says, raises up the poor and honors the needy, God who scatters the proud. And this is a deep recognition of her salvation in the moment, to be saved from her current circumstance, and to bring joy in the moment. So, we really need to stop right here and just think about for ourselves, this isn't one of necessarily one of the questions, but it's, it's something I think we need to just stop for a minute, and fit yourself in this picture of God's promise and ask yourself, Is God lifting you up or scattering your prideful, plentiful self [ouch] where you are in this season. Hey, nobody said it'd be easy. I'm joining John. I'm going straight to the heart.

Karin Peter 08:24

Yep, yeah. That's the reality when we read that, isn't it? Yeah, yeah.

Blake Smith 08:30

But it is in this setting that the women are truly experiencing blessing, and that's important for us to be able to pick up on and perhaps to hold on to for ourselves, depending on our circumstance. We need to decide if we're in that place where God is lifting us up or maybe helping us to remember our place. So now for the questions. First question is, Have I ever felt like I needed to head to the hills? [Mm, hmm] and did any blessing come from that experience? If so, another question is, when have I been dismissive of or judge someone because of their circumstances? Maybe you thought they needed to go to the hills. When do I yearn for God to lift me up? When do I yearn for God to lift me up? And finally, what parts of me need to be scattered? So, a little bit of both sides.

Karin Peter 09:41

Yeah, so I like the first two questions because they make me think in kind of a new way. But these last ones, then there's God to lift me up, or what parts need to be scattered. Those are good questions for this last week of Advent, because Advent is coming to a close or time of preparation is coming to a close. And so, it's like, okay, people, if you have stuff left to deal with in your spiritual formation this year, this journey through Advent, now's the time. In what ways do you need God to lift you up and what parts need to be scattered? Let's, let's get this done, because Jesus is arriving. So, one way that we can maybe live into this last week of Advent is to think about, who do you know that needs some comfort or blessing this week. Mary was blessed, even in her difficult circumstances, and she and Elizabeth celebrated that. So, who is in the periphery of your life right now that needs a little bit of blessing? So, is it a harried parent, someone crazy with all these things to do? Is it the postal carrier or the homeless in your community? But what? What can you do to bring blessing and offer comfort and joy in this last stretch of week before Christmas? So, your family remember that Mary found comfort and joy with Elizabeth and so what kinds of things bring those feelings for you? For you, you might want to have each family member bring something that they find comforting or joyful, whether it's like a warm blanket or a stuffed animal or a can of soup, chicken soup is my comfort and joy in the winter, or a book or a pet. And as you light all four Advent candles this week, tell why you selected that and why it's comforting. What's comforting about it? Is it how it feels or tastes or smells or their memories associated with it, but find that moment of blessing and comfort and joy,

Blake Smith 11:49

Alright, well, speaking of blessing, our blessing today is another from Meta Herrick Carlson called "For Mary, Mother of Jesus." Now, I happen to believe that this is Karin's favorite Advent blessing. And I know that I normally do the blessing, but Karin, because this is your favorite, do I want to read it? I wonder if you might like to share the blessing today.

Karin Peter 12:11

I would. It's short, so let me, let me read that. I really like this, "For Mary, Mother of Jesus." Every year, folks with the Mary, did you know? Well, yeah, she knew. An angel told her. She opted in without asking for permission from her father or quietly convincing her fiancé. She sang an earth-shaking prophecy and had stretch marked skin in the game. She knew. She's super new. Her youth and virginity paint our telling of Mary as vulnerable and mild, but do not forget God's favor for her power and good courage. It has been there all along.

Blake Smith 13:01

That is a very powerful piece, and may have just simply ruined my liking of the song, "Mary, Did You Know." I will always hear it differently now, but, but, but thanks.

Karin Peter 13:13

Stretch marked skin in the game, you can't handle more than that.

Blake Smith 13:17

That's an image you cannot, cannot forget absolutely well. So thanks for that, Karin, and thank you to you, our listeners, for joining us here at Coffee to Go. We invite you to join us next time, for the next part of our journey through the liturgical seasons and holy days of the Christian tradition.