

# Coffee to Go | Fourth Sunday of Advent

## SUMMARY KEYWORDS

Mary, God, angel, choices, Christmas eve, love, precious moments, Advent, expectations

## SPEAKERS

Blake Smith, Karin Peter

### **Karin Peter** 00:27

Welcome to Coffee to Go, where we center ourselves in the scriptures and seasons and holy days of the Christian tradition. I'm Karin Peter here with Blake Smith, and we welcome you on this journey. So where are we this week? So this is the last Sunday of Advent. And this year, it actually falls on Christmas Eve, Christmas Eve is a Sunday. And so it's the last Sunday before Advent. So we will be not looking at a week of experiencing but we'll have a shortened fourth week of Advent. So as we prepare to receive Jesus, the light of peace into the world tomorrow on Christmas Day, we need to first spend a little time with Mary, teenage girl betrothed but not yet married. She learns she shall carry and deliver the Son of God. So as we've gone through Advent this year, this is kind of our first visit with Mary. So I'm glad we're doing that since it would have been kind of hard to have the story without her. So let's hear about this encounter that Mary has, as she learned she will carry and deliver Jesus.

### **Blake Smith** 01:43

All right, well, our scripture comes from the Gospel According to Luke, the first chapter, the 26th through the 38th verse. In the sixth month, the angel Gabriel was sent by God to a town in Galilee called Nazareth, to a virgin engaged to a man whose name was Joseph of the house of David. The virgin's name was Mary. And he came to her and said, "Greetings, favorite one, the Lord is with you." But she was much perplexed by his words and pondered what sort of greeting this might be. The angel said to her, "Do not be afraid, Mary, For you have found favor with God. And now you will conceive in your womb and bear a son, and you will name him Jesus. He will be great, and will be called the Son of the Most High, and the Lord God will give to him the throne of his ancestor, David, he will reign over the house of Jacob forever, and of His kingdom, there will be no end." Mary said to the angel, "How can this be since I am a virgin?" The angel said to her, "the Holy Spirit will come upon you, and the power of the Most High will overshadow you, therefore the child to be born will be holy, he will be called Son of God. And now, your relative Elizabeth, in her old age has also conceived a son. And this is the sixth month for her who was said to be barren, for nothing will be impossible with God." Then Mary said, "Here, am I, the servant of the Lord, let it be with me, according to your word." Then the angel departed from her. Well, why does this matter on Christmas Eve? And we could spend probably hours and hours and hours talking about all the reasons that it matter, but a couple that stick out for me, Karin are first of all, this is Mary, a young girl who gets this unexpected visit with an angel and is told she's been chosen for a divine task. Make a note here that when we hear favored in the Scripture, it's referring to being chosen, not special. But it's a girl that actually in the Gospel of Luke, it's the women who are the heroes, Mary and Elizabeth. Like you said at the beginning, it's good that we have this passage about

Mary because without the women, we would not have the story. Well, I guess we could say if we read, without God, with God, nothing is impossible. However, I think they seem pretty critical.

**Karin Peter** 04:30

Okay, it wouldn't be a good story.

**Blake Smith** 04:33

No, it wouldn't be as good a story. So I mean, this whole thing, of course, to Mary, this young virgin, seems completely unbelievable. But she asked some questions. She doesn't just humbly or quietly or submissively step back and take it. She asked some questions. And then she agrees she makes the decision that she chooses to be a servant or slave to God, and slave of God is a moniker which also describes Moses and Elijah and other female and male figures throughout the scriptures. So religion and popular culture has turned Mary into a Precious Moments figurine.

**Karin Peter** 05:20

And I love sweet, cute little ceramic figurines. Yeah, yes.

**Blake Smith** 05:24

And I love Precious Moments figurines, you know, the pure, harmless, neat, lovely, everything's perfect. But when we when we read the stories, this was not a clean, perfect, pure milky white, everything is great, I mean, the birth narrative in itself is although it is a precious moment, it is not a precious moment in, in the same sense.

**Karin Peter** 05:50

Well, and like I just have to interject here seriously, if we're going to talk about being pregnant nine months and riding a donkey on a long journey. It's like this, this has some complications that Mary might not have been aware of going in this, what's going to happen? Because when you read the Scripture, what I'm hearing for the first time is really different than what I've heard in the past. So when you read that the angel came and said, Greetings, favored one, the Lord is with you. And she was much perplexed by his words and pondered what sort of greeting this would be in my mind, I see her like, arms crossed, eyebrows furrowed brow, tapping foot like, What are you talking about? And I see her kind of putting the angel in this position of trying to convince her. Well, and even Elizabeth, I mean, it can happen, Mary, trust me, it happened to Elizabeth, look what happened? And she's like, No, and, the angel continues to kind of talk her into it. And that's how I hear it now, as an older female. And that's different than I heard it when I was growing up. And I like this new Mary, in that lives in my imagination when I saw her as you read it today,

**Blake Smith** 07:09

Who's saying, wait a minute, first of all, who are you? Second of all? No, that's not the way it works.

