Sermon: “A Dream Come True” Matthew 1:18-25

There is a lot of dreaming that goes on this time of year. Children dream of “sugar plums” or more likely Apple iPads and Macbooks. Adults dream of fishing boats, new TVs and diamonds. I just picked a few that sounded better than new socks, gloves, or a new Dysan vacuum cleaner (hint: now is Not the time guys). Some of us are already dreaming of Spring, when winter has not even officially commenced.

Christmas is a dreamtime, from the Nutcracker Ballet to white Christmas’s. Some of us about now are just wanting some more sleep and perchance to dream. So we come to the 4th Advent gospel lesson of Matthew. Surprise, it’s a dream sequence.

Now how many times have you or I heard or read this story? Forty, fifty, eighty, hundreds? We all know the basics and could tell it to our children and grandchildren in without extensive Biblical research. And yet, I bet there are a lot of hidden nuggets of wisdom and spiritual insight in these seven very familiar verses.

For example, how many words are spoken by Joseph in this lesson? Mary? The angel of the Lord? None. It’s all Matthew, except for the quote from Isaiah 7:2, the same reading read by Joyce in the advent lighting. This is Matthew’s continuation of his defense of who Jesus is and why we need to pay attention to him. Nobody would normally pay attention to a baby born to unknown parents, especially under less than legitimate recognized circumstances. Matthew makes Joseph the key here. We know about Joseph in these 7 verses than we know almost in its gospel entirety elsewhere.

Who is Joseph related to? Verses 2-17 make it clear enough. Joseph is 41 generations descended from Abraham, the father of the Hebrew people. The famous “begets” of the King James version. Aren’t you glad I didn’t choose to read that part? You should read it though. Again, lots of hidden nuggets. Jesus will be the descendant of King David, and Ruth, and even Rahab, the prostitute. Amazing isn’t it? The Bible is an amazing set of stories. I wish I knew as much about my family history, and I know a lot, but I can only take it back about 400 years, or about 20 generations.

What do we learn about Joseph here? We learn that not only is he well-connected if currently poor, but he is “righteous.” Matthew indicates that Joseph was a good religious law-abiding Jew. He was betrothed to Mary. Now, then Jewish marriage had three steps, engagement, usually at childhood, engagement at adulthood, probably 12-14 for her, and proper marriage occurring usually one year after the betrothal. Now the first step you could undo easily enough. The second or betrothal was much harder to undo. Legally, the couple were already obligated to each other, and to end it was a type of divorce. To end it because she was pregnant was scandalous and punishable.

Joseph found out somehow, says Matthew, that Mary was with child. He knew he was not the biological father. He decides his course of action and that is the next indication we have of his character. He plans to quietly dismiss his fiancée out of public view, for her sake more than his. But he is stopped by a dream, a Christmas dream.

Now another nugget, who else named Joseph is recorded as having dreams with messages from God? The one with the Amazing Technicolor Dreamcoat? Another ancestor, who gives us Moses, and Jesus will be seen as the new Moses.
Joe is counseled to take Mary to be his wife by an angel of God. Because this child is special. This child is from the Holy Spirit. The Holy Spirit meant something different to Joseph and that Older tradition. The Holy Spirit was how God, Yahweh, brought truth to men and women. The Spirit taught the prophets what to say. If Jesus comes from the Holy Spirit, then Jesus will be bringing truth to us, God’s truth.

William Barclay, whom I am borrowing from here, observes Jesus will be the one who can tell us what God is like, or as John put it, “whoever has seen me has seen the Father (14:9).” And the Holy Spirit that brings us the truth of God, will open our eyes and enable us to recognize the truth when we see it. Open my eyes that I may see, glimpses of truth Thou hast for me. Oh, yeah.

Fred Craddock, another scholar and preacher I greatly admire, says, Matthew shows us how Jesus, the child of such strange and forbidden circumstances, a child of mystery, the Great Mystery if you will, is really the embodiment, the incarnation of twin mysteries of faith: one, God comes to us, in the form of a child, and second, we long for God to come, it is Advent, the time of waiting.

We wait for God, it is true, but not always patiently, as noted last week. We want to get out of the dark waiting room. We are tired of the bleak mid-winter of our souls. We may be tired of waiting for the promises of God.

The poet Robert Frost, would often be asked to read his poetry aloud to college audiences, in his heyday. On one occasion, after reading the familiar “promises to keep and miles to go before I sleep”, one student eagerly raised his hand and asked Frost, “You spoke of promises to keep. What are those promises?” Frost replied, “If I had wanted you to know, I would have told you.”

Well, God told us. He told the people then, a few like Matthew listened to the truth of the Spirit. Fortunately more did over the millennia since then. Unfortunately, not enough have heard this truth. So this is Christmas, a genesis, a beginning, a birth. We tell this story again, hoping more will hear it and listen to how God comes to us, is with us, in fact is part of us. God is with us. Fear not. A son is born. You are commanded by God to name him Jesus, from Joshua, for he will save his people from their sins. Thus says the Lord.

Alleluia! Amen.