

## **Advent to Easter - the Whole Story of Jesus**

**Karen May**

Hello everyone, and welcome. I'm Karen May, and today we're going to talk about Advent to Easter, discovering the whole story of Jesus because, if you're like me, you take individual celebrations in liturgical seasons and you really keep them to themselves. Advent leads to Christmas, and then we're done. Lent leads to Easter, and then we're done. And we do ordinary time, and then the next season rolls around and then we're back to Advent. But they are so intertwined. It's the same story. It's the story of the same person. And a while ago, I discovered that that really needs to be connected a lot more in my life. And I hope to help you to see that as well.

### **Opening Prayer**

*Shall we pray? In the name of the Father and of the Son and of the Holy Spirit. Amen. Heavenly Father, I thank you so much for the connections and the stories that help us to understand who you are and what you have done for us on a much deeper level than we ever could before. Lord, I thank you for the ways that you prepare us to receive your son, to receive your gift in the Eucharist, in the sacrifice of the cross, in the resurrection. I ask you Lord to open our hearts and our minds to receive you in a much deeper way this Lent and this Easter. And we ask all this in Jesus' name. Amen. In the name of the Father and of the Son and of the Holy Spirit. Amen.*

### **The Connection of Advent and Lent**

So, a few years ago I had just written my book, "Walking Through Holy Week", and I had an offer from a group to come and speak to them about my book. And so, we were tossing around some dates, and I was giving them some dates in Lent, and they came back with, "How about December 10th?". I'm like, "That's Advent". I think they misunderstood the title of my book. Although I feel like "Walking Through Holy Week" is fairly clear that that's the week before Easter, so that would be Lent, not Advent. And it seemed a little funny to be talking about Holy Week as we're preparing for the birth of Jesus.

But then I received a second invitation to speak. And again, they could have had me any day, and they decided to ask me for December. And again, I went back and I said, "This is a Lenten book. Do you really want me for Advent?". And again, they said, "Yes, that's when we want you". Now, when things like that happen, they are so bizarre, so odd. I know that there's something in there that God has for me, and I need to go to prayer and figure out what in the world that might be, because I'm thinking, "This is not connected". And the more I prayed, the more I realized it's very connected.

I was thinking that I was going to take people through Holy Week and help them to understand the death and the beauty and all of the connections from the Old Testament to the New Testament that are happening in those liturgies and masses of Holy Week, and then receive that

Easter in a way that is unbelievable, and I want to fill the church with people who can't wait to receive that. And these people want to do that with Advent, to discover all of the things that are contained, all these little treasures that are contained in this waiting, in this receiving of Jesus in His birth. And they want to fill the church with people who are just so excited to receive that. And God said, "I want to put the two of you together because there are so many connections, and I want you to speak about both of them".

## **Our Past, Present, Future**

And so, I started to look, because when God tells you, you need to speak about both, there's reason. There are connections, and they were everywhere. And as I looked at the Christmas season of our church, we had a nativity scene, and our nativity scene is huge. It's in front of our altar. It's really big. And there's the nativity scene, and then the altar, and the crucifixes above the altar, and then behind all of that is the tabernacle. And as I sat looking at all of them, I realized that our past, our present, and our future were all right there.

Our past in the birth of Jesus, but also in the crucifixion. We don't take the crucifix down at Easter. We don't at Advent or at Christmas. We don't cover it like we do on Good Friday. We have it up there because we see that this birth was in order for Jesus to die. That was the point of His coming to earth for us. And so, we leave that there, and that's our past. And then at the altar is our present. That's when we receive Jesus in the Eucharist, when that sacrifice is made present to us so that we can receive it in the Eucharist, in our hands, in our bodies. And then our future is represented to me by the tabernacle. That's that little window that shows us that this is not meant for today. This is not food to get us just through our journey today. It is to get us to heaven. That touch with eternity that we receive today in the Eucharist, to me, is represented by the tabernacle, that opening to heaven, that space that is there that helps us to see that this is so much more than we can see. And so, with all of that, I started to go through and find the connections from Advent to Easter, and there are so many.

## **The Significant Role of Mary**

The first is just Mary, because she's the only one who was there for all of it. She was there from the very beginning until the very end. No one else was there like that. Not a single apostle, not a single disciple, not even Jesus's father on earth, Joseph, only Mary. And we have a gift of the rosary to help us to remember that, especially in both of these seasons, because we can pray all of those mysteries and we can be with Mary at the Annunciation, and at the birth of Jesus. We can be with her as she finds Him in the temple, as He institutes the Eucharist at the last supper, as He dies and was buried, and as He rises again, we can walk through each part of those stories with Mary. And so, that's a beautiful way to experience this Lent, but also to bring that Advent into that story, into that practice, and that understanding as we prepare for Easter.

