

-Shepherd of the Mountains

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The Nativity of our Lord

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“We Have Seen the Light”

Text: John 8:12

“I am the light of the world. Anyone who follows Me will never walk in the darkness but will have the light of life”

“Grace to you and peace from God our Father and the (newborn) Lord Jesus Christ” (Philippians 1:2).

“Hi folks. As of last night, . . . , the Centennial Bulb appears to have burned out. Before officially announcing this to the world we will make sure there are no power problems first. Let’s hope.”

That was a Facebook post to nearly 9,000 “friends” . . . of the light. Light *bulb*, to be more precise. (And no, to keep you from doing any quick comparisons, I’m not going to tell you how many Facebook friends *I* have!)

Friends . . . of the light. Those who weren’t content just to be able to watch *live* on the “BulbCam.” Those who didn’t want to be “in the dark” - you know, FOMO (fear of missing out), and all that - about anything in the life of that bulb.

In its early life, the bulb was moved around several times: It hung in a *hose cart* for a few months, then briefly both at a garage and at City Hall, and then finally it found a permanent home at Livermore, California’s Fire Station.

While the firefighters were *part-time*, that bulb was on duty 24/7:

“It was left on 24 hours-a-day to break up the darkness so the volunteers could find their way,” then-Fire Chief Jack Baird recalls.

Okay, so there was that *one* week - back in *the 30’s* - when the bulb was turned off so that President Roosevelt’s WPA people could remodel the fire house. All right, and in full disclosure, it *did* have to be turned off again in 1976 so it could be moved to Livermore’s new Station #6.

Did I happen to mention that the Centennial Bulb is the only bulb ever to have had a parade and “a police escort”? Well, that was the *time*, Deputy Chief Tom Brandall remembers: accompanied by a “full police and fire truck escort,” the bulb arrived with a large crowd eager to see it regain power. Only, in the chief’s words, “there was a little scare”:

“We got to new location and the city electrician installed the light bulb and made connection. It took about 22-23 min, and [the bulb] didn’t come back on. The crowd gasped. The city electrician grabbed the switch and jiggled it; it went on!”

Once the famous bulb had been resettled, the decision was made that in order to guarantee that it remained alive, it was going to need to be placed under 24-hour video surveillance. Later, a live “BulbCam” was put online. Then, in 2013, when it lost light yet one more time, the bulb’s groupies on Facebook received that sobering notice. At long last, it appeared, the bulb had finally “met its maker.” However, no “coroner” was going to make the call without a full investigation. And nine and a half hours later - to the joy of all those friends of the light, someone discovered that it was the bulb’s dedicated, uninterrupted power supply that had failed. The 113-year-old bulb had outlived its power supply - the same way it had outlived three surveillance cameras. As soon

as the power supply was bypassed, the bulb's light returned!

As bulbs go, "The *Centennial Bulb*" is a 30-watt, coiled carbon filament unit manufactured by the Shelby Electric Company under the protection of U.S. Patent #701,295, dated June 3, 1092.

Today's bulbs, of course are incandescent, Halogen, tungsten, fluorescent, compact fluorescents (CFL) and light emitting diode (LED). They range anywhere from less than 1 Watt up to 10,000Watts. The average wire filament (incandescent) light bulb lasts between 1,000 and 2,000 hours. Light emitting diode (LED's) bulbs promise between 25,000 and 50,000 hours. But now that "Centennial Bulb"? I'm sure you've figured out by its name by now; that Shelby Electric Company coiled carbon filament bulb was first lit up well over *a century ago, in 1901 - a million* hours and another ten or twelve incandescent bulbs *ago!* No wonder the folks at General Electric have proclaimed it "the Eternal Light"! No wonder it's earned a place in Ripley's *Believe It or Not!* as "the oldest burning bulb in the world"!

Today, that bulb still shines; although, as one *now-retired* fire volunteer admits, "It don't give much light." No, that little Energizer Bunny™ is down to only about 4 watts.

So how many bulbs would you say it would take to light up a *city*?

If you're talking about *Jerusalem*, and you're talking about in *Old Testament* times, the answer is *four*. Four giant lamp stands (or candelabras (or menorahs)).

For if you're talking about *Jerusalem*, and you're talking about in *Old Testament* times, you're probably talking about a *festival* - one of the three Great Festivals prescribed in the Old Testament where Jewish males were obliged to return to "the Holy City" to celebrate. As the Jews called the Great Festival commemorating the Exodus from Egypt - The Feast of Unleavened Bread (or Passover) - "the time of our *deliverance*," so they called the Great Festival that reminded

them of the Pillar of Fire that had accompanied and guided them in their forty-year wilderness journey - The Feast of Tabernacles (or Booths) - "the time of our *joy*." And in the end, that *joy* was that in the same way - *someday!* - their God promised to send a *Light* - a Messiah, a Deliverer - to release Israel from bondage, renew the shining glory - the *Shekinah* - that filled the Temple (Ezekiel 43:1-5) in King Solomon's day, and restore her joy. "Joy to the world, the Lord is come! Let earth receive her king," and all that!

