

# Coffee to Go | Christmas | Year C

## SUMMARY KEYWORDS

Christmas, Gospel of Luke, God's reign

## SPEAKERS

Karin Peter, Blake Smith

### **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, and I'm here with Blake Smith, and we welcome you on the journey. Today is Christmas Day, which is not just the day itself, but begins the Christmas season, which lasts 12 days ... from Christmas day until the eve of Epiphany, or what's called "12th Night." For you Shakespeare fans will find that familiar, which is January 5, and then January 6 is Epiphany. So, this week we hear the traditional Christmas story from the Gospel of Luke. And this is the version that Linus recites in the half hour cartoon, "A Charlie Brown Christmas." And it has lent itself, this text, to multiple Christmas carols and children's pageants over the years, and so let's listen to it today with an ear, not so much to the tradition or the sentimentality, but with an ear to the radical nature of God within its verses.

### **Blake Smith** 01:44

I had kind of forgotten that that was in the Charlie Brown Christmas. Unfortunately, I don't do impersonation, so I can't do Linus' voice. You'll just have to settle for the Blake voice. This time, it is the second chapter of Luke, and it is the first through the twentieth verses...

In those days, a decree went out from Caesar Augustus that all the world should be registered. This was the first registration and was taken while Quirinius was governor of Syria. All went to their own towns to be registered. Joseph also went from the town of Nazareth in Galilee to Judea, to the city of David, called Bethlehem, because he was descended from the house and family of David, he went to be registered with Mary, to whom he was engaged, and who was expecting a child. While they were there, the time came for her to deliver her child, and she gave birth to her first born son and wrapped him in bands of cloth and laid him in a manger, because there was no place in the guest room. Now, in that same region, there were shepherds living in the fields, keeping watch over their flock by night. Then an angel of the Lord stood before them, and the glory of the Lord shown around them, and they were terrified, but the angel said to them, Do not be afraid, for see, I am bringing you good news of great joy for all the people. To you is born this day in the city of David, a Savior who is the Messiah the Lord. This will be a sign for you. You will find a child wrapped in bands of cloth and lying in a manger, and suddenly, there was with the angel a multitude of the heavenly hosts praising God and saying, "glory to God in the highest heaven and on earth, peace among those whom he favors." When the angels had left them and gone into heaven, the shepherd said to one another, "Let us go now to Bethlehem and see this thing that has taken place, which the Lord has made known to us." They went

with haste and found Mary and Joseph and the child lying in the manger. When they saw this, they made known what had been told them about this child and all who heard it were amazed at what the shepherds told them, and Mary treasured all these words and pondered them in her heart. The shepherds returned, glorifying and praising God for all they had heard and seen just as it had been told them. So why does this matter? Well, this story takes place during a time of Roman domination, lot of oppression, lot of control, and people are there to register for that very reason, so that they can be further controlled economically and politically, so that the the leadership of the area knows exactly what their resources are, if you will. Roman occupation, however, was violent and terrifying. So this was, this was a rough time. And in this setting, Mary, who was Joseph's not yet wife, and Joseph traveled to Bethlehem. Um, obviously, she is very, very pregnant. And we typically, as we do in these joyous occasions, cast this as a sentimental narrative. And this is a sentimental travel narrative. You just think of the the holy couple going on a trip. But in reality, it's a gritty, tedious and uncomfortable journey, especially for Mary. I mean, imagine being near birth riding on the back of a donkey, not exactly the most comfortable animal, and it's a long journey. Elizabeth Johnson points out that Mary was no slouch. Her actions and even her name designates her as a, as courageous. She'd have to be. I mean, somewhere imagine, if you will, she's somewhere between the ages of 12 and 16, probably closer to the younger age, but somewhere in that range, and she's not yet married, and she's delivering a baby in a barn or a stable, or however you imagine that, but it's not in a comfortable maternity ward with a nurse button to call when you when you need something, right? And not only is she delivering a baby, she's delivering a baby that will what, maybe overthrow an empire. And this is not just your everyday baby, so it's a pretty significant journey and a story that's not just all wrapped up in in costumes and held sentimentally in a church. It was a real life journey that required courage, and Luke uses this event to place the birth of Jesus in Bethlehem. It's important because it fulfills the prophecies of Micah, chapter five, verse two, that Israel's hope for a ruler would come from this place. Uh, not so much in real life, but in essence as God's chosen one. Yeah. So yeah, and here God enters into the world, not just in human form, but in the most vulnerable human form, that, and that's a pretty significant thing. We talk a lot about that about, you know, Jesus coming didn't come as a warrior, an adult with power. He came in the very most vulnerable human form. And the visitors, the first visitors, as this passage tells us, at least, are nasty, smelly old shepherds who, by the way, and we say a lot of things about the shepherd. One thing about shepherds is that shepherds also protect the vulnerable. You think about sheep and being out there to protect them from the wolves and all those who would attack them and see them as prey. So the shepherds are ones who might not be the most desirable of society, but they are ones who also protect the vulnerable, and they may not be the person that we would invite to a baby shower, not without, not without a shower first,

