



THOSE
WHO
DREAM

Apex UMC
Daily Devotions
for Advent 2023

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November 27

THOSE WHO DREAM

When the Lord restored the fortunes of Zion, we were like those who dream. Then our mouth was filled with laughter, and our tongue with shouts of joy; then it was said among the nations, "The Lord has done great things for them." The Lord has done great things for us, and we rejoiced.

Psalm 126:1-3, NRSV

A dream come true. That is the scene the psalmist describes here in Psalm 126: Babylonian exiles finally returning home to Jerusalem after a lifetime of being away. For years upon years, they dreamed of this moment, this return, this happy ending.

Yet some Biblical scholars argue that this psalm was written *before* the exiles returned home to Jerusalem. The psalmist, they assert, is not looking back on a happy event but rather looking ahead with anticipation, *dreaming of what will come* in God's good timing. Read in this way, Psalm 126 anticipates the dream of return in vivid detail, with laughter and joy and abundance.

I can't decide which reading of this psalm I like better. Perhaps it's best not to choose between them, to simply let each reading of the psalm teach us its own truth. After all, Scripture is full of both instances, of dreams fulfilled and of dreams deferred. The birth of Christ is the ultimate dream fulfilled, of course, after being deferred for generations. And our patient waiting for Christ to return and heal this world is the ultimate dream deferred. As people of faith, we live in the tension between the two. Salvation *has* come in Christ and salvation *will* come in Christ's return.

Where does that leave us? It leaves us as people who dream. And we are in good company, for Scripture is full of dreamers. There's Abraham, who dreamed of a large family. There's Moses, who dreamed of freedom. There's Ruth, who dreamed of security. There's David, who dreamed of peace. When you get to the Advent stories, the dreamers multiply. There is Elizabeth, Mary, Joseph, John the Baptist, Shepherds, Angels, and Prophets – all dreaming of a better world, of God's world, when God's salvation will cover the earth and God's Kingdom will reign victorious.

In this booklet of daily devotions, you'll be invited to embrace our calling to be people who dream. Together in this Advent season, we will dream of the hope, peace, joy, and love God promises to us. We will consider what it means to be active dreamers, those who don't just look back in celebration or look forward in anticipation, but those who allow God's dreams to shape their daily lives. For that's what discipleship is all about, really. It's about letting the dream of God's Kingdom so permeate your heart that your actions reflect it's reality. Discipleship is living as though the dream is coming true right before our eyes, as though everything God has promised is been fulfilled. When we do this, something surprising happens: the Spirit of God transforms us dreamers into a dream come true for a hurting world.

by Pastor Laura Johnson

November 28

GOD DREAMS A HOPEFUL FUTURE

Then I saw a new heaven and a new earth, for the first heaven and the first earth had passed away, and there was no longer any sea. I saw the Holy City, the new Jerusalem, coming down out of heaven from God, prepared as a bride beautifully dressed for her husband. And I heard a loud voice from the throne saying, "Look! God's dwelling place is now among the people, and he will dwell with them. They will be his people, and God himself will be with them and be their God. He will wipe every tear from their eyes. There will be no more death or mourning or crying or pain, for the old order of things has passed away."

Revelation 21:1-4, NIV

At the time the book Revelation was written, there was great suffering in antiquity. Domitian was the emperor who implored his subjects to refer to him as "our Lord and God." This led to great persecution and suffering on behalf of the Christians who refused to embrace this demagoguery.

The words that John speak gently whisper through the chronicles of time and remind the readers of a new heaven and of a new earth. It is a new place where God would indeed abide fully and completely. This first heaven and earth would fade away as would the sea. God's dwelling place becomes entwined with His people and resonates with the tranquility alluded to in Eden. There will be no more death, pain, mourning, or suffering for God will be with them and their tears will be wiped away.

This passage invites a peace that we need to see now more than ever. It invites us to step on a grassy knoll on a cold December night and listen to the bleating of sheep as we wait expectantly for the Christ child who will deliver us from death, pain, suffering, and mourning. We long to have the tears wiped from our eyes and to know that God sees us too.

There are times in this life when we may feel impervious to God's presence. We may long to feel the gentle touch of God wiping the tears from our eyes, but there is some disconnect. Perhaps it is a relationship that feels so tattered that it feels truly implausible to fix. Maybe it is a test result we know we need to seek, but we just simply can't muster the courage to read the result. Maybe, it is a drastic change that requires great faith, but we are terrified to leave the sanctity of the known. In all of these moments, we pray for God to go before us, and we trust that He is there. God gathers us close, wipes the tears from our eyes, and says, "you are loved." All at once, the pain is abated, the crying is comforted, the tears are wiped away, and the old things are removed.

In this season of gentle and pervasive waiting, we invite God to be fully present for the great, small, and in-between things. May you feel held when you feel unsteady and know that God sees you and is always present. What a truly wondrous and loving God we worship!

by Rev. Kara Matthews

November 29

THE HOPEFUL DREAMER TRUSTS

Against all hope, Abraham in hope believed and so became the father of many nations, just as it had been said to him, "So shall your offspring be." Without weakening in his faith, he faced the fact that his body was as good as dead – since he was about one hundred years old – and that Sarah's womb was also dead. Yet he did not waver through unbelief regarding the promise of God, but was strengthened in his faith and gave glory to God, being fully persuaded that God had power to do what he had promised.

Romans 8:14-21, NIV

When I was a child, this time of year was filled with hope! I poured over the Sears Catalog for hours, circling items and turning down corners of pages. This was the ultimate "wish" book. The vision of receiving those items was thrilling.

The hope the Scripture for today is talking about is something much, much larger. This hope is anchored to a promise that God gave Abraham and it depends entirely on God's character and what Abraham believed about his God. The last part of verse 17 describes the God of Abraham as, **"the God who gives life to the dead and calls into being things that were not."**

Abraham had learned through his interaction with God to believe him to be a very big God, Almighty in fact, which can challenge us to think, "How big is my God?" Are the problems of life and our world huge in my mind and heart and where does God factor in all of this? How am I allowing Him to impact my inner world?

What if we precede our private times of prayer and meditation with a truth such as this of 'Who God is' and 'What He is Like'? What if we begin with our thoughts focused on truth about Him, "the God who gives life to the dead and calls into being things that were not." This could change our inner atmosphere and inject us with renewal of heart and mind. Hope.

"Without weakening in his faith, he faced the fact." The facts Abraham faced were daunting from a human point of view. Really impossible. But rather than being overwhelmed by the problem, he made the leap of faith to trust God and His promise. Facing the facts without weakening in faith is not an easy thing! But it is life-giving! When we take our eyes off ourselves and put them on God, it changes everything!

