

My prayer for you this Christmas is like a special gift. I choose to ask for peace and joy and there's more on this list! I know you need both hope and love to fill your life anew and so I take these precious things and wrap them up for you. I ask that you would know how much you're loved and held so dear. As I take a ribbon of grace and tie a bow this year. And on the label, I will write my promise new to you: "You're in my prayers this Christmas time and the whole year through." (Author Unknown) Amen.

### **"Even with a Pandemic - Nothing New to Say for Christmas Eve, 2020"**

So, I'll let you in on a little minster's secret: the Christmas Eve sermon is one of our least favorites of the entire year.

Here's why. It's not because we don't love the season. Most of us truly do. And it's not because we have to write a long sermon. Usually these are pretty short. Instead, it's this: we're worried you've heard everything we are going to say before.

I want to say something meaningful about Christmas. I want to say something so profound and to tell the story to you in some sort of new way and make it real. But the reality is this: I can look back at every Christmas sermon I've ever preached, and I can summarize them all in three don'ts:

- Don't be like the innkeeper. When the love of God comes to your front door, don't say there's no room at the inn.
- Don't limit Christmas to one day a year, or even one season. Make Christmas a year-round affair.
- Don't extinguish the light. Christmas is about the light of Christ coming into this world. Each of us has the choice to let that light of God's love burn brightly within us for the year, or to put out the flame.

So you see Christmas sermons can be boiled down to three lines. And I really don't have a lot to add, because that's pretty much everything to say about Christmas. That's why this is one of the hardest sermons to preach all year. Nothing changes, and there's nothing new to say.

But maybe...maybe that's the point. Maybe that's the good news. Because maybe the fact that the story never changes, no matter what, means that there is hope for this world.

I think we can all agree that 2020 wasn't a great year for most of us. There was a lot of sadness, a great deal of loss, lot of anger, a lot of misunderstanding. And I keep hearing people say that they can't wait for this year to be over.

I've been thinking about that this Advent. In Advent we concentrate on four main themes: hope, peace, joy, and love.

I think about hope, and I think about our Youth and how they are still hopeful about the future.

And I think about peace, and I think about the saber rattling between nations even as we are fight an enemy we can see with the naked eye.

I think about joy, and I think about how hard it has felt for so many to find joy this year.

And I think about love, and I think about how far we still have to go when it comes to loving our neighbors.

And in the face of all of this, the same words preached here last year, and the year before that, and all the years before that, by all the preachers this pulpit has seen, still apply. That might be boring, or it might be the greatest news you could receive.

Two thousand years ago God looked down into a broken world and, despite the mess that people had made of it, God loved them anyway. And on this night, we celebrate that love coming into the world, not as a conquering army, but as a little baby, a new life, that would change everything.

Two thousand years later, we still mess up this world. But two thousand years later, the story is still the same. God still loves us. God still chooses to come into this world. God still gives us light that is bright enough to overcome any darkness.

And each Christmas, God also gives us a choice how are we going to respond to that love?

I go back to those three “don’ts”, and I think of a few “do’s”. And so, don’t be the innkeeper, shutting God’s love out. Instead, open the door of your heart wide, and say that there is room at the inn.

And don’t let the joy and kindness of Christmas be a once-a-year event. Instead, know that how we treat one another, on July 25th says a whole lot more about how well we really keep Christmas than who we are on December 25th.

And, finally, don’t extinguish the light that you have been given. Instead, tend to it. Fuel it. Let it burn so brightly within you that others can see it and find hope in it. Because this world needs a little light a little hope right now.

My prayer for you, my prayer for the world this Christmas as many Christmases before, is that Christ’s light will shine so brightly in all of us this year, yes especially this pandemic year that this world will be just a little better for it next December 24th. To be a Christian, to believe that something special happened on this night, is to choose to live in hope, and to pass that hope on to those who need it the most.

I believe in hope because I believe that God loved us 2000 years ago on a night in Bethlehem, and I believe God loves us even still.

And on that note, I’ll leave you with a spoiler alert: the words you’ve heard from me tonight are probably pretty close to the words you’ll hear from me next year. But rest assured, they’ll still apply. Every year, they’ll still apply. And that is incredibly good news indeed.

**“Even with a Pandemic - Nothing New to Say for Christmas Eve, 2020” Amen!**