

December 24, 2004



A Christmas Dream

by Rev. Jerry L. McGlone

Christmas Eve Sermon (no stated scripture).

I don't know who wrote this poem. I don't even know its title.
But I think it's a good poem to hear this particular night.

*That night when in Judean skies
The mystic star dispensed her light
A blind man moved amid his sleep
And dreamed that he had sight.*

*That night when Shepherds heard the song
of hosts angelic choiring near,
A deaf man stirred in slumber's spell
And dreamed that he could hear.*

*That night when in the cattle stall
Slept child and mother cheek by jowl
A cripple turned his twisted limbs,
And dreamed that he was whole.*

*That night when o'er the newborn babe
The tender Mary rose to lean
A loathsome leper smiled in sleep,
And dreamed that he was clean.*

*That night when in a manger lay
The Sanctified who came to save
A man moved in the sleep of death,
And dreamed there was no grave.¹*

¹ Garrett, James T., God's Gift, C.S.S. Publishing Co., Inc., Lima, Ohio, 1991, pp. 28-29.

What's your Christmas dream tonight? After the last Christmas Carol has been sung, after the last drop of egg nogg has been drunk, after the last candle flame has been blown out -

- when you're all alone,

- when everything is quiet,

- when you close your eyes to sleep,

- what's your Christmas dream tonight?

O yes, this is a night for dreams. Christmas has always been a night for dreaming.

It was in a dream that "the angel Gabriel was sent from God to a ... virgin... and the virgin's name was Mary. And he came to her and said, 'Hail, O favored one, the Lord is with you!' ... And the angel said to her, 'Do not be afraid, Mary, for you have found favor with God. And behold, you will conceive in your womb and bear a son, and you shall call his name Jesus. He will be great, and will be called the Son of the Most High; and the Lord God will give to him the throne of his father David, and he will reign over the house of Jacob for ever; and of his kingdom there will be no end.'

"And Mary said to the angel, 'How shall this be, since I have no husband?' And the angel said to her, 'The Holy Spirit shall come upon you, and the power of the Most High will overshadow you; therefore the child to be born will be called holy, the Son of God.'" [Luke 1:26-35]

It was in a dream when an angel of the Lord appeared to Joseph, saying, "Joseph, son of David, do not fear to take Mary your wife, for that which is conceived in her is of the Holy Spirit; she will bear a son, and you shall call his name Jesus, for he will save his people from their sins." [Matthew 1:20-21]

Out on the hillside, tending their flocks by night, awaken from their slumber, the shepherds saw an angel of the Lord who said to them, "Be not afraid; for behold, I bring you good news of a great joy which will come to all the people; for to you is born this day in the city of David a Savior, who is Christ the Lord." [Luke 2:9-11]

It was in a dream that the wise men were warned not to return to Herod with the news that they had found the Christ child. [Matthew 2:12]

Christmas has always been a time for dreams. All across this world people are dreaming their Christmas dreams tonight.

In far off Iraq, a soldier boy, rifle in hand, stands guard in the shifting sand and dreams of hearth and home.

A continent away, a child will spend his first Christmas away from his family and friends and dreams of his mother's warm embrace.

In a drafty apartment, a widow sits alone, holding a faded photo of her husband who has passed, and dreams of one last kiss.

In the suburbs, the parents wait through the silent night knowing their children cannot return, but their hearts dream of a surprise knock on the door.

Those who are without employment dream of honest labor, won.

Those who are ill and facing the unknown dream of vitality and health.

Those who have been beaten down by disappointment and circumstance dream of laughter and joy.

Those who are lost and can't find life's noble direction dream of walking down a sure pathway.

Those who are filled with guilt, those who have gone astray, those who have lost touch with their God dream of forgiveness and welcome.

All across this world, Christmas dreams will turn to hope. And that's the way it's supposed to be.

For dreams become hope.

Hopes give birth to faith.

And active faith changes lives.

It's the way God wants it to be this night.

A blind man moved amid his sleep - And dreamed that he had sight.

“And some people brought to [Jesus] a blind man, and begged [Jesus] to touch him. And [Jesus] took the blind man by the hand... and laid his hands upon him, [Jesus] asked him, ‘Do you see anything?’ And [the blind man] looked up and said, ‘I see...’” [Mark 8:22-24]

A deaf man stirred in slumber's spell - And dreamed that he could hear.

“And they brought to [Jesus] a man who was deaf and had an impediment in his speech; and they besought [Jesus] to lay his hand upon him... And... [Jesus] put his finger into [the man's] ears... and said to him ‘Eph'phatha,’ that is ‘Be opened.’ And [the deaf man's] ears were opened...” [Mark 7:32-35]

A cripple turned his twisted limbs, And dreamed that he was whole.

