

Isaiah 9: 1 – 4; 1 Corinthians 1: 10 – 18; Matthew 4: 12 – 23

**'The Start of the Ministry of Jesus: God's dream'**

**God's Dream ...**

The Bible readings around Christmas are full of visions and dreams. Now, in today's Gospel passage, it's time to think about God's dream. I say this because the birth of Jesus discloses the dream of God.

A Commentator, Dan Clendenin writes that: **Jesus unveils and reveals the heart of God for all the world, and, indeed, for the entire cosmos. Paul calls it a mystery that has been made known. We invoke this divine dream every time that we pray that God's will be done "on earth as it is in heaven," This dream of God is for the here and now, not the far off future.**

In Matthew's gospel, the birth of Jesus revolves around five dreams that culminate when Jesus proclaims God's dream for us all – the kingdom of God is at hand! Don't wait, he says. Repent, believe, and live this dream today!

What does this dream look like in reality, when we awake from our slumber and darkness, and live in the light of God? There's a little phrase from an early church letter (*Letter to Diognetus (c .130 AD)*) that captures what living God's dream looks like. He calls it "*the wonderful and confessedly striking method of life*" of the early believers.

They were known for their social generosity. Care for the weak instead of privileges for the powerful. Dignity instead of vulgarity. Love instead of hate. Peace instead of violence. Inclusion rather than exclusion. Generosity rather than greed. Doing justice and loving kindness.

About the same time as Diognetus, **Justin Martyr** (c. 100 – 165) summarised the appeal of the Christian dream: "Those who once delighted in fornication now embrace chastity alone ... we who once took most pleasure in accumulating wealth and property now share with everyone in need; we who hated and killed one another and would not associate with people of different tribes because of their different customs now, since the coming of Christ, live familiarly with them and pray for our enemies."

**What is repentance ...**

If you asked for a definition of 'repentance', it's likely that many would include in their answer something about 'saying sorry'. And many a 'prayer of repentance' in our worship will reinforce that definition. But today's Gospel reading suggests a broader definition. Jesus proclaims, 'Repent for the kingdom or heaven (or God) is near.' If repentance is just saying sorry, what has that got to do with the kingdom being close by?

When Jesus called the fishermen to follow, he didn't ask them to say sorry first; but he did call them to a life of repentance. And what happened? They 'immediately' left their boats and followed Jesus. And that suggests repentance is about realignment rather than simply saying sorry. To be a part of the kingdom adventure they needed to realign themselves, their lives, towards Jesus. Realignment to God's dream.

And the same is just as true now as it was then. To see the kingdom of God we need to turn, to re-orientate ourselves, our lives. And this isn't a one-off. We need to do it daily. We need to ask ourselves 'What's stopping me from seeing God's kingdom today?' and to realign ourselves accordingly. That might, or course, involve saying sorry – but it's not the be all and end all of it. So, repent and let the adventure begin!

We're on a journey and who knows where it might take us. If the example of the disciples is anything to go by, it **PTO**

might be a bumpy ride and we're in for a few surprises along the way.

This prospect might lead some of us to balk. Maybe we could feel that we're too old for adventure now; maybe we prefer the comfort and security of where and who we are.

Perhaps in this case, we could think of it more along the lines of one of the 'transformation' programmes on TV at the moment – e.g. Garden Rescue, The Repair Shop, or the 'transformation challenge' part of The Great British Sewing Bee. All of these programmes start with a product that is okay (more or less!) in itself, but needs to undergo some sort of change to make it better or more user-friendly. The same is true of repentance. It's not just say a 'sorry prayer'; it is a call to keep the core of ourselves, but to re-orientate it towards Jesus, and to allow him to make us better and more like him.

Whatever our age or stage of faith, Jesus calls us to repent and follow him. A realignment. To repent is not to feel bad, but to think differently. To repent doesn't mean to grovel in self-hatred or pious sorrow. When we repent we turn around, change directions, choose a different path, or sometimes ... make a radical rupture. Repentance signals an abrupt end of life on auto-pilot or to business as usual. And it joins us to God's purposes for his world and our lives. Could there be anything better?

Daring to dream God's dream begins with this change of direction or re-alignment.

Where there is no vision, no dreams, says **Proverbs 29: 18**, the people perish. In his famous poem "**Dreams**" by **Langston Hughes (1902 – 1967)**, the African-American poet, novelist, playwright, and newspaper columnist, he urged us not to forfeit our dreams:

*Hold fast to dreams*

*For if dreams die*

*Life is a broken-winged bird*

*That cannot fly.*

*Hold fast to dreams*

*For when dreams go*

*Life is a barren field*

*Frozen with snow.*

So, may we live the dream of God. Unveil the meaning of Jesus. Hear what the Spirit is saying to God's people. Disclose that "wonderful and confessedly striking method of life" that Jesus called us to when he said that the reign and the rule of God has begun. May it be on earth, right here and right now, as it is in heaven. **Amen.**

Adapted from [Journey with Jesus – Current Essay & Explore and respond \(rootsontheweb.com\)](#)