The writer of St. Matthew’s Gospel
is someone steeped in the history of the Hebrew people
and in their sacred writings
If you look at the beginning of the Gospel
you’ll find a long genealogy (ancestry)
that firmly establishes the Hebrew roots of Jesus
along with his roots in the bloodline of King David.
The Jews who would have first heard Matthew’s version of the Gospel
would have probably made a quick connection
between the Joseph in our Gospel story today
and another Joseph—a man who was also guided by dreams.
You may have heard of the musical
"Joseph and the Amazing, Technicolor Dreamcoat."
It’s about that other Joseph, the son of Jacob.

In the lives of both of these men, God spoke powerfully to them
by means of their dreams.

John Sanford was an Episcopal priest and Jungian analyst.
He died in 2005.
I heard a talk he gave one time in which he said:
“Dreams are one of the most direct ways God speaks to us.”

So we just heard a Gospel story
in which an angel speaks to another Joseph in a DREAM.
The story starts out with Joseph acting quite rationally.
He has just found out the woman he is betrothed to is pregnant.
He’s thinking, for the sake of all involved, that he should divorce her quietly,
all of this quite rational.

Then comes this DREAM.

Angel (i.e. a messenger from God) announces to Joseph:
• Don’t be afraid.
• Take Mary into your home.
• Name the child Jesus.
• He will save HIS people from their sins.

The angel urges Joseph to do what seems
irrational, counter-intuitive (contrary to what is expected).

Dreams are out of our control
From the subconscious
Most brain activity is subconscious (95 percent).
The final instruction of the angel is that Joseph name the child Jesus. In doing that, Joseph would be taking responsibility for this child even though the child was not his.

He is to name him Jesus, meaning he will save HIS people from their sins. What sins?
Greatest sin — not believing, trusting whose and who we are.

The name Emmanuel is this simple but powerful assurance that God has a greater longing to be with us than is our longing to be with God.

In today's second reading St. Paul points out that we are "called to be saints." He says we have received grace and apostleship to bring the outsiders, the gentiles, to faith.

Paul believes that because the Romans (and we) know the good news that we have no choice but to be angels/heralds of that good news. It becomes our responsibility to listen for the angels who tell us just how we are to do that.

The VanDeveld family is here today. Jerome was, I understand, a perfect example of faithfulness to the call to be an apostle. He would not have used that term, but he was every bit that. When asked if he was pleased to be an IHM Associate, his spontaneous response "You bet'cha life, by golly."
A reading from the letter of St. Paul to the Romans

Paul, a servant of Jesus Christ, called to be an apostle,
set apart for the Gospel of God, which he promised beforehand
through his prophets in the holy scriptures,
the Gospel concerning his Son,
who was descended from David according to the flesh
and was declared to be Son of God
with power according to the spirit of holiness
by resurrection from the dead,
Jesus Christ our Lord, through whom we have received grace and apostleship
to bring about the obedience of faith among all the gentiles
for the sake of his name, including yourselves
who are called to belong to Jesus Christ,
to all God’s beloved in Rome, who are called to be saints:
grace to you and peace from our gracious God
and the Lord Jesus Christ.

The word of the Lord.