

Advent Vespers Reflection

December 17, 2025

Jonny Wheaton

Good evening, everyone.

I want to thank all of you for being here for this Wednesday service. I want to thank Elaine for giving me the chance to speak tonight, and I want to thank my parents for coming tonight.

As many of you know, tonight's theme is "Light in a Jar."

The light represents hope and encouragement.

The jar represents the way we hold onto that hope and that encouragement — how we carry it with us.

The light never fades.

The light never dies.

It shines until the hope reaches you and once it reaches you, you pass it on to someone else.

This theme reminds me of the stories I grew up hearing. Stories from when I was born, especially around Christmastime.

My mom was in labor with me for at least three days. I may not be a woman, and I may never truly know what that pain feels like, but three days of labor has to be tough. And yet, when I finally arrived, the jar of light in our family was lit shining bright. And to be honest,

my light must have been shining brighter than my mom's, because the first thing she asked for after giving birth was Subway.

My dad was a fisherman. He worked with my grandfather, and they didn't always get along. But he kept going.

He missed a lot of moments in my life, but I don't hold that against him because he was trying to survive. He was trying to support us the only way he knew how.

During the winter, he didn't fish. The money he made in the warmer months had to last us through the cold ones. And we struggled a lot.

There were times we didn't know if Santa would come.

At times we weren't sure if we could pay our bills.

At times we didn't know if we would have enough food.

Times we feared losing our home.

Yet somehow, the light in the jar always gave us just enough hope to keep going.

Eventually my dad left fishing and found a better-paying job. When that happened, we knew the light had guided us. We knew the jar hadn't run out of hope after all.

Setbacks happen. That's life.

But the light tells us:

Don't give up. Keep going. Hope is still here.

When 2020 came, people everywhere were losing hope.

People were dying. Everything was closed.

Families were forced to talk through glass windows.

I lost myself too.

Even though my dad and grandfather didn't always get along, I had a strong relationship with my grandfather. But a few years before my dad quit fishing, my grandfather's health and mental stability began to decline.

The light in the jar kept telling me:

“Jonny, don't give up. Give him hope. Have hope for yourself.”

But after one difficult day of driving around the island with him, a day filled with drinking and confusion, we realized we were losing him. Thankfully, nothing terrible happened that day, but in a way, I lost him long before he passed away.

He was diagnosed with dementia.

He had already lost about 35% of his memory.

And as he faded, so did I.

When he passed on April 7th, 2020, the light inside me dimmed to almost nothing.

My depression grew stronger.

I stopped expressing emotions.

I hid everything.

I turned to food for comfort.

I slid deeper and deeper into darkness.

But here's the strange thing:

When I felt most broken,

the light grew brighter.

It kept whispering that I wasn't done yet.

Then one night, I had a dream, a vision.

I was in a place filled with hope and encouragement.

The light in the jar was shining brighter than ever.

I saw people I had loved and lost.

And there he was, my grandfather, waiting for me.

I walked up to him, and he said:

“Jonny, it’s okay to be sad. But you need to have encouragement and hope.”

Those words stayed with me.

I wouldn’t have made it through that darkness, I wouldn’t have found myself again, if it wasn’t for St. Brendan’s.

If I had never come here, I don’t know if I would be here today.

But because of the light in the jar and because of *all of you*, I am still here.

Every day, the light still shines.

Every day, it encourages me.

Every day, it reminds me to encourage others.

I want to ask everyone to close your eyes.

Picture a jar with a light inside it.

The jar doesn’t have to be perfect.

It doesn’t have to be clean.

It doesn’t matter what shape or color it is.

Just see the light inside spreading hope and encouragement to you and everyone around you.

Hold onto that image.

Carry that jar with you always.

Don't throw it away.

Don't forget it.

Wherever you go,

let the light guide you,

let it encourage you,

let it give you hope,

and let it help you give hope to others.

Amen.