"Yet he did not waver through unbelief regarding the promise of God, but was strengthened in his faith...being fully persuaded God had power to do what he had promised."

by Phyllis Stern

November 30

THE HOPEFUL DREAMER PRAYS

*In her deep anguish Hannah prayed to the Lord,
weeping bitterly.*

1 Samuel 1:10, NIV

Elkanah, a man from the Levite tribe, had two wives, Hannah and Peninnah, but Hannah was his favorite although she was barren. Peninnah was fruitful in giving Elkanah sons and daughters which may have caused the jealousy that led Peninnah to taunt and be unkind to Hannah. In a culture where women's status was based on having children, especially a son, and being head of the home, Hannah was unfulfilled. Year after year, Hannah prayed for a child. Peninnah teased Hannah about her childlessness to the point that Hannah would cry and not eat even as Elkanah tried to console her. What a dark and desolate place Hannah must have experienced for years. It would have been easy and understandable for Hannah to lose hope.

But Hannah did not lose hope, and she did not stop praying. One day she encountered the priest Eli while she was praying in silence, and Eli accused her of being drunk because she was moving her lips. From the depth of her being, Hannah described her longing to have a son. Then Eli gave her a benediction, saying, "Go in peace and may the God of Israel grant you what you have asked him" (v. 17). The happy ending was that Hannah did have a son, with other children to follow. When he was of age, Hannah took her firstborn son, Samuel, to Eli to dedicate his life to the Lord's service. Young Samuel grew up to become a great prophet.

There are several lessons we can learn from Hannah's story. She was not deterred from praying, so we can see that she was consistent and persistent in praying. Secondly, even though she was not sure how God would answer, she demonstrated her belief that God would hear her prayers and be faithful to her. And finally, she placed her dreams and hopes in the Lord.

Hannah's story is one we can use as an example this Advent season and in the days and years that follow. Be consistent, persistent in prayer. Believe God will hear our hopes and dreams, and remember that our ultimate hope is in the Lord. Even when our world is in turmoil and holiday festivities seem too much to handle, prayer is the discipline we can follow to find our place of peace.

by Norma Keyes

December 1

THE HOPEFUL DREAMER EXPECTS A MIRACLE

Now there was a woman who had been suffering from a flow of blood for twelve years. She had endured much under many physicians and had spent all that she had, and she was no better but rather grew worse. She had heard about Jesus and came up behind him in the crowd and touched his cloak, for she said, "If I but touch his cloak, I will be made well." Immediately her flow of blood stopped, and she felt in her body that she was healed of her disease.

Mark 5:25-29, NRSV Updated Edition

It will take a miracle! How many times have we heard or said that? And when we say it, isn't it usually in the context of an experience in which we are at the point of giving up hope? In other words, when we say "it will take a miracle", we really don't expect to get one.

The sad sibling of "it will take a miracle" is "we can only hope", a statement where use of the word "only" demonstrates our very lack of hope.

As Christians, we often think of miracles along the lines of those performed by Jesus, walking on water, changing water into wine, and miracle of miracles, raising the dead, or, in this case, healing the bleeding woman.

We don't know much about the woman in this Scripture. We know that she had been suffering from this terrible disease for 12 years. She had expended all her resources on doctors, with no success. She must certainly have been thinking that her healing would require a miracle. It seems she had reached the point where she could only hope that her dream of a miracle of healing would come true. However, her hope was made manifest by her very act of faith, and her belief that, by merely touching Jesus's clothing, she would be healed.

In these modern times it may seem that miracles, at least those of a biblical scale, are few and far between. We, as Christians, must express our hopes and dreams for miracles through our faith in prayer, but prayers, like faith, must be followed by action and works, however small. While our prayers and even our acts of faith may not result in the specific miracle we seek, we must not let that deter us or let it diminish our faith, or our belief in miracles. After all, the acts we perform in pursuing our own hopeful dreams may provide the miracle that another hopeful dreamer is seeking.

by Alan Hoal

December 2

THE HOPEFUL DREAMER PERSEVERES

[That is why] we never give up. Though our bodies are dying, our spirits are being renewed every day. For our present troubles are small and won't last very long. Yet they produce for us a glory that vastly outweighs them and will last forever! So we don't look at the troubles we can see now; rather, we fix our gaze on things that cannot be seen. For the things we see now will soon be gone, but the things we cannot see will last forever.

2 Corinthians 4:16-18, NLT

Twenty-four hours before this writing I wept over my sister's lifeless body – tears of grief that we will no longer walk together through good times and bad; tears of gratitude that God rewarded her years of hopeful perseverance by taking her swiftly and peacefully during the exact week she had prayed to leave this earth. Since her diagnosis three months ago, she hoped to die during the same week her husband and our brother died years before. God answered her prayer.

My sister's life exemplified hope: "confident expectation of what God has promised." She persevered with undying hope "through many dangers, toils, and snares." Perseverance – "the effort required to do something and keep doing it until the end, even if it's hard; laying down our strength so the strength of the Holy Spirit can rise up within us." Moses "persevered because he saw him who was invincible" (Hebrews 11:27). Hebrews 10:36 encourages us to "persevere so that when you have done the will of God, you will receive what he has promised." And James 1:12 reads, "Blessed is the man who perseveres under trial, because... he will receive the crown of life that God has promised to those who love him." Therefore we persevere, keeping our eyes on what can't be seen now, knowing our current struggles are temporary, but what we cannot yet see will last forever.

But there's more. John Wesley, founder of Methodism, believed Scripture is twice inspired – once when it was written and once when it is read. Have you ever read the same Scripture on different days and focused on different words, depending on what was going on in your life? Today as I read 2 Corinthians 4:16-18, something else stood out, a gift from the Holy Spirit – the word **WE**; it appears six times! In this season of my life, our church family has been the **WE**. Through uncertainty, grief, and even laboring together with an amazing group of men and women who launched GIFT groups this year, this season has been abundantly **WE**. Persevering and doing the will of God are so much easier if there is a **WE**!

Are you struggling to persevere right now? Do you feel alone? Please let us know. Talk to a pastor, or a staff member, or a friend here at AUMC. Your church family longs to walk beside you during good times and bad, confidently anticipating what God has promised. In this Advent season as we await the arrival of Emmanuel ("God with us") with hope, may you feel the **WE** in your journey. It is God's GIFT waiting for you.

by Rev. Ellen Rose

December 3

THOSE WHO DREAM HAVE HOPE

TO CARRY A DREAM / LUKE 2:1-20

To carry a dream
is to walk at night,
Or to walk by light,
But with a pebble in your shoe.

To carry a dream is to
Wake at night
To wake and blink twice,
in case you see something new.

To carry a dream
Is to plant trees in old age,
To be a part of a church,
That is human and frayed.

To carry a dream is foolish and wild.
It's the faith of a child,
Wishing on stars.

