

Coffee to Go | Christmas Day

SUMMARY KEYWORDS

Mary, shepherds, Christmas, hope, angels, darkness, Bethlehem, birth, Jesus, God, light

SPEAKERS

Blake Smith, Karin Peter

Karin Peter 00:27

Merry Christmas, and 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 this Christmas morning with Blake Smith. And we welcome you on the journey. So the interesting thing about Christmas, if you're listening, which many people I think won't listen to this till after Christmas, but if you're listening on Christmas Day, Christmas is not just a day, Christmas is a season and it actually lasts from Christmas Day for 12 days. And Blake, as you know, it's just like the song right? The 12 Days of Christmas. And Christmas is concluded then, with the arrival of Epiphany on January 6, which is often called Three Kings Day. So Christmas is 12 days. So if you haven't listened to this until later in December, guess what, it's alright, you're still in the Christmas season. So some of the things that happen in those 12 days, though, that we won't be doing coffee to goes on are really interesting. So, for example, the day after Christmas has several kind of notes about it. One is that in the greater Catholic Church, it's the feast of St. Stephen and maybe an Episcopal Church too. And, St. Stephen was a deacon who cared for the poor. And out of that tradition, came a tradition that we kind of associate maybe with Commonwealth countries and with Great Britain, and that is Boxing Day. We are on the day after Christmas boxes of food and gifts and, and used to be even coins were given to people in need. And then that was continued by the aristocracy in Great Britain and those things were given them to servants and land tenant farmers. So there's all kinds of traditions about that about almsgiving that come out of the feast of St. Stephen, who was considered, is considered, the first Christian martyr. Then on December 28, is a day called Holy Innocents day and I wasn't as familiar with this. Blake, I don't know if you had encountered it in your studies. But Holy Innocents Day is the day that we recognize those children whose lives were taken by Herod when he was trying to eliminate what he considered a kingly rival in the coming of the Messiah as an infant. And so in the story, and the Christmas story, we know that he had all of the male children under a certain age killed, and so December 28, we remember that part of the story. And remember those lives lost. Then there's another Oh, go ahead, Blake

Blake Smith 03:23

I was gonna say no, I had not heard that connection either. That was kind of new to me as we began preparing for this episode.

Karin Peter 03:32

Well and when we talk about it now and kind of how do we recognize it today, I think we can look at what's going on between Israel and in the Gaza Strip, Israel and Hamas. We can look at the tragedies

happening in in Sudan and Darfur and other places, and other continents. We can look at any of the places in the world where people who are are innocent of whatever acts caused the conflict are suffering greatly. Especially displease people in the refugee crisis, and other issues that are caused by war and violence.

Blake Smith 04:06

Right.

Karin Peter 04:08

So on the little more frivolous side of what happens in the season of Christmas, let's go to New Year's Eve, which, where I live in the States, it's usually a big party to celebrate the end of one year and the incoming of another. But in Scotland, it's called, I'm sure I'm not going to pronounce it right but Hogmany. However you want to, it's a funny word, H O G M A N Y. And in Scotland, Christmas was not a big deal. It wasn't celebrated as kind of the big, religious and secular festivity. In fact, it was frowned upon after the Reformation in Scotland to even kind of be frivolously celebrating Christ's birth but Hogmany New Year's Eve was celebrated and it has a ton have interesting traditions and kind of good fortune practices and all kinds of fun things that go with it. So Google it, H O G M A N Y, Hogmany and Scotland and you'll find all kinds of fun things that go along there on Christmas.

Blake Smith 05:15

Do you happen to know off the top of your head if it included haggis?

Karin Peter 05:19

I don't know if it included. But I do know that it included that the unmarried oldest unmarried girl in the family was going to marry the first like dark-haired stranger that crossed the threshold. So that came from but you know, there you go.

Blake Smith 05:39

I just wondering because I I've been to Scotland once and I probably stand in the minority among people. I really like haggis. And while you're Googling Hogmany, guys, listen, Google haggis, to and I would actually recommend that you don't google it first. Try it first before you find out what's in it. But if haggis is part of Hogmany, I'm a I'm a fan.

