

*A Christmas story delivered by the Rev. Timothy C. Ahrens, senior minister at the First Congregational Church, United Church of Christ, Columbus, Ohio, Christmas Eve 7:30 p.m., December 24, 2012, dedicated to my children, the children of First Church and all the children of the world, to the memory of Christopher Mondiek and to Dr. Washington Gladden on the 130<sup>th</sup> anniversary of his first sermon in the pulpit of First Church, and always to the glory of God!*

## **“Santa Claus in the Pulpit”**

### **Luke 2:1-20**

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Let us pray: May the words of my mouth and the meditations of each one of our hearts be acceptable in your sight, O Lord, our rock and our salvation. Amen.

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The other day, I came into the sanctuary to pray. It is one of my favorite things to do. I usually go way back in the sanctuary to pray. There I was – back where (well Nicholas) is sitting. I had my head down in prayer....when all of the sudden, I heard a voice.

“Hello there!” the voice said. I thought, “Is this God speaking to me?” I continued to pray, though my curiosity and interest were definitely heightened.

*“Timothy Carl Ahrens, I am talking to you. Hello there!”*

My eyes opened wide and I looked to the place where the booming voice was coming from. To my utter amazement, it was St. Nicholas in the pulpit. In this pulpit. Right where I am standing now. Santa Claus himself was in this pulpit. What was going on? Never had I had a vision like this. He started to talk.

*Yes, it is me, Timothy. Old St. Nick! Never heard me preach before, did you? No, talking is not my trade. But the preacher in the*

*Good Book, (Ecclesiastes by name), says there is a time to speak and time to keep silence. I've kept my mouth shut for several hundred years. Now is the time to speak. Now I have something to say. Here we go . . . hang on to your hat!*

(I wasn't actually wearing a hat, but I knew he meant).

*First, I have the list of all your church's children. I know which ones have been naughty and which ones have been nice. The good news, your children and teens all made the "nice list" – although a few had to get some extra credit points to make the list. They need to start a little earlier and work a little harder at being nice next year. But, they made it. Let me say, I am impressed by 100% niceness of your children here! Ho-ho-ho!*

*Second, if you can't see from there, I will tell you - my eyes are puffy and red - because I have been doing a lot of crying the last couple of days. I am so sad for the children and adults of Sandy Hook Elementary and all the people of Newtown, Connecticut. All the children, moms and dads there need more love, more care, more prayers from you and all your people because of all that has happened. Please know all the little ones and their teachers are with God.*

*I am also so sad that your young man named Christopher slipped and fell to his death. He was so beautiful and wonderful. You know his name means "the one who carries Christ?" **I nodded.** He carried Christ. Now, Christ is carrying him.*

*Tell, all your moms and dads, grandmas and grandpas to hug and kiss their precious children. Love them. Help them. Don't hurt them. They are all so beautiful. That is the way Jesus would do it. That is way Mary and Joseph always did for him, too.*

*Now for my third point (don't preachers use three points, Timothy?). **I said, "Some do."** Anyway, number three . . . You do know that all the children of the world are in God's love and care. Right? **I nodded "right."** Well, you know what that means? Since God loves all the children, and since all the children belong to God,*

*that means I watch them all – all over the world – on Christmas night. I want you to remember that when I go off the radar screens in North America, I am travelling to South America, Europe, Africa, Asia, Australia, and even to the penguin land of Antarctica. There are a few children there, too!*

*As I fly around I see a billion children or more. I see children who are orphans with no one to hug and kiss them, children who are homeless poor, children so sick – standing at heaven’s door, children who are hurt, hungry and sad; children who are refugees of war searching for a new home; and children who are living in homes where all love is gone and where people are unkind and they cannot even sense their own lives affected by love lost, by gentleness and strength that has moved out of the house. There are millions and millions of children who need love, Timothy. Please tell others to remember the children. All of the children are our children. Love them. I cannot do it all myself.*

*Timothy, tell them that the children don’t just get poor. They don’t just lose love, or become hungry and homeless; orphans or refugees. This happens because of the cruelty and greed of small numbers of people. We have to put an end to cruelty and greed. There is enough in this world for everyone – enough money and enough love for all. It hurts me to see lovely people get treated in mean ways by people who have lost love and act with cruelty toward others. If you have no love in your heart, you will miss the meaning of life - and Christmas, too!*

*That’s why God sent me into this world. He sent me to bring hope, laughter, love and joy. The gifts I bring are just a way to show love. That is all. But, I am only here because of Jesus! It is Jesus that really matters, not me. Without him, there is no Christmas. He loves everyone. Love him and follow him and things will get better!*

*One more thing. Tell the kids and parents to get their faces out of the TVs, computer screens, ipads, ipods, iphones, all the things that begin with “I”. Oh, and tell Andrew Welsh-Huggins, I like his idea about the I-God. But it needs lots of work before it matches “my God.” (Ho-Ho-Ho!)*

*Tell everyone to look into the eyes of those around you and feel their love. Share your love that is in your eyes, too. The eyes of love. When you look with love into the eyes of others, you see the face of Christ!*

*I am done talking! That's all I have to say, Timothy!*

*"So," Santa finished, "how did I do as a preacher? HO! HO! HO!"*

As I grabbed the pew in front of me and started pull myself up and started to clap for Santa's fantastic sermon in the pulpit of First Church, I looked and he was gone! Santa was gone from the pulpit. He was gone from the sanctuary. In a flash he was gone! He had disappeared. He must have climbed the scaffolding and escaped through an opening in the Jeffrey Window!

From the rooftop high above, I heard his voice joyfully calling to the reindeer. Then there was no more sound. He was gone in the twinkling of an eye.

I rubbed my eyes – wondering what had happened. Was it just a vision or really Old St. Nick? I'll never know for sure.

But I do know this: Look into the eyes of your children and love them. Never take them for granted. Remember all the children this Christmas. In them, you will see the face of the newborn Christ. Believe me. It comes from a good authority.

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