

**First Presbyterian Church  
Southampton, New York  
*“You Lookin’ at Me?”***

**Isaiah 61: 10 – 62: 3  
Luke 2: 22 – 40**

**December 28, 2014**

Several years ago, before I was your pastor, and before Sylvia and I were residents of Long Island... we traveled to Brooklyn for a Thanksgiving visit with our daughter Anita, who was doing an internship in the city, at MSNBC. And while we were there, one of the little side-trips that we took was a sightseeing expedition to the Empire State Building.

It was a clear, beautiful, late autumn evening... and we knew that the view would be spectacular. So we made our way up Fifth Avenue until we reached the lobby of the building... and the long line of fellow tourists who were also interested in seeing the borough of Manhattan from the top of this world-famous skyscraper.

Now, we didn’t expect to just walk in the door, jump in an elevator, and merrily ride our way up to the 86<sup>th</sup> floor observation deck. We knew we’d have to buy a ticket... stand in line... go through security... and generally wait our turn, like everybody else. And, sure enough, that’s exactly the way it was. The usher at the front door told us that the wait would be about two hours... and, believe me, he wasn’t exaggerating!

First we snaked our way through a Disneyland-like line which traversed the first floor of the building; this brought us to the main security checkpoint. Then there was more lining up, waiting, and shuffling along like cattle; to the cheerful woman selling tickets, who was doing her best impersonation of a boot-camp drill instructor. Then there was an express elevator ride up to the 80<sup>th</sup> floor; where we were disgorged into another serpentine line, which brought us to another elevator, which eventually landed us on the observation deck.

But even here the waiting wasn’t over, because the hundreds of tourists who’d come up before us were still thronged around the edges of the observation deck... taking pictures, “oohing” and “aahing,” and enjoying the stunning beauty of New York City at night. So, we crammed our way into the milling throng... and patiently waited our turn until the previous wave of spectators finally decided that they’d had enough, and began to make their way back to the elevator.

It was a lot of pushing, and jostling, and standing, and waiting, and elbowing, and inching along for nearly two whole hours. But, once we reached the side of that building, and gazed out over the city in all its lit-up brilliance... there was no doubt whatsoever that the entire wearying enterprise had been completely worth it.

We eventually made our way to every side of that observation deck: north, west, south, east. We took pictures; we pointed out famous landmarks; we saw Brooklyn, Staten Island, Central Park, and Bergen, New Jersey, where we’d gotten lost two days before while looking for the Holland Tunnel. We drank it all in... and when we ourselves

had had enough, we once again followed the crowd, back to the elevator, back down to the street, back to the busy world far below preparing to celebrate Thanksgiving. It was truly one of the highlights of our trip!

I was reflecting this week on our high-rise expedition to look at the New York skyline... because it reflects so much the same kind of thing that was going on in the days and weeks following the birth of Jesus.

Not that people were flocking to New York, or riding up elevators, or elbowing their way around some Jerusalem observation deck. No... I mean that a lot of people wanted to *see* something. A lot of travelers were interested in having a *look* at something. A lot of men, women, and young people were anxious to cast their *eyes* on something... something that could change them, and bless them, and make their lives into something new and grand and glorious. And, of course, this some-*thing* that everyone wanted to see, was really a some-*one*... the One who'd been born in Bethlehem, and wrapped in swaddling cloths, and laid in that low-rent manger, because there was no room for Him in the inn.

The gospel record tells us that it was a group of anonymous shepherds who were the first to come and see Jesus... leaving behind their flocks and their fields to check out the report of the angel, that God's Messiah had been born in the city of David. Then we're told of a troop of Wise Men who'd traveled halfway 'round the known world to come and have a look at the One whose star had appeared to them amid the constellations of the Eastern sky. They were so bound and determined to see Jesus that, even though they were a bunch of guys, they still stopped in Jerusalem to ask for directions to the newborn King of the Jews.

We already know that Mary and Joseph were looking at their baby with wide-eyed amazement... having been told as they were, by dreams and angels, that the child before them was a gift direct from God, who would save the world from all its sin and evil. And we can only imagine the roster of friends, relatives, and village curiosity-seekers who dropped in on that blessed night in Bethlehem... to have a gander, to cast a glance, to take a look at the tiny little baby who'd been the subject of so much talk, so much speculation, so much supposition about who He really was and where He really came from.

