

What Child is This?  
#5 – “The Child of the Dream”

Matthew 1: 18-20 and 2: 10-13  
Ephesians 3: 20-21

Let me begin this morning’s sermon with a sampling of quotes about dreams and dreaming:

Carl Sandburg suggested that nothing happens unless first a dream, and the great novelist Victor Hugo opined that there is nothing like a dream to create the future. George Bernard Shaw originally said, though the words are often attributed to John F. Kennedy: You see things; and you say, "Why?" But I dream things that never were; and I say, "Why not?" And in the same spirit or seeing what is yet to be, Antoine de Saint-Exupery said that a rock pile ceases to be a rock pile the moment a single man contemplates it, bearing within him the image of a cathedral. While fictional character Fox Mulder from the show, The X Files, suggested a dream is an answer to a question we haven't yet learned how to ask. And Marcel Proust argued that if a little dreaming is dangerous, the cure for it is not to dream less but to dream more, to dream all the time.

Of course, there are the famous songs about dreaming – from Stephen Foster’s, “I dream of Jeannie with the light brown hair” to “Day Dream Believer” by the Monkees. Aerosmith invited people to “Dream on”. John Lennon and Bob Dylan made famous their song meditations on dreams, but The Everly Brother’s “All I Have To Do Is Dream,” remains listed among the all time top ten dream songs.

Then we have the quotes about dreams that are written by that famous author, anonymous. Of a more practical note, someone said if your dreams turn to dust....vacuum. And on a prophetic note, this: never laugh at anyone's dreams. People

C:\Andrew\sermons\2010 srms\Dec26

who don't have dreams don't have much. And though it was forty-seven years ago that it was spoken, probably Martin Luther King Jr’s famous speech, I have a dream, still stirs some of the deepest longings of the heart for the kind of world we pray may yet come to be.

People have been fascinated with dreams and dreaming since the world began, probably because dreams are not only a phenomenon common to most of us, but one that, despite all sorts of scientific study, somehow remains mysterious and evocative. More than just the midnight wanderings of our subconscious, our dreams often beckon and tease us with a sense of deep and holy promptings – of that proverbial land that though it seems somewhere far over the rainbow, at the same time, it seems so tantalizingly near that we just might dare to believe dreams could come true.

Scripturally, dreams were seen as being of great significance. Among the great dream stories of the Old Testament, we have Jacob’s dream vision at Bethel of a ladder reaching to heaven and the angels ascending and descending, while to Jacob’s father-in-law, Laban, came the dream warning him not to do any harm to Jacob. Joseph, the dreamer and resented younger son, had dreams of the sheaves of his brothers bowing down to his sheaves, and later of the very sun and moon and stars bowing down to him. Grandiose dreams sparked even greater jealousy and Joseph found himself sold into slavery where he became known as an interpreter of dreams, from cupbearers and butlers to the Pharaoh himself. Through his dreams, Gideon was called to lead his people in battle against the Midianites. Solomon received the answer to his prayer for wisdom in a dream, along with the promise of greatness and wealth, while Daniel, like Joseph before him, became an interpreter of dreams for the king of Babylon. The prophet Joel declared that on that day of the Lord when the Holy Spirit would be poured out on all people, the young would have visions and

the old would dream dreams and all would behold the wonders of the Lord being revealed.

Thus, on one hand, we ought not be surprised that dreams play such a large place in Matthew's gospel, notably in the stories of our Lord's advent into the world. What is interesting, other than in the Acts of the Apostles, when the prophet Joel was quoted on the day of Pentecost by Peter, the only other dream reference in the New Testament is at the end of Matthew's gospel, where Pilate's wife comes to her husband and begs him to have nothing to do with that righteous man on trial before him, because, she said, she had suffered a great deal because of him in a dream.

It's in Matthew's nativity story alone that dreams play such a significant means by which God communicates his intent to the key players of this drama. The Lord appeared to Joseph in a dream to inform him of the holy identity of the child Mary was carrying in her womb. In a dream, the magi would be directed not to return to Jerusalem and to Herod. In a dream, Joseph would be warned to flee with his family to Egypt and later would be told in a dream to return to the land of Israel, though in a subsequent dream, the Lord would command Joseph to settle, not in Israel proper, but northwards, in Galilee, in a no-account town called Nazareth.

So why would Matthew use all these dream references, notably in connection with the nativity narrative. I can guess only one reason – he wants us to understand Jesus as the Child of the dream, but not in the sense of just the nighttime dreams of Joseph and of magi, but in the sense that he is the daytime dream and hope and longing for all the world. Nothing happens unless first a dream, said Sandberg, and surely the gospel is this unimaginably good and glorious dream that, in and through Jesus, has come to be more than true. For Joseph's dream was that all of Israel's dream and longing was now going to be fulfilled by the Lord in Mary's child. That he would be Immanuel,

C:\Andrew\sermons\2010 srms\Dec26

God with us. That he would be the one who would save his people from their sins. That he would be the messiah.

And perhaps more wonderful yet for Joseph was this: that the holy dream of a saviour was not just about God doing something so glorious and wondrous for Israel – but the gift was coming into his own very life and experience.

Which makes me ponder whether we – you and I – have truly awakened out of our slumbering sadness and nightmare fears to the marvellous message and promise that the good news that came to Joseph and Mary and Israel is really and truly the good news that is given to each of us. I really believe that in the depths of every human heart there beats the dream of a heavenly love that is so powerfully good that it would risk all, give all, surrender all, for the sake of redeeming all and any who are lost, frightened, sin-saturated, broken, ashamed, and desperate for hope. Sadly, too many of us believe the dream was meant only to come true for some other, but not for us.

Yet here, here is the amazing truth and grace – this grace of Heaven's Love come wrapped in human flesh, laid helpless in a manger and hung crucified on a tree, is precisely for every simple Joseph and every ordinary Mary living in our no-account towns and places. The hope and dream for salvation to grasp us, joy to fill us, peace to embrace us, healing to touch us, forgiveness to sweep over us, mercy to mend us and eternal life to beckon us is no longer just a dream – it is the promise of God for all who will believe. The best dream we could ever have, the best and holiest dream this world could ever dream, of that holy love of God reaching out to cleanse and claim and bless us, is the dream come true in Jesus. Indeed, as Paul would tell the Ephesians, even more than ever we could have dreamt or imagined, beyond our wildest, noblest, and best dreams, is the gift that is given us in Jesus Christ our Lord.

Thanks be to God. Amen.