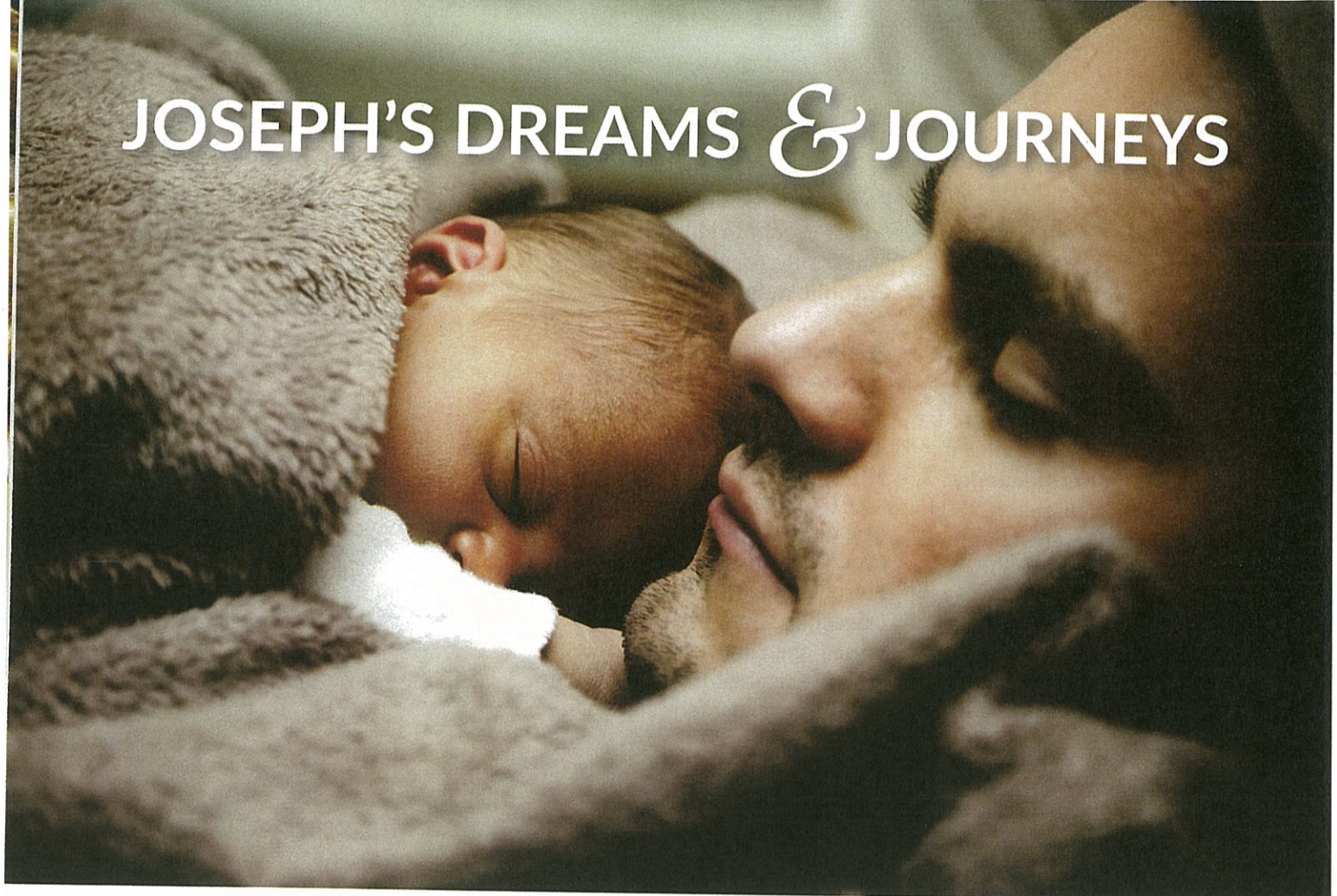


# JOSEPH'S DREAMS & JOURNEYS



**Bruce Drysdale** tells Joseph's story from the nativity account in Matthew's gospel.

I'm Joseph and looking back now from the familiarity of my Nazareth workshop, those early years seem like a dream. At the time the opposite was true: dreams were as much reality as the events that unfolded about me. It was in a dream that I first glimpsed who Jesus would become. I had been in a dazed state since Mary had told me she was pregnant. The dream seemed like part of my waking. It was the name – "You are to name him Jesus" – the very name making God present among us!

Nazareth isn't Mary's or my hometown. Bethlehem was our home where we lived in the house of my father Jacob and we had been in the land of Judah for generations. I still have difficulty thinking of myself as a Galilean but we are settled here now and work is fairly steady.

