

“A DREAM WORTH DREAMING...”
by Rom A. Pegram (11/29/20)

Today begins the season of Advent—Advent 2020. And, as we begin this season together today, let me ask you this: *Do you remember how the Christmas story goes in the Gospel of Matthew?* For most of us, we’re very familiar with the Gospel of Luke and the Christmas story there—reading Luke, Chapter 2 just about every Christmas Eve since the beginning of time ... but, how does the story of Christmas go *according to the Apostle Matthew?*

Well, it was all about a dream—the dream of a young man who was engaged to be married to a young virgin. And he found out she was pregnant. Not good. So, how does he handle this? What is everyone going to think? Well, long story short, God spoke to Joseph—the young man—and expanded his horizons just a bit. *Perhaps God needs to expand our horizons just a bit this Christmas season, too!* But first, let’s begin with the dream ... from the Gospel according to Matthew (1:18-25, NLT):

¹⁸ This is how Jesus the Messiah was born. His mother, Mary, was engaged to be married to Joseph. But before the marriage took place, while she was still a virgin, she became pregnant through the power of the Holy Spirit. ¹⁹ Joseph, to whom she was engaged, was a righteous man and did not want to disgrace her publicly, so he decided to break the engagement quietly.

²⁰ As he considered this, an angel of the Lord appeared to him in a dream. “Joseph, son of David,” the angel said, “do not be afraid to take Mary as your wife. For the child within her was conceived by the Holy Spirit. ²¹ And she will have a son, and you are to name him Jesus, for he will save his people from their sins.”

²² All of this occurred to fulfill the Lord’s message through his prophet:

**²³ “Look! The virgin will conceive a child!
She will give birth to a son,
and they will call him Immanuel,
which means ‘God is with us.’ ”**

²⁴ When Joseph woke up, he did as the angel of the Lord commanded and took Mary as his wife. ²⁵ But he did not have sexual relations with her until her son was born. And Joseph named him Jesus. – Matthew 1:18-25 (NLT)

He was hurt, wasn’t he? Joseph’s heart was broken. He just couldn’t understand how someone could do this to him. He didn’t understand how ‘his Mary’ could do this to him! It just wasn’t like her. But something had to be done, didn’t it?

Well, Joseph soon found out that ‘it wasn’t really about him.’ Something was going on here that was much bigger than him—much bigger than anything he could have ever dreamt up on his own ... and, here, God was letting Joseph in on his plan. He & Mary were going to be at the center of God’s plan—his plan to reconcile all creation with himself. It was a dream—a *God-size dream*. *It was a dream like no other!* And that’s how the Christmas story begins in Matthew...

...Again, today is the beginning of the season of Advent—that time of preparation leading up to Christmas each year. It's the time when the first advent took place—when God entered into *our* history ... and changed our world forever. So, as we begin this time of preparation for Christmas *this year*, how will this time begin? Let me suggest that, this year, *we begin with a dream—a dream worth dreaming...*

Several years ago, there was a church that started to become a bit disillusioned about Christmas—the way they were experiencing it. Something was seriously wrong! After all, wasn't Christmas supposed to be about the birth of Jesus? Wasn't it *his* birthday party? Yet, year after year, the reality of Jesus increasingly diminished ... and other things were taking his place. It was disheartening to those who loved him. Christmas needed some re-thinking... And this year's been a great time to rethink a lot of things, hasn't it? What's really important in our lives? What's essential? And *who* is essential in our lives? Those questions have come up a lot, haven't they? Anyway, in this little church that was somewhat disheartened, the pastor and church took a very brave step. They decided they'd begin to 'rethink Christmas'—basically an agreement between everyone in that church *to take back Christmas*. It was a plan to put Christ back in the center of their lives—to rethink how they celebrated Christmas. Well, *here was this church's general thinking on the subject...*

Over 2,000 years ago, God entered into our history ... as a child. It's obvious by how our calendars are set up in this world just how important Jesus' birth really was—the *pivotal point* in our world's history. But the Christmas many were experiencing today wasn't really recognizing Jesus' birth as a pivotal point any longer. So, what happened to Christmas? What's it all about now? And what's taken its place?

- Shopping...
- Spending time with the relatives ... because it's the right thing to do...
- Shopping...
- Mailing out all of those Christmas cards (hopefully before someone else in the family who always gets theirs out first does)...
- Shopping...
- Making sure there's enough treats in house to feed the entire neighborhood...
- Shopping...
- Getting all of those Christmas lights up in the yard—adding just one or two more new items this year, so we can at least *reasonably* keep up with those neighbors who always seem to outdo themselves with their display each year...
- Shopping...
- Making sure we carefully craft our Christmas gift list, purchasing them & delivering them promptly, so those who receive them will know just how much we love & care about them...
- Shopping...

You know, even though many of these things are *really nice things*, where's Jesus in all of this? Isn't it *his* birthday? And, if it's *his* birthday we're celebrating, shouldn't Christmas reflect *his* heart—not just the whims of the world we live in?

