

Those Who Dream

Luke 2:8-20

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Damion was ten or eleven the Christmas he wrote to Santa. He and his family had been going through a rough time and he was feeling pretty disillusioned. His mom, a newly single mother, was doing her best to make a life for their family, but they were struggling to even have enough to eat, let alone Christmas presents. They didn't have a television and slept on a mattress on the floor.

So, Damion wrote to Santa and asked for either a radio so they had some sound in their home from the outside world or an alarm clock so his mom wouldn't have to get him up in the mornings. He could get himself up and off to school and not have to burden her.

Well, Christmas came and, perhaps to his surprise, Damion had a gift from Santa. What was inside was not a clock or a radio - it was clock radio - everything he wanted rolled up into one. That single gift changed Damion's life. He had something to believe in, hope that someone outside his family loved and cared about him. Today, Damion runs a non-profit whose mission is to recreate that feeling of hope Damion experienced for kids in impoverished neighborhoods like East Harlem.

I learned about Damion's story from the new documentary entitled "Dear Santa". If you like adorable children and stories of humanity at our best, if you are looking for something to watch this Christmas season that will both touch and inspire you, I definitely recommend it. The film tells the story of the United State Postal Service program called "Operation Santa". For 107 years, the postal service has collected children's letters to Santa and then done everything possible to make their dreams come true.

And isn't that what Christmas is all about? Our Advent theme this year has been "Those Who Dream" because, as I said at the beginning, the Christmas story is full of dreamers. Mary, Elizabeth, Joseph, Simeon, Anna, the shepherds and the Magi—they were all dreamers. Their dreams, though, were not about clocks or radios, a new bike or a puppy. Their dreams were of a Messiah, a savior who would come and change the world, lift up the poor, heal the broken, and create a just world in which all of God's children were safe, healthy, and whole. That was the collective dream of their people, carried from one generation to the next, proclaimed by the prophets, longed for and prayed for as they lived under the rule of one foreign empire after another.

What they didn't dream of was a baby - well, at least not until the Angel Gabriel came to Mary and told her that she would have a baby who would be God's Son and would rule over the people like his ancestor, David. More likely, they expected a military leader, not a newborn, birthed in a stable and laid in a manger with the smell of cow dung and straw hanging in the air as he drew his first breaths. Not a tiny, helpless baby born to a working class family in a little village outside Jerusalem.

Yet, that's the thing about dreams. Like Damion who didn't even know such a thing as a clock radio existed, we don't always know what will fulfill them. Yet, that's where God's dream comes into the Christmas story. God's dream that this little baby whose birth we celebrate this night, born not to a prince or emperor but to an ordinary, poor, faithful family, this child would live among us and teach us how to love. Teach us to see the image of God - the beauty and creativity and potential and goodness of God - in each other and in every other person in God's world.

That is what incarnation is. Christmas is the celebration of God living and breathing, teaching and loving in the form of a human being - a tiny child who grew to be a man whose very life was God's love for us expressed in human words and actions that we could understand - and we could learn from. God's dream that if we could see the image of God in him, we could see it in each other.

Because that, ultimately, is what will bring peace on earth as announced to the shepherds by the angel choir. God's dream is that we live peacefully together, caring for each other - nation to nation, African American and Caucasian, straight, gay, lesbian, bi, cisgender and trans, every child with enough to eat and clean water to drink, every family with shelter and income. God's dream is for all of humanity to thrive and that peace prevail among us.

Our task living here in the 21st century is to claim and embody that dream. The wonderful theologian Frederick Buechner once said, "What keeps the wild hope of Christmas alive in a world notorious for dashing all hopes is the dream that the child who was born that day may be born again in us." Decades later, Nadia Bolz-Weber explained the meaning of Christmas in similar terms. "Christmas itself isn't about getting what you want, or making sure you're giving others what they want. To experience Christmas is to trust that God can do this thing again. God can again be born in me, in you, in this broken mess of a gorgeous world."

That is why Damion's story touches so many of us. I don't know if Damion is Christian. I don't know if he is even religious. But, in his work to fulfill the Christmas dreams of kids in East Harlem, he has found his way of being God incarnate in the world. God has been born in him. So, how will God be born in you this New Year? How will you embody God's dream?

As people who follow the baby of Bethlehem, we are the inheritors of this dream of God's. We have this vision of God's kingdom woven into our own hopes for humanity, for the world. Like Mary, Elizabeth, Joseph, Simeon, Anna, the shepherds and the Magi before us, now we are those who dream.

May it be so. Amen.