

Living the dream this Christmas and always: "God with us", our Lord Immanuel!  
(Matthew 1:23)  
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Have you had any dreams lately? Most often, if we do have a dream, we don't usually remember it. But in our Gospel reading from Matthew, we are told about a very important dream that Joseph who was betrothed with Mary had. It needed to be remembered, but most importantly lived out. Joseph was told to live the dream for it was a message from God Himself. An angel of the Lord appeared to Joseph, a messenger of the Lord spoke these words:

**"Joseph, son of David, do not be afraid to take to you Mary your wife, for that which is conceived in her is of the Holy Spirit.**

**21 "And she will bring forth a Son, and you shall call His name JESUS, for He will save His people from their sins."**

**22 So all this was done that it might be fulfilled which was spoken by the Lord through the prophet, saying:**

**23 "Behold, the virgin shall be with child, and bear a Son, and they shall call His name Immanuel," which is translated, "God with us."**

Joseph had been wrestling with a predicament. Mary was pregnant and he was not the father. The angel's message confirmed this. Her baby conceived in her is of the Holy Spirit.

The angel gave further information about what exactly was going on by telling Joseph that this prophecy, from Isaiah 7:14, that he had no doubt heard many times read in the synagogue, was about her! She is and remains the virgin, and the Son she is to have is Immanuel! And the angel even gives the translation of what Immanuel means. "God with us!!"

The baby whose name is Jesus, is God. That little baby growing in Mary's womb is God. And He has a very special purpose. He's come to save His people from their sins.

So....., Joseph, this is the dream you are to live out, you are to believe in this fulfillment of the prophecy of salvation, and take Mary as your wife. Don't be afraid! Immanuel is with you!!

What did Joseph do? Did he wake up and do what he was thinking of doing? Putting her away silently not to cause her shame? No, there was nothing scandalous about this pregnancy. He was not ashamed of Jesus but openly and proudly took Mary as his wife and Jesus as his son to raise. In faith, he obeyed God's command. What a wonderful couple we have in Mary and Joseph. With great faith, they both believed the Word of God and their role in God's plan of salvation. Are you just as ready and willing to live the role and purpose that God has given you through faith? How has God called

you to serve Him? How can you proclaim what you have seen and heard like the shepherds?

Yes, Mary was living the dream. God's word came to her from an angelic messenger, Gabriel. Mary's response to the angel Gabriel's announcement, that she was chosen as the mother of the Son of the Highest, was one of deepest faith.

**38 Then Mary said, "Behold the maidservant of the Lord! Let it be to me according to your word." And the angel departed from her.**

And when she arrived at Elizabeth's house she began to tell of her dream life in Christ, that we sing in what is called the Magnificat -the song of Mary.

**47 And my spirit has rejoiced in God my Savior.**

**48 For He has regarded the lowly state of His maidservant; For behold, henceforth all generations will call me blessed.**

**49 For He who is mighty has done great things for me, And holy is His name.**

My Savior. Her dream life began like ours begins with repentance ...admitting our need of a Savior. She was a sinner just like all of us as we heard from Isaiah 40 during Advent.

**"All flesh is grass, And all its loveliness is like the flower of the field.**

**7 The grass withers, the flower fades, Because the breath of the LORD blows upon it; Surely the people are grass.**

**8 The grass withers, the flower fades, But the word of our God stands forever."**

And yet Mary's dream does not end with a flower that fades because of sin. But, because her baby was her Savior, she would live eternally with Him. So the angel Gabriel said to her:

**33 "And He will reign over the house of Jacob forever, and of His kingdom there will be no end."**

That is the great and mighty thing God did for her and for all mankind.

Mary was living the dream...to do the will of God and serve Him, her Savior, was her greatest joy.

Are you living the dream? That is, are you living the greatest possible life there is to live on this earth? Sometimes when people are asked how they are doing, they respond, "I'm just living the dream". And they say it sarcastically, because what they thought was going to be a great job or future, turned out to include a lot of mundane, unpleasant tasks. But, now they're stuck just livin' their dream.

Again, are you living the dream? In the midst of the mundane, boring, daily routines, is the light that shone in Bethlehem shining in your heart, giving you joy and peace. Is your life a life in union with your Creator through His Son, Immanuel? Living with all the blessings that this dream, this reality, has for you...forgiveness, salvation and eternal life in a life of service to the ONE born of Mary, suffered under Pontius Pilate was crucified, died and was buried and on the 3rd day rose again from the dead? Who will come again in glory to judge both the living and the dead? And give you the life of the world to come?

If we're honest with ourselves, we often fall short of living the life that Jesus has for us. Sometimes our man-made dreams push Jesus to the side and focus on what we think is important in our life. Is Jesus an afterthought or the sole purpose for your living?

Sometimes we dream what the perfect life would be for us in this world. Getting a higher education, a good paying job, a family, a home, a retirement, a vacation, — the American dream.

There have been youth brought here from other countries, though not legally, wanting to also have the opportunity of the American dream. They are often referred to as dreamers.

The name comes from an acronym invented called the Dream Act. :: Development, Relief and Education for Alien Minors.

Every two years their deportation is deferred as the application is renewed until something permanent can be resolved. To date, it still remains unresolved.

