

A dream come true. Usually that phrase suggests something of a welcomed bonanza. But for Joseph, the dream brings a hard ask. The dream itself follows a hard discovery. His betrothed has been found to be pregnant: a disgrace to the prospective husband, and likely justification for stoning the woman. Except Joseph proves to be just, not vindictive. He decides on a quiet resolution. Then comes the dream. Its “do not be afraid” prefaces an even harder ask. *Take Mary as your wife.* All that follows – the child, the name, the prophecy – hinges on whether Joseph decides to act counter to conventional wisdom, and trust the dream. Joseph decides on trust.

I suspect that in the aftermath of his decision, Joseph the Just would likely have been deemed by his neighbors as Joseph the Fool. The old man who fell for a voice in his sleep, dishonoring self and family and community by standing by his betrothed, who some would have naturally assumed betrayed him. Joseph’s legacy, at that moment, might have been an epithet leveled even in our time: *Dreamer!*

We hear nothing more of Joseph in Matthew. In Luke, Joseph disappears after Jesus’ childhood. Perhaps the Nazareth gossips wagged tongues at Joseph, guffawing behind his back at his folly, until he died. A dreamer, and nothing more. But consider this. At the site where Martin Luther King Jr. was assassinated, there is a plaque on which is engraved these lines from Genesis that detail the planned killing of another Joseph by his brothers: “Behold, here cometh the dreamer. Come now, let us slay him, and we shall see what shall become of his dreams.” Dr. King’s dream still beckons us. And our Joseph? We still gather in the name and presence of the dream Joseph decided to follow with Mary: *Emmanuel*, God with us. Hail Joseph, follower of dreams!

For Reflection and Action:

*In Joseph and this story: What do you find most hopeful; most challenging; most lively?
How do the dynamics of Joseph's dream connect with our faith's dreams and "hard asks?"*