
Believe in the Dreams of the Person You Love

A sermon by the Very Reverend Sam Candler
Atlanta, Georgia
The Fourth Sunday of Advent, Year A
Matthew 1:18-25

It was a few days before Christmas. A woman woke up one morning and told her husband, "I just dreamed that you gave me a pearl necklace for Christmas. What do you think this dream means?" "Oh," he replied, "you'll know the day after tomorrow."

The next morning, she turned to her husband and said the same thing, "I just dreamed that you gave me a pearl necklace for Christmas. What do you think this dream means?" "You'll know tomorrow," he said.

On the third morning, the woman woke up and smiled at her husband, "I just dreamed again that you gave me a pearl necklace for Christmas. What do you think this dream means?" He smiled back, "Oh, you'll know tonight."

That evening, the man came home with a small package and presented it to his wife. She was delighted. She opened it gently. But when she did, she found -- a book! It was titled "The Meaning of Dreams."

What have you been dreaming about lately?

Some of us are dreaming about wonderful possibilities. We're dreaming of pearl necklaces and sugar plum fairies and new bicycles. I hope all those dreams come true!

As I consider my own dreams, I realize that I dream in two major categories. I have two kinds of dreams. Sometimes, my dreams are dreadful. I imagine painful relationships. I live out meetings and deadlines that I have missed. I am standing in a pulpit, for instance, with nothing to say. These are nights that I spend wrestling like my ancestor, the patriarch Jacob.

But on other occasions, my dreams are the most refreshing I can imagine. I have also dreamed about reconciliation. I have dreamed that enemies are at my table, and we are living convivially. I have dreamed of flying fancily through the air. I have dreamed of new life and hope. I have dreamed of lean years followed by wonderful years. These are nights that I dream like my ancestor, the patriarch Joseph.

Time magazine published an intriguing cover article a few weeks ago. I don't mean the article about the birth of Jesus, one that was similar to a recent *Newsweek* article. Those articles were intriguing, to be sure, but they covered material that has been discussed before: where was Jesus born, who were the wise men, and so forth.

No, the article that struck me was about sleep. For all that we know about the human body these days, scientists do not know the exact reason we need sleep. We know why we need food, shelter, and clothing; but we do not know why we need sleep.

And what is the reason for dreams, those strange images that bounce along our brain waves. We wake suddenly, and reality

itself seems like a different world.

Why do we need sleep?

I believe the answer is this: We need sleep because we need to dream.

Today's gospel lesson is about a dream. The Fourth Sunday of Advent is about a dream, Joseph's dream. At least one item (among others) in the *Time* magazine article last week was correct. The story of the angel Gabriel appearing to the Virgin Mary appears in only one gospel, the gospel of Luke.

In two other gospels, Mark and John, there is no account whatsoever of the physical birth of Jesus. We have four gospels, and they differ dramatically in how they tell the story of Jesus' birth. In Matthew's gospel, the angel appears not to Mary at all, but to Joseph.

And it is Matthew's gospel that we read this year (Matthew 1.18-25). It is Joseph we hear of today. Consider his point of view.

Joseph dreamed something wonderful. It was astounding. God would enter the world. God would be born to his wife, as crazy as that was to understand. But Joseph had to trust someone else. Joseph had to trust Mary.

I know Mary was his wife, and surely Joseph must have loved Mary. But still, this took a lot of trust! For Joseph, the way of salvation meant trusting someone else.

This is why Joseph's dream was so important. Joseph dreamed of the salvation of the world. But true salvation comes through someone else.

That is the lesson for us, too. Like Joseph sometimes, we are supposed to trust God and then get out of the way. Trust that God is working through our wife, and then get out of the way. Trust that God is working in our children, and then get out of the way.

I was asked a recurring question this past week. I am asked something like this all the time: Why doesn't God speak to us directly again? Wouldn't it be great if an angel appeared again? Like the angel Gabriel appeared to Mary?

Imagine young Mary, minding her own business, suddenly being overcome with news of a great conception, a great presence of the divine. It's something to have an angel speak to you. Even folks who are not religious might turn their heads.

Wouldn't it be great to know that such a revelation might happen again? Here's my reply: Well, you know what? It did happen again.

The angel did appear to someone besides Mary. The story is recorded right in the Bible. The angel appeared not just to Mary. The angel appeared to someone else. The angel appeared to Joseph.

Yes, we forget about poor Joseph. Every year, we hear the story of Mary.

Now, if the angel can appear to Mary, and then also appear to Joseph, there's lesson in that. That means that the angel can appear to you and me, too. In the Bible, the annunciation does not occur only once, but twice - not just to a woman, but also to a man.

The Bible, then, carries an implicit message that God does appear over and over again, to various sorts of folks. Matthew and Luke both have it right, but they are different stories. God continues to come into the world, but we have to trust other sources!

What are you giving for Christmas this year? I do not mean what are you getting. We all want something wonderful, I am

sure. But what are you giving for Christmas?

The greatest gift you can give this year is to believe in someone's dreams. The greatest gift you can give is to have faith in someone else; believe in their dreams. Believe in the dreams of the person you love. Believe in the dream of your husband. Believe in the dream of your wife. Believe in the dreams of your children. Believe in the dream of your hero, your leader, your friend. Believe in their dreams!

And sleep comfortably this season. I know some folks do not sleep well. Too much worry. Too much food and drink. Remember what Rabelais said, "I never sleep comfortably except when I am at a sermon." The reason we sleep is to dream. The reason we have relationships is so that we will have someone who will believe our dreams.

God works through those relationships. God works through both Mary and Joseph. God needs both Luke's story of the annunciation and Matthew's story of Joseph's dream. They are miracle stories.

God works through a young and wonderful woman, and her husband believes in her. Believe in the dreams of the person you love. Believe in dreams this Christmas, and Jesus will be born again. Believe in dreams this Christmas, and God will appear.

AMEN.

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