

# “Dreams to Live By”

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## Matthew 2:10-23 NRSV

*When they saw that the star had stopped, they were overwhelmed with joy. On entering the house, they saw the child with Mary his mother; and they knelt down and paid him homage. Then, opening their treasure-chests, they offered him gifts of gold, frankincense, and myrrh. And having been warned in a dream not to return to Herod, they left for their own country by another road.*

*Now after they had left, an angel of the Lord appeared to Joseph in a dream and said, ‘Get up, take the child and his mother, and flee to Egypt, and remain there until I tell you; for Herod is about to search for the child, to destroy him.’ Then Joseph got up, took the child and his mother by night, and went to Egypt, and remained there until the death of Herod. This was to fulfil what had been spoken by the Lord through the prophet, ‘Out of Egypt I have called my son.’*

*When Herod saw that he had been tricked by the wise men, he was infuriated, and he sent and killed all the children in and around Bethlehem who were two years old or under, according to the time that he had learned from the wise men. Then was fulfilled what had been spoken through the prophet Jeremiah:*

*‘A voice was heard in Ramah, wailing and loud lamentation, Rachel weeping for her children; she refused to be consoled, because they are no more.’*

*When Herod died, an angel of the Lord suddenly appeared in a dream to Joseph in Egypt and said, ‘Get up, take the child and his mother, and go to the land of Israel, for those who were seeking the child’s life are dead.’ Then Joseph got up, took the child and his mother, and went to the land of Israel. But when he heard that Archelaus was ruling over Judea in place of his father Herod, he was afraid to go there. And after being warned in a dream, he went away to the district of Galilee. There he made his home in a town called Nazareth, so that what had been spoken through the prophets might be fulfilled, ‘He will be called a Nazorean.’*



*It's been a baaaaad year. But you know what they say... New Year, new ewe!*

I read an article in the Globe and Mail that talked about the fatigue people are feeling as we enter the year 2023. The article talks about the pandemic and how there have been different kinds of exhaustion and fatigue all through the pandemic. In the first year there was the jittery anxiety that came with not having enough information and feelings of fear and loss of control.

I remember the fatigue I had last year at this time because for the last two years, this particular Sunday was one where I had to preach a sermon to be evaluated. So last year when we were shut down again I remember

preaching that sermon with about five of us here at the church! Everyone was grumpy — there was no energy in the place. (We all needed a Red Bull and maybe to blast “I’m Walkin’ on Sunshine” to get us going! I’m grateful the evaluation sermons are behind me — I’m in the ‘editing my thesis’ phase of the doctorate.)

But there is a new fatigue, as clearly there will be no sharp ending to the actual pandemic or even the effects of the pandemic: things like health care being in a crisis and travel headaches.

There’s always a little hope that a new year will bring a new you and a new reality — but as the beginning of January feels an awful lot like my least favourite month, (November), you can’t help but look ahead sometimes and even dread what lies ahead.

I don’t know how tired Mary and Joseph were but I imagine they were at a point where they were looking for a little stability. The birth of a child is always disrupting and almost always exciting, but their journey to giving birth to the Messiah was more disrupting and exciting than most. As Lynn talked about last week, the visit from the Magi — the astrologers from the East — was probably one of the capstones in an incredible journey. Just wow! Important people came looking for a king and offering gifts suitable for a king to these humble and ordinary people, and now they were gone. It was a time when finally, maybe, they could relax and settle into their life as new parents.

Right? Wrong.

Signs from heaven once again break into the ordinary plans and life on earth. Joseph has a dream where an angel warns him of serious danger. He is told to take the child and his wife to Egypt and flee the murderous king Herod. Joseph is a man of action, so in the night, without so much as a goodbye, he packs up the family and they escape to Egypt. They remain there until he once again has a dream where an angel tells him to return to Judea, and another dream that directs him to settle in Galilee. At that point we don’t hear anymore from Matthew about Joseph.

Now I want to push pause here for a moment and tell you a little about Matthew. There are 4 gospels, 4 books that talk about the life of Jesus: Matthew, Mark, Luke and John. Matthew, Mark and Luke are similar, but John is quite different in many ways. Matthew is the most Jewish of all the gospels. He is very concerned with placing the story of Jesus within the bigger story of the Hebrew Scriptures. There are some parallels here that are worth seeing. The first chapter of Matthew has the genealogy of Jesus where his lineage is traced back to King David and further. The word used

in the Greek is the same word as Genesis. Genesis means origin.

There's a good chance that Matthew deliberately uses the word "genesis". I think he is saying '*We have the story of Genesis, the origin of humanity — but now we have the 2<sup>nd</sup> Genesis — the story of the origin of the Messiah.*

In chapter 2 of Matthew we see parallels with the Exodus story. We have the first Exodus story where the baby Moses is spared from being killed. Pharaoh the ruler of Egypt wanted all Hebrew male babies killed by the midwives because they were becoming too numerous. The midwives ignored the command, and his mother puts Moses in a basket and puts him in the river for the Pharaoh's daughter to find and rescue him, and the child is spared. Moses is spared so that he can grow up and lead his people out of Egypt, out of slavery. He is protected so he can save his people.

