**“Wishful Thinking”**

**Christmas Eve, 2018**

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What’s on top of your Christmas tree? I have to admit that one of the first arguments that my wife and I had after we were married was about what goes on top of the Christmas tree. Of course it’s a star, right? A star goes on top of the tree commemorating the star that shone over the manger and guided the wise to Bethlehem. But she looked at me like I had no idea what I was talking about because an angel is supposed to go on top of the tree, remembering the angel who brought the good news of great joy to the shepherds. An angel. No, a star. No, an angel. So what do you think was at the top of our first tree together as husband and wife. Of course it was an angel. I may have been a new husband but I know who wins those kind of arguments.

For the time being anyway. Because for years there was an angel on the top of our tree. And the kids loved her. Although she was an angel who was dressed all in white she held two white decoration style lights in her hands, so she kind of looked like she was about to direct an airplane how to take off or land. At least that’s what one of the kids thought. But she was on our tree for many years. That is until my wife saw in a store one day a very nice, old fashioned star that goes on the top of a tree. And she fell in love with it. So after twenty years of being an angel topped tree, we now have a star topped tree. And do I sit back and say “See, I told you so?” I’m not a complete idiot. I simply say, “What a wonderful tree this year.”

But my wife loves to decorate more than just the tree. And the angel goes on the book shelf along with the nut cracker and Father Christmas and a small glass tree that lights up and the Charlie Brown snow globe. And she still lights up each Christmas and is a joy to look at. At least until this year. A few weeks ago, after the tree was all decorated, we were putting out some of the other decorations around the family room and putting some lights and garland on the bookshelf and we went to light up our faithful angel … and got nothing. No more lights. I tried replacing bulbs and fuses but to no avail. Now you have to understand that normally all year long on that bookshelf sits a decorative light that is shaped like a rooster that was a gift to us many years ago. And since the angel would no longer light up, my wife said, “Well, it’s too bad there’s no rooster in the Christmas story—we could just leave the rooster up with all the other decorations.”

“Well, you know…” I said.

And she looked at me disbelievingly—“There’s no rooster in the Christmas story!”

“Don’t you know the old legend about the rooster and Christmas?”

“Now, you’re making things up.”

“I really am not. Don’t you remember Act one, Scene one from Hamlet? Shakespeare wrote about it.”

Again she looked at me with doubt in her eyes. And not knowing my Shakespeare well enough to recite it, but being able to quickly Google it, I looked up the scene where Marcellus says to Horatio:

Some say that ever ‘gainst that season comes

Wherein our Saviour’s birth is celebrated,

This bird of dawning singeth all night long;

And then, they say, no spirit dare stir abroad,

The nights are wholesome, then no planets strike,

No fairy takes, nor witch hath power to charm,

So hallow’d and so gracious is the time.

That’s the legend, I told Erin, that on Christmas Eve, the rooster crowed all night long because of the coming not just of the light, but of the light of the world. The ancient legend says that Christmas is such a holy time that the rooster crowed the whole night long, as if it were always dawn, and for one night anyway, the dark was powerless. But then Horatio responds to Marcellus by saying, “So I have heard, and do in part believe.” I do in part believe. I can’t yet come to believe all this stuff, but in part, I do. I think sometimes that all this stuff may just be wishful thinking, but then … There’s something here that is beyond me, there is something hopeful about Christmas, something mysterious, something grace-filled, and if I could believe really, something holy.

This is the thirtieth year that I have been here for Christmas Eve service and it is the most special and holy service of the year. But for most years part of its holiness for me came after the service. After all the hugs and kisses and wishes for a Merry Christmas, people begin to leave and head home. And I walk around the church and lock the doors and turn out the lights. And I go out the front of the church and it’s amazing how quiet everything is. The square is beautiful and the village is peaceful, but I always have to look up. And I’m not sure if I’m looking for an angel or a star shining in the sky. But I can’t help wishing that I could have seen that sight. Part of me says, Oh that’s just wishful thinking. If you had been there that night it would have been like any other night. But maybe not. Is this like any other night? When you go out and look up, what will you see? Maybe nothing. But maybe … and if you listen really closely, what will you hear? Was that a rooster? Maybe …