

## Dreams and Visions

Christmas is approaching once more. How the years roll round! Advent, Christmas and, if you are reading this in January, will have come and gone and the New Year with all that it promises will be facing us full on. The words of the song 'I'm Dreaming of a White Christmas' must have come into your minds and probably on your television screens over the last few weeks. The thought used to fill me with excitement but as I get older I'm not sure excitement is just the correct word. Cold, dark nights, venturing out on ice-covered surfaces and possible intrepid encounters with vehicles stuck in the snow come more to the fore. But hey-ho, long may the next generations enjoy building snowmen, sledging and snowball fights!

Was excitement the emotion that Mary and Joseph felt two thousand years ago? Did they look forward to what was to happen in their lives? Of course they did at first, a wedding then or now is a wonderful event. Two ordinary people planning to marry and spend the rest of their lives together is surely worth celebrating. Then what happened? Joseph received a message from God, Mary received a message from God, to say nothing of Elizabeth and Zachariah and their whole world was turned upside down. What a message!! Mary would bring shame on all her family with the penalty for becoming pregnant outside marriage being stoned to death. Joseph felt that the girl he trusted had been unfaithful and decided to break off the engagement until he was told otherwise. According to my research Joseph, together with Daniel who we discussed last month, received more dreams from God than any other people in the Bible. Firstly God told Joseph that everything would be Ok and to go ahead and marry Mary. Following the birth he received three separate dreams on how to keep his family safe. The first told him to flee to Egypt (Matthew Ch 2 v 13). The second to return (Matthew Ch 2 v 19-20) but the third guided the family to Nazareth in Galilee (Matthew Ch 2 v 22). Joseph was obviously a very special man and often gets overlooked by the gentle, meek and mild figure of Mary. Mary appears to accept her message from God without hesitation and the words of 'The Magnificat' (Luke Ch 1 v 46-55) are so joyous and uplifting. Both were special people but maybe not in the way we think of 'special' today. They were ordinary people like you and I, not great intellectual thinkers or prominent figures in their society. If we had been in Mary and Joseph's position would we have reacted in the same way?

I think the main lesson that we can learn from this whole story is to 'listen' and to 'obey'. Both bring their own challenges. How hard it is to stop and listen to God in our busy lives. How many times do you hear people say 'there just aren't enough hours in the day'? Even harder is it to obey what we feel God wants us to do? To go God's way and not our own - to follow in Jesus' footsteps and not the way we would necessarily choose. Our lives are often turned upside down. Time and time again things happen that make us wonder what life is all about. The pandemic has surely tested us in that direction! Sometimes they are events of our own making and sometimes due to things going on around us. In any event do we really stop and think about the correct path to take and, like Mary and Joseph, obey without question?

Perhaps to be more like that special couple could be our New Year's Resolution!

For Discussion

1. Who would you count as 'special people' in today's society?
2. Have you encountered special people who have helped you to choose the right path in your life?