

“I’m Dreaming of a _____ Christmas”

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Matthew 1: 18-25 Advent Three

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*Twas the night before Christmas,
when all through the house not a creature was stirring,
not even a mouse;
The stockings were hung by the chimney with care,
in hopes that St. Nicholas soon would be there;
the children were nestled all snug in their beds,
while visions of sugar-plums danced in their heads;*



Christmas and dreaming seem to go hand in hand. Just this week I woke up my youngest for school and she protested. She didn't want to wake up — she was dreaming about Santa coming!

Whether it's sugar plums (what is a sugar plum anyway?) or toys and fun, children tend to dream of the good things that are soon to come. Maybe, like children, you're dreaming of exciting things to come: perhaps a trip over the holidays, or getting together with people you haven't seen for a while. Christmas brings anticipation and excitement.

But for adults, the Christmas dreaming often takes on a certain longing or reminiscing quality. Just think of the WWII classic Bing Crosby Christmas song: "*I'll Be Home for Christmas ... if only in my dreams*," which is written from the viewpoint of a soldier overseas, wishing he could be home for the holidays. Or how about Bing's other classic: "*I'm Dreaming of a White Christmas*"? He dreams of a white Christmas — '*just like the ones I used to know*'. Christmas is often a time of looking back. Christmases are

connected to each other a bit like the links of a chain, so that each Christmas tends to remind us of the ones before. Do you have a favourite Christmas memory from your childhood, or from when your children were young, or perhaps of a Christmas when someone you loved was there to celebrate that Christmas with you?

It's funny how our dreams creep into the reality of our present Christmas — the reality which so often falls short of the dreams. Sometimes it seems that Christmas shines a spotlight on all that is missing or wrong in our lives. The reality of being separated from loved ones, or perhaps of frazzled nerves and strained relationships or of lonely living rooms, or blown budgets and diets that seem to contrast with our hopes and dreams. I'm dreaming of a _____ Christmas. You fill in the blank. What are you dreaming of this Christmas?

There was a lot of dreaming in the original Christmas story too. When Joseph found out that Mary was pregnant, he was going to break off the engagement quietly. Mary told him the child was from God, but Joseph had imagined a simple life together, and this didn't fit with the life that he had dreamt of. So he planned to end the relationship. But then he had a dream—a real dream. While he slept, an angel told him that it was true that Mary was carrying God's chosen one, and that he should marry her. Amazingly, when Joseph woke up, he didn't blame the strange dream on the chilli-dog he ate the night before — he believed the dream. He believed that God spoke to him in the dream and he changed his plans and changed his dreams to fit God's dream.

God's dream broke into Joseph's romantic daydreams with a new plan and a new future. You need to notice and remember that this was not the world's most convenient dream. This dream changed everything, and brought a lot of headaches to their life. Instead of brushing away that inconvenience, *Joseph made room for God's dream and God's plans when he married Mary — in spite of the rumours, in spite of his own doubts.*

Joseph kept on dreaming. Later on, after the baby is born and after they had just started to get used to their new reality, the new normal — as parents of a fragile, sweet and likely demanding little boy — God breaks into Joseph's plans with another dream. This time he is told to run for safety to Egypt with the child and with Mary, for Herod is out to find and kill the child. Again, Joseph's hopes and dreams are interrupted by a dream from God, and they become refugees in a new and strange place. Again, Joseph lays down his plan for God's plan, and he acts. It is another dream years later that brings the family back from Egypt to their own country, this time to Galilee.

This wasn't the first time God sent a message at night through dreams. Jacob went to sleep with a rock for a pillow and saw a vision of angels going up and down a ladder, and he heard God speak to him in the dream, telling him of the covenant that he had given to Abraham. God told him that he would give him the land and that his offspring would spread to the east and the west like the dust of the earth. In that dream God told Jacob *"Know that I am with you and will keep you wherever you go, and will bring you back to this land."* Gen 28:15. When Jacob woke up he said *"Surely the Lord is in this place—and I did not know it!"* He called it the house of God and so named it "Bethel" (Beth=house, el=God. Beth-lehem means 'house of bread').

Jacob's son Joseph was also a big dreamer. Remember how he dreamt that the sun and moon and 11 stars were bowing down to him? Many years later, King Solomon fell asleep and God asked him in his dream what gift he would like in his Kingship, and Solomon, still asleep, asked for wisdom. Dreams are very important all through the Bible. God speaks to his people in many ways, but dreams are one significant way that God spoke and still speaks today.

I'm dreaming of _____ Christmas. What are your longings and dreams? They matter. They are part of what makes us human and part of who we are. Inside those longings and dreams might be pain and hurt. God knows that. God knows you and God knows the hurt that seems to be highlighted in the Christmas lights. It was because of that pain and the brokenness and grief in you that God sent his son, so that you might have a real healing and whole relationship with him. What are you dreaming of? Inside that longing is your hurt, but also your calling, for you were born for a purpose.

