

### **3<sup>rd</sup> January 2021 - Matthew 2:13-18; Romans 12:1-8**

**Aim:** *The need to offer our whole lives to God as our worship, and that we are who we are only through being members of the body of Christ and using the gifts that he has given to us.*

Let us pray:

Father, as we start a New Year, with many challenges ahead, may the words of our mouths & the thoughts of all our hearts be now and always acceptable in your sight O Lord our strength and our redeemer. Amen

What do you make of your dreams? According to Scripture it was not unusual for God to speak to people through dreams. We read about it happening many times in the Bible; most famously Joseph interpreting the dreams of Pharaoh. As we go through these challenging times of managing the Covid epidemic, I feel that most of us would be hesitant about the way in which we interpret our dreams. Yet in this passage today, God so clearly used a dream.



That is how the Angel of God appeared to Joseph. He knew he was not the natural father of Mary's baby and now he was asked to take them to Egypt. Over the generations before Jesus, many people had fled from Israel to Egypt because of persecutions and difficulties. And when they reached Egypt they found colonies of Jews in the major cities. For instance one commentator has suggested that there were over one million Jews in Alexandria. So Joseph and Mary would have found themselves among friends and possibly relatives.



We might think that the birth of a baby is a harmless event. How could anyone be afraid of a baby? What kind of a threat does a baby pose to others? At this Christmas time is there anyway you might think of Jesus as a threat? Herod was notorious for the way in which he murdered those who stood in his way. He even murdered members of his own family. He had heard from the wise men that a King had been born. As far as he was concerned he was the only King in that province and he was not going to have his position and authority undermined by anyone, not even by a baby. His vengeance was frightening, having been out-witted by the Wise Men he had all the baby boys in the Bethlehem district under 2 years old murdered. Our hearts go out to those mothers, who must have been absolutely distraught. Sadly we still see that kind of thing happening today, when dictators are acting in terrible ways.



Turning now to look at what Paul wrote to the Roman Church, its clear that he was aware of the tensions they were experiencing. Christians in Rome came from different cultures, some being Jews, others Gentiles, Greeks, or Romans, and some had been involved in pagan worship. They had different ways of living their lives.

He begins by appealing to them to give priority to their relationship with God. Why? "On account of God's mercy". If they are thankful for all God's mercies then out of gratitude to him their response should be one of commitment. The motive for our own Christian obedience and worship of God should come from our gratitude for God's goodness to us through Jesus Christ; who cares and loves us - we who deserve nothing.



At this time is not possible to worship in the way we have been used to. Is worship just for us to enjoy being together in a special place where we receive comfort, mysterious thoughts and are inspired by singing and prayers? Or is it more profound, involving the whole of our being? A time when, by praise adoration and thanksgiving, we give God the glory for what he has done for us in Christ Jesus. It is important that we think about the way we are the Body of Christ at the present time.



I feel many Christians have difficulty in making a sober assessment of their abilities. They either think that they are not good at anything, not wishing to be thought proud or arrogant, or they have too much confidence in their own abilities. How do we have a right judgement?

One way is not to compare ourselves with those around us. When we come to faith we are given a variety of gifts to contribute to the well being and work of the Body of Christ, even in this period of not being able to share with one another in the way that we have been used to.

The marvelous fact that **Christ lives in us** has everything to do with how we should live our Christian life.



During this Covid epidemic God still has a purpose for each of us in the Body of Christ. We are who we are because of the Body to which we belong. We each have a function within that body and we all belong to each other (v5b). These words stop me in my tracks. I belong to you and you belong to me. For God's will to be done, we need each one of us to exercise our gifts fully. How do we react to this? Do we like it, or do we say we don't need anyone else? Let us encourage one another to use their gifts.

And so to sum up, Matthew tells us that Joseph obeyed the Angel, and so saved the life of his wife and her baby. Do we look for ways in which God might speak to us? More importantly do we respond? Or do we sit thinking that we may have got it wrong or that we can do nothing in the current situation? Our faith in God through Jesus Christ needs to develop and grow. If we just sit back and do nothing then this won't happen. We need to have some input. Joseph had already obeyed an Angel when he married Mary, even though he had wanted to cancel the marriage privately, thus not making a public example of her. But he obeyed the Angel, as he had done before. I wonder if it was any easier the second time, because he knew that events had worked out OK on the previous occasion? Joseph didn't waste any time. He got his family up and fled at night.



It is when we take a few hesitant steps believing God is telling us what to do, it is then that God can use us for his purposes. Imagine what would have happened if Joseph had disregarded the dream. I know that you are probably thinking, Jean don't be so silly, God chose Joseph for a particular job. I know. But we are taking part this morning because we want to follow Jesus. And we want to follow Jesus because God has chosen us. As it says in Romans 12 v4 "Just as each of us has one body with many members, and these members do not all have the same function, so in Christ we who are many form one body and each member belongs to all the others."

Let us keep listening to God, being on the look out for him speaking to us, so we each play our part in the Body of Christ and enable God to use us to reach out with his love to those amongst whom we live in Chilton & Harwell and in the wider Christian community.



### **Give Your Lives to God Romans 12:1-2 ERV**

**12** So I beg you, brothers and sisters, because of the great mercy God has shown us, offer your lives<sup>[a]</sup> as a living sacrifice to him—an offering that is only for God and pleasing to him. Considering what he has done, it is only right that you should worship him in this way.<sup>2</sup> Don't change yourselves to be like the people of this world, but let God change you inside with a new way of thinking. Then you will be able to understand and accept what God wants for you. You will be able to know what is good and pleasing to him and what is perfect.