

Joseph's Choice

Intro. Dreams are strange. There are good ones and bad ones. I have had my share of both. Most of the time, I don't remember my night-time dreams. When I do, usually they are crazy, making little sense. There are other kinds: daydreams or hope dreams. Some of them are just as fantastic and strange as the ones while we sleep. They are dreams we have for our lives and our family and our life's work. Joseph had his dreams too, but they changed one night.

I. Dream-messages and announcements were common in the Old Testament, experienced by Ishmael (Gen. 16:11-12); Isaac (Gen. 17:19); Solomon (1Chron. 22:9-10); and Elizabeth/Zecharia for the Baptist's birth. People accepted them as fact. But if we have never had one, it is a bit hard to

believe, isn't it? Joseph's dream might have been to have his own carpenter shop in his hometown and marry a woman he loved. That dream took a huge hit when Mary told him about the baby and the angel's visit. How difficult it must have been for her to tell him. How difficult it must have been for Joseph to hear. How could she explain! I imagine Joseph leaving that meeting with Mary in grief and confusion. His world was turned upside down. There is no mention of how long after that meeting with Mary, he had the dream with the angel. I hope the angel visited that night. Joseph was probably just as perplexed at the angel's news as was Mary. But it was good news. His heart must have swelled, and his joy blossomed. The angel's words breathed life back into his dreams. There would certainly be hard times ahead, but in that moment, he felt great

happiness. Joseph had choices. Scripture calls him a “righteous” man, meaning he followed the rules of his Jewish faith. He could follow the strict law by publicly shaming Mary and her family in the community and asking for the extreme punishment of death. Or he could decide to keep private his own pain and anguish, and Mary’s by quietly signing a decree ending their betrothal and walking away. What choices! This was his choice before the angel appeared to him. Before he acted on it, he received his own annunciation explaining God’s plan for him. Like Mary, it was a bit much to understand but also like her, he said yes. His short-term dream of marrying the woman he loved was restored. His long-term dream was altered but still included Mary in his life.

Concl. The two, with faith in God and love for each other, together accepted the challenge of fulfilling the promises made throughout their history. What a burden and what a joy. As followers of the Lord, one of our long-term dreams is heaven. We have shorter-term dreams like finding our vocation to single, married or religious life; discovering work we enjoy; and experiencing a faith that binds these dreams together. We know well the detours and derailments our dreams take. Sorting through the good dreams and the bad dreams is not easy. Being able to absorb and adjust to the changes is part of life. **Joseph and Mary took a chance, a leap of faith to follow God’s plan. With our faith in God, in family and friends to guide and support us as we dream, can we take the chance to follow God’s plan?** Fr. Michael Pendergraft, 12/18/22