



Advent Dreams

Session One

1. **Hamilton's Joseph** - Joseph's initial choice of a *quiet divorce* may have intended that he, not Mary, carry "...*the stigma and shame*" (p. 52) of their situation. What does this suggest about his character? For Matthew's narrative, how is this foreshadowing of Jesus' own nature and teachings?
2. **The Hebrew Connection** - Some dreams clarify our personal priorities and challenge us to strengthen our character. Review I Kings 3:5-15. What does this scene suggest about Solomon's character? How does this dream help him to discern the difference *between good and evil* (3:9), and challenge him to be a better person?
3. **Go Deeper** - The Greek name Jesus echoes the Hebrew Joshua, which means "to save" (or "the Lord is salvation"). What does it mean to say that Jesus saves his people from their sins (Matthew 1:21b)? Cf. Luke 1:77 and Titus 2:14, as well. How do our holiday traditions in this season honor this particular understanding of who Jesus is?
4. **Optical Conclusion** - Recall the art work used in this week's presentation. Did those visuals add to your understanding of the scripture? Did they call your attention to a particular portion or feeling in the narrative?

Give Your Dreams a Chance

The word "Advent" comes from the Latin word *adventus*, which means "coming" or "visit." If God were to visit you in a dream this week, what would God say to you about **character**?

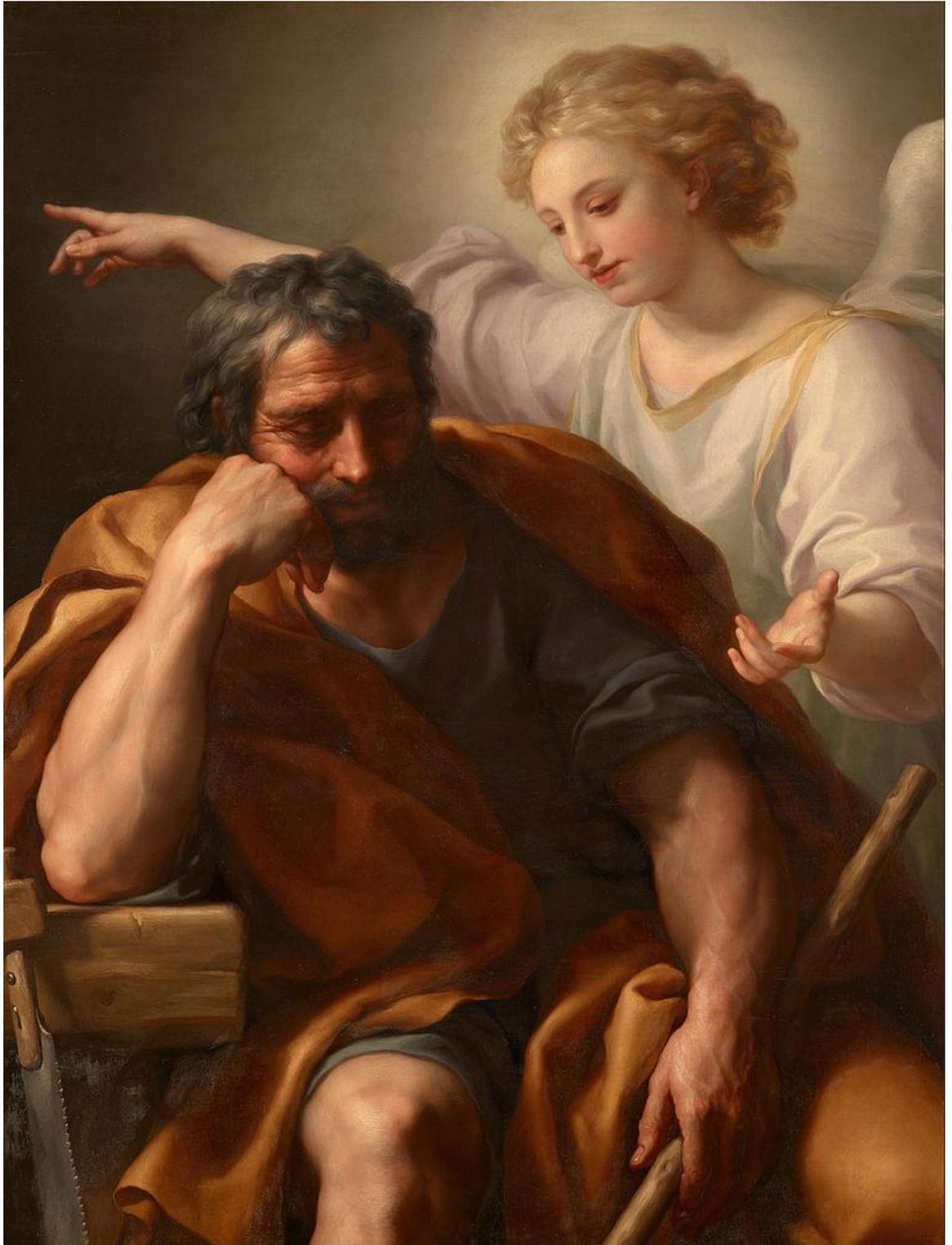
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Session One