But to carry a dream is also hopeful and wise,
The faith of our elders,
Saying God will provide.

So may we walk
Until we see the light.
May the pebble in our shoe
Remind us why we fight.
May they say
We are foolish and unwise,
And may we continue to dream;
May hope keep us alive.

December 4

JESUS DREAMS OF PEACEFUL HEARTS

Peace I leave with you, My peace I give to you; not as the world gives do I give to you. Let not your heart be troubled, neither let it be afraid.

John 14:27, NKJV

As we look forward to Christmas we have always looked forward to the gifts. We see here where Christ is leading his disciples and you know that he has imparted on you a gift. The gift of peace is a gift that we should not enjoy for a few weeks and then take it out again on a rainy day as we and our children do with some of our Christmas gifts. God wants you to know how important His peace is in your life. There are three different types of peace mentioned in the Bible .

1. Peace with God- When you receive Christ as savior you are born again. We are now reconciled with God when our sins have been forgiven and we can have peace with God.
2. Peace of God- The peace of God which resides in every believer through the Holy Spirit.
3. Peace on Earth- When Christ comes back to Earth to establish His Kingdom there will truly be peace on earth.

Christ is focusing on the " Peace of God" here with his disciples in this verse. God wants you to have peace. If Christ is your Lord and He is the one that is in control of your life then our hearts should not be troubled. There is truly nothing to fear when we can come to God in prayer in the name of His son, Jesus Christ, and cast all of our burdens and fears on Him. He is the one who created us and loved us enough that he sent Christ to die for our sins. He wants the best for us (Romans 8:28) and he wants us wholeheartedly to rely upon Him for our every need. God wants you to enjoy this great blessing and present of peace.

First you must have peace with God. You may have that by confessing your sins and asking God to save you. "For all have sinned and come short of the glory of God" (Romans 3:23). Christ paid for your sins and mine and it is the only way mankind can have peace with God. If you have that peace with God then He is asking you to enjoy the knowledge that God that lives in you. May it cast out all of your fears and worries.

by Matthew Nance

December 5

THE PEACEFUL DREAMER LOVES THE WORD

Great peace have those who love your law, and nothing can make them stumble.

Psalm 119:165, NIV

God's dream for the world is that all of His creation would live in peace. Oh how beautiful that would be! It will happen when all the world knows the Lord and loves Him as he created us to do.

God created humans to worship Him and to follow His Word. The Word has been given to us through the patriarchs and prophets and fulfilled in the death of Jesus on the cross. When the love of God's Law is on our lips, He is present with us, lighting our path so that we do not stumble into the cares of the world. There is no fault in those who have faith in God's son Jesus fulfilling the Law. Peace is found in reading the Law and knowing that Jesus is the path to righteousness before the Law.

Love is an action verb. In our calling as Christians to love the Law, we read and reread to know the Law found in the Word so that we can always proclaim the work that Jesus did on the cross to bring God's dream of peace to fulfillment. When we know the Law, we follow Jesus' commandments to first love the Lord our God with all of our soul and strength and mind; and secondly to love our neighbors as ourselves. When we keep this Law in our hearts, we will not stumble in this life or the next, as we depend on the great love He has given us. With the love of His Law, we are able to fulfill His command for us to help the widows, orphans and strangers in our presence live in peace.

God provides peace for us who love His Law today and will provide peace for us forever. Praise be to God!

by Lane Cloaninger

December 6

THE PEACEFUL DREAMER BUILDS UNITY

As a prisoner for the Lord, then, I urge you to live a life worthy of the calling you have received. Be completely humble and gentle; be patient, bearing with one another in love. Make every effort to keep the unity of the Spirit through the bond of peace.

Ephesians 4:1-3, NIV

How do we know what God's dreams for the world are? Surely Scripture is one guide. There are several signposts in the Scripture above – humility, gentleness, patience, bearing with one another, unity, peace. That is not an easy list, but it certainly gets us pretty far down the road towards the Kingdom of God when we can accomplish those things.

And how do we help make those dreams come true? Building unity is a tall order these days. It seems like it's often human nature to define ourselves and build community with others by finding agreement on what we oppose. That is a core strategy of hate groups when they recruit new members. But it's not limited to radicals or politicians. People of faith have been guilty of this for millennia. After all, there aren't so many denominations of Christianity for nothing. One of the things I often say to people who come to our community garden is that we believe that the things that we have in common are more important than the things that divide us. I think that's good advice anywhere in the world and especially in the church. At the garden we focus on our belief that no one should go hungry. No matter what our background or faith, that is something we can all agree on. Sometimes it's easy to let the small things divide us, but I wonder if God's dream is more about letting the Spirit hold us together in unity and learning from one another in our differences.

Unity is not easy. After all, as my father used to say, there isn't one single person in the world that you will agree with about everything. I think perhaps there are two things that are important when we strive for unity. First, we have to remember that every one of us is a beloved child of God, with all sorts of potential for improvement, but loved and cherished exactly as we are. Without that foundation we are too weak and vulnerable to defensiveness to build unity. Maybe the second requirement is that we accept that unity is rarely easy. Human nature causes us to recoil from people we have significant disagreements with. But putting in the extra effort to bear with one another in love is what we are called to do. May our small efforts to build unity change the world.

by Anne Harrison

December 7

THE PEACEFUL DREAMER IS HUMBLE

Live in harmony with one another. Do not be proud but be willing to associate with people of low position. Do not be conceited. Do not repay anyone evil for evil. Be careful to do what is right in the eyes of everyone. If it is possible, as far as it depends on you, live at peace with everyone.

Romans 12:16-18, NIV

I recently came across an idea that I found myself continually going back to in my thoughts. Maybe you came across or understood this concept years ago; however, for me, it has really started to resonate. The cute little GIF I saw scrolling through some form of social media said, "It is a superpower to let others be wrong about me." I began to really let that idea sink in. Is it okay to let others be wrong about me? Can I be quiet and not try to convince people to agree with me, like me, or see my point of view? Can I do what I believe to be morally right in the eyes of most and be okay with others thinking a certain way about me?

People have opinions. People think one way or another. Some judge my choices, my clothes, even my hair. I do not have to let those thoughts impact my peace or let those actions force me into a battle to prove myself. I can instead choose to let go of my need to be right. I can choose to get over my need to have the last word or feel like I won some debate. I can choose to see and to accept others regardless of their opinions or situations. Romans 12:16-18 tells us to live in harmony with one another letting go of judgement. I have found that when I can let go of how I feel when people judge me, I in turn can push away my impulse to judge.

One of God's dreams for the world is for us to live in peace and harmony. I have discovered that when I put my personal agendas aside and really see people, when I can listen to listen, not listen to respond, I experience more acceptance of others. Not feeling the need to repay misdeeds or prove I am right allows for me to have room for peace and harmony.

