
The Good News is That You Don't Have to Be in the News! Christmas is Believing in the Person You Love!

**A sermon by the Very Rev. Sam Candler
The Fourth Sunday of Advent – Year A**

*Joseph, son of David, do not be afraid to take Mary as your wife,
for the child conceived in her is from the Holy Spirit. (Matthew 1:20)*

It's okay! You don't have to be in the news!

If the dream had come to Joseph in the twenty-first century – let's say last night—if the herald of good news and glad tidings had spoken to Joseph last night, the angel would have said:

"Hark! I have some good news today. And the news is this: It is okay not to be in the news! The good news is that you don't have to be in the news! (Maybe someone should tell that one night to the president of the United States!)

It is okay not to have an impressive Facebook post today. Today, you don't need to have someone like your Instagram post, or re-tweet your comment, or watch your Tik-Tok, or listen to your podcast, or publish your book. Or maybe even listen to your sermon.

Joseph! You don't have to be named the Carpenter of the year in Judea. You don't need to have made the dean's list in your school. You don't need to have gotten a raise this year. You don't need to be the star.

Today, the angel, the bringer of glad tidings, says: Hey, the world publishes everything these days. Everything gets published. Posts, tweets, comments, retweets, reposts, Tik-toks. Everyone wants to be noticed. Everybody wants to be the star of something.

But, says the angel, you don't have to be noticed to be important. You don't have to be noticed to make a difference in the world. All you have to do is believe in the dreams of the person you love. And believe in the dreams of the person who loves you.

Today's gospel lesson, on the Fourth Sunday of Advent, is about a dream, Joseph's dream. Besides the wise men, a few verses later, Joseph is the only person in the New Testament who dreams. Other characters have visions. And, yes, the Angel Gabriel appears to Mary in the Gospel of Luke. But only Joseph dreams, maybe like the former Joseph in the Book of Genesis whose dreams caused his brothers to sell him away.

At Christmas time, only the Gospel of Matthew tells Joseph's side of the story. The more familiar story about the birth of Jesus, which we have known for as long as we have seen Christmas pageants, is about Mary receiving the word of the Lord, from an angel. But that story is only in the Gospel of Luke.

The Gospel of Matthew tells the story from another point of view, maybe a forgotten point of view these days. The forgotten Joseph, who was never named Carpenter of the Year. All the action in Matthew's birth narrative revolves around Joseph receiving news.

(Nothing against Mary and Luke, of course! But it's good, once every three years in our lectionary cycle, to hear

the story from Joseph's point of view! By the way, in our 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's birth. That's why we have four gospels. And that's why we have many types of Christians!)

Surely, the puzzled Joseph was in a troubled way. Joseph, a man of decency and responsibility, realized that his betrothed was actually pregnant before they were married. What should he do?

Well, he took time to sleep. He took time to rest. He took time to dream. Somehow, it was in his dream that Joseph consolidated things; he put it all together. He realized something wonderful and astounding. Ancient scriptures, an angel, all sorts of theologizing, came flooding into his soul. Yes, God would enter the world. Immanuel, "God With Us" would be born to his wife, as crazy as that was to understand.

Joseph had to trust the angel in his dream, but Joseph also had to trust someone else. Joseph had to trust Mary. Yes, of course, I know that Mary would be his wife, and I know that 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 is so important. Joseph dreamed of the salvation of the world. And he realized that true salvation comes through someone else.

That is the lesson for us, today. Like Joseph sometimes, we are supposed to trust God and then get out of the way. Trust in someone else. 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.

Imagine young Mary, minding her own business, suddenly being overcome with news of a great conception, a great presence of the holy. Wouldn't it be great if such a revelation might happen again?

Well, today we hear that it did happen again. The angel did appear to someone besides Mary. The story is recorded right in the Bible, but not in Luke. It appears here in the Gospel of Matthew. The angel did appear to someone else. The angel also appeared to Joseph.

Now, if the angel can appear to Mary, and then also appear to Joseph, 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. Not just to Mary and Joseph, but also to you and to me!

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 somebody, to believe in someone's dreams, to believe that God is living in the person right beside you. That's the gift that Joseph gave Mary; and, thus, that is the gift that Joseph gave the entire world. Trust in the dreams of the person you love!

The great gift that each of us 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 partner, your hero, your leader, your friend. Believe in their dreams!

When we believe in the dreams of another person, we are in relationship. 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. It is a miracle repeated again and again. Believe in the dreams of the person you love. Believe in dreams this Christmas, and Jesus will be born. Believe in dreams this Christmas, and God will appear in the world.

AMEN.