And so, as a part of that Feast of Tabernacles (Sukkot) there was a great ceremony called the "Illumination of the Temple." It ran for six nights. And forget about the guy in the neighborhood who has a million LED lights in his yard at Christmas; this is *big!* Big enough that the priests had to climb tall ladders to reach those four towering lampstands that were erected in the four corners of the spacious *outer* court of the Temple, the Court of the *Women*. Big enough that each of those oil pot held five *gallons* of olive oil. Big enough that the wicks on those massive menorahs were made from the worn-out, torn-up linen garments of the priests. Big enough that all the light they cast spread well beyond the Temple, for all night long those *seventy-five-foot-high* lamps shined their brilliance, flooding the streets of the city.

So how many bulbs would you say it would take to light up *the whole world*?

Christmas says, "Only one." Just one. For, only a week after celebrating the Feast of Tabernacles with His followers, Y'shua - Jesus born in Bethlehem, Jesus of Nazareth, that promised Messiah and Deliverer of Israel - stood in that very same Temple courtyard and announced:

". . . "I am the light of the world" (John8:12a). Oh, and not just *that*, mind you, for He wasn't finished yet: "I am the light of the world. Whoever follows me will not walk in darkness, but will have the light of life" (Jn 8:12).

It's just what we heard in our Gospel lesson this

birthday morning.

You want *glory* - God's presence, *Shekinah*?

^{Heb 1:1} *In the past God spoke to our forefathers through the prophets at many times and in various ways,* ^{Heb 1:2} *but in these last days he has spoken to us by his Son* ^{Heb 1:3} *The Son is the radiance of God's glory and the exact representation of his being, sustaining all things by his powerful word*

You want *light*?

"In him was life, and the life was the light of men. The light shines in the darkness, and the darkness has not over-come it" (John 1:4-5).

Oh, but not for not *trying*, of course! Not that it wouldn't *die trying*!

Only it was "the Light" that died, wasn't it? It was the "Bulb" that went out - can we call it, "the *Millennial Bulb*"?

Oh, but maybe we're getting a little bit ahead of ourselves .

In its early life, "the Light" was moved around several times:

"In those days Mary arose and went with haste into the hill country, to a town in Judah, and she entered the house of Zechariah and greeted Elizabeth. And when Elizabeth heard the greeting of Mary, the baby leaped in her womb" (Lk. 1:40-41).

"And Joseph also went up from Galilee, from the town of Nazareth, to Judea, to the city of David, which is called Bethlehem, because he was of the house and lineage of David, to be registered with Mary, his betrothed, who was with child" (Lk. 2:3).

Okay, so there was that one time - just after it had been turned on - when that "light" was nearly turned off so that . so that King Herod's people would *not* have to remodel the line of succession to the throne of the King of Israel.

"Now when they had departed, behold, an angel of the Lord appeared to Joseph in a dream and said, "Rise, take the child and his mother, and flee to Egypt, and remain there until I tell you, for Herod is about to search for the child, to destroy him" (Mt. 2:13).

All right, and in full disclosure, it was almost turned off again after that years later, so it could be moved to a new

"Station"

"When they heard these things, all in the synagogue were filled with wrath. And they rose up and drove him out of the town and brought him to the brow of the hill on which their town was built, so that they could throw him down the cliff. But passing through their midst, he went away" (Luke 4:28-30).

Did I happen to mention that "the Millennial Bulb" is the only Light ever to have had a parade and "a police es-cort"? "Deputy Chief" Luke remembers:

"And they brought it to Jesus, and throwing their cloaks on the colt, they set Jesus on it. . . . and as he rode along, . . . the whole multitude of his disciples began to re-joice and praise God . . . saying, 'Blessed is the King who comes in the name of the Lord'" (19:35-38).

Only to say "there was a little scare" is to put it mildly.

"And immediately while he was still speaking, Judas came, one of the twelve, and with him a crowd with swords and clubs, from the chief priest and the scribes and the elders. Now the betrayer had given them a sign, saying, 'The one I will kiss is the man. Seize him and lead him away under guard'" (Mk. 43-44).

"So Pilate, wishing to satisfy the crowd, released for them Barabbas, and having scourged Jesus, he delivered him to be crucified" (15:14-15).