Of course, we still try to do what is right in the eyes of God and most people, while knowing we do not have to please everyone. When we try to live according to God's principles the best we can, it is okay if what others think about us is not always accurate. When we let go of the weight of other's judgment and we ourselves do not judge, we find peace and can live in harmony. Then we might just be a little closer to God's dream of harmony and peace on earth as it is in Heaven.

by Julia Beam

December 8

THE PEACEFUL DREAMER FORGIVES

Bear with each other and forgive one another if any of you has a grievance against someone. Forgive as the Lord forgave you. And over all these virtues put on love, which binds them all together in perfect unity. Let the peace of Christ rule in your hearts, since as members of one body you were called to peace. And be thankful.

Colossians 3:13-15, NIV

Paul speaks of the unity Christians have with Christ as the head. We are all part of a spiritual "body," which is the Church. Peace within the body requires peace between its parts. In this we experience the true joy the Father wants us to have.

From these words comes a bit of my story that led me to Church and Jesus and, really, a more joyful life. Some years ago, a friend of mine was talking about her church, the music, the joy it brought to her. One day these words just fell out of my mouth, "Take me with you this Sunday." And so she did and I continued to come to this church and was eventually baptized and became a member. Slowly, ever so slowly, I began to try some of the variety of "offerings," of Apex UMC. I took the Women's Bible Study class from Phyllis Stern and became a follower, taking classes from her as often as I can. There is a real sense of camaraderie in that group. I was interviewed and became a member of the intercessory prayer group, in which we pray for others as needed. Currently, I am taking Pastor Laura Katherine's class on the second half of Matthew and Pastor Gray Southern's Methodist theology class.

More importantly, my prayer life, my internal life has brought me closer to Jesus, and in doing so, I am able to forgive some people who I believe have done wrong to me. That is especially freeing; bringing with it a sense of lightness of spirit. I have become a peaceful dreamer, seeking God's presence daily, and this has added an unbelievable amount of joy and lightness to my life.

by Toby Shaw

December 9

THE PEACEFUL DREAMER SEEKS FIRST THE KINGDOM

Instead, desire first and foremost God's kingdom and God's righteousness, and all these things will be given to you as well. Therefore, stop worrying about tomorrow, because tomorrow will worry about itself. Each day has enough trouble of its own.

Matthew 6:33-34, CEB

Looking back at a few verses in this chapter, we find Jesus talking about the worry of necessities. He talks about how the birds don't seem to worry about where their next meal is coming from because they know it will be provided. And after a few more analogies, Jesus tells us not to worry because as we work to pursue the kingdom of heaven and bring the kingdom of heaven to earth, God is working to provide us with what we need so there's no need to be anxious about what tomorrow brings. Each day has enough worry and anxiety, so why bring tomorrow's anxieties into today?

It's easy for us to get caught up in the worries and anxieties of life. It's easy to get consumed by the thought of what the future COULD hold. In this scripture, Jesus is encouraging us to not worry about that, he's inviting us to focus on the present and trust in God. Jesus is inviting us to know peace and know God.

I think one of God's dreams for us is to always pursue a relationship with Him. Jesus proves this dream when he states, "Instead, desire first and foremost God's kingdom and God's righteousness, and all these things will be given to you as well." When we pursue a relationship with God, we turn our worries, anxieties, and fears into feelings of peace and allows us to focus on the present. Then and only then can we better bring God's kingdom to earth. We are better able to spread the good, good news of the gospel.

So, as we take Jesus' words to heart and choose to seek God above all else, we can trust as people who dream, we will have peace because we have God and God has our backs. Friends, I challenge you this Advent season and beyond to find new and creative and exciting ways to pursue God and all of God's righteousness.

by Hailey Burroughs

December 10

THOSE WHO DREAM HAVE PEACE

PREPARE / MARK 1:1-8

My dad built me a changing table.
For nine months, my mom watched her ankles swell and her belly grow.
For nine months, my dad would come home from work, kiss her on her forehead --
Pressing bangs to skin--and tell her she was beautiful.
Then for nine months, he'd slip into the garage
To build sawdust sand castles and a dresser out of dreams.
I imagine she smiled, perched in that rocking chair.
He was in his woodshop, preparing the way.

Eighteen years later I left for college.
As I packed my bags, my mom baked blueberry muffins for the road--the smell of home.
She wrapped them in foil and placed them in a cardboard box,
Wiling similar layers of protection to be wrapped around me, her little girl.
She was preparing the way.

My aunts and uncles bought sweatshirts in my new school colors.
My dad taught me how to change a tire.
My mom gave me the earrings I'd been sneaking from her jewelry box for the last four years.
I hid sticky-note love letters on the kitchen door for them to find when they returned home.
We were quiet in the car.
My brother cried.
We were all preparing the way.

And through these moments, I have come to see,
That preparation and love can be the same thing.
For there is something about love that makes us want to prepare.
There is something about love that compels us to
Throw open the doors,
Yell it from the rooftop,
Set the table,
Decorate the nursery,
Leave love notes on the back door,
Build the changing table,
Trim the tree,
Bake muffins for the road,
And when it's time,
If you must,
Let go.

Preparation and love can be the same thing.

December 11

JESUS DREAMS OF JOYFUL CELEBRATIONS

I tell you that in the same way there will be more rejoicing in heaven over one sinner who repents than over ninety-nine righteous persons who do not need to repent.

Luke 15:7, NIV

I was in my office getting ready for Christmas Eve worship to start – zipping up my clergy robe, making sure my stole was straight, thinking through the words I would use to begin our Christmas Eve worship service.

Just then, the trustee chair barreled into my office. He was clearly fighting back tears. I asked, “what is wrong?” It took him a minute to speak – and even then his voice was cracking with emotion – “My son. He just walked in and sat down on the front row beside his Mama.”

Now – I didn’t know the full story, but I knew enough. In fact, everyone in that small church knew enough. We all knew this young man was in his early 20s and had left home in a huff several months earlier and had not responded to his parents’ calls, texts, or emails. This was in the day far before FindMyPhone or anything like that – and there were several months there where the parents did not even know if their son was alive.

But on that Christmas Eve night, that young man wanted to come home. He knew his parents would be at the church on Christmas Eve. He knew that they would be sitting in the same pew they always sat in. He knew where to find them.

When I left my office that evening to begin the service – not only did I see that family with tears in their eyes, I saw a whole congregation filled with tears in their eyes. I don’t think anybody heard the sermon that night. I am not even sure I know what I said. What we all took away was this sense of a Christmas miracle – that a family had been reunited and in that joy, we all found joy. In that miracle, we all found a miracle.

The Shepherd’s dream for the lost sheep is a dream of a lost relationship being recovered – a lost hope being found once more.

