

Homily. 4th Sunday In Advent. Year. A. 17/18 December 2022.

God is always seeking ways to communicate with us, but has to do so indirectly in order to respect our freedom and nature. To see and hear God directly would be too much for us now. If this were to happen it would take away our free will, destroying our humanity and personality. So, since the beginning, dreams are one way that God has used with some people in order to communicate with us. Many of the prophets such as Daniel, Isaiah and Ezekiel had dreams and visions in the night, receiving God's words then telling others God's message.

1500 hundred years and more before our Joseph of the house and line of David ever came onto the scene there was another Joseph that we know about. He was the youngest son of Jacob, one of twelve brothers who would go on to give their names to the tribes of Israel. This Joseph, son of Jacob, has a coat of many colours which made his brothers jealous. They set out with the intention of killing him, but ended up selling him off as a slave to nomads. These desert traders took him in their caravan to Egypt and sold him on to Pharaoh.

Now, at this time Pharaoh was plagued by dreams that he couldn't understand. Joseph was called on to make sense of them, for some had already heard of his gift. So well did he interpret Pharaoh's dreams that he rose in both stature and favour becoming Pharaoh's favourite and 2nd in charge of that country. The story of this Joseph has to be kept in mind if we're going to understand our Joseph of Nazareth.

This is because St. Matthew tells us that Almighty God, by dreams rightly understood and applied, spoke to Joseph, husband of Mary and father to

Jesus in this world. Listening deeply to his dreams with the wisdom and grace of the Spirit he chose to take Mary home as his wife even though her circumstances were perplexing to him and scandalous to his society. As with Mary, the focus in Luke's gospel, Joseph in Matthew's story was always listening for God. He was ever ready and waiting to hear what God had to say to him through the open door of his dreams.

Today's gospel ends with the Angel of the dream telling Joseph to name his son, Jesus, because he will be the one to save us from all of our sins. In the ancient Aramaic language of that time the name 'Jesus' literally means 'God saves'. He would grow up, becoming God's most direct and personal communication to us and with us because he was a person like us in every way, except for sin. He lived in this world of ours with all of its joys and sorrows, spoke an understandable human language and did human deeds that were seen, touched and felt. He was, as Isaiah said, Emmanuel, God with us as one of us for all time.

We've just days left before we celebrate the birth of the Son of God, of Mary, and by his faith and attentiveness of Joseph as well. One of our Parish Patrons is this dreaming Joseph who played such a vital role in allowing God's dream of our salvation to come true. By listening daily to God in whatever ways God chooses gives honour St. Joseph. He in turn then directs us to the voice of Jesus his son, the word made flesh, who comes to us bearing in his wings gifts of healing, grace and peace.