One Christmas morning many, many years ago Santa left me a coon skin cap and a horse that was attached to a frame with springs that let you bounce up and down and forwards and backwards, which made it much easier to pretend that you were actually riding a horse. Those were great gifts because my hero back then was Davey Crocket. Our family watched the television show about him every week. In preparation, I would put on my coon skin cap, get on that horse and begin bouncing up and down with great gusto as the show began with the singing of, “Davey, Davey Crocket, king of the wild frontier.” In those days I dreamed that I would become just like Davey Crocket, who killed a bear when he was only three. But after a while I realized that my hat wasn’t real coon skin, that I was never going to be going anywhere on that horse, that there wasn’t much of a wild frontier to be king of anymore, and that I had already passed three and hadn’t even seen a bear yet. So that was the shattering of one dream.

But that was okay, because by then I had started watching Superman. And my dream was that I would become just like him – especially the flying part. For quite some time, I would put on a cape (well, it was really a towel pinned around my neck) and jump off the top step of our porch yelling “Superman.” I dreamed that one day when I did this, I would find myself going up rather than landing hard on the ground. In those days, when I slept, I often dreamt of flying. They were wonderful dreams. But finally, I realized that as hard as I tried, this wasn’t going to happen either – after all, I wasn’t from the planet Krypton, so how could I be like Superman? So there was the shattering of another dream.

But that was okay because by then I had fallen in love with baseball. And I began to dream that I would become a great baseball player. This was an even better dream because it was something I could actually do. And I was pretty good at it. The first game I pitched, I struck out every batter. I dreamt of playing in the big leagues. It was a wonderful dream and I dreamt it for many years, until I hurt my arm and couldn’t pitch any more. The shattering of that dream was painful. But it too was replaced by another and then another, and another, and another -- which is how I got to be here, presiding at this great Christmas liturgy.

During the course of my life I have learned that shattered dreams, while painful, are necessary if we are going to move on to even greater things. Our shattered dreams are like the cracking of an egg in a bird’s nest. When the crack first appears it seems that the beautiful egg has been ruined. And it has. But then out pops a bird. And eventually, that bird soars up into the sky. In the same way, though it is usually difficult to imagine when it is happening, the shattering of one dream – as disappointing as it may be -- opens us to new and even more wonderful possibilities, especially when God is part of the process, because all the best dreams come from God, for nothing is impossible with God.

We certainly find this to be the case in the gospel reading we just heard. There we encountered Joseph, who had been betrothed to Mary. No doubt, for quite some time it had been his dream to have a kind and loving wife with whom he could share his life. And when he was betrothed to Mary it seemed that his dream was coming true. He was eagerly awaiting the day of their wedding and the fulfilling of this dream. But that dream was shattered when he learned that Mary had become pregnant. For he knew that the child wasn’t his. So the only thing he could assume is that she had committed adultery. And the Jewish law was very clear about how such a situation was to be handled. The adulteress was to be exposed publicly and the betrothal terminated. So his dream was definitely shattered.

Now Joseph was a righteous man who felt compelled to follow God’s law. Yet, though he was terribly disappointed, he was also a compassionate man. He just couldn’t bring himself to shame Mary
publicly. Instead, he decided to divorce her quietly. Of course, God knew that Joseph was such a man. 
And God had another dream in store for him that was far more wonderful than the one that had just been shattered.

In this new dream an angel came to him and assured him that Mary had not been unfaithful. Rather, the child she carried had been conceived by the power of the Holy Spirit working in her. She had become pregnant in this extraordinary way because she was to become the mother of the most extraordinary child who had ever been born. He was the one who would save his people from their sins. He was the one who had been foretold by the prophets – the one who would be called Emmanuel – meaning, God is with us. And in this dream, Joseph was told to go ahead with the wedding plans, which meant that he had been chosen to become the father of the messiah!

Talk about a dream! Of all the people that had ever lived, Joseph had been the one chosen to provide for and protect the messiah. Joseph had been the one chosen to teach this child and to be such a good example for him that he would be prepared to fulfil his mission – to bring God into the lives of all who would receive him – to save his people from their sins. This is what sprang from Joseph’s shattered dream.

Of course, a similar thing had happened to Mary. She too had dreamed of sharing life with this good carpenter Joseph – the kind of life that most of the young women of her village dreamed of – simple, but happy. Well, that dream had definitely been shattered when the angel Gabriel came to her and told her that she had been chosen to become the mother of the messiah – the one who would be called the Son of the Most High – the Son of God. As with Joseph, the shattering of the one dream had put her in a position to have another, even greater dream -- the most wonderful dream ever.

This is part of the Good News we celebrate today. With God, the shattering of dreams is never the end of the line for us. Rather, it is the very thing that opens us to the possibility of having new dreams that are even more wonderful, until we come to the most wonderful dream of all -- the dream of the heavenly life that goes on forever – a life in which the accomplishments of Davey Crocket, Superman, and the greatest athlete that has every lived are nothing compared to the new possibilities for life that will be ours.

And yet, the shattering of dreams is a hard thing to deal with, and it can easily lead to the shattering of faith as well. And when this happens, our lives are diminished because God is the source of all our best and truest dreams. That’s why we are given this feast of Christmas to celebrate each year – this feast of dreams come true. In the birth of this child Jesus, we see how the shattered dreams of Joseph and Mary had opened the way for them to have a far more wonderful dream – a dream so great that people all over the world are gathering to celebrate it in beautifully decorated homes and churches, with joyful song and scrumptious feasts. We do this each year to remind ourselves that our shattered dreams will always be a prelude to new and even more wonderful ones, as long as God is with us.

Fr. Rod Damico
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