

The Rev. Rose Anne Lonsway
The Second Sunday after Christmas Day
Matthe 2:13-15,19-23, Psalm 84, Ephesians 1:3-6, 15-19a, Jeremiah 31:7-14
St. Paul's Episcopal Church
January 5, 2025

Dreams seem to permeate the Christmas story. It appears that God gives some pretty important information in dreams. Matthew 1:20 tells us that Joseph was told in a dream by an angel to not be afraid to take Mary as his wife and explains about Jesus. Another example – an alternate Gospel reading for today, Matthew 2:1-12 in which the Magi were warned in a dream not to return to Herod to report on the child they sought; the child that threatened Herod's claim to be King of the Jews; the child that Herod wanted not to worship as he told the Magi, but to destroy in order to preserve his Kingship. And then in today's Gospel we hear that Joseph is told (again in a dream), to take the child and his mother and flee to Egypt.

Told not just go but to flee! There was an urgency to the directive, again to avoid danger to the child from Herod.

God was active in protecting the child and Joseph, just as God had when the angel, in a dream, explained the whole situation with Mary to Joseph, Joseph, who believed what was told to him -- acted on God's word that came to him in that dream. The irony of the situation is that the Magi, gentile kings from a foreign country, through their dream, act to honor and protect the child, while Herod, the supposed leader of the Jews, who, one would think, would be faithful to God, and be the protector, is the danger. Who but Herod would know his true intentions? Yet, it is clear that God knew and God acted. Through the dreams given, God preserved the life of the child.

Dreams are not usually a form of communication that we think of God using in today's world are they? Dreams can be pretty foggy and hard to understand. Dreams are not usually something on which we are ready to make significant life changes.

Even in the Old Testament when God came to people in dreams, they usually had to be interpreted to be understood or useful. For example, Daniel interpreted Nebuchadnezzar's dreams; - In Genesis, the first Joseph overcame the results of being sold into slavery and became powerful in Egypt because of his ability to interpret Pharaoh's dreams. So it would appear that God acted through both of the Joseph's for the good of God's people.

While we may be iffy on the dream front, Matthew is using Old Testament scripture to show us that God has been and is active in the world, - dreams or not. Matthew makes a case that Joseph, the NT Joseph, is a connector to OT events.

Taking his family to Egypt can be seen as recreating the events recorded in the books of Genesis and Exodus – Israel going to and leaving Egypt, removing Israel from danger; all demonstrate God's continuing involvement and action, God's intervention. This connection shows us that while problems, even danger may continue to be present, God is also always present and active, for Israel, for the Child Jesus, and for us.

The question for us then becomes how we discern God's direction in our lives.

We may or may not have experienced God in our dreams, so it is helpful to realize that we hear from God in many ways and through different experiences. This hearing from God thing is not easy and sometimes it can be downright scary. Following God may mean changing direction or choosing a new route for our lives. Sometimes this road may even present new opportunities and fill us with excitement.

God's revelations may take us to strange places, and yet when God changes our direction, God will give us the directions we need for our journey.

Other times, we recognize that we will be lost if we fail to take that other route or fail to change our lives. Sometimes we only become aware of this leading by looking back at our lives. Transformation occurs as a result of divine revelation no matter how that revelation comes to us or when it comes. So how do we discern? It comes through faith and looking at our lives through the lens of that faith.

Our experiences teach us when we are seeing God's work and God's direction. We learn to look not only at the big things in life but to be awake and aware of the small, peace filled openings,- happenings, - people, in our lives and as we look at these things with our eyes of faith we see the minutiae and the largess of God everywhere we look. We see it in the things that result in loving outcomes, in the things that bring no harm or hurt to us or to those around us. We see God acting, with or without the dreams. Because God has and continues to act in the world, we can absorb the words of Ephesians and say "Blessed be the God and Father of our Lord Jesus Christ, who has blessed us in Christ with every spiritual blessing...".

We can know the blessings from God because of our adoption as children of God. We are told that God destines us to be God's adopted, not through obligation or compulsion, but does so freely, with God's bounteous Grace, mercy and love. God has acted and is with us always and in all things through the incarnation of Jesus – God with us.

With our eyes of faith, with or without dreams, we will see God act and believe that, as Bishop Steve Charleston expresses it:

Wherever you go in the year to come, you will not walk alone. The love that has watched over you since you were a child will remain beside you. It will help you, and guide you, and laugh with you, and comfort you when you need it. You do not have to do anything to earn this love or to keep it. It is the presence of a mind and heart as old as time.

It is eternal and unchanging. It is a love so intimate it knows what makes you afraid at night and so strong that it can face any dawn with you. Therefore, you will walk in love throughout this coming year. You will be enfolded by love, sheltered and sustained, enlightened and inspired, challenged and received. What is to come is waiting for you. What has always been is with you already.

Christ is what is to come. Christ is what is waiting for us. Christ is with us. Blessed be the God and Father of our Lord Jesus Christ! Amen