

# Dreams of Peace

## Friar Bob Hutmacher, ofm

*Now this is how the birth of Jesus Christ came about. When his mother Mary was betrothed to Joseph, but before they lived together, she was found with child through the holy Spirit. Joseph her husband, since he was a righteous man, yet unwilling to expose her to shame, decided to divorce her quietly. Such was his intention when, behold, the angel of the*



*Lord\* appeared to him in a dream and said, "Joseph, son of David, do not be afraid to take Mary your wife into your home. For it is through the holy Spirit that this child has been conceived in her. She*

*will bear a son and you are to name him Jesus, because he will save his people from their sins." When Joseph awoke, he did as the angel of the Lord had commanded him and took his wife into his home. He had no relations with her until she bore a son, and he named him Jesus. (Matthew 1:18-21)*

November's article was about dreams and how they reveal some of the conscious world around us and our relationship with God. Matthew's account of one of St. Joseph's dreams does exactly that. The Incarnation of Christ came about because a lowly carpenter paid attention to his dreams and the anxiety of facing life with a pregnant fiancé. An exploration of the Infancy Narratives in Matthew and Luke's Gospels reveal the significance of dreams. Whatever happened inside Joseph that night was a guide to his future, along with that of Mary and their Son. The Holy Spirit guided Joseph and he was very attentive to finding himself trapped between the laws of Judaism, an obvious concern for Mary's welfare and God's guidance.

At this time of year I often suggest to people in the Sacrament of Penance to read the Infancy Narrative of either Matthew or Luke as a penance, a response to God for that great gift

of forgiveness. My reason? Both of them take the reader through the lives of people just like ourselves who have encounters with God. Remember Zechariah and Elizabeth, parents of John the Baptist? An **angel** appeared to Zechariah in the temple and one of the first things the angel said about Elizabeth conceiving was: "**Do not be afraid.**" You saw in the passage of Matthew 1 the same words: "**Joseph, do not be afraid...**" When the **angel** Gabriel appeared to Mary she was "greatly troubled at what was said" and Gabriel said to Mary: "**Do not be afraid, Mary,** for you have found favor with God. Behold, you will conceive in your womb and bear a son, and you shall name him Jesus..." In Luke 2:10 **angels** appear to simple shepherds out in the fields and to these terrified people proclaim: "**Do not be**



**afraid;** for behold, I proclaim to you good news of great joy that will be for all the people. For today in the city of David a savior has been born for you who is Messiah and Lord. And this will be a sign for you: you will find an infant wrapped in swaddling clothes and lying in a manger."

In Matthew 2 we find the Magi's encounter with the jealous King Herod. "Having been warned **in a dream** not to return to Herod, they departed for their country by another way." Right after that we read: "When they had departed, behold, the **angel** of the Lord appeared to Joseph **in a dream** and said, "Rise, take the child and his mother, flee to Egypt, and stay there until I tell you. Herod is going to search for the child to destroy him."

Our ancestors in faith teach us centuries later via the evangelists. In great biblical fashion God's will for an individual is so often revealed in a person's dreams. Genesis, Deuteronomy, Daniel and more of the Hebrew Scriptures all hold stories about those who dream. How many times do psalms proclaim

that there is no reason to be afraid of life? “Do not fear. I am with you. Do not be anxious: I am your God, I will strengthen you, I will help you and I will uphold you with my right hand.” (Is.41:10) Those are words from God, words of comfort for anyone who’s facing the difficulties of everyday life.

A 17<sup>th</sup> century French carol, *The Band of Children*, tells us: “the stars shall light your journey; your mother holds you close and warm: the donkey’s pace shall rock you. Sleep, baby, dream no harm.” That’s a wonderful image of the Christ Child: a newborn encouraged to sleep so soundly that he dreams only of goodness.

The aftermath of the 2016 election has left wounded hearts all over our country. Those who succeeded on Nov. 8 and those who did not must continue to work together for the basic human rights that our founding ancestors passed on to us, always guided by the common good, a basic principle of Catholic social teaching and certainly of Pope Francis. Archbishop Wilton Gregory of Atlanta just issued his statement about the election. He writes: *While there are still a great many issues that continue to divide us, we must rely on our love for our country, our freedom and our national wellbeing that holds us together.*

*Christians must work boldly and tirelessly to restore the Gospel message of peace, reconciliation, mercy and civility to our wounded public discourse. I will not politicize here but our Pope has stated that Catholics must be involved in public discourse, must voice our own teaching within the framework of a particular secular government. This holds true for the new cardinals elevated on Nov. 21. Pope Francis said that we must be open to polarization and exclusion in the Church. He is not solely addressing culture but speaking globally about oppression, borders closed to immigrants and failed humanitarian efforts due to lack of care and myopic views of the world’s needs. Archbishop Gregory certainly reiterates the pope’s call to peace and reconciliation and challenges U.S. Catholics to be **bold** in how we live the Gospel of peace.*

Ruminating even more about dreams I have to tell you that I do long for the day when

the green monster of racism no longer exists. I dream of our Mother, Sister Earth (Francis’ own expression) being so respected and restored that she glistens with new life. I dream of little kids in Chicago and everywhere who can be carefree and play in their front yards without fear of being caught in gang crossfire. I dream about water that is so calm, warm and tranquil that all those who step in it are immediately purged of hatred aimed at any single person or group. I dream of universal peace that comes from a foolish and complete trust in our God of Forgiveness. Dreams are not just nocturnal, you know; they happen in our hearts while awake too.