This season is a season for dreaming for more than just goodwill and cheer, it is a season to dream that all that is lost is truly found.

by Pastor Laura Katherine Stern

December 12

THE JOYFUL DREAMER DANCES

David retorted to Michal, "I was Dancing before the Lord... He appointed me as the leader of Israel, the people of the Lord, so I celebrate before the Lord. Yes, I am willing to look even more foolish than this, even to be humiliated in my own eyes!"

2 Samuel 6:21-22, NLT

We all have songs that cause us to groove when we hear them, regardless of time or place. Do not fool yourself. You've belted out Queen in the kitchen. Your body moves when "Dancing in the Dark" starts and you just want to have fun to Cyndi Lauper. "Single Ladies" and "I Wanna Dance with Somebody" send you into a flurry of uncoordinated motion. Their presence on any day brings joy.

Dancing is the right thing to do in those moments. Its bubbly, silly joy allows us to shed our pride. We dance because we kind of "have" to. Ignoring that deprives our soul of a chance to recharge. We gain so much from losing ourselves in these moments.

This kind of transcendent joy is exactly what Jerusalem experienced as David entered with the Ark of the Covenant. This relic had followed Israel through their desert wanderings and into the promised land. Where the Ark went, the presence of the Lord dwelt. And as the anointed king over Israel, David wanted the Lord near to him.

In 2 Samuel 6 the "shouts and the sound of trumpets" (v15) accompanied the Ark's entrance. As the Lord entered their city, the people overflowed with joy. Even David lost himself in the triumphal procession. "Wearing a linen ephod, David was dancing before the Lord with all his might" (v14). David, in his underwear, was leaping around in the streets. He fed the masses while rejoicing in the Lord's presence, actions that Michal, his wife and the daughter of the previous king, Saul, detested.

She reprimanded him. She called him a fool. She shamed him for being the king but acting indecently "as any vulgar fellow would (v20)." David's response places the day in context. He danced for the Lord, with the Lord's people, as the Lord's anointed. What Michal saw as humiliating, David knew brought God glory. And the servants that witnessed him? They will hold him in honor. They now know their king loves God and will throw himself, dignity and all, toward worshiping God.

Paul in 1 Corinthians writes: "Has God not made foolish the wisdom of the world?" (1:20). With the birth of Jesus, Emmanuel, God with us, why not lose ourselves in the joy of his presence? Our dancing reveals and honors his presence, even if we look silly. He deserves our selfless joy.

by Colin Whalen

December 13

THE JOYFUL DREAMER SINGS

Then the prophet Miriam, Aaron's sister, took a tambourine in her hand, and all the women went out after her with tambourines and with dancing. And Miriam sang to them: "Sing to the Lord, for he has triumphed gloriously; horse and rider he has thrown into the sea."

Exodus 15:20-21, NRSV

The joyful dreamer sings! The dreamer Miriam, the first woman identified in Scripture as a prophet and named in more Biblical books than any other woman, was a leader of God's people who helped to lead the Israelites out of slavery (Micah 6:4).

As a child, with maturity and courage far beyond her years, Miriam stood and watched Moses (her baby brother) in a basket by the river bank. Then when Pharaoh's daughter discovered Moses, Miriam approached the Pharaoh's daughter and volunteered to go and find a nurse from the Hebrew women to nurse him. It was a daring, fearless and gutsy move for anyone, much less a child, in a day and age when Pharaoh had commanded all the Hebrew children to be slaughtered. It was the beginning of leading God's people.

Years later Moses led the people out of slavery and they meandered around the wilderness for 40 years. When they came to the Red Sea, God commanded Moses to lift his hand over the Sea and divide the waters so that the Israelites could travel over dry ground. Then when Moses lowered his hands, the waters returned and the Egyptian horses and riders sunk in the water. The Egyptian army was no more. No more oppression. The Israelites are free at last! Miriam rejoices! Miriam sings! Overwhelming joy bubbles up in her and the 85+ year old leads the women in song and dance---never mind that they were tired from the journey, never mind that their bodies ached from their years of backbreaking slavery. Can't you just see them in your mind's eye kicking up the dust and shouting with glee? What a marvelous picture of the celebration of God's presence in their lives. What a way to praise God for deliverance!

God had accomplished what was once only a dream. It was a day that the Israelites weren't sure they would ever see. And it was a celebration to end all celebrations---singing and dancing. God had brought forth the impossible. God can do for us what we cannot do for ourselves.

The God of Miriam and Moses has a word for us today. Our God still delivers God's people. God still dreams dreams. God still makes the impossible possible. God seeks out the lost, the lonely, the depressed, the hurting and the impoverished. God brings justice out of injustice. God calls his people to be God's eyes and ears and hands and feet in a broken fragile world. God brings healing and wholeness to all people. May we reach out and build relationships to all God's people and courageously live a life that echoes God's love. Thanks be to God!

by Rev. Karen Whitaker

December 14

THE JOYFUL DREAMER GIVES THANKS

Rejoice always, pray without ceasing, give thanks in all circumstances; for this is the will of God in Christ Jesus for you.

1 Thessalonians 5:16-18, NRSV

Imagine a fist. Fingers held tight against your palm. Nail beds flushed pink. Tendons of your wrist raised. Imagine a fist. See all the pressure you exert against yourself? A number of years ago, that was me. A fist furled tight.

The combination of what was in my life and what wasn't had left me strained, dreamless, and unhappy. Heather, my pastor, challenged me to commit to a year of patience. I didn't want patience. I wanted to fix it. I was also tired. So, reluctantly, I agreed to the experiment. To get started, she suggested I try out Morning Prayer at our church on my way to the office. I didn't think it would fix anything, but at least it was something I could do. Day after day, week after week, every morning a line of the liturgy stuck to my tongue like toffee: that our hearts may be unfeignedly thankful.

Unfeignedly is a hard word at 7:30 a.m., especially when I haven't had Diet Coke yet. Unfeignedly comes from the Middle English verb to feign, meaning to touch, handle, devise; to fabricate, alter, or change. Relevant to me, it is also the root for the word, fiction. I tell stories—I write books—but I knew there was a reason I kept tripping over unfeignedly.

I had to let go of an image of myself that I was holding onto. It was an image of what a "successful" me looked like. Like a balloon that escapes the hands of a toddler, I had to learn that while I love creating stories I'm not one. I had to loosen my grip because God's imagination is just better than mine.

God's dreams are better than ours.

In today's passage, Paul begins with JOY. That was what I was missing those years ago; it's what a lot of us miss. Here is what I learned from stumbling over unfeignedly thankful for a year: giving thanks is a present-oriented discipline. It grounds us in the day-to-day rather than allowing ourselves to be overtaken by past regrets, future fears, and ongoing circumstances beyond our control. When we give thanks in the now, we give up waiting for some non-existent version of ourselves that deserves to feel joy.