**Karin Peter** 07:15

Yeah, and by the way, did you catch I'm not married yet. You want me to have that on me as well? I mean, yeah, just ...

**Blake Smith** 07:24

It's hard enough being a woman in this culture. Try being unwed and pregnant? Yes. Yeah, not good. So she gets some props from the feminist perspective here, right?

**Karin Peter** 07:36

Absolutely. Absolutely.

**Blake Smith** 07:40

So yeah, but in the end, it tells us a little bit about God, two, I think is, first of all, we learned a lot about Mary, if we really look at it, honestly. But we also learned some things about God. God chooses whom God chooses. And it's not about status. Yeah, you couldn't have been a whole lot more lowly. I mean, she was at least Jewish, right? But young, female, unmarried, her value hasn't even come yet, because she has not married and you know, and become part of the male lineage kind of thing. And contributed to that. So but God chooses who God chooses, and probably more importantly, is that God invites, not coerces or forces. So the invitation from Gabriel and it might seem strong. And certainly, as you said, sounds like he did try to convince her because she was not going to just go easily. But ultimately, it was her choice. It's her choice to follow it, it's our choice, to follow God and to do what God is calling us to. And then ultimately, God sends this promise of the Spirit to be the companion in the midst of this. So it's not calling us to these things alone. And certainly we see that in story that the Holy Spirit is there with Mary. One of the things that that I just want to pull out of this, and I and I do say, you know, acknowledge that the women here are the heroes. But this idea that God chooses whom God chooses, I would just want our listeners. It's not just about male or female either. I mean, I think it's about regardless of gender identity. God chooses us and can call us regardless of what the expectation is of the culture or that kind of thing. This is, this is good news for all of those who would be in relationship with God, that God can call us and use us. So a couple questions because in this as always God turns the table on us and, and makes us think about God in new ways. I think it would be good for us to ask ourselves the question, How is God inviting me to birth something new in my life? How is God calling me to birth something new in my life, of course thinking of birth as something larger than giving birth to a child. God works in a lot of different ways. And so what does that look like for each of us? What are the expectations or the assumptions about God that I may need to reevaluate?

**Karin Peter** 10:46

I think Mary had to do some reevaluation here.

**Blake Smith** 10:48

Yeah. Yeah.

**Karin Peter** 10:50

Agreed. And yeah, I do think some of the points you made earlier are are things that, that we do need to reevaluate. We make assumptions from these stories, because we've heard them so many times,

that we have a hard time looking at them and new, but looking at this in a new way, brought new understandings about God's relationship with us that will stay with me for some time. Yeah. Yeah.

**Blake Smith 11:18**

So maybe if we if we take a look at Mary's experience, and really think about what is what is meaningful, what part of that experience? Or is it the whole experience, what there might be just a piece of that experience that is meaningful to you and your journey? And so to think about why that is and how this particularly connects with you on this Christmas Eve?

**Karin Peter 11:43**

Absolutely. Well, Blake, thanks for having us hanging out with Mary for a little bit. We're not going to do how to experience it this week, simply because Christmas Day is tomorrow, and we will be back with you then, with another Coffee to Go. But I'm wanting to close this with a blessing. It's a little bit of a long one, but stick with me here. It's called "A Parent Advent Prayer," which I think is perfect for the transition from Advent to the birth of Jesus. It's by Ariane Braithwaite Lehn in *Starlight and Ash: Prayers for the Chaos and Grace of Life*.

God I now stop what I'm doing, what I'm thinking, what I'm scrambling to plan and hustling to finish, so that I can be here. Be here in the safety and warmth of your love. This love that holds me fast and keeps me centered. What I want to be a season of joy for my children so quickly becomes a season of increased expectations for me, not because they expect things, but because I do. It's the pressure I put on myself to make things perfect and memorable and happy and special. But you came to me amidst darkness and stars, reminding me how darkness and light are most beautiful together. And in that holy, mysterious and messy night, you redefined perfection, promising me that leaning into the mystery, and laying down in loving awe, compose the most faithful response. You tell me the best gift I can give my children this Christmas is to look with love in their eyes, and pause throughout the day, to pray over them and envelop them with arms of fierce grace, when I feel most angry, or annoyed, to sit and wonder for a moment, or many and marvel at all that shaped our family this year, to give thanks and to allow tears to fall and dreams to rise to take my pilgrim band by their hands and walk together deep into the heart of Bethlehem shining bright within our souls. And this will be more than enough because you have made a manger in which my heart will rest and find your heartbeat becoming mine. Amen.

**Blake Smith 14:45**

Amen! That's a great blessing to send us off here on this Christmas Eve. On behalf of Karin and I and all of the team here at Project Zion Podcast and Coffee to Go we wish you a blessed Christmas season. As we move into this new season, may you be blessed. And we invite you of course to join us next time here at coffee to go for our next part of the journey through the liturgical seasons and holy days of the Christian tradition.