

We are not Dreaming!

“When the LORD brought back the captives of Zion, we were like those who were dreaming,” David writes (Psalm 126:1). The nightmare of exile is over, and the sudden rush of joy is like a barren desert turning into a flood. Imagine the flow of life-giving water or the flow of wine into the cups of joy-filled guests at the best of banquet celebrations, bringing happiness to the heart as people celebrate freedom!

Captives who have been set free cannot do anything but rejoice and be glad; every breath of free air is a celebration. The return from Babylon meant so much to Judah. The former captives are set free to build their own homes wherever they wanted. They could work their own ground and farms and not be forced to hand any of their crops over to Babylonian taskmasters. They were set free to worship the LORD God, no longer being forced to bow down and honour the false gods Ishtar, Marduk, or any other idol ever again. They were free to worship the One who created, redeemed, and called them by name. Isaiah 43:1: *“Now, however, this is what the LORD has said, He who created you, O Jacob, He who formed you, O Israel: “Do not be afraid! For I have redeemed you. I have called you by your name. You are Mine.”* Those who returned were like those who had just awakened from a nightmare and jumped into a river of gladness.

From what nightmare do you need to wake up? We all have them, you know. I know that everyone is supposed to be happy this time of year, but maybe you aren't. Maybe life during these joyful, festive days is too much. The nightmare of debt, addiction, or abuse has led to the destruction of hope, and suddenly, you feel like a captive. Exiled in the Babylon of your own sins and forced to bow down to some rather worthless idols. Power, money, sex - name your poison - we've all been there. You know what it's like to wake up in the morning with regret, sorrow, shame, hurt, and hopelessness.

Whatever it is, your own sins or the impact of someone else's sin against you, it has you shackled like a slave. It's just as Jesus says in John 8:34: *“Truly, truly I say to you, everyone who practices sin is a slave to sin.”* Sin, Satan, and death have us lock, stock, and barrel. Chained up and ready to march us off into that eternal Babylon we call hell.

But just when you think all is lost, a voice is heard. A voice calls you out of death and the valley of the shadow. Calling to you like a voice in the wilderness, there come words of promise and deliverance. Listen to Jesus speak in Luke 4: *“The Spirit of the Lord is on Me because He has anointed Me to tell the Good News to poor people. He has sent Me to announce freedom to prisoners and restoration of sight to blind people, to set free those who have been oppressed, 19 and to announce the acceptable year of the Lord”* (18-19). This Scripture, Jesus says, has been fulfilled in your hearing. The Spirit was, is, and forever shall be upon the incarnate Son, who was born for us to set us free from the nightmares that haunt our lives.

But after dealing with so much sin and temptation and all the weakness of life, how can such promises possibly be true? Freedom, liberty, sight, good news for the poor, and the year of the Lord's favour for everyone. Is it possible? Could it really be true? Could it be that the promises are for me?

Good news! This is for you indeed. The Word of God that called in Isaiah is now incarnate in Jesus Christ. The Word has been made flesh, and He has so much to say and give to you, me, and the world. Your idols have been broken. Your sins are forgiven. Your death has been undone because the Baby in the manger has grown up, died, and risen again. No longer are you compelled to live in a prison of your own making. You are brought back home by the grace of God given to you by faith in Jesus Christ our Lord.

Home. Back to the altar and the font of your Baptism. Brought back to the very Word of God made flesh. Given new life - redeemed and renewed. Yes, you can start all over again.

The nightmare is over. You are not dreaming! This is far better than any dream we could ever have. A new reality is yours in Christ our Lord. A blood-bought and baptismal-water-covered reality. You have been brought back to God, back to your Creator. Returned to the Father who loves you more than we could ever ask or imagine. Exile broken. Death defeated. Freedom granted. The Baby in the manger who grows to be the man on the cross - everything is His gift. We have returned from a nightmare to a new reality in Christ.

How do we declare our advent hope? The resounding words of our Introit for today, Psalm 126!