

I come in the name of the Father, and of the Son, and of the Holy Spirit. Amen.

Have you ever thought about what it means to ‘believe’ in something or someone? Webster tells us that to ‘believe’ is to accept or regard something as true. For example, “I believe my wife loves me.” If I believe, I can have faith. Faith is to believe in things unseen with the assurance of things hoped for. “I have faith that my wife, in love, wants the best for me.” In faith and hope, I can have a vision of something in the future. For example, “I have hope that she will love me for the rest of my life.”

Did you ever notice that children have two amazing gifts: Wonder and awe? Like gifts, endless possibilities are unwrapped through wonder and awe. It dazzles them in the moment, and unleashes visions for the future. Children have unbridled freedom to dream, believe in things unseen, to hope. Their hopes and dreams are not hindered by logic, the burden of proof, or social expectations. Children hope for the impossible, illogical, even magical. They play dress up, jump in puddles, believe they can be superheroes. They don’t worry about how they look, or how they smell. They live their dreams, their hope in full force – all in – sometimes resulting in a trip to the emergency room to get patched up. Their insatiable curiosity and unlimited imaginations help create a vision of a world filled with hope, joy and love. Dreams can be their reality.

But, time takes its toll. As we mature, the abrasions of life slowly scratch away at the mysteries of magical kingdoms, the realities of make-believe, and the super-powers of super-heroes. Angels, wizards, and fairies get locked away, considered illogical, or nonsense. Facts, evidence, and logical reasoning move in, displacing magic and discounting dreams. **I suggest that reality is a dream imagined into being.**

We know that not all dreams are true, or become true. But I do believe that all realities begin with dreams that emerge through faith, and become reality through hope. Thinking really big: If you dream that our world can be driven by love, and you have faith that love wins, then you can have hope that love will ultimately conquer hate. In faith, you can redirect your vision to do all you do, in love. It takes work, but it also takes faith and hope. But it starts with a dream!

As a dreamer, I celebrate the shepherds. The shepherds, a bunch of grimy, smelly sheep herders, who were the cast-offs from society. In our story tonight, these shepherds had a dream, a vision, that included angels, who inspired them to believe, have faith, and to hope. These misfits believed there was something new, magical, exceptional about a child – born in a barn, wrapped in cloth, sleeping in a food trough. They HAD to find out! They rushed to get there! They couldn't wait!

Just imagine. Mary and Joseph, exhausted, and perhaps a little crabby, wanting to get a good night's sleep. They traveled all that way with Mary pregnant. Motel 6 did not have a light on. So, Mary gives birth in a barn. The last thing they needed was visitors. Then! There is a knock on the door, and who is standing there? A bunch of dirty, smelly, sheep herders who heard about their baby. I can hear Joseph, "Now what!? Couldn't it wait?" There they were, dressed in their 'earthy' garb, filled with curiosity and wonder. They followed a vision, not worrying whether their visit was logical, welcomed, or if their dream was possible.

These social outcasts had hope, had a dream of this child becoming their Savior, their king. They believed he would be a king for the marginalized, the undesired, for them! He would bring promise and hope. He was not going to be a king who would live in a palace, but would be a king who lived among them, and love them as they were, and for who they were. This king would not build armies and seek power, but would attribute all he was to God, and confront hate with love and compassion.

What were these guys thinking, right? Yet, if no one would have believed in this dream, Jesus could have never become our Savior. His power of love would have fallen flat. He could not have changed the world if no one shared in this vision of love.

But yet, the poorest of the poor, the outcasts **did** believe. They envisioned hope. They went out rejoicing, launching this dream into reality. **The world would be forever changed! And it began with a dream by a few dirty, smelly sheep herders!**

For tonight, allow yourself to dream, to imagine, to believe in magic – no matter how crazy it sounds, or illogical it may seem. Look at Christmas through the eyes of wonder and awe. Envision hope, feel the love. Just for a moment believe that dreams **can** become reality. And - believe in the absurd idea that a poor, innocent, infant – born in a barn – sleeping in a food trough, with livestock, can be the Son of God, our Savior, a creation of pure love, living among us.

Be assured that this crazy dream changed the world in more ways than we could have ever imagined! So, dare to dream wildly! Dare to hope carelessly! Dare to envision endlessly! Dare to believe! Merry Christmas! Amen.