Many good things are done at Christmas time, but not all in the name of Jesus ... and that's the point. *Philanthropy is a wonderful thing ... but what we're talking about is something bigger than just doing something out of the goodness of your heart.* What we're talking about is a relationship with the God of the universe ... and inviting others to be a part of that relationship—*that they might know the joy of God NOW ... and the company of God FOREVER.* That's why the Church is here—to let people know about a God who loves them, who wants to be in a relationship with them, and desires his very best for them! *As good as good deeds can be, without keeping Christ in the center of Christmas ... everything we do sooner or later ends up being about us!* We don't mean for that to happen, but that's human nature ... *without Christ...*

Folks, we need to discover, as Joseph did in the midst of his dream, that what God came to do that first Christmas is not really about us at all; it's all about the reconciliation of humanity to a God who created them, who loves them more than anyone could ever imagine. But the only way they'll experience this incredible, essential love of God ... is for the Church—the people of God—to show them that love *tangibly.* (In other words ... **don't tell me about Jesus; show me Jesus!**)

That's what 'Rethinking Christmas' is all about—to put Christ back in the center of Christmas ... and *to show the world Christ's love ... tangibly.* It's to take Christmas back from the world of consumerism ... and move Christmas back to a place that might actually change the world again, just like it did over 2,000 years ago...

So, what about Christmas this year? Do you think Christmas in our lives ... and in our church life ... could change the world this year? Could we be part of a Christmas that could actually save lives? Could we partner with God as Christ's representatives in this world in such a way that others will know without a doubt that God loves them?

I want you to think about opportunities we have to share the love of God with this world that will have eternal consequences. Think about a project our church has been about for the past few years—especially during this season. It's called Operation Christmas Child. Sometimes we take Christmas for granted, don't we? We know Christmas is coming & we make our Christmas lists on Amazon and we expect what we've always known in the past. But for others, it's not like that; Christmas is not that easy. And Operation Christmas Child may be their only HOPE of having a Christmas—of realizing the love of Christ in their lives in a tangible way.

GOD IS LOVE. Yes, God is ... but many in this world won't know it, *if they don't see it ... in us!* And, folks, *I'm just crazy enough to believe that we here at TRINITY CHURCH can help change the world too!* I'm just crazy enough—and have enough *faith*—to believe that God can use us ... so several during this season will not miss out on what Christmas is really all about. But how do we do that? How do we become a church like that? How do we go about 'taking Christmas back' from the 'god of consumerism?' Here's how: For the next 4 weeks, we're going to learn these very important steps...

SPEND LESS. Proverbs 3:27 says, "Do not withhold good from those who deserve it when it's in your power to help them." (Did you hear that?) Folks, sometimes 'the god of consumerism' takes over and says things like ... *it takes money to love;* if you spend more on people, they'll know you love them, but is that right?

The truth is, *it doesn't take money to love*; and if that's so, then a recalculation is needed... Folks, if love is to be the driving force behind our gift-giving, then *money cannot be*; but what does that look like? Well, if we have the ability to help others in their time of need, then *we need to*; we'll talk more about that; we're going to learn to spend less so we can...

GIVE MORE. Deuteronomy 15:7-8 (GNT) tells us: "If in any of the towns in the land that the LORD your God is giving you there is a fellow-Israelite in need, then do not be selfish and refuse to help him. ⁸Instead, be generous and lend him as much as he needs." So, if we can learn to *spend less* out of misguided motives (i.e. consumerism), then maybe we can learn to *give more* out of right ones...

Spending less actually frees us up to give more ... to what matters to God! That little church that started to rethink Christmas explained it this way: "Spending less gave us the resources to make a huge difference—and the greatest resource was the presence of Christ within us." With that in mind, the next step we'll talk about should make sense: once we get the giving recalculated, we'll then be free to...

WORSHIP FULLY. Exodus 20:3 (The First Commandment) says simply: "Worship no god but me" ... and yet how often do we allow other things in life—including our stubborn will—to get in the way of *worshipping fully*...

Once we get the 'distractions' of our lives out of the way, we can then concentrate *not* on guilt or greed or what's on sale on Black Friday, but on *the Christ of Christmas*. And, once our eyes are back on Christ (*picture the Christ-child in the manger*), it'll then be easier for us to...

LOVE ALL. 1 John 4:7 is a great reminder of what our actions should be about—especially this time of year: "Dear friends, let us love one another, for love comes from God. Everyone who loves has been born of God and knows God." So, that's where love comes from God; God is the Source; and if we're connected to God (through a faith in Christ), that's what we'll be about too! That's where we'll be going on Christmas Eve—with a challenge to represent Christ in this world we live in *in a tangible way!*

As we move through Advent this year, we're going to be challenged to do some things we've maybe never been challenged to do before. For some, it may simply be a stretching of what we already know God wants us to do. For others, it may be something totally new. And some are thinking: Shouldn't we take care of ourselves first during Christmas? Well, you may think that now, but let me remind you what Jesus said clearly in Acts 1: 8 (NLT),

"But you will receive power when the Holy Spirit comes upon you. And you will be my witnesses, telling people about me everywhere—in Jerusalem (at home), throughout Judea (State of Wisconsin), in Samaria (Midwest), and to the ends of the earth (throughout ALL the world!)."

God's love is usually bigger than what we think, isn't it? So, with that in mind, TODAY...

- We enter into the story of Christmas, maybe as never before...
- We begin to get back to the basics of Christmas—the stable, where Jesus was born...
- And we begin to move all the distractions that stand between us and the stable out of the way, so we can truly worship the Christ-child once again...

Hold this picture in your mind, as we close this introduction to Advent: *Our knees need to be in the dirt beside that manger by Christmas Eve.* Can we do that? That's what Christmas is really all about. It's not about us. It's about him—*Christ*. It's about his purposes for coming into this world. That's what we need to get back to ... *that others might live!* Now, folks, *that's a dream ... worth dreaming!*