

In 2002 Baltimore launched its BELIEVE campaign aimed at reducing the amount of drug use in the city. Billboards, trash cans, and bumper stickers all over town encouraged citizens to BELIEVE

This year, anticipating a challenging holiday shopping season, Macy's created its "A Million Reasons to Believe" campaign. In exchange for coming into the store to deposit a letter to Santa Claus (and hopefully shop while you're there), Macy's promised to send \$1/letter to the Make-A-Wish Foundation, up to one million dollars. MAWF grants special wishes to severely ill children. "

Drugs are still in Baltimore City.

Macy's still had a pretty dismal shopping season though Macy's reached its 1 million dollar mark for Make a Wish!

Just because city leaders or corporate officials say we are to believe, doesn't make us do it..

To truly believe, it must come from the heart....to accept something as true with confidence

Elizabeth believed...that in her old age she was to bear a child

Mary believed...that she had conceived by the power of the Holy Spirit

Joseph believed...that Mary was with child, not because she was unfaithful,

 But because she was faithful to God

The shepherds believed...and went to see "this thing which they have been told"

The Magi believed...and traveled from afar to worship the newborn king.

We, too, come into the Christmas story being asked by God to believe

To believe in what?

To believe that God so loves this world which God created, that He gave His only Son, so that whoever believes in him will not perish but have everlasting life.

Christmas is a celebration grounded in believing in God's power to make the impossible possible.

It is a dream/a vision/a prophecy become reality.

It is believing in the incarnation of the very one who created us, then who became one of us in order to come close to us so that we might move closer to him.

It is believing in the resurrection of this same innocent God/man as he defeats sin, death and the devil in order to free us to live our lives filled with hope and promise.

Tonight we are caught up in the drama of God's story as it unfolds once again in Bethlehem and in Laurel and in towns and villages across this globe. We hear the angels announce "unto you is born this day in the city of David a Savior who is Christ the Lord" and we hear their song of praise, Glory to God in the highest; and on earth, peace good will to men.

We move with the shepherds to bow down and pay homage to the one whose birth is announced even though we, like them, do not fully comprehend the enormity of it all.

And then, in the quiet darkness, we experience the power of light to overcome the dark, One lit candle at a time, all the while declaring the light is come and the darkness cannot keep it away.

In the early hours of the morning, I walk our dog Coale. One morning last week, I was struck how when we started walking, it was pitch black outside. As we walked, the clouds began to take on a pinkish/purplish hue of twilight. In it I became aware of the promise of new day whose events were yet to unfold; whose possibilities were yet only potential. As I was pondering this, off in the distance I heard the crow of a rooster, then a chorus of many roosters, trumpeting the call that the light had come, declaring the dawn of a new day, and calling everyone to wake up and receive it..."ready or not."

Friends, 'ready or not' the light has come into the world; the logos, God's Word is in fleshed¹ and dwells among us full of grace and truth.

Friends, the impossible has become possible.
This is the dawning of a new day.
So do not be afraid to BELIEVE the impossible dream.

Over 25 years ago I was a young, orphaned, single mother called by God to be one of the first women to be ordained a Lutheran Pastor.

It was a lonely, frightening difficult journey from which I often wanted to turn aside and quit...maybe, I wonder that is how Mary sometimes felt...

Frequently at night, after I had put my 5 year old son, James to bed, I would go out into the seminary commons and swing, pumping my legs to push me higher and higher toward the heavens.

In those dark hours, I would lift my prayers into the vast heavens, singing words first penned by Joe Darion...
(Words to Impossible Dream)

With these words on my lips and the sight of millions of stars lighting the night sky, I no longer felt alone. I could feel the presence of Jesus by my side encouraging me to BELIEVE....and I did...and I do....

We each have come tonight with our own story of challenge and struggle. And none of us knows what lies ahead in the upcoming year...

Yet, no matter what sorrows or disappointments lie behind us or what challenges or uncertainties lie ahead of us...

Tonight we again can BELIEVE the miracle that Jesus is Emmanuel, God with us, our Savior and Lord.

As we light our candles, I invite you to look around you at the points of light...the stars...the light of Christ which shines alongside you in the darkness.

This is the true light which shines in the darkness and declares, you are not alone;

Not tonight...not tomorrow...not ever... all you need to do is to+ BELIEVE.