I suppose it's not too much of a stretch to think that even the cows, donkeys, chickens, and household pets who were on the scene that night were probably trying to shoulder their way in too... to get their own firsthand look at this curious new arrival who was creating such a fuss.

So, yeah, everyone wanted to have a look at Jesus... on that blessed Christmas night in Bethlehem. And, as our text from Luke this morning reminds us, the godly folks in Jerusalem were no less interested in having a firsthand look of their own... when, eight days later, Jesus was brought up to the temple to be circumcised and presented to the Lord, according to the laws and customs which had been laid down by Moses.

First Luke tells us about a man named Simeon... a righteous and devoted Jew who, according to the text, "had been looking forward to the consolation of Israel" and upon whom God's Holy Spirit rested. Prompted by the Spirit, Simeon also went looking

for Jesus and, when he finally found Him with His parents in the temple, he took the child in his arms and praised God, saying:

*“Sovereign Lord, as you have promised, you now dismiss your servant in peace. For my eyes have seen your salvation, which you have prepared in the sight of all people, a light for revelation to the Gentiles, and for glory to your people Israel.”*

Simeon looked at Jesus and saw the fulfillment of the Lord’s promise and the arrival of the Lord’s salvation... He saw the hope of God’s grace for both Jew and Gentile alike.

And then Luke tells us about the prophetess Anna, daughter of Phanuel... a member of the Israelite tribe of Asher. *She* also came looking for Jesus in the temple that day... and when she saw Him, she praised God and began to proclaim that the redemption of the Lord had come to the people of Jerusalem. *She* looked at Jesus and saw hope... and forgiveness... and mercy... and grace.

So, you have shepherds... Wise Men... prophets... holy people... a mother and a father... friends, neighbors, relatives... maybe even an assortment of various barnyard animals. All of them coming to Jesus... and looking at Him... and seeing, what? A baby? Yes, a baby, but so much more than just a baby... so much more than just another family portrait... so much more than business as usual in a small Jewish village. Because, when they leaned down and looked at Jesus they also saw hope. They saw the fulfillment of God’s promise. They saw forgiveness... they saw deliverance... they saw acceptance, by the Lord who made them and loved them.

They saw a cooing bundle of swaddling cloths, but they also saw a prophet... and they saw a king... and they saw the Son of God: announced by holy angels, proclaimed by heavenly choirs, revealed by the very stars themselves to those who seek Him and love Him. They saw God’s plan for the ages, come to full fruition in the person of a tiny, crying, child. They saw salvation and mercy, grace and peace which no one would ever be able to take away from them. They saw the greatest gift that God could ever give to them... and none of their lives would ever be the same again.

Which brings us to this morning, and our own personal pilgrimage to come and look at Jesus. It may be twenty centuries later, but just like the shepherds and Wise Men, we, too, are peering over the side of that rickety manger... to get our own firsthand look at the baby who’s sleeping in the hay.

Like Simeon and Anna, we, too, have been drawn to this sanctuary to catch a glimpse of the holy child... who bears within His soul so much hope, so much promise, so much grace for our sin-sick and weary lives. Like Mary and Joseph and their family in Bethlehem... we see the infant Jesus and we ponder in our hearts, what will His presence mean for us? Can this truly be the Son of God who’s come to save me... to forgive me... to lead me by the hand to the very gates of God’s kingdom?

In one way or another, for one reason or another, to one end or another... we’ve all come together to see the Lord Jesus. And as we cast our eyes upon Him, He speaks to us from the manger:

*“You lookin’ at me? And if you are... what is it that you see? Do you see more than a greeting card? Do you see more than a holiday? Do you see more than a day off*

*from work... more than a couple of weeks off from school... more than a time-honored cultural tradition? Do you see more than presents and parties and pageants... more than trees and tinsel and trimmings... more than busyness and exhaustion and hand to hand combat at the mall?*

*“Do you see... **me**? And in seeing me, do you see what Simeon and Anna saw... do you understand what the Wise Men and the shepherds understood... do you realize what Mary and Joseph realized... that I have come to save you, and to love you, and