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When the midwife arrived with Salome, Mary certainly wasn't dreaming; her loud cries of pain kept everyone wide awake and attentive. At other family births I'd steered clear of the women calmly, but determinedly, going about their tasks. This time, however, was different. While my brother Clophas succumbed to the women's pointed remarks about the "extra" bodies overfilling the room – I was determined to stay.

I made myself useful by holding firm the birthing stool and offering Mary words of encouragement.

At first the women were uncomfortable with my presence but before long they appreciated my help, which freed them for the many and delicate tasks of midwifery.

While I tried to hide my deep concern at Mary's obvious pain, nothing could hide my relief when, finally, I heard that primal wail. My pride and joy overflowed when the midwife handed me our little, slippery bundle of humanity. For a moment I was back in the dream: "She will bear a son ... he will save the people". Was this dark, wet-curved head on such a tiny frail torso to be the Messiah? Jesus, wriggling enthusiastically (as though aware of the swaddling that was soon to come), brought me back to the moment. I placed him

on the shoulder of his exhausted mother who, forgetting her recent distress, beamed with joy at the safe arrival of our son.

### Unusual visitors arrive

While we delighted in the presence of Jesus in our lives, for several months life was very normal and we had almost forgotten those dream-borne predictions of his unique place in our genealogy. Then, one morning, Jesus was crawling just a little too close to some of my tools. Mary picked him up and was about to scold me (again) for leaving the tools within his reach when she noticed some visitors arriving.

I was surprised when I went out to meet them as they were obviously not locals and their clothes suggested they were from the lands to the east – perhaps Parthians. I greeted them and they responded politely before quickly asking: “Where is the child who has been born a king?”

Mary and I had kept close counsel about what we had learned of Jesus’ future so I was formulating a guarded answer when they noticed Mary behind me with the child in her arms. To my surprise they rushed forward and bent down in homage. After a very long, awkward moment, while Mary and I exchanged confused glances, the visitors rose to their feet and with their eyes still fixed on Jesus explained that they had travelled many months to find this child and offer him gifts from their people.

### Stars and learning

Our questions revealed they were *magoi* (magi) – an ancient group of wise, priestly leaders skilled in astronomy, astrology and the interpretation of dreams – and, their “people” were a small group whose Babylonian ancestors had been greatly influenced by their Judean captives during the time of exile. Some of the *magoi* had been so impressed by the faith of these Jews and their belief in a

promised Messiah that they left their Zoroastrian practices and became Jews.

Our visitors came from a long line of *magoi* who had studied all the signs of the messianic age and were convinced that the birth of our son heralded its beginning. I was excited enough at their mention of dreams, so finding out they too awaited the Messiah elevated the moment to an occasion of awe.

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### Our little boy in danger

We invited them to share a meal and during the ensuing conversation we asked if they had found anyone else on their journey who shared their views. When they mentioned that Herod, king of Judea, had told them he also wished to come to Bethlehem and pay homage to the new-born king, our feelings turned to dread. Everyone in southern Palestine knew about the megalomaniacal Herod and the lengths to which he would go to eliminate threats to his reign.

I was even more disturbed when the visitors told me of a dream they had interpreted as warning them not to return to Herod as planned. When it was time for them to leave I carefully explained an alternative route that would take them well away from Herod. I also made sure Mary and Jesus were indoors before dusk.

### Fleeing from our country

I didn’t think I slept at all that night but I must have closed my eyes long enough to dream because when I awoke in a sweat I knew the only safe thing to do was to take

Jesus and Mary well away from Herod’s influence – to Egypt.

“Egypt?!” asked Mary with a look of utter confusion. But she needed little convincing because she’d heard the rumours about Herod’s cruelty. I hurriedly made arrangements with Clophas and a carpenter in the neighbouring village of Bethbasi to take care of our carpentry business.

We packed what few belongings we could load onto our only mule and set off, joining others also escaping from Herod’s attention. We thought it would be the longest journey of our lives.

### Returning to a new region

The news reached us in Egypt that Herod, on his deathbed, had ordered the deaths of all young boys in the Bethlehem area. That night I had the most disturbing dream of our ancestor, Rachel, weeping for her children and I felt the horror and great sadness of the families. Mary and I consoled each other.

Months later I dreamt that it was now safe to return to Israel. Almost immediately we set out for our home in Bethlehem but on the way we discovered that Herod’s son, Archelaus, was as cruel as his father and we did not risk being found. So we decided to move out of his reach to the district of Galilee and there settled in Nazareth.

I am still a frequent dreamer and value this form of insight as pure, unfiltered revelation. These days, however, God’s revelations are less urgent, more consoling and filled with the new hope Jesus is for my people. ■



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