

## The Light Has Come

---

Christmas Eve | Titus 2; Luke 2

On this night of nights, we celebrate  
how the light of God revealed to us in Jesus Christ  
has come into our world.  
And by his coming, has reunited us with one another  
and with God in a way that heals all the divisions  
our human sin and darkness have created.  
Even divisions that would seem to be otherwise insurmountable.

The story is told of a brand new pastor and his wife  
who arrived in Brooklyn in early October  
excited about their opportunity to reopen a church.  
When they saw their church,  
it was very run down and needed much work.  
They set a goal to have everything done  
in time to have their first service on Christmas Eve.  
They worked hard, repairing pews,  
plastering walls, painting, and what not.  
And on Dec 18 they were ahead of schedule and just about finished.

On Dec 19 a driving rainstorm hit the area and lasted for two days.  
On the 21st, the pastor went to the church.  
His heart sank when he saw that the roof had leaked,  
causing a large area of plaster about 20 feet by 8 feet  
to fall off the front wall of the sanctuary just behind the pulpit.  
The pastor cleaned up the mess on the floor,  
and headed home to tell his wife what had happened.

On the way he noticed that a local business  
was having a flea market type sale for charity so he stopped in.  
One of the items was a beautiful, handmade, ivory colored, crocheted  
tablecloth with exquisite work, fine colors  
and a Cross embroidered right in the center.  
It was just the right size to cover up the hole in the wall.  
He bought it and headed back to the church.  
As he got there, an older woman  
was running to catch the bus; she missed it.  
The pastor invited her to wait in the warm church  
for the next bus 45 minutes later.

She sat in a pew and paid no attention to the pastor  
while he got a ladder and hangers to put the tablecloth up  
as a wall tapestry. The pastor could hardly believe  
how beautiful it looked and it covered up the entire problem area. Then he  
noticed the woman walking down the center aisle.

“Pastor,” she asked, “where did you get that tablecloth?”  
The pastor explained. The woman asked him to check the lower right corner to see if the initials, EBG were crocheted into it there. They were.

These were her initials, she said.  
She had made this tablecloth 35 years before, in Austria.  
When the Nazis came, she was forced to leave.  
Her husband was going to follow her the next week.  
She was captured, sent to prison and never saw her husband or her home again.  
The pastor wanted to give her the tablecloth; but she made the pastor keep it for the church.  
The pastor insisted on driving her home, feeling that was the least he could do.

What a wonderful service they had on Christmas Eve!  
The church was almost full.  
The music and the spirit were great.  
At the end of the service, the pastor and his wife greeted everyone at the door.

One older man, whom the pastor recognized from the neighborhood, continued to sit in one of the pews and stare, and the pastor wondered why he wasn’t leaving.  
The man asked him where he had gotten the tablecloth on the front wall because it was identical to one his wife had made years ago when they lived in Austria before the war and how could there be two tablecloths so much alike? He told the pastor how the Nazis came, how he forced his wife to flee for her safety, and he was supposed to follow her, but he was arrested and put in a prison.  
He never saw his wife or his home again.

The pastor asked him if the man would allow him to take him for a little ride. They drove to the same house where the pastor had taken the woman three days earlier. He helped the man climb the three flights of stairs to the woman’s apartment, knocked on the door, and saw the greatest Christmas reunion he could ever imagine.<sup>1</sup>

A tablecloth reunites a long lost couple  
and mends the rift placed in their lives by the war.  
A babe laying in a manger reunites a long lost humanity  
and mends the rift placed in the world by human sin.

We know something about the power of sin and darkness.  
We are surrounded by the darkness of war and turmoil  
in far away places like Iraq and Afghanistan, as well as  
the turmoil of grief and family struggles in our own neighborhoods and in  
our own homes.

I don't have to tell any of you about the darkness,  
because in one form or another, at one time or another,  
it's touched the life of each person here.

But we come here tonight to boldly and faithfully proclaim  
that darkness doesn't have the last word.  
How does John put it?

*The light shines in the darkness  
and the darkness has not overcome it.*

1.5

We come together to proclaim that Christ's light has come.  
Titus reminds us how we are given salvation,  
forgiveness for our sins and the power to live lives of service;  
that we might be instruments of Christ's light  
in those places and relationships we can touch.  
Because of this, our world and our lives  
will never be the same again.

What a wonderful gift to be given!  
Merry Christmas!

Amen

---

<sup>i</sup> This story is *The Ivory and Gold Tablecloth* and was written by Howard C. Schade. It was printed in Alice Gray's Christmas Stories for the Heart in 1998, and it reportedly first appeared in the December 1954 issue of Reader's Digest. From: <http://www.snopes.com/glurge/tableclo.htm>