"And when the sixth hour had come, there was dark-ness over the whole land until the ninth hour. And at the ninth hour, Jesus cried out with a loud voice, 'Eloi, Eloi, lema sabachthani?' which means, "My God, my God, why have you forsaken me?" And Jesus uttered a loud cry and breathed his last" (33-34, 37).

There was hardly an escort at all as "the Light" was transferred from one "station house" to the other.

"Joseph of Arimathea, a respected member of the Council, who was also himself looking for the kingdom of God, took courage and went to Pilate and asked for the body of Jesus And Joseph brought a linen shroud, and taking him down [from the cross], wrapped him in [a] linen shroud and laid him in a tomb that had been cut out of the rock" (43, 46a).

And that's when the decision was made that in order not to guarantee that it remained *alive*, but rather that it remained *dead*,

it was going to need to be placed under 24-hour video surveillance:

“The next day . . . the chief priests and the Pharisees gathered before Pilate and said, “Sir, we remember how that impostor said, while he was still alive, ‘After three days I will rise.’ Therefore order the tomb to be made secure until the third day, lest his disciples go and steal him away and tell the people, ‘He has risen from the dead,’ and the last fraud will be worse than the first.” Pilate said to them, ‘You have a guard of soldiers. Go, make it as secure as you can.’” So they went and made the tomb secure by sealing the stone and setting a guard” (Mt. 27:62-65).

An so, understandably, the first “Facebook post” that went out in the dark early that first Easter morning might have been just like the one you heard:

“Hi folks. As of last night, . . . , ‘the Millennial Bulb’ appears to have burned out. Before officially announcing this to the world we will make sure there are no power problems first. Let’s hope.”

The women heading out to the tomb had little hope at all. They were sure their “Light” had gone out. They had seen it with their own eyes. The first minute. Twenty-two or twenty-three minutes. The Light didn’t come back on. The crowd gasped.

But two dark mornings later, “as soon as its earthly power supply was bypassed, ‘the city electrician’ grabbed the switch and jiggled it; it went on!”

“And very early on the first day of the week, . . . they saw that the stone had been rolled back, . . . and entering the tomb, they saw a young man sitting on the right side, dressed in a white robe, . . . And he said to them: ‘Do not be alarmed. You seek Jesus of Nazareth, who was crucified. He has risen; he is not here.’”

For, you see, “*the Light shines in the darkness, and the darkness has not overcome it*” (Jn. 1:4).

And every day since, that “Millennial Bulb,” that “Eternal Light,” has indeed been “left on - 24 hours-a-day - to break up the darkness so the volunteers could find their way.” “Volunteers” like you and me. The way through *this* dark world to the one above that knows no end.

Why that “*Light*”? Because, once upon a time, there *was* a light that was supposed to burn forever. God had placed it in Adam and Eve. But sin snuffed it out like the light from a candle. Satan snuffed it out when he tempted our first parents into believing that there was a *better* life, a life where *they* could be god. .

Therefore the one true God sent a second “light,” a second “Adam,” as it is written, “*for as by a man came death, by a man has come also the resurrection of the dead. For as in Adam all die, so also in Christ shall all be made alive*” (1 Cor. 15:21-22). .

That towering “Lampstand,” that “Mighty Menorah,” that shining-into-all-the-world “Light,” has been lifted up. Not just on the tree of the cross, as Jesus said, “*And I, when I am lifted up from the earth, will draw all people to myself. He said this to show by what kind of death he was going to die*” (John 12:32-33) - but out of death to life. Oh, the prince of darkness wanted to overcome His life, but he was not able. Death got its hands on him, but it could not hold him.

For He is “the Eternal Light” in ways that General Electric could never imagine. He is the world-record “oldest burning bulb in the world”! For that “Light” was “*in the beginning*” and it will be the glorious lamp of that eternal city that is heaven (Rev. 21:23).

Believe it or not, Ripley’s!

And, of course, the whole idea is that you believe it! You, and all the world.

And *we do*, for we have seen “the Light” - not that Centennial Bulb, not that Millennial Bulb, not the light of the Temple, but the very “Light of the World.” A light that will never burn out or be snuffed out. A Light in which is life - *new* life, *God’s* life, *everlasting* life.

Today we celebrate the light coming into the world. Tomorrow, too. And the next day. And the day after that. We have seen the Light, thanks be to God. May others see it thanks to our life, for “*you are a chosen race, a royal priesthood, a holy nation, a people for his own possession, that you may proclaim the excellencies of him who called you out of darkness into his marvelous light*” (1 Peter 2:9). Thanks be to God.

“Joy to the world. The Lord is come. Let earth - let us! - receive her King.” Amen. Merry Christmas. Amen.