Remember, God is better at this than we are. To pray without ceasing and to give thanks no matter the circumstances isn't about always being happy. It is about receiving from the Dreamer that which we need most in the midst of the hard. It's about receiving joy.

At the end of every worship service is a benediction, or blessing. It's not merely ceremonial words to close out a service, but rather it's a gift offered. To hold up your palms is a quiet gesture, but it reminds you and me that we first receive before we accomplish. We receive God's blessing, which is far greater than we could ever imagine. To see the proof of that, we simply need to remember what we are doing right now: anticipating the gift of the Christ-child. Joy is unfurling our hands to welcome Him.

by Katie Byers-Dent

December 15

THE JOYFUL DREAMER SEEKS GOD'S PRESENCE

You show me the path of life. In your presence there is fullness of joy; in your right hand are pleasures forevermore.

Psalm 16:11, NRSV

Dreams. We all have them. There are those often cryptic ones that bubble to the surface of our minds during our deepest sleep, producing a surprising range of emotion from abject terror to profound comfort. There are those we have for our loved ones—often resembling a prayer—which, paraphrasing Jeremiah, envision a future to prosper them and give them hope. And there are those day dreams that allow us the freedom to explore what might be. Some dreams ground us firmly in the present, while others bring up regret and still others inspire hope for the future.

We dream. And created as we were in God's image, I suspect that perhaps God dreams, too. I can imagine that for his children he dreams of a loving, joyful, meaning-filled, lifelong relationship with him. And out of this relationship, I can suppose that he dreams of children who "act justly, love mercy, and walk humbly" (Micah 6:8), as they follow the path set before them. In his dreams, I believe that God calls out to us in our own hearts to be open to his fondest desire for us: To live out our human potential as faithful servants, without fear or reservation, assured of his presence throughout all the days of our lives.

That is one powerful, life-changing dream—one made possible through the example of God's great gift to us in the form of a tiny human baby many millennia ago. May our lives reflect God's dreams and become our own unique and undoubtedly cherished thank-you note to the Creator of all.

by Valerie Sutton

December 16

THE JOYFUL DREAMER LOVES OTHERS

If you keep my commands, you will remain in my love, just as I have kept my Father's commands and remain in his love. I have told you this so that my joy may be in you and that your joy may be complete. My command is this: Love each other as I have loved you.

John 15:10-12, NIV

In the Gospel of John, Chapter 15, verses 10-12, Jesus imparts a message to His disciples, a message that is still very relevant today. He says, "If you keep my commands, you will remain in my love, just as I have kept my Father's commands and remain in his love. I have told you this so that my joy may be in you and that your joy may be complete. My command is this: Love each other as I have loved you."

These verses unveil a profound connection between love, obedience, and joy. Jesus sets a simple yet profound condition for remaining in His love – obedience to His commands. The obedience of Christ becomes a template for us to follow, a path that leads not to burden but to boundless joy.

The promise of complete joy is captivating. It's not a fleeting or conditional joy but one that finds its home in a love that remains steadfast. Jesus desires His joy to be in us, an abiding joy that transcends circumstances. This joy is a fruit of our relationship with Him, nurtured through obedience and love.

The command to love one another mirrors the selfless love of Christ. It's a love marked by sacrifice, compassion, and forgiveness. As recipients of such immense love, we are called to be conduits of that love to others. In this act of love, we find a deeper connection with Christ and a reflection of the joy that completes us.

As we near closer to Christmas, let us reflect on these verses. May we abide in the love of Christ through obedient hearts, experience the profound joy He promises, and extend His love to others, becoming beacons of His transformative and abiding love.

by Marshall Bass

December 17

THOSE WHO DREAM HAVE JOY

SOW JOY / LUKE 1:46-55

If I wanted to sow joy,
I wouldn't use words.

I would turn the music all the way up,
And push the table against the wall,
Until we had room to dance.

I would roll the windows down
And drive you out of town,
Until fresh air filled your lungs.

I would squeeze your hand
And look you in the eye,
So that you would know you are not alone.

I'd lay down the picnic blanket and we'd look at the stars,
So that nothing could separate you from God's great beauty.

I'd open my door, like Elizabeth did for Mary.
I'd tell you to stay as long as you'd like.
Make yourself at home. What's mine is yours.

And maybe we'd sing. And maybe we'd laugh.
And maybe it would be enough to be in the presence of God and each other.

If I wanted to sow joy, that's what I'd do.
So sing me your song. We've got dancing to get to.

by Sarah Are | A Sanctified Art LLC | sanctifiedart.org

December 18

JESUS DREAMS ABOUT KINGDOM OF LOVE

By this everyone will know that you are my disciples, if you love one another.

John 13:35, NIV

Wait a second. I understand this verse better when I backtrack one verse. John 13:34 reads: "A new commandment I give to you, that you love one another: just as I have loved you, you also are to love one another." John, in verse 34 tells me two important things: (1) This is a commandment we are talking about; and (2) Our love for our neighbor is to be like God's love for us.

I know that God's love for us is unconditional. It has no strings attached. And it is a goosebumps kind of love. It is like being out in a spring rain shower; it is being filled to the brim with pure happiness.

Since this is one of God's commandments, I take this "dream" of God very seriously. If I want to be one of Jesus' disciples, I should try my hardest to love others. It is easy to love my family and my friends, so I need to try harder. I need to love beyond my "easy loves" and stretch to love strangers, people that I don't feel harmony with, and even people I am inclined to fear or hate. Ugh. This makes the simple word "love" so much harder.

But look at the reward! If I can love unconditionally – or even dream of loving unconditionally – Jesus will be my shepherd, and I will be in Jesus' flock as one of his disciples. And I want this ever so much.

When I look around me in today's world, it is hard for me to dream God's dream. It is hard for me to feel unconditional love. I am pelted, almost bullied, with stories of people who are cruel, who are frightening, who make me want to hate them, fight them, or flee. I fear for myself, my wife, my family and friends. I want to become a small island, a refuge from this larger world. I want only my family and friends and me to live on this island.

I find it so hard to resist this urge to protect myself and those whom I find easy to love. It is just as hard not to lash out, even in the privacy of my personal thoughts, and to hate and fear those all around me who seem mean and dangerous and confusing.

My dream (that I often fail to keep, but I can dream) is to not sequester my heart behind castle walls with a moat full of loyal alligators. Instead, in order to dream God's dream, obey his commandment, and be his true disciple, I must lead with love. No matter what my animal brain says, I need to overcome it, dream like God, and lead with love.

