

God's Dream for You
A Sermon for Every Sunday
Matthew 1:18-25

"I'm dreaming of a White Christmas, just like the ones I used to know..."

These last days before Christmas are a time when many of us have dreams. Bing Crosby dreamed of a "White Christmas." In the song, "Merry Christmas Darling," Karen Carpenter sings that "I can dream and in my dreams I'm Christmasing with you." And soldiers in war-torn parts of the world may find new meaning in that World War Two song, "I'll be home for Christmas, if only in my dreams."

What are YOU dreaming about this Christmas season? Some of you may be dreaming about the presents you want Santa to bring. Some of you may be dreaming about the new electronic gift that you want grandma to give. Some of you may be dreaming about the college acceptance letter you hope to receive. Some may be dreaming that 2020 will be better year financially than 2019.

Some of you may be dreaming about Christmases past, and people you miss.

Some of you may be dreaming that you'll find a doctor who can give the healing that you desire. Some may be dreaming that your children will thrive, that your family will reconcile, that God will feel closer, that you will look thinner, that you'll win the lottery.

I suspect that Joseph and Mary had dreams too. I'll bet their dreams were a lot like yours. Their dreams probably focused on married life and family life. They were engaged. And, according to the Jewish marriage customs at that time, once a couple was officially engaged, they were, in effect, legally married.

But it was the custom that they would announce the legal engagement first, and then wait up to a year until they started to live together as husband and wife. So when we hear about Mary and Joseph in Matthew's Gospel, they are engaged. But they are not yet living together.

I'd guess that both of them are dreaming – dreaming about what it will be like to live together as husband and wife, creating a home together. Dreaming about the future. Dreaming about what it will be like when they start to have children of their own. What it will be like to teach them the Jewish faith, raise them to be good people, and watch them mature.

Mary and Joseph have hopes about what the future will be. Like most couples, they have started to dream about their life together.

And all of that is great, until we encounter Joseph in today's Gospel passage. Something has gone terribly wrong. Mary has told him that she is with child. This is a potential scandal. There is a passage in

the Jewish scriptures which say that if a woman is with child before she lives with her husband, she is guilty of adultery, and she could be stoned to death.

This is not what Joseph had planned. This is not his dream – I think it's fair to say that his dream has turned into a nightmare!

He decides that he is not going to expose Mary to the harshest religious penalty. He decides to divorce her quietly, that is, to legally break the engagement without any public fuss.

Imagine Joseph's emotions when he goes to bed that night, as this whole horrible scenario comes crashing down around him. His plans have been pulled out from under him. His dream has been torn apart. Does he toss and turn before he goes to sleep that night?

When he DOES fall asleep, however, he discovers something that no one could have predicted. Matthew tells us that, while he slept, Joseph had a dream. And in that dream, Joseph learns that this situation is not a waking nightmare. HIS dream for his family's future will not come true in the way that he had dreamed it – rather, Joseph learns that GOD HAS ANOTHER DREAM – another dream for Joseph, and Mary, and the child whom he shall name Jesus.

Joseph has to let go of his dream, so that he can embrace the dream that GOD has for his life. Joseph has to trust that God's plan for his life is the one that will lead to blessings, even though it's not the plan the Joseph had come up with himself.

On a deeper level, Joseph has to trust that HIS dream for his life is too small – God has a dream for his family that is more expansive, more wonderful, more world-changing than Joseph could comprehend at that moment.

On that night, in that dream, Joseph learned again that God is God, and Joseph is not, and that we should not fear when our dreams get turned around.

How could Joseph TRUST, even when his whole future seemed to be unraveling before his eyes?

I suggest that Joseph's trust is based on one word in Matthew's account of this dream. And that word is, *emmanuel*. That word, "emmanuel," means, "God is with us."

God is with us. God is with me. God is with you. God is with us, always, and everywhere. And if God is with me, then how can I be afraid? Is there anyone, or anything, in the universe that is bigger than God, or more powerful than God? Not to my knowledge! And if THAT God is with me – how can I let fear control me? God is with me.

God is with us. And that God has a dream for you, and for me, and for our church and nation and world. God's dream for us is bigger than we can imagine. God's dream is that we will play our part in revealing a redeemed world, following the example of Jesus. God's dream for us is that we will be so faithful to Jesus, that his Gospel will take flesh here and now. God's dream for us is amazing.

When God dreams for our world, what does that dream look like? Well, I think Jesus told us. It's a dream in which we:

- + forgive 70 x7 times
- + love our enemies and pray for those who persecute us
- + understand that whenever we feed the hungry, clothe the naked, care for the poor – we are doing those things for Christ.
- + pray constantly
- + we shall not kill, shall not steal, shall not covet
- + we do not try to serve the god of money
- + patience and compassion are at the core of our hearts
- + we are faithful to our promises, faithful to each other, faithful to God.
- + go where God leads, when God leads, as God leads.

God is with us, in Christ. And God has a dream for us, in Christ. Are you willing to let God do the dreaming for you, trusting that God's dreams are always bigger, and bring greater blessings, than the ones that we can come up with in our fitful sleep?

We're dreaming about a lot of things this Christmas season. Some of your dreams haven't come true, may never come true. Some of your dreams in 2019 may feel as though they turned into nightmares.

Is it possible that God wants to show you his NEW dream for you, right now?

Don't panic. And don't be afraid. Trust, as Joseph and Mary did, that God can lead you to that place, to that life, that will bring you greatest joy. And whenever life causes you to toss and turn, let your prayer be that one Gospel word:

*Emmanuel. God is with me. Emmanuel. God is with us.
No matter what – God is with me!
Emmanuel.*

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