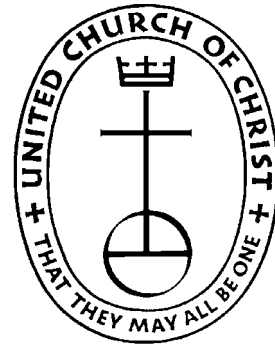


Christmas Dreams

A Sermon By —
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This Christmas meditation reflects on the meaning of Christmas as offering in the story in Luke: The good news of God's love come alive is delivered by angels, the heavenly host, God's own messengers, not to the king, not in the middle of the day in the city square, but in the still of the night, to roughhewn shepherders, untouchable and outcast. And what is the message that those angels sing? "Glory to God. Peace on all the earth."

FIRST CONGREGATIONAL CHURCH

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Christmas Dreams Luke 2

It's Christmas Eve! In just a couple of hours, hopefully, many of the little ones here in this room tonight will be safely in bed, all tucked in, having received their last drink of water and their last good night kisses, falling into a deep sleep filled with sweet dreams about what magic might transpire in the hours between their falling asleep and waking up. Visions of sugar plums dancing in their heads.

Some of you who are the parents and caretakers of those little ones will also, hopefully, be able to get to bed at a somewhat reasonable hour tonight, or perhaps tomorrow morning. Your role as official ambassador from the North Pole carries with it many responsibilities that may keep you working into the wee hours, but, hopefully, you too will get a few hours of well-deserved sleep before the pattering of little feet or the cries of "Can we get up yet?" rouse you from your rest.

You may not have visions of sugar plums in your dreams tonight. I suppose that your dreams might be more focused on your concerns for your children, your hopes for their happiness, your desires that Christmas Day glee is only a beginning of a year of growth and learning and innocent joy.

Some in this room tonight will have dreams that are filled with remembering – our children are grown and gone, perhaps our parents alive to us only in our dreams, and we dream with a nostalgia over Christmases past. Some of us here are on the verge of adulthood and know that this is one of the last holiday seasons that we will be minor children in our parents' homes, and maybe it is dreams of Christmases yet to come that will be occupying those minds in the coming hours.

Wherever we are on this life's journey, Christmas brings out in us our desires about connection and belonging, our dreams about lasting happiness and peace. Someone a bit more cynical than I am might say that the reason for that is Hallmark- and Hollywood-generated sentimentality of this time of year, creating the effect of Bob Cratchit's forgiving spirit, Tiny Tim's optimism, and Ebenezer Scrooge's transformation on steroids. And while it's true that throughout the northern hemisphere people have created celebrations of light in late December to coax the sun back from its hiding, I chose to believe that our Christmas dreams are something more than manufactured sentimentality or the modernization of ancient solstice rituals.

I find my clues about the meaning and the pull on us at Christmas time in the narratives of our Christmas mythology in the writings of the gospel of Luke. You all know this story well. A poor laborer and his betrothed are forced to travel under the rule of an oppressive government; far from home and with no safe and warm place to rest, she gives birth in a stable. Angels sing to shepherds, and they, startled and in awe, go off to investigate.

There is, of course, nothing in this story that makes any sense at all. There is no Roman record of a census in Palestine. If there had been, women would not have been included, so Mary would not have been traveling. Scholars tell us that the biblical stories, taken in their entirety,

suggest that Jesus was born in Nazareth, not Bethlehem. And shepherds, amongst the lowliest of workers, and considered unclean by their handling of animals, would not have been welcomed around a newborn child. And yet this story persists, and we continue to engage it, not because of its historical accuracy, but because of what it teaches us of God – and God's dreams for us.

The one who will come to be known as God's love come alive in human flesh is first seen as an infant child: born out of wedlock, in a strange place, completely vulnerable and dependent upon those who are willing to be kind and generous to weary travelers.

The good news of God's love come alive is delivered by angels, the heavenly host, God's own messengers, not to the king, not in the middle of the day in the city square, but in the still of the night, to roughhewn shepherders, untouchable and outcast. And what is the message that those angels sing? "Glory to God. Peace on all the earth."

God's dreams for us – that the stranger be welcomed, that the vulnerable be protected, that the outcast be welcomed, and that peace reign over all the earth – are clear in our strange and wonderful story. This is the meaning of Christmas, and this is the dream to which God's love compels us to act.

As you go out into this night, into the noisy celebrations and the quiet reflections, may God's Christmas dreams of peace on all the earth live in you and through you. Merry Christmas – and God bless us, every one. Amen.