"I am only human," I whine to God. And God answers: "I know. Just do what you can do. That's all I ask." So I can do little things. I can lead with love, every day and in every way; and I can do small, loving things toward people who aren't in my tidy little "love circle." I don't have to be Mother Teresa or even the Apostle John. I can just be me. I can be ready, alert, and do little acts of random kindness. I can participate in church ministries for needy people who are strangers to me, but who allow me, in a concrete way, to do God's will: to "love one another, just as I have loved you."

by Fred D'Ignazio

December 19

THE LOVING DREAMER SAYS YES TO GOD

Then Mary said, "Here am I, the servant of the Lord; let it be with me according to your word." Then the angel departed from her.

Luke 1:38, NRSV

Mary said "yes" - and that one answer changed the world. A Chinese proverb says "A journey of a thousand miles begins with a single step." God's dream to provide the way for mankind to be redeemed was set in motion when Mary took the first step - by saying "yes".

Without Mary's "yes" God's dream would not have occurred in the exact manner it did. No doubt, with God's omnipotent powers another way would have been made possible. But for it to occur as it did, God needed Mary to say "yes" where and when she did. I doubt seriously if young naïve Mary knew to what she was saying "yes." Her dreams at that point were most likely small, that of any typical young Jewish girl of her time; a husband, a home, a family. But she was also a devout believer and opened her heart to God's big dream for her. Praying for, listening to, and accepting God's direction allowed her to receive a magnificent blessing - beyond her wildest dream - bearing God's divine Son. Mary's decision to say "yes" set into motion God's plan of incarnation.

Every day we make hundreds of decisions, both large and small, yes or no, now or later. With every decision, a new fork in the road opens to us, leading to more opportunities for more decisions. Many think one of the most important decisions was when your spouse said "yes" to a marriage proposal. But actually, the fulfillment of dreams was set into motion when "yes" was said to that first date, or "yes" to moving into the same apartment building, or "yes" to accepting a job at the same company. Somehow, somewhere, something happened that placed you at the exact time to meet your future spouse, to accept that job, to find that perfect house. And without that first "yes", the marriage would never have occurred, the fulfillment of your dream for a family, for children, for your life as it is today would not have been possible.

God's dream for you is found in Jeremiah 29:11; "Plans to prosper you and not to harm you. Plans to give you hope and a future." In this season of Advent, following the example of Mary, find quiet time to pray, to listen, to open your heart to God's dream for you, trusting in God's love for you. Just as God showered his love on Mary, abundant blessings are waiting for you to say that first "yes" to God's dreams for you.

by Pastor Sheila Ahler

December 20

THE LOVING DREAMER TRUSTS GOD

When Joseph woke up, he did what the angel of the Lord had commanded him and took Mary home as his wife.

Matthew 1:14, NIV

She was called many things – this client - the most gracious, “she was a pill!” Haughty, arrogant, prideful, demanding, rude! But wealthy. Because management did not want to lose her account, she was passed along – one financial consultant to another, when one day the office manager dumped the file with our team. The Senior consultant immediately left it on my desk. For me there was no desk of recourse. “The pill” stayed with me. Over the months I experienced emotions and feelings I’d never known before: unbridled anger, extreme frustration and passion bordering disdain.

Then, in an almost audible voice, I heard: “Alta, pray for her. And forgive!”

No time here to go into my response (or the remarkable outcome). Just suffice it to say I appreciated anew the story of Jonah...running from God’s clear message. This continued for some time, the message and the running, until I finally screamed back, “But I don’t understand, God. And I don’t feel like it!!!”

Clear as day, my patient, loving, gracious God answered, “Alta, OBEDIENCE trumps feelings and OBEDIENCE trumps your understanding!”

And so, we come to Joseph. Let’s recap his familiar story. Joseph is of the lineage of David (Matthew 1:16). His betrothed (Mary) is pregnant, not by him (Mathew 1:18). Being a righteous man, he did not want to expose Mary to public disgrace and decided to divorce her quietly (Matthew 1:19). Decision made. He slept.

What turmoil must have accompanied his fitful sleep. Perhaps he tossed and turned and in great angst also cried out to God, “I don’t understand. I feel so betrayed.” What a disturbing dream it must have been. An angel appears, calls him by name, and pretty much says, don’t rely on your feeling of fear. Don’t lean on your own understanding. Do as I say. Take Mary as your wife. She will have a son. Name him Jesus, for he will save his people from their sins (Matthew 1:20-21).

Unlike Jonah and me, Joseph did not run. The Scripture says that when Joseph woke up, he did what the Lord commanded (Matthew 1:24).

While Joseph did not yet have the commandment to love God and love your neighbor as yourself, he was a faithful and obedient Israelite and from the depths of his being he loved God with all his heart, soul and strength (Deuteronomy 6:4). He knew obedience trumped understanding and feeling, and as a result he took history’s stage and became an integral part of the Greatest Story ever Told.

by Rev. Alta Whitt

December 21

THE LOVING DREAMER IS A FRIEND

But why am I so favored, that the mother of my Lord should come to me? As soon as the sound of your greeting reached my ears, the baby in my womb leaped for joy. Blessed is she who has believed that the Lord would fulfill his promises to her!

Luke 1:41-43, NIV

I am sure in her old age Elizabeth never in her wildest dreams believed she would have a child and believed motherhood had passed her by. This time in history, she might have been devalued and shamed for not producing heirs and Zechariah could have taken a second wife, abandoned or divorced her.

How Elizabeth must have dreamed of becoming a mother. The yearning to hold a newborn child of her own in her arms must have left her devastated. After many months and years of disappointment, she could have blamed and been angry with God. However, the Bible states, "both of them (Elizabeth and Zechariah) were righteous in the sight of God, observing all the Lord's commands and decrees blamelessly"(Luke 1:6).

When Elizabeth passed her years of childbearing and was blessed with a child, she declared, "The Lord has done this for me," she said. "In these days he has shown his favor and taken away my disgrace among the people." (Luke 1:25) Her faith had been tested. Oh what joy she must have felt as she continued to praise God for his blessing.

During Elizabeth's sixth month of pregnancy, the angel, Gabriel, came to Mary in a dream and told her she would conceive the Son of God and her cousin Elizabeth in her old age was also pregnant. I am sure Mary never dreamed of having a child out of wedlock might as well have a child as a virgin.

Mary trusted in the Lord. She went to visit Elizabeth. At Mary's arrival, the baby later known as John the Baptist kicked really hard, when Elizabeth heard Mary's greeting. Elizabeth, filled with the Holy Spirit, asked why she is so favored to be visited by the mother of my Lord. She continued with, "blessed is she who has believed that the Lord would fulfill his promises to her."

Two women: one old and one young, one married and one engaged, one who believed motherhood had passed her by and the other a virgin. Both women were surprised with the coming and blessing of a child. Their great faith gave them strength and courage to endure the shame of barrenness and the shame of an unwed pregnancy. They were there for one another. They both received one of the greatest gifts of love, the gift of a child. And the Child given to Mary was filled with the greatest, deepest love - love for all the world . "For God so loved the world that he gave his one and only Son, that whoever believes in him shall not perish but have eternal life "(John 3:16).

by Norma Wallace

December 22

THE LOVING DREAMER COMES TO US

The Word became flesh and made his dwelling among us. We have seen his glory, the glory of the one and only Son, who came from the Father, full of grace and truth.

