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St. James', Mt. Airy  
12/24/17

Christmas Eve  
Isaiah 9::2-7  
Psalm 96  
Titus 2:11-14  
Luke 2:1-20

Once there was someone who did such amazing things and told such wonderful stories, that people wanted to know who he was.

One time he said, "I am the Light." (*light a candle*)

That person was Jesus – and this is why when we come together to pray and to tell our stories we light candles – to remind us that the Light came into the world and lived among us.

On this night we light many candles, because this night is like no other. On this night celebrate as we tell the story of the birth of that Light.

It is easy, in the midst of the holiday hubbub, to lose track of this Light.

As the days have grown shorter over the last several weeks, we've sought out the bright lights of stores to purchase the perfect gifts. We've been dazzled by the lights on trees and houses. And we've sat in the glow of screens watching countless holiday shows and movies. We can easily get lost in the artificial light.

But the light of Christ is different, because it is the light of **hope**.

And this **hope** invites us to pull back the layers of sentimentalism and consumerism we swim in at this time of year to offer us **something more** – just as it has been doing for the last two millennia.

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It was a world completely different than, and very much the same as, our own that was given **light** and **hope** that first Christmas.

In Luke's story, which we read tonight, we hear that the first to hear this good news of great joy were the shepherds.

Not the king. Not the Roman authorities. But the shepherds – those on the margins of their society. Those without power were the first to welcome the Christ child and the first to make known what had been told to them about babe in the manger.

We remember, and tell the good news of this birth today, not because of that precious 8 pound baby, but because of the person Jesus would grow up to be – the one who would speak truth to power, and preach that the first shall be last and the last shall be first.

This was a subversive grass-roots movement of **hope** of love, justice, and compassion from the beginning.

This is the **something-more-hope** that extends to us today.

Because the ways that we humans divide and set ourselves over and against one another is not what God wants for us. And so God loved us enough to become one of us, to show us there is another way – to proclaim that's God's **hope** can be our **hope**.

Archbishop Desmond Tutu once said that **hope** is being able to see that there is **light** despite all the darkness.<sup>1</sup>

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<sup>1</sup> Desmond Tutu as quoted in *The New York Times Magazine*, March 4, 2010.

The **light of hope** shined through the darkness of the shepherd's fields – and it is still shining for us.

Christmas is a time for us to remember to pay attention and seek out **this light** above all the other lights – to run towards it like the shepherds did – and then to make known **hope** in a world desperate for good news.

This is why we gather on Christmas.

Also for all the sentimental reasons, and to sing carols and light candles – but most importantly to be reminded that the **light of hope** is reborn in us every year so that we may be that light in the world.

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Watch the light, I'm about to change it. Right now it is all in one place, but if you pay attention you can see it change. (*blow out the candle*)

Do you see it? The light is no longer in one place. Now it is spreading out, getting thinner and thinner as it rises up and spreads through the room.

But it's still there – and even when you can no longer see it, you will be close to that light.

Gracious God, grant that this light, enkindled in our hearts, may shine for in our lives.

Merry Christmas

Alleluia ~ Amen