[1] Second Sunday After Christmas (Epiphany Sunday – Jan 5, 2025)
Sermon Title: The True Light
Scripture: John 1:6-18
Theme: The True Light is Christ who manifests the Way of Restoration and Redemption

**[2]** “The true light, which enlightens everyone, [has come] into the world. He was in the world, and the world came into being through him; yet the world did not know him.” (Jn 1:9-10) / Sentinels, lift your voices and sing for joy, for in plain sight (eye-to-eye), you are seeing the Lord’s return to Zion. (Is. 52:8)

Simeon’s famous words, upon seeing the Christ Child, ring true: “my eyes have
seen your salvation, which you have prepared in the presence of all peoples, a light
for revelation to the Gentiles and glory to your people Israel.” Eye-to-eye, face-to-
face, I have seen your salvation, he proclaimed. If you have eyes to see, and ears to
hear, just look, and listen, at what is happening in plain sight! In plain sight for
**[3]** everyone to see. “I will stand at my watch post, and stand on the rampart, to keep watch,” said the prophet Habakkuk, and the Lord responded, “Write the vision, and make it plain on glistening tablets (billboards) so that a runner [racing by] may read it [at a glance].” The Lord has come among us in plain sight, albeit, as a baby in a manger, born in a stable in lowly Bethlehem, yet not as a distant divine being, but, in plain sight, as a flesh-and-blood human being. Yet, as John tells us, “He came to what was his own, and his own people did not accept him.” (Jn 1:11).

Despite being in plain sight, many in the world did not know him and did not
accept him. Many did not receive him or believe in his name, even though he was
right there in front of them. Many did not accept the power freely and openly given to them to become children of God.

When Jacob limps away from wrestling with the angel, he says: “I have seen God
face-to-face, and my life is preserved. (Gen. 32:30). In the great theophany on
Mount Sinai, while Moses stood in the “cleft of the rock,” God “made all his
goodness” pass before Moses (Ex. 33:19-23) and, in addition, Moses took off his
shoes while approaching the burning bush to show deep respect for the presence of
the Almighty. In the pillar of cloud, during the Exodus from Egypt, God would
speak to Moses face-to-face, as a friend speaks to a friend (Ex. 33:11). In those
days, many would stand before their own tent and converse with God. They
recognized the presence of God, although it was a veiled presence. But, in Christ,
the Incarnate, the Emmanuel, the divine was finally unveiled in the form of a
helpless baby in his mother’s arms, in his father’s arms. God was finally in plain
sight, eye-to-eye, face-to-face. The mystery was revealed for all to see, no longer a
global phantom, but now a local phenomenon; the message was no longer cerebral,
but real, embodied in the tiny, yet powerful, messenger of peace.

“How beautiful upon the mountains are the feet of the messenger who announces peace, who brings good news, who announces salvation, who says to Zion, "Your God reigns."

**[4]** The Lord has comforted his people; God has redeemed Jerusalem, God has
redeemed Israel, God has redeemed all the nations, all the peoples of the world. As the scripture declares, all the “ends of the earth” (Scythian, Sheba, Persia, North
Africa, etc.) shall see God’s salvation, not in a formidable marching army or
thousands of sailing ships, but in a peaceful sleeping baby, cuddled in a manger,
lying amidst the contented livestock, and born into the House of Bread (*Beth-
lechem*) to peaceably feed the entire world with spiritual and earthly food. In the
beautiful phrases of the First Testament, “the Valley of Achor has become a door
of hope (Ex. 32:6; Jn 10:9)!” The Branch of Justice and Righteousness (Jer. 33:15)
has sprung forth into budding! The Rose of Sharon has blossomed into complete
joy (Song of Solomon 2:1; Is. 53:2). Those who have “faced their Jeshimon” (Num
21:20, 23:28) have now seen the fullness of their hope come alive!

Though the perfect love of God was in full sight for all to see, the divine
completely embodied in the human, emptied of all royalty or privilege, the Word
of God made flesh, Isaiah had foreseen that the Suffering Servant of God, who
would bring us peace and heal all our wounds, would have “no beauty or majesty
to attract us to him, nothing in his appearance that we should desire him,” and “like
one from whom people would hide their faces.” (Is. 53:1-5). For us to have the
eyes to see, and the ears to hear, we would have to intentionally correct our vision
and straighten our hearing, even though the supreme act of God to save us,
identified in the beautiful Aramaic name, Yeshua, is in plain sight.

The ancient and poetic priestly blessing, first delivered to Aaron, and then to all the
priests descending from him, in each new generation, is a call to seek the Lord’s
face-to-face, eye-to-eye, blessing:

“The Lord bless you and keep you; The Lord make His face shine upon you, And be gracious to you; The Lord lift up His countenance upon you, And give you peace.” (Num. 6:24-26)

It is no small thing that God offers God’s face to each of us, forgiving, merciful,
personal and intimate. The experience is totally unlike any that we have ever seen,
any voice we have ever heard, beyond anything we could ever imagine, says Paul,
quoting Isaiah:

“Eye has not seen, nor ear heard, Nor have entered into the heart [of any man or woman] The things which God has prepared for those who love Him.” (1 Cor. 2:9; Is. 64:4).

In futility, we look down into the face and eyes of the baby Jesus to find any image
or colors that we might recognize, to humanize our God and find our image there,
but it is God’s image that is in us, not the other way around. As when Peter, one
who was part of the inner circle of Disciples, on his fateful night of denial, looks
into the eyes of the Savior, expecting disappointment, only to find an unconditional
and unfailing love (Lk. 22:61). The Christ-child It is an everlasting Love-come-
down at Christmas staring us in the face, looking deep into our eyes, with a
piercing look that divides soul and spirit, joints and marrow, to reveal the thoughts
and intentions of the heart (Lk. 2:34-34; Heb. 4:12).

**[5]** Jesus would teach us in adult years that “[our] eye is the lamp of our body, when our eyes are good, our whole body is also full of light, but when they are bad, our body is full of darkness, and so we are called to guard our eyes so that our body will be full of light, with no part of it in darkness, and that we will be radiant as though a lamp were shining on us.” (Lk. 11:34-36). And he would also teach us, when it comes to criticism and judgement, not to harp upon the “speck in our
brother or sister’s eye” without regard to the much larger “beam in our own eye.”
(Lk. 6:42).

There is nothing like face-to-face, and eye-to-eye, to guide us into a profound
humility. We speak with our eyes and our faces what our tongues cannot say, what
our minds cannot find the words to say. This is the “abba, daddy God” experience
we have through the Holy Spirit, knowing us better than we know ourselves.

**[6]** Ultimately, these loving eyes, and forgiving face, lead us to the humble
understanding, realization and revelation, that an eye for an eye, and a tooth for a
tooth, will eventually make the world eyeless and toothless, and that we should
wisely leave all judgment in the hands of Almighty God, lest we be so judged
ourselves as we have judged others (James 2:13).

I invite you, this Christmas morning, to look into the loving eyes of the baby, the
forgiving face of the Savior, to find an everlasting love beyond all others, and to be
drawn into the Lord’s fold, into those who worship in the Lord’s name, confessing
the Christmas in your soul, that “Jesus is Lord!” Alleluia! Amen!