John 1:14, NIV

As we approach Christmas it is important to keep a few things in mind.

Christmas is obviously full of presents and being together with the ones you love the most but that is not the most important reason we celebrate. We celebrate because it is the day our one and only savior, Jesus Christ, was born. In John 1:14 it says "The Word became flesh and made his dwelling among us. We have seen his glory, the glory of the one and only Son, who came from the Father, full of grace and truth." This tells us that God's dream for the world was to send his one and only son down to Earth and bring peace to society and forgive those who have committed sins in the past.

This opens up our understanding of what God hopes to accomplish in this world because he wanted to show the world that his Son will do great things on this Earth he created. We can learn through this Bible passage that we can help God's dream come true by living through Jesus.

Jesus was able to forgive a lot of people's sins and live a life that is making the world a better place no matter how much chaos goes on in our society. God works in and through humans to dream with God and his kingdom coming on Earth because if you live your life through Jesus and talk to God he will help you out and work with you through all of the possible ups and downs you may have. That is the exact reason the Bible is so powerful, because it is a chance for you to talk to God to work out your problems so he can guide you towards his light and to his glory.

Finally, this Scripture reflects upon the theme of love because God understands how sin and how sometimes the world can be a broken place. However, through it all God will still love us by sending his one and only Son Jesus to help us experience the glory he will bring to the world.

by Bennett Headlee

December 23

THE LOVING DREAMER WELCOMES CHRIST

So it was, when the angels had gone away from them into heaven, that the shepherds said to one another, "Let us now go to Bethlehem and see this thing that has come to pass, which the Lord has made known to us." And they came with haste and found Mary and Joseph, and the Babe lying in a manger. Now when they had seen Him, they made widely known the saying which was told them concerning this Child. And all those who heard it marveled at those things which were told them by the shepherds.

Luke:2:15-18, NKJV

Here's an amazing truth: The shepherds were not potent or lavish characters in the Bible. They were often regarded as the bottom rung of the social ladder, considered to be "unclean" and "outcasts" within society. Despite this, God chose them to be a part of the birth of his only Son, to witness the miracle that was the arrival of Jesus Christ to the world.

Oftentimes we can trick ourselves into believing that we are not worthy of God's love and that we don't deserve to be a part of his story. This is untrue. God loves us more than anything in all of creation. He sent his only Son to live among the people and welcomed us to be a part of his story and dream for his kingdom. Just like the shepherds in Jesus's story, God is inviting us to be a part of his story, to live within his love, and to create a sense of Heaven on earth. God has offered us the invite, all we need to do is make the decision to accept it.

Choosing to love God means being a part of his kingdom and all the wonders it contains, as well as having a friend to rely on no matter what. There is no mountain he can't move and no waters he can't part. We don't have to be perfect or pristine to God. We look to the shepherds as an example of this as they worked in the fields and among the animals. Society looked at them as imperfect and God looked at them as perfect enough to receive and deliver his glorious message from the angels. God sees us as perfect in his eyes and we are worthy of all he has to offer. We don't need to earn God's love because he already loves us, all we have to do is love him.

by Christian Peterson

December 24

THOSE WHO DREAM HAVE LOVE

ALL IN ALL

It takes strength to dream.

I imagine it's that same strength that leads people to say "I love you" first,
Those three vulnerable words,
Wrapped in heart strings,
Whispered,
Because what could be
Is too good to keep quiet about.

It takes strength to choose joy.

It takes strength to push the covers
Off our weary bodies morning after morning,
To plant weary feet on solid ground,
And look for signs of beauty.

It takes strength to remember that we are not alone,
But the story starts with bone of bone and flesh of flesh.
That feels like so long ago.

Oh yes,

It takes strength to dream.

I imagine that's why many choose not to,
For it would be far easier to simply sleep.
But there are always those who dream,
Those who are up at night picturing what could be,
Because this world is too good not to.

So we say, "I love you."

We push the covers off.

We find solid ground.

We look for beauty.

And we dream.

We dare to dream.

December 25

DREAM BIG

It came upon the midnight clear, that glorious song of old, from angels bending near the earth, to touch their harps of gold: "Peace on the earth, good will to men, from heaven's all gracious king." The world in solemn stillness lay, to hear the angels sing.

It Came Upon the Midnight Clear by Edmund H. Sears, verse 1

Today is a day for dreamers. And not just the Christmas dreams we've been weaving throughout the season - the anticipation of the look on their faces when they open that gift or the joy of that meal with loved ones. These may happen exactly as we hoped, or they may turn out differently. If plans go awry or if plans don't materialize, don't despair. Today is a day for dreamers.

Today we remember that long ago God fulfilled a long awaited dream. Generations upon generations of God's people dreamed of a Messiah. They dreamed him up as a great King, a warrior, one who would rescue them from political plight, from all the ills of economic injustice, from all the suffering associated with our broken, aching world.

Today is a day for dreamers, because today we celebrate that their dream came true. Today this long-awaited Messiah was born.

But, dear dreamers, let us never forget that God's dream came true in the most unexpected of circumstances. This child was born to an unwed couple, obscure in their working class world. This child was born in a stable, greeted by mangy shepherds, guarded by donkeys, sheep, and puzzled parents.

It was a dream come true, yes. But at the time, surely it felt like a dream gone wrong, a plan gone awry. This feeling, this suspicion of a dream gone wrong followed Jesus to the very end, when he was nailed to a cross and buried, the dream dead in the tomb with his lifeless body. It wasn't supposed to end like that. It must've felt like a nightmare for the dreamers of Jesus' day.

But that's when the fullness of *God's dream* was revealed through resurrection. A bigger dream than any human could imagine. For in God's dream, Jesus was a Messiah for the whole world, for all time. His Kingdom wasn't to be bound by earthly borders, by a human life span, instead it is eternal and universal. His victory wasn't to be over foreign armies, it is to be a victory over death itself. Salvation for all.

Today is a day for dreamers, because today we remember that God's dream is bigger and wider and more imaginative than our dreams could ever be. Today, may you take the time to dream about the incredible surprises God has in store for you, for us, for this whole world. Dream big! After all, God is the biggest and best dreamer of all.

For lo! the days are hastening on, by prophets seen of old, when with the ever-circling years shall come the time foretold when peace shall over all the earth its ancient splendors fling, and the whole world send back the song which now the angels sing.

It Came Upon the Midnight Clear by Edmund H. Sears, verse 4

by Pastor Laura Johnson