In an address to the 2013 Conclave that elected him (before ballots were cast) Pope Francis said: “The Church is called to come out of herself and to go to the peripheries, not only geographically, but also the existential peripheries:



the mystery of sin, of pain, of injustice, of ignorance and indifference to religion, of intellectual currents, and of all misery.” His sense of the Church’s mission is universal so we cannot take his words as being aimed solely at the United States. The Church means **all the baptized!** We all carry the mission to search out and care for those who are left behind. We may not be called to serve in Aleppo or South Sudan but peace begins within our hearts and spreads to all God’s children we encounter.

Images of the Christ Child are often romantic but a sweeping glance at Christmas carols shows us they often reveal the fullness of the entirety of the Christ event: the Death, Resurrection and Glorification of Jesus. An ancient Spanish carol sings: *See the tears in his eyes, now; Sleep my pretty one, sleep! Let him dream when he can, now; Sleep my innocent, sleep! Ah, my precious jewel, Great the grief and pain, Suffered through the wide world for the sins of all.* We move from a feed trough outside Bethlehem to the cosmic scope of universal salvation in Christ. And that salvation is none other than God’s unlimited forgiveness through Christ, a moment in

history when the divine/human interchange became flesh in Jesus Christ and that peace “beyond all understanding” becomes ours to have, to live and to give. As Gianmaria Polidoro, ofm, of Assisi writes in *The Greeting of Peace Revealed to St. Francis*: “The theme of peace constitutes a central part of life because it has to do with the way that every single creature deals with the whole of creation and with the Creator himself. Placing this argument in a secondary position will diminish the capacity to understand life.”

Francis went to battle as a knight, he was a POW nearly a year and he certainly knew class divisions. He also knew well the peace and forgiveness that flows from the ocean of God’s love. Why do you think he reenacted Bethlehem in a cave above Greccio in 1223? As St. Bonaventure describes in his biography of Francis: *The man of God stood before the manger, full of devotion and piety,*



*bathed in tears and radiant with joy; the Holy Gospel was chanted by Francis. Then he preached to the people about the nativity of the poor King; and being unable to utter His name for the tenderness of His love, he called Him the Babe of Bethlehem.* Francis so emulated the poverty of Jesus that he wanted everyone to remember that our Prince of Peace was born into nothingness. Yet this humble Christ brought reconciliation to our broken world that Francis knew God intended to heal with the help of those who believe in Christ. And those who are reconciled with God and other people come to know true peace.

I’ve been working for a few months on a new theatre piece about St. Francis and his mission of peace. Two musicians and an actor who live outside Assisi and I discussed this in

June and hope to bring it to life within a year. (I ask your prayer support for inspiration too.) The four of us feel compelled to use our talents as a contemporary voice for our wounded world. Our founder was led by a dream to bring new life to the Church in startling new ways. Peace was and is at the heart of the Franciscan mission because that’s the heart of the Gospel.

Our Franciscan/Scriptural heritage shows how integral dreams are and, I contend, essential in our lives with God. Murray Bodo, ofm, wrote in his classic work *The Journey and the Dream* about Francis’ great love for the Eucharist: “The Bread of Life had sustained him on his journey and the presence of Jesus had kept the Dream alive. Without this faithful being-there of Jesus, he could never have survived.” Just like you and I. The presence of this Babe of Bethlehem in the Eucharist, in the words of Scripture and in each one of us can bring us peace, knowing we have nothing to be afraid of because God is always, lovingly with us. As sure as God comforted Elizabeth, Zechariah, Joseph, Mary and Francis may God give you everything that is good and may God’s Son, our Prince of Peace, dwell in your heart and home always.



## Christmas at St. Peter’s

Christmas Eve, Saturday, Dec. 24

Vigil Mass 5:00 pm

Midnight Mass 12:00 midnight  
(Carols before)

Christmas Day, Sunday, Dec. 25

Masses at 9:00 and 11:00 am

No Mass at 12:30 or 6:00 pm

Find hundreds of Christmas gift items in **St. Peter’s Book & Gift Shop** in the lower level of church. I also recommend my recordings like *The Nature Suite*, *Mystic Vista*, *Dialogue of Francis and Clare* or *Prayer for Peace*, available at iTunes, Amazon.com, CD Baby, Spotify and our bookstore. Past Legion articles are on St. Peter’s website: [stpetersloop.org](http://stpetersloop.org) **From all the friars and staff of St. Peter’s in the Loop: Merry Christmas!**

~ Fr. Bob Hutmacher, ofm