



"The True Light"

Christmas Day
10:00 a.m. Sunday, December 25, 2016
The Reverend John H. Brock
Trinity Evangelical Lutheran Church
Camp Hill, Pennsylvania

Isaiah 52:7-10; Hebrews 1:1-4 [5-12]; John 1:1-14

I was there, you know: in the beginning. I was there the night it happened.

I was a whole lot younger then. My Uncle Levi had taken me in, 'cause my folks had died. Didn't know much about sheep until then, and now I know *too much* about sheep.

I don't remember how old I was, I think maybe around eight or so. I hadn't been with Uncle Levi all that long, but I was starting to learn how to be a shepherd. Nights would get *really dark* up in the hills. If you weren't there by the fire, some nights, with no moon out, you could barely see the hand in front of your face. We could see the fires burning in town, but up in the hills, it was dark.

And I remember that night. I was almost asleep, and all of a sudden, there was this light. I thought at first maybe the moon must be coming out. That wasn't it, and then I got afraid and thought maybe the fire had gotten out of control; but the light wasn't coming from the fire. Some of the other shepherds, the guys in Uncle Levi's crew, they started making noise, too, and the sheep; do you know how stupid sheep are? The sheep *weren't* afraid.

But then I realized the lights were coming from *up there* in the sky. So, I looked up, and there was this. . . this, I don't know what. Later on, Levi said it was an angel, but it was *beautiful* and *terrible*, all at the same time. And it told us, it told us about, about this child. I was a child, why wasn't it talking about me? But it told us about this child down in Bethlehem, this *amazing* child. And one of these things wasn't enough, there's suddenly a whole *chorus* of them. I have to tell you, I might have needed to change my robe.

But we went. The whole lot of us, we went. Didn't give a thought of the sheep, we went into town. Now I've said we hang out with sheep, and sheep have a distinct *odor* to them. We had grown accustom to it, but, apparently, other people *don't* care for it, and so as we're going through town we're getting looks from people, but we went right to where the angel told us to go, and we found the baby.

Now like I said we had an odor, and there was another *very distinct* odor in the barn where we found the baby, coming from the other critters, but the smells kind of cancelled each other out. But this child; he just looked like a regular child, a little baby. Smaller than a lamb, and yet there was something *different* about him. And *definitely* something different about his parents: they were calm, and not really surprised that we

had shown up. But we stayed there awhile and rejoiced with them at the birth of this little one. Then we went back up to the hills to be with the sheep.

We talked about it for the next few days – well, we talked about it for years to come – but I never really gave that child too much more thought. I grew up and I found a girl who didn't mind the smell, and got married, and kept being with the sheep. As a matter of fact, Uncle Levi eventually let me be in charge of one of the flocks.

I heard about some guy down at a river and so I went to check on him. Because I thought, 'Is that the boy?' But it wasn't. As soon as I saw him I knew it wasn't that little infant. This guy was *wild* looking; he had a camel's hair shirt on and a big old leather belt. He himself said "*I am not the one.*" I almost turned around and walked away when he said that. Then he said, "*There's one coming after me.*" And I just knew I just knew in my *heart*, that, that one coming after this mad man must be that little boy.

Now things weren't going all that great for the country as a whole. Rome had come in, and idiots in Jerusalem were trying to ruin things. The days were kind of dark. But this one that, that mad man talked about, I started to hear about him, too, telling us to love one another. Telling us that money is not the end all of everything. Telling us that God loves us, no matter what we do. It gave me some hope in those dark days, I'll tell you that.

Now it didn't surprise me, though, when I learned that those morons in Jerusalem had connived to put him to death. Made me sad when I heard that. But then I heard he wasn't dead. No, that's not right. I heard that he rose *from* the dead. Death couldn't hold him. And *that* I believed, because I remember that infant there in the stable.

I've met a lot of his followers since then. It's been, oh, more years than I can remember since I heard that he rose. Life hasn't gotten that much better. Those despots in Rome continue to rattle their sabers and go around and kill you for practically any reason. There still continue to be idiots in Jerusalem.

But even in the midst of *all* that darkness, I know that **one thing**: I know *this child* is the light in the darkness that we all need. *This child* that grew up to die, but death couldn't hold him. *This child* is the **one, true, light**.

Amen.

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