And then, as we go into those stories, we see so many connections, and I'll give you a few. The first is the Annunciation. So, the angel Gabriel comes to Mary and says, "You are going to bear the savior of the world". He is announced to Mary. And then later in Jesus' ministry, He's announced again. By who? John the Baptist. John gets everybody ready, "There is someone coming, and I am not fit to untie His sandals. I am baptizing you with water. He is baptizing you

with the Holy Spirit." And all of that preparation, that announcement, happens in both of those stories, Advent and Easter, Advent and Lent. And then that recognition. The first time that Mary sees Elizabeth, who recognizes Jesus? It's John, John the Baptist. And I love that, later in Jesus's ministry, the one who recognizes Jesus is John the Baptist. He points Him out and he says, "That is the lamb of God. That's the one that you need to follow. I know him. I've been preparing you for him. And now he's here". That recognition is there in both parts of the story.

And then when He's born, He's born in Bethlehem, which means "House of bread", which shows us that connection again. He's born in Bethlehem. This house of bread is the place where the bread of life is born. And we're shown that the Eucharist is coming, that Jesus' body will be given for us and will become the bread of life that we receive every day that we go to mass which can be every day. And then in His birth, we even see a parallel there, because we think of His birth as so sweet and beautiful and calm, "Silent Night", "Oh Come all Ye Faithful", all these beautiful songs, but in reality, His birth was very undignified. He was rejected and turned away, and He was sent out to this manger, to this stable. And in His death, it's the same. He is undignified. He is rejected and turned away and crucified outside the city. So, even in His birth, there's a little reminder of what's coming, and it is not going to be dignified. It is not going to be pretty.

But even in that, the shepherds come, the shepherds who tend the flocks of lambs, the shepherds who know lambs and sheep. They come to see Jesus as one of the first people who even know about him. And they show us that the lamb of God is here, that when we get to Easter, that lamb of the Passover is going to become the lamb of God who will be sacrificed for our sins. And the lamb of the Passover was sacrificed. His life was given for the lives of the Israelites, so the angel of death would pass over and they would be saved from slavery. And the lamb of God was sacrificed. His life was given for us so that we could be saved from the slavery to sin, and not only saved from death, but from eternal death, and given eternal life.

### **Significance of the Magi**

And then the magi come, and they come bringing gold, and frankincense and myrrh, which can seem kind of odd for a baby, but again, here are those little reminders that this is just the beginning of the story, and the end is already known. That gold is given for a king. That is the type of present you would give to a king. And frankincense is used in the anointing of a priest. So, we have our priest, and we have our king. And then the myrrh is something that is used for burial, to prepare a body for burial. So again, even in His birth, we are reminded of His death. We are shown that His birth was because He was going to be given for us, and what a gift that is. And to be able to take that into our land as we prepare for Easter is such a beautiful thing.

And then finally, again, with Mary, that she was present through all of these things, that she was there when the shepherds and the magi came, and she held all these things in her heart. And we are called to do the same. We are called to see all of these little connections, all of these stories to help us to understand even more deeply what God is doing in these times of Holy Week and Easter, and after, because this season is so much bigger, and so much more important. It is so important that we understand all of it and how God has prepared us.

## Connection of The Old and The New Testament

As Saint Augustine says, the Old Testament is revealed in the New, and the New Testament is hidden in the Old. He's been telling us from the beginning. And that's what I wanted to do in walking through Holy Week, is to show you how our Catholic Church shows us those connections, helps us make those connections from the Old Testament. In the liturgy of Holy Thursday, we hear about the Passover, and then we hear about the institution of the Eucharist and how Jesus says, "This is my body" as He holds up the bread, not the lamb, but the bread, and says, "This is my body. This is how you will eat me. This is how you will eat my flesh, because you must eat my flesh and drink my blood to have life within you. And it's not going to be in representative form of a lamb. It will be in the bread. I will be here". And there are so many things in the liturgies and the masses of Holy Week and Easter, and in the ways that the Church helps us to enter into that story in a deeper away.

So, I invite you to look at all of those little connections, discover all of those stories, discover all of those treasures and gifts as you go through this Lent and prepare for Easter in a brand new and beautiful way.

## Closing Prayer

*Shall we pray? In the name of the Father and of the Son and of the Holy Spirit. Amen. Heavenly father, I thank you so much. I thank you for the beautiful ways that you prepare us to receive you, whether it is through these stories, through these connections, or through things in our lives that get in our way and help us to turn our attention to something we have not paid attention to before. I ask you Lord to help each person who hears these words to find you anew, to find you close, and to see the gift that you have given to them in your Son, Jesus. We ask all this in Jesus' name. Amen. In the name of the Father and of the Son and of the Holy Spirit. Amen. Thank you and God bless.*