Well, what God resolved on that first Christmas in Bethlehem was something permanent, the perfect dream life, and it was for all people. God the Father sent His only begotten Son into the world, taking on our flesh, to bring relief, the greatest relief, for all sinners who were aliens to the God who created them, and give to them permanent residency in the fatherland of all fatherlands, heaven above!

So, composed Martin Luther the Christmas hymn, "From Heaven Above to Earth, I Come"...

"to bear good news to every home, glad tidings of great joy I bring, whereof I now will say and sing."

Then follows 12 beautiful stanzas in our hymnal #358 of what those glad tidings include. Verse 4 speaks of our permanent home in heaven as His children.

"He will on you the gifts bestow prepared by God for all below, that in His kingdom bright and fair, you may with us, His glory share."

That's living the dream, the true dream, sharing God's glory in heaven eternally.

This Christmas message transcends place and time. Mary and Joseph had to go to Bethlehem to be registered under the rule of emperor Augustus for taxation purposes. The rules of the lands in which we live in temporally, have to be obeyed both then and now. But in the midst of complying with the rules of the land, God's prophecy of salvation breaks through and was fulfilled. He establishes a new kingdom and new Ruler without borders.

**2 "But you, Bethlehem Ephrathah, Though you are little among the thousands of Judah, Yet out of you shall come forth to Me The One to be Ruler in Israel, Whose goings forth are from of old, From everlasting." (Micah 5:2)**

The One to be Ruler, would establish His eternal Kingdom, where grace and love reign was the Infant Holy, Infant lowly, Lord of All. So the choir sang....

"Flocks were sleeping, shepherds keeping, vigil till the morning new, saw the glory, heard the story, tidings of the Gospel true." And that's not a pipe dream but reality!! The Gospel! Salvation for all of fallen mankind.

John the Baptist, the baby in Elizabeth's womb who leapt for joy when Mary came to visit carrying the Lord Jesus, lived the dream. He preached the Gospel as Jesus' forerunner.

**4 John came baptizing in the wilderness and preaching a baptism of repentance for the remission of sins.**

He lived the dream, even in prison, the dream that cost him his earthly life, but won for him his eternal life through his Savior the Lamb of God who takes away the sins of the world. Yes, living the dream, involves, persecution from the enemy, who wants to take your dream away. Don't ever let the devil steal the Gospel from you.

Joseph was forced to flee to Egypt after being warned in another dream that King Herod wanted to kill Jesus. Your dream life in Christ, often involves testing and trials. But the Gospel keeps you strong, and joyful.

The Gospel is given when humble sinners receive the washing of their sins in baptism, and eat the very body and blood of the Babe of Bethlehem in the Lord's supper for forgiveness of their sins. Yes, tomorrow morning, we will celebrate the Lord's supper on Christmas day!

That Gospel was first sung to the shepherds near Bethlehem... so we sang also..

**"Oh, little town of Bethlehem, how still we see thee lie! Above thy deep and dreamless sleep, the silent stars go by...**

It's amazing to think about the Savior of the universe coming into the world, and everyone is asleep, totally unaware of the momentous event happening right in their midst. Deep, dreamless sleep, oblivious to what was happening that evening.

**“Yet, in thy dark streets shineth the everlasting light”**

**The true light, which gives light to everyone, was coming into the world. He was in the world, and the world was made through him, yet the world did not know him. ...But as many as received Him, to them He gave the right to become children of God, to those who believe in His name: (John 1:9,10,12)**

Like the people of Bethlehem 2,000 years ago, we too can sleep through the miracle of Jesus' birth, death and resurrection, if we create “our hypothetical dream life” apart from God.

You've heard of sleep walking. Many in the world suffer from sleep running. People running around chasing the latest new thing, but in reality in deep slumber to what is most important - their spiritual awakening in Christ.

If we aren't careful, the frenetic pace of life in our quest to make our earthly dreams come true will pull our attention away from the Creator of life in that manger. In all the chaos and noise, we can miss the still, small voice in His eternal word that beckons us into a relationship with God Himself. There, in His word, the hopes and fears of all the years are met in Thee tonight.

So, we sang in the 3rd verse of “Oh, Little Town of Bethlehem” of the powerful word that creates faith.

**“How silently, how silently, the wondrous gift is given! So God imparts to human hearts the blessings of His heaven. No ear may hear His coming; but in this world of sin, where meek souls will receive Him, still the dear Christ enters in.”**

There, in the manger, our crushed hopes, man-made dreams and fears in this life, are replaced with the Good News in the the flesh, the Word made flesh, Jesus, who created the dream life that seems so good that it couldn't possible be reality - but it is.

Jesus is real, He really came, dwelt among us, lived the dream life, the perfect life that we couldn't live, in our place, as our substitute, and died for us so that our greatest fear - death, would lose it's sting and that our dream reality would continue with our Savior in heaven above, eternally!

This is your Christmas gift, now and always, living the dream, living the reality of a blessed relationship with your Triune God, Father, Son, and Holy Spirit. To which we reply, “Behold the maidservant, (manservant) of the Lord! Let it be to me according to your word.” All glory to God in the highest! Merry Christmas Amen!