



# **Sermon Series Devotional**

December 3 - January 6

Hinckley First United Methodist Church

# Introduction

The Bible is full of people who received and responded to God's dreams for the world. During this season we step into the mystery and awe of God's dreams and pray they shape our reality. This time of year is for all those who dream of a deeper connection with God and for a better world becoming reality.

## Why a Devotional?

A vibrant and authentic faith is not grown merely in one hour on Sunday morning. This devotional will give you the opportunity to engage with God's word on a regular basis as you seek to become more like Christ each day. There is a daily Bible reading plan, as well as reflection questions that are linked with each week of the sermon series. You can use this devotional individually or in a formal or informal small group.

# Daily Bible Reading Plan

December 3 - Worship	December 20 - Luke 1:26-38
December 4 - Genesis 15:1-21	December 21 - Matthew 1:18-25
December 5 - Genesis 28:10-22	December 22 - John 1:1-18
December 6 - Genesis 37:1-11	December 23 - Luke 2:1-7
December 7 - Isaiah 2:1-5	December 24 - Worship
December 8 - Isaiah 9:1-7	December 25 - Luke 2:8-20
December 9 - Jeremiah 33:14-22	December 26 - Luke 2:25-38
December 10 - Worship	December 27 - Matthew 2:1-12
December 11 - Isaiah 11:1-10	December 28 - Matthew 2:13-23
December 12 - Micah 5:2-9	December 29 - Luke 4:16-22
December 13 - Isaiah 40:1-11	December 30 - Matthew 27:15-26
December 14 - Zephaniah 3:14-18	December 31 - Worship
December 15 - Isaiah 61:1-11	January 1 - Acts 2:1-21
December 16 - Psalm 126	January 2 - Acts 9:1-19
December 17 - Worship	January 3 - Acts 10:1-15
December 18 - Matthew 1:1-17	January 4 - Revelation 1:7-19
December 19 - Luke 1:1-25	January 5 - Revelation 4:1-11
	January 6 - Revelation 22:1-21

- Begin your time with prayer. Ask God to speak to you, for Jesus to be revealed to you, and for the Holy Spirit to fill you as you read these words of Scripture.

- Slowly, thoughtfully, read God's Word. Pay particular attention to words or phrases that stand out to you. Write them down or take time to memorize them.

- Consider how this Scripture connects with your life today. What may God be inviting you to do, challenging you to learn, or calling you to change?

# Week 1

## Dare to Dream

"It seemed like a dream, too good to be true, when God returned Zion's exiles. We laughed, we sang, we couldn't believe our good fortune. We were the talk of the nations--'God was wonderful to them!' God was wonderful to us; we are one happy people. And now, God, do it again - bring rains to our drought-stricken lives so those who planted their crop in despair will shout 'Yes!' at the harvest, so those who went off with heavy hearts will come home laughing, with armloads of blessings."

- Psalm 126 from *The Message*

- There are a lot of kinds of dreams. Day dreams that are escapes from the present or reality. Pipe dreams that are far-fetched fantasies that are likely to never come true. But there are also what I would call "God Dreams" and these are what allow us to envision God's preferred future and give us hope. The Psalm above is one example of a "God Dream" what are some others that you can think of from the Bible?

- One of the most persistent 'dreams' in the Old Testament is of a Messiah who would come to save and lead the people. What were some of the central hopes of the Messianic dream?

- What hinders you from putting your hope in "God Dreams"? Do they seem too good to be true? Do they seem too long in coming?

- What helps you to keep the faith in "God Dreams"? Why do you dare to dream?

# Week 2

## The Dream Foretold

"I have no idea to this day what them two Italian ladies were singin' about. Truth is, I don't want to know. Some things are best left unsaid. I like to think they were singin' about something so beautiful it can't be expressed in words, and makes your heart ache because of it. I tell you, those voices soared. Higher and farther than anybody in a gray place dares to dream. It was like some beautiful bird flapped into our drab little cage and made these walls dissolve away... and for the briefest of moments every last man in Shawshank felt free."

- Red in *The Shawshank Redemption*

- There are many people throughout the Bible who hear from God in dreams and visions. Can you think of some? What did God show/tell/reveal to them in their dreams?

- What do you dream or hope for most in your life? What do you dream or hope for most in the world? What would have to happen to make those dreams become a reality?

- God's dream is for a world of healed wounds, a world of restored harmony, a world of justice, a world made whole. What needs to happen for God's dream to become a reality?

- How do your dreams compare with God's dream? How can you align your dreams with God's dreams?

# Week 3

## The Dream Fulfilled

"God has a dream, a vision, plan, a sublime purpose for this world. God has a dream for his creation, a dream for every man, woman, and child whoever walked upon the face of the earth, and God will not rest until our nightmare is ended and God's dream is realized. That's what Jesus is all about. That's what he came to show us. He came to show us the way to live God's dream instead of our nightmare."

- Bishop Michael Curry

- In Matthew 1-2, the primary way God speaks to Joseph is through his dreams. It happens four times. Skim through those two chapters of Matthew and see if you can find them all.

- Has God ever used a dream to get your attention or communicate anything to you?

- Put yourself in the shoes of Joseph. What would have been going through your mind when you had the first dream telling you why Mary was pregnant? How would you have reacted?

- If there is one characteristic to describe how Joseph responded to all of the dreams he received it may be trust. Is there anything that prevents you from trusting God? What helps you to put your trust in God?

# Week 4

## The Dream Made Real

"Jesus came to show us the way to be truly and authentically and genuinely human as God intended and created us. He came to show us how to become more than simply an individual collection of self-interests. He came to show us how to become the human family of God. And when the world is lived like that, when our lives are lived like that, when children don't go to bed hungry. When the world is lived more in accord with God's dream, God's vision for life, then we will find ways to lay down our swords and shields by the riverside to study war no more. Oh, God has a dream. And God will not rest until God's dream is accomplished, and miraculously God will not do it without us."

- Bishop Michael Curry

- Read the Christmas story - Luke 2:1-20. Does anything stand out to you as you read it this year? Something you hadn't noticed before? Or a new perspective on something? What part of the story did you need to hear this year?

While the angels didn't appear to them in a dream, those shepherds must have thought they were dreaming! Imagine what it must have been like for the shepherds on that first Christmas night. What do you imagine they were thinking or feeling?

- What dreams or hopes do you think Mary and Joseph had for Jesus as they held him in their arms for the first time?

# Week 5

## Dreaming Still...

"What [John] is offering [in Revelation] is part of his continuing vision; and it's a vision not of nice dreams in his head, but of the heavenly reality which is the absolute, utter truth against which the nightmare must be measured. This, he says, is the ultimate reality of the situation and you must hold on to it for dear life as you plunge back into the nightmare. The reality is that the creator God and the lamb have already won the victory, the victory which means that those who follow the lamb are rescued from harm."

- N.T. Wright in *Advent for Everyone*

- At Christmas we celebrate the birth of Jesus who came to make God's dream a reality - for a world of healed wounds, a world of restored harmony, a world of justice, a world made whole.

- In what ways did the birth of Jesus fulfill those dreams?

- In what ways are we still waiting for those dreams to be fulfilled?

- How can you join with God in making these dreams a reality? How can you heal wounds, or restore harmony, or deliver justice, or help to make someone whole?