Karin Peter 06:06

So when you go down to Google rabbit hole, there you go. So also January 5th is the last day of the Christmas season. And that's the day that you're supposed to take down all of your greenery, whether it's real or fake, doesn't matter that all needs to come down before epiphany on January 6th. And again, January 6th is the day of Epiphany, often called Three Kings Day. We will do an episode on that day. It's a Saturday, I think, this season. So with all of that to talk about the Christmas season, let's get back to where we are with Jesus this week. And on Christmas Day we have several gospel scriptures to choose from. And we're going to go with the nativity story from Luke. And so today we are traveling with this little family unit to Bethlehem. Mary is nine months pregnant, she is riding on a donkey, which had to be terribly uncomfortable and was headed with Joseph to his ancestral town to be counted. So like let's hear the Scripture today.

Blake Smith 07:13

So our Scripture today comes from the second chapter of Luke the first through the seventh first and the eighth through the 20th verse.

In those days, a decree went out from Emperor 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 firstborn son and wrapped him in bands of cloth and laid him in a manger, because there was no place for them in the end. In that region, there were shepherds living in the fields keeping watch over their flock by night, then the angel of the Lord stood before them, and the glory of the Lord shone 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 host, 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. So 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. But 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 as it had been told them.

You know, as we take this passage from Luke, it's really common and Luke, it's one of his themes, or one of the writer's themes, I should say that this message is for everybody. And what's important here is that Christ or the Holy in this case shows up in unremarkable places and engages with remarkable people. I mean, there's, there's no kings in this particular story of the Nativity. And even the birth narrative itself is quite short, what seems to be the most important is the acknowledgement that the Holy comes to those who are in darkness and shines a great light. It's a light of hope. And, and this is done, as the angel says, For peace on earth among those whom God favors. An important piece here with favors is that favor isn't about material or personal abundance. Eric Barreto says "favor is not about material or personal abundance. It's about the abundance of God's grace." So first, you've got Mary who is a poor, young woman without means not a person of status, whom God has chosen to bestow this honor on. And then the first persons to be told about this birth. I mean, you've got prophets who have who have steeped themselves in the law and all of that and know what's coming. And yet the ones who find out first, are the shepherds who are watching their flocks by night, they are in the dark at night, and the angel comes to them. Favor, this favor of God is about this abundant grace of God that comes and is that is available to everyone, and comes to those often in unexpected times, and places. When we least expected God's grace is poured out in ways that surprise us. Another piece here is that, Mary, in this section at least, of the passage, I mean, there is the appearance of the angel to her in the first chapter. But in the birth narrative, it's like, okay, she gave, she gave birth to the child, she wrapped

him in clothes and put them in the manger and Mary's done. And we don't see Mary again. But it's important for us to note that Mary's job is not done. Any of our listeners, any of our listeners, certainly those who have given birth and are parents, but even those who observed who have observed others, giving, having given birth to children and raise them and being in community that helps raise them that that job is not done. Mary is just beginning, if you will, this time of great influence in the life of Jesus. She is the one who was going to be there providing sustenance and nurturing and healing, and teaching all of the basics of walking and talking and how to treat people and follow the customs and do all of the things that are expected of him. And so it's a process. It's not a it's not a one off. And so once made sure that we would catch that, that even as we pass over very quickly, in this passage, this is just the beginning of an incredible time for her influence to play a role in the life of Jesus, and as we know will play a role in the life of the church for centuries beyond that time as well. And this process, we also would think of shalom as being a process. We live in an "I want it right now" world. But God invites us as God invited Mary, to be co creators of peace to be in a process that takes place over time. And as Linda Pinga writes, The hope is that God sustains us in the process, with signs of grace, and glimmers of hope, because can only imagine, I mean, just starting out. And Karen, you mentioned, you know, she's nine months pregnant, she's writing on the back of a donkey, she's probably not in a great mood. I mean, (you think?) This is not the life of royalty. She's not laying on a tufted bed with pillows all around her. I mean, she This is tough life. This is tough life. And yet...

Karin Peter 14:42

It really is. And we forget that about the whole kind of build up with the advent story and then getting to this point of the nativity story. Because we're looking at it from such a different perspective. But if we really want to think about what it would be like for a young woman to be visited in, in some manifestation of the divine or holy being asked, because Mary was able to make a choice to do this, to engage in this process with God, not married, and what that was going to mean, regardless of the fact that Joseph got his own little visit and went, "Okay, fine." This was still not going to be an easy road. I mean, at one point, it says that they sent her to the hills, right. And she went to visit Elizabeth. Well, I worked down south for a while and I've heard stories about young women who got pregnant being sent to relatives in the hills. You know, that's, that's what happened. And her life was not easy at that point. Even though she had Josephs we understand it, her having Joseph support. This is not this is not the happy, happy joy, joy to quote Ren and Stimpy. So all you 60 year olds out there know who that is. That's not what this was like, for Mary. This was a huge commitment to a process that was not always going to be easy.