“And they came, bringing to [Jesus] a paralytic carried by four men. And when they could not get near [Jesus]... they removed the roof above him; and... let down the pallet on which the paralytic lay. And when Jesus saw their faith, he said... ‘Rise, take up your pallet and go home.’ And [the paralytic] rose, and... took up the pallet and went out...” [Mark 2:3-12]

A loathsome leper smiled in sleep, And dreamed that he was clean.

“And a leper came to [Jesus] beseeching him... ‘If you will, you can make me clean.’ Moved with pity, [Jesus] stretched out his hand and touched him... And immediately the leprosy left [the man], and he was made clean.” [Mark 1:40-42]

A man moved in the sleep of death, And dreamed there was no grave.

“Now when Jesus came, he found that Lazarus had already been in the tomb four days... [Jesus] cried out with a loud voice, ‘Lazarus, come out.’ The dead man came out...” [John 11:17, 43-44]

“Jesus said... ‘I am the resurrection and the life; he who believes in me, though he die, yet shall he live, and whoever lives and believes in me shall never die. Do you believe this?’” [John 11:25-26]

It was true “that night;” and every night since his birth, people of faith have been able to dream and live with new hope. It’s what makes the good times great and the bad times bearable.

When you believe, your Christmas dreams do come true. What’s your dream for tonight?

Fred Craddock² who is one of the very best preachers the Christian Church (Disciples of Christ) has ever produced, tells a story about a trip he took to his home state of Tennessee. Fred said he stopped by a restaurant in the Smoky Mountains. It was one of those kind of places where the proprietor is the waiter, the cashier, and the greeter.

Fred noticed that the owner moved from table to table, visiting with all the diners. Everybody seemed glad to see him. Everybody seemed to like him.

Then, the moment came when the owner walked over to Fred’s table. He introduced himself and wanted to know who Fred was. The Rev. Dr. Fred Craddock confessed that he was a preacher. The owner pulled up an empty chair, sat right down, and told Fred his whole life’s story.

He was born in that little town in Eastern Tennessee, not far from where they were. He was born to a mother who wasn’t married. It was the kind of town where everybody knew everybody else, what they’ve done, and all the gossip and scandals.

They had a name for someone who was born to an unmarried mother, and the boy got used to hearing “that name” before he even knew what it meant. “That name” followed him to school. On the playground, the other children would call him “that name.” When he went downtown to the five and

² IBID., pp. 29-30

dime store, everybody else looked at him, knowing he was different, mumbling “that name” under their breaths.

His mother wanted him to go to Sunday School, but even the good church people seemed to look at him as if they were afraid he would be a bad influence on their own children.

Then one day a new preacher came to town. The boy went to church. When the service was over, he tried to hurry out. The preacher stopped him at the door. He said, “Who are you, son, whose boy are you?”

He just wanted to crawl in a hole somewhere and disappear. He knew the other people had told the preacher who he was. He knew that they had called him “that name.”

But before the boy could answer, the preacher said with a smile on his face, “Wait a minute! I know who you are.” The preacher leaned down and looked closely into the boy’s face and said, “I can see a family resemblance. YOU are a child of God.” Then, the preacher put his hands on the boy’s shoulders and straightened him up and said, “Boy, you’ve got quite an inheritance. Go out and claim it.”

I want you all to dream tonight. Dream of who you are. Dream of the person you can yet become. Dream of your Father, God, in heaven who made you. Dream of your brother, Jesus Christ, who saves you. Dream of all the good you can do, of all the tenderness you can give away, of all the love you can share.

Dream your dreams tonight. That’s what God made Christmas for.

You can make your Christmas into whatever you want it to be. The great gospel work of salvation is already complete. God and Jesus don’t need to do any more.

They’re done.

Salvation is free.

But, it won’t be yours until you claim it.

No ear may hear His coming,

But in this world of sin,

Where meek souls will receive Him still,

The dear Christ enters in.³

³ “O Little Town of Bethlehem,” Phillip Brooks and Lewis H. Redner.

“For to you is born this day... a Savior, who is Christ the Lord.” [Luke 2:11] Tonight, as you take the bread in your hands, as you drink from this cup - let it once again be the sign of your salvation.

You are saved,
 through the life,
 the death,
 and the resurrection
of the One born so long ago in that little town called Bethlehem.

Go home this night and dream your dreams, knowing that in a child your dreams will be fulfilled.

Let yourself dream it into reality. Be the person you want to be.

You are forgiven.

You are loved.

May you find peace on earth,
and goodwill to all.

Merry Christmas!