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“Behold, the angel of the Lord appeared to him in a dream” (Matthew 1:21).

*Jer 23: 5-8; Matt 1:18-25*

Pope Francis’ devotion to St. Joseph is well known. Before going to bed, the pope puts prayer requests under a small statue of the sleeping Joseph, asking the saint to address them in his dreams, as he does in today’s Gospel when confronted with Mary’s mysterious pregnancy.

The pope also recently published a book titled “Let Us Dream: The Path to a Better Future.” In it he invites readers to imagine a renewed global community after the pandemic and a year of divisive political chaos. It is as though the pope recognizes that some problems are so deep they exhaust rational solutions and only dreaming anew can move us beyond stalemate and entrenched interests.

Finally, the pope’s admiration for St. Joseph’s care for the Holy Family prompted him to declare a Year of St. Joseph during 2021 to entrust the church and the world to his guidance. Though St. Joseph is silent in the scriptures, his reputation for justice, his role as a father and husband and even his skills as a carpenter were key to advancing God’s plan for the world.

Matthew clearly associates Joseph of Nazareth with that other famous Joseph in the Book of Genesis, the beloved son of Jacob whose dreams and many-colored coat prompted his jealous brothers to sell him into slavery in Egypt. There, he saved both

the Egyptians and his own people from famine. St. Joseph will save Jesus from Herod by taking him to Egypt after an angel in another dream warns him.

Here begins the Christmas story. Joseph's decision to take Mary into his home, to protect her and parent with her the child she gives birth to in Bethlehem is the beginning of the story that has made all the difference in our lives. Christmas is one week away. The Word is preparing us to enter a different mindset and sensitivity to what is deepest and most true about our hopes for the future. We cross from our modern, secular world into a realm of angels and dreams, prophecies and promises, cherished stories that remind us of the faith, courage and trust we want for ourselves and our children. The path to a better future begins here, in the hearts of those who still know how to dream.

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