08:22

Maybe not, but I'd sure have them as bouncers at the door. That's for sure. You go. That would keep some people out, wouldn't it?

**Blake Smith** 08:30

But what's important here is that they hear the news and after they regain their senses. I mean, you can only imagine what you know that event might have caused for them, they come and see, and not only they come and see, but they're in awe, and they begin to proclaim God's glory. They are transformed, if you will, in that moment, and can do nothing other than to proclaim God's glory. So, for a Messiah, a

chosen ruler, one who will liberate God's people. It's important for us to note in this story that it, one who comes from an unsuitable parent, an underage, non-married woman in an unsuitable place, in unsuitable circumstances, receiving unsuitable visitors. And it is in that context that God begins. The reign of God comes near. Jesus is Emmanuel. God with us. So it's in all of that, the reality of that, not in that beautiful manger scene that we put together, or we may have collections of, but in real life, grit and struggle God begins and the reign of God comes near. So, some questions we might ask ourselves in light of all of that is, Who have I judged as unsuitable? Kind of talked about this question, or thought about this question, or versions of this question, this Advent season as we have prepared. But again, in this, when we talk about the unsuitable circumstances, we need to ask, Who have we judged as unsuitable and how might God see them? The next question is, what vestiges of empire oppress people today, we don't think technically in terms of empires, but when we think about systems that oppress and that have been put in place to keep people in power, in places of power, we might think about that as empire. So what vestiges of empire oppress people today? And finally, am I willing to be vulnerable to further God's purposes in the world? Just a few things to think about.

**Karin Peter 11:03**

Especialy here on Christmas Day, when we're talking about a baby, an infant, Jesus, being born, the vulnerable question really, really stands out. How am I willing to be vulnerable, and how can we experience that today? On Christmas day, take a moment to read the Scripture aloud, either from Luke or Matthew. It doesn't matter, but as you read, listen to the animals and smell the stable and hear the baby cry. Watch for the visitors and feel the nearness of the divine spirit. Use all of our senses today,

**Blake Smith 11:47**

Alright, and our blessing today comes from Meta Herrick Carlson, and it's called "For Another Way." Empire says, look no further than these small choices, and the way it's always been. Heaven says there is another way that tells the truth with love and sets the whole world free. We here at Coffee to Go wish you a Merry Christmas. So we hope that you will have a blessed Christmas season as we enter into this season of Christmas and move toward our own epiphany in the days ahead. So, Merry Christmas, from Coffee to Go and the whole Project Zion Podcast family. Thanks for joining us here today for this episode of Coffee to Go, and we invite you as always, to join us next time, for the next part of our journey through the liturgical seasons and holy days of the Christian tradition.