Blake Smith 16:13

Right. But in the midst of that, again, God sustains us in the process. And that's something that we can take from this story. I mean, gosh, what she had to deal with is just unimaginable, most likely, like you said, you know, that hasn't gone away. And in this passage, it even reminds us again, Joseph and the woman he was engaged to but not married to

Karin Peter 16:37

Yeah, exactly. Let's rub it in your face again. Yeah. All right. All right. Well, I think it's really interesting, though, because at towards the end of the passage, it says Mary treasured these words and pondered

them in her heart. And I think that those are the signs of grace and glimmers of hope in the story. For her.

Blake Smith 16:53

Yeah, yeah. Yeah, I think, you know, thinking of the affirmation, she went to be with Elizabeth and Elizabeth affirmed kind of what she had heard. And now here the shepherds have come in and, and you want to say you believe and you're in this, but those little moments, those glimmers of hope really kind of helped to strengthen us in those times to know that we're not alone. And that there is hope. And that's, that's a great thing for us to hold on to.

Karin Peter 17:18

We can live in that story. And remember Mary and her story as we work through the process of being a people committed to God's peace to God's shalom. So yeah, absolutely. So today, Christmas Day, as we share, this is a day. That is one of those glimmers of hope.

Blake Smith 17:35

Absolutely, absolutely. And I mean, even though this is Christmas, and we, in this moment, live in that glimmer of hope, that is a glimmer of hope that is much needed. Because we're living in a world right now that is that is violent, full of poverty and greed and all kinds of things. And you know, this darkness that the shepherds were in. And I want to be real careful here about making a distinction between darkness and light. I'm not talking black and white, I'm talking about the absence of light. And some days we may wake up hopeless, with the absence of light, when we hear what's going on. And so it's important for us to hold on to the hope of this good news that enters into that world and brings the signs of grace and glimmers of hope. And so we need to ask ourselves the question, where do we see those signs of grace and glimmers of hope in our life each day? We need to, we may need to make mental, intentional note of those things so that we don't lose hope. And then, how do we in the midst of this world that is that surrounds us with these moments of darkness, how do we bear witness to peace? How do we bear witness like the shepherds? They come out of darkness they've seen a light and then they go to bear witness to that light, even knowing that they're gonna go back to the darkness tonight to watch you know, to watch their sheep, whatever so. And how will how will we share that abundance of love and joy and grace with the people that we will encounter this week and in the days ahead? I just think it's really important today that we take a moment and be mindful not only of ourselves, but all of those around the world. We mentioned air at the beginning of the podcast those who are struggling in our world and who are the outcasts and are part of oppression, these children who are the Holy Innocents? That was the word that we talked about, or that you talked about. So as we think about those what signs of grace or glimmers of hope, reside and can we share Are with those hopes in mind.

Karin Peter 20:03

So I think like when we're going to look at how we can experience it this week, I'm going to suggest that we experience it into the Christmas season all 12 days. And that is to watch for glimmers of hope in your life. And when you see one, remember it and write it down on a small slip of paper and maybe invite your family or group of friends to do the same. And put all those small slips of paper in a basket or a jar or a hat wherever you want to do it. Place all those pieces of paper in it. And then at the end of the Christmas season, light a candle and pull them out one by one, have everybody take a turn and

read them aloud, and then offer a prayer or give a statement of thanksgiving. For the glimmers of hope revealed to you this Christmas season. So I think we've got a blessing to close out our podcast Blake.

Blake Smith 21:00

Indeed we do, and it is from "Light upon Light" by Gerard Manley Hopkins.

Moonless darkness stands between.

Past, the past, no more be seen.

But the Bethlehem star may lead me to the sight of him who freed me, from the self that I have been.

Make me pure Lord, thou art holy. Make me meek, Lord, thou art lowly. Now beginning and away, now began on Christmas Day.

So we here at Coffee to Go and Project Zion Podcast wish you the blessings of the Christmas season and invite you to join us again next week. That Coffee to Go for the next part of our journey through the liturgical seasons and holy days of the Christian tradition.