

**Trinity Church Wall Street 6pm Holy Eucharist – Christmas Eve  
The Rev. Phillip A. Jackson Transcript**

**Christmas Past, Christmas Present**

"Remembrance is such a fundamental part of the Christian faith," said the Rev. Phil Jackson in his sermon on Christmas Eve. Recalling Christmases past, those from his youth and even just last year, he weaves together stories of excitement, embarrassment, and anticipation, while directing us to look toward the horizon, where hope and joy live, and where all is right in the world because God is with us. Merry Christmas!

**Sermon Transcript:**

In the name of the Father and of the Son and of the Holy Spirit. Amen. Please be seated, everyone.

Good evening and Merry Christmas. Merry Christmas. I want to reflect just a little bit about remembrance tonight. I have remembered that I've been reading the text that I just read for so long. But when I read it on Christmas Eve, it never fails to move me and tonight was no different at all. Matter of fact, it's amazing what comes up sometimes when I read this text. The line that got me tonight, today, yesterday was Luke 2:10. "But the angel said to them, the shepherds, 'Do not be afraid. For see, I am bringing you good news of great joy for all the people.' To you is born this day in the City of David, a Savior, who is the Messiah, the Lord.'" It's hard, no it's impossible. Not just hard, it's impossible for me to stand here in the pulpit tonight and not remember last year on Christmas Eve. You remember? We had just had the first service back in Trinity after the nave had been rejuvenated and the place was packed, was absolutely packed. It's hard for me not to remember that and what a beautiful, glorious Christmas that was.

It was good news indeed. It was glorious. It was wonderful. It is impossible to even imagine what would then happen. We had no idea, did we? We had no idea what would happen. How our world would be changed, how everything around us would change, and even how we worship as Christians has changed. The tactility of being together, which I think our faith is premised upon because that's what the incarnation means. God became one of us. So in each of us, there is something that wants to reach out and touch the other, to be with others. It's not just that we're social people. We are. But we respond also to the spark of divinity that lies in each of us and we want to reach out and touch it. And this year, I would argue that the main difficulty has been that we have not been able to do that, to respond to the divinity in each other the way we have. A question of fundamental importance for me as I think about the pandemic year, which is still going. How will we remember it years from now? How will we remember it?

Remembrance is such a part of the Christian faith. We gather and every year you hear that lesson read, these lessons read. We remember them, we remember the events that they evoke, what they tell the story of. Remembrance is a fundamental part, like tactility, of the Christian faith. I had a visit from the Ghost of Christmas Past this week. I don't know why, I was thinking about being a kid at

Christmas years ago. I must have been four or five or six and my brother was a year older than me. I remember as a kid, the excitement of Christmas. Do you remember that? Just the sheer excitement and anticipation of Christmas. I had this visual of my brother and I pouring through the Sears catalog. You may remember the Sears catalog. It was that thick and would come in October, and my brother and I would strategize. Both of us would do one initial pass-through of the toy section and then we'd focus and narrow it down, try to really hone in on what we wanted.

By the beginning of December, we would pen letters with the maximum amount of fawning unctuousness to Santa. "Dear Santa, I do so hope you're well. I do hope this has been a rich and well-met year for you. My brother and I have heard that Mrs. Claus might not be well, and we do send her our best. We were awful. All trying to game the system. Just trying to game the Santa system. Spoiler alert. Sorry if you're watching at home. Just trying. I remember I had this memory of my dad who would wait. I grew up in Chicago, so my dad would wait until the last minute and I mean, the 22nd or 23rd of December would be early. But he would wait to the last minute to go to this place that sold Christmas trees because by then he could get a discount and then he would haggle with the guy. I mean, it was just humiliating. It was just awful. But every year that we'd bring the tree back and we'd decorate it. My mom would make a lovely dinner and then she would bake cookies. She would bake these, they were Santa cookies, they were sugar cookies, but she would bake these cookies because they would go out.

Now, we lived in an apartment in Chicago on the 20th floor. All we had was a small balcony. We had a balcony and we were told, my brother and I, that Santa came in through the balcony door. Only once did we wonder because we had seen the literature on this. Where were the reindeer because the balcony was small? Only once did we raise that issue, which seemed to us of some mild importance. I think we were told something like, "They hover or they all fit. Don't worry about that." But we'd put out these cookies and milk and then with terrific anxiety and excitement, just what's going to happen. We'd make our way to bed and then we'd wake up at the crack of dawn. You probably did too. Did you have a time limit? Like you couldn't go out there to the tree until x out. For us, it was 7am and we'd wake up at six and we'd sit there plotting what we were going to get. We would then run at 7 o'clock and one second. We would run out to the tree and my dad, sorry, Santa would leave boot prints in the carpet from the balcony to the tree. So we were like, okay, that's good. He came and we would just go nuts.

I had a memory in college. After my freshman year, I took this philosophy class, I was going to be a philosophy major. I had this memory of bringing my mom and dad each for Christmas-- I gave them copies of a collection of essays by Camus because I had read it that semester and they needed to read it! They really needed to read it. I'll never forget their faces as they opened these gifts and looked at them and said "Thanks." Sure, you bet. For all the crass and sometimes vulgar commercialism that seems to have taken over Christmas, there is just something about Christmas that even this year takes our gaze out to the horizon of the world where hope and joy live. Where comfort and peace are lasting. Where a little helpless child is born in a pitiable land and that nonetheless on this night, the world stops for just a moment because for a split second the world remembers an eternal truth, that all is right with the world because God is with us.

Amen.