How would God sing that song for you? "I'm dreaming of a _____ ? Christmas for you"? Joseph had his dream, but then God's dream came and interrupted his own. God's dream was not comfortable or easy, but Joseph was a man of faith. Joseph knew that God's plans are always worth laying down our plans for. Joseph knew that God's plans would be bigger and better, no matter the cost. We don't know anything about Joseph after the story of the birth of Jesus, but we know that he was a critical player. He was the protector and the provider, in a day and age when Mary and the baby wouldn't have made it without him. They needed Joseph. But what about Joseph and his dream of a simple life, of a wife and his own kids and a small carpentry business? Joseph didn't get a simple life, but I'd like think he didn't regret for a moment laying down 'simple' for the chance to answer the high calling of protecting the King of Kings and the Prince of Peace.

God still speaks to us today in our dreams. Mostly the language of dreams is symbolic and not direct language and instruction the way that Joseph heard God speak. Still, we can learn that language. Recently I've started using my dreams in my morning devotions. When I remember a dream, I work through its interpretation and I pray about it. Our dreams are a window into what we are longing for or concerned about at a deep level, and so taking those things to God in prayer can be a way of connecting more deeply, as well as hearing God's guidance on them.

I was going to tell you about a dream I'd had a few years back, but as I was driving into church this morning I was thinking about a crazy dream I had just last night. I didn't have time to sit and journal it out in my devotions this morning, so I'm still working through it. It was a real 'chilli-dog' dream— one of those dreams that just seems to make no sense. In the dream I was following Cathie, our Office Manager, to a Country Western concert. It turned out that Cathie was the Country Western Singer! I didn't know where we were going and I was totally out of my element. I noticed that the fans and the crowd gathered were wearing cowboy boots with the toe part cut off. Sticking out of their boots you could see they were wearing *pink socks!* ?

So here is how you interpret it. (Maybe sometime I'll do a more in-depth workshop on this!)

You can use the acronym **DAESI** (think of the daisy flower only spelled differently).

Dream **A**ction **E**motion **S**etting **I**nterpretation

First, you begin by giving a brief description of the **dream** as I did above. Next, you identify the primary **action** of the dream. For me, the main action was following Cathie into a place and space that was unfamiliar to me. Then, you identify the primary **emotion** you were feeling in the dream. For me, the emotion was not knowing what was going on, but still being open to that space and trusting the people I was with to guide me. Next, you look at the **setting** of what is going on in your awake life. Setting is about the context for the dream — what is going on in your life that might have worked its way into the dream?

For me, there were two things: one was an immediate setting, and one was a bigger picture setting. In the immediate setting yesterday, I was at the church and feeling a little down. I get a bit Seasonal Affective at this

time of the year, and was just feeling a bit low and Cathie happened to be here. She noticed, and she insisted on saying a prayer for me.

The bigger setting is that for the past year or more I've felt a bit like a fish out of water, learning how to do ministry in a new context. I have had a number of dreams about learning, and I know that God is taking me to a deeper level in my faith so that I will manage and thrive in my ministry; and so that this church and ministry will survive and thrive through the many changes and challenges that are upon us.

Next is the **interpretation**. In that step, you bring the setting and the other pieces together to find meaning. My dream was about me being in an unfamiliar place in my ministry and life, but I was ok with it and I had good guides with me. In fact, Cathie not only represents a guide and fellow Christian on the journey, but she also was a Christ figure.

People are often symbols for us in dreams, and Cathie was the star of the show. Yesterday as she prayed for me in the dream, she was being Christ to me and bringing me into Christ's presence. But she also just symbolized that I am not alone because the Star of the show — Jesus — was there with me to guide me.

So as I was driving to church this morning, I was wondering about the interpretation of the cowboy boots and the pink socks sticking out. As soon as I walked into the sanctuary, I saw the Advent candles and I knew: today is the Advent Sunday of Joy, and ***the candle for this Sunday is pink!*** The cowboy boots cut off are boots for the journey — but a layer is being peeled away, revealing a bit of vulnerability. Still, the promise for me is Joy. What I will do next is pray about that interpretation, and ask God if there is anything more about this dream he wants me to see or hear. I think that as I do that, I might hear God telling me that I am in a new place — but I am not alone, and there will be joy.

I'm dreaming of a _____ ? Christmas. For me the answer is that I'm dreaming of a joy-filled Christmas. What are you dreaming of, and what is God dreaming for you?

God still speaks to us in so many ways, and we need to learn how to have the ears to hear God — how to pick up that signal — and then to have the courage to act on God's guiding. Because when we do; when we are able to lay down our dreams and pick up God's dream, that's when we experience the wonder of the new life of the baby Jesus who is born for us this day. Thanks be to God.

Now, you are going to have a chance light a candle and place it in the sand boxes. The act of lighting the candle represents two things. First, the

acknowledgement of what isn't. Hold up the unlit candle and acknowledge the loss, the grief, the longing for something more. And then come forward and light that candle from the fire of the Advent candles which remind us of the gifts God gives to us in Jesus: Hope, Peace, Joy and Love. We are not making a wish, but we are saying a prayer that God would fill us with his light and his love this Christmas. Amen