Optical Conclusion

"The Dream of St. Joseph"

by Anton Raphael Mengs



Advent Dreams

Session One
Optical Conclusion

"Joseph's Dream"

by Laura James



DREAMS

Even if we don't remember our dreams, we all dream. These dreams evaporate upon waking and we seem to have two levels of existence. One kind of dreams occurs during the daytime and the other during the nighttime. Just as we are not our thoughts we are also not our dreams. Even if we can't remember them, dreams are instructive for our spiritual life.

Evagrius noted that his own conversion occurred when he took an oath while he was dreaming. He vowed to leave his worldly life in Constantinople and become a monk in Jerusalem. He took dreams seriously in his teachings, too. If a monk has the affliction of sex, he advises him to attend to his dreams and to see whose face emerges and if he has been using his waking time to fantasize and has therefore created an object of lust which occurs in his sleep. He says that dreams that are peaceful or only have signs of the normal needs of nature are indicators that thoughts during our waking hours are in order. But if dreams are exotic then most likely some action needs attention during our everyday consciousness.

Three dream indicators signal danger: overly symbolic and chaotic sequences speak of disintegration; repetitive themes and fixations are petitions to our consciousness for attention; dark forces and directives caution us to return to prayer, since Christ has already overcome dark forces.

Welcome signs in dreams are scenes of harmony and humor: the presence of loved ones, scenes of the community of saints, and memories with little distortion. Dreams can confirm a question held with open hands before the Holy Spirit's guidance. As dreams come and go, they do hidden work in our psyche.

Interpreting dreams may be dangerous because, while dreams are universal, our interpretation of them is distinctively personal. Since they do not show up in our ordinary consciousness, we should be cautious about quickly assigning a meaning to them; yet not too cautious because often, when we are ready, they reveal an important message to us.

Cassian says that a monk who is afflicted with lusty dreams should be asked what she looks like. If she's the woman in town that he's brought to the desert in his imagination, then she's no longer dwelling in town but in this very monastery. He needs to take severe measures to cut off this cycle of thoughts through the practices of guard of the heart and watchfulness of thoughts, or physical exercise or staying at the common table with the brothers.

The dream in this case acts as an indicator to the monk to not think so highly of his spiritual training and discipline that he can go to town and not suffer consequences to his inner life.

Dreams sometimes come from memories or anticipation of events yet to come. They not only mediate data and historical evidence, but they convey feelings and point to very deep levels of encounter. Daydreams, though on a lesser scale, can do the same. Everything that rises in the mind isn't core to our being, but if we are not mindful these thoughts create forces that sooner or later we have to face. Another way of saying this is that our memory, imagination, and thoughts all converge in our dreams through symbols. It's an amazing language that does two things simultaneously: puts order and restores balance in our subconscious and gives direction and focus to our conscious awareness.

Dreams are tools. We can use them to view our own souls and therefore to discern how much our conscious choices are affecting our deeper unconscious ways of being true. It is a mystery that at some very deep level we are all united in a single "way of being in the world." Dreams train our un-thinking skills because all is symbol and layers and layers of mystery.