See the parallel? We had the first Exodus and Matthew wants us to see an even more important Exodus. Jesus is protected as a baby from the Pharaoh of his time — from king Herod— so that he can grow up and save his people, all people, from a different slavery, the slavery of sin and death.

What interests me about this Epiphany story and where I think we can take something home is the intersection of heaven and earth. The season of Epiphany began on Friday, January 6<sup>th</sup>. Epiphany means revelation, and it has themes of light, stars, wonder and awe. There is a sense of the in-breaking of heaven to earth. In the middle of the ordinary, grubby, tired, awful and evil world there are God-Sightings, there are reminders that there is a bigger story, a story that has meaning in the middle of what often feels hard and meaningless.

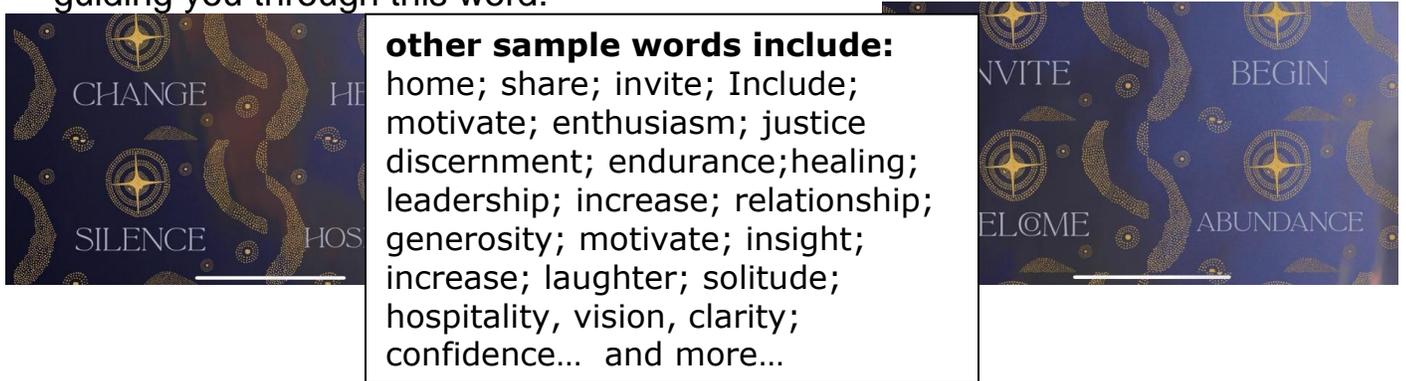
I like that the Magi look for signs and then respond, and follow even when it leads to unlikely places. I like that God speaks to Joseph in his dreams — not every night, but sometimes.

It reminds me that if I want to hear God speaking it might not be in my email inbox. I might have to listen in different ways. It seems to me that God often communicates through art, music, poetry, dreams, meditation, seeing something on your walk that makes you wonder. It reminds me to seek God like the Magi, and to be open to God speaking in dreams and in ways that we don't hear if we keep the television on or our news app open during every waking hour.

But the story also reminds me that God guides and speaks so that people will live and act in a real and often difficult world. Life was not easy for Moses or the people in Moses' time. Life was not easy for Joseph or for Jesus or the people living in Jesus' time. As we look and wonder what 2023 will bring, try not to cling to it being easy or comfortable or stable. Instead of

wishing that the world was better for you, look to heaven. Find ways to make space so that you can experience God's presence in the middle of whatever comes. Make room for God's bigger story for you.

I came across these Star Words. If you are here in person there are words on the communion table and the prayer table and at the back. I invite you to prayerfully pick one up. They are face up and you can see them; but I invite you to *let a word pick you* instead of the other way around. What will you do with this word? Put it on your fridge, make it a bookmark. Put it in your back pocket (and remember to take it out before you do your laundry!) Go for a walk with it. Draw something inspired by it. Meditate on it. Write something that feels like a poem to you. Pray about how God is speaking to you and guiding you through this word.



Matthew wants us to see that these events concerning the birth of Jesus are not just the news story of the year, but go way, way back and are connected to *The Story* of the people of God. In the same way, the story goes way, way, forward and is connected to you and me here and now in 2023.

Whatever hardship you are facing, whatever lies ahead in 2023, remember there is a bigger story. You are not alone. The one who was protected from evil and harm as a baby grew up and suffered and died to give you life.

As we like Joseph become willing followers and participants in this great story, we set forth not expecting things to be easy, but expecting that God goes with us. Expecting that the small things we do make a difference and make the world brighter, healthier, more filled with peace and love.

As W.H. Auden wrote:

*To discover how to be truthful now...*

*To discover how to be living now....*

*To discover how to be loving now...*

*To discover how to be human now....*

*Is the reason we follow this star.*

— **W.H. Auden**

*The people who walked in darkness have seen a great light;  
those who lived in a land of deep darkness — on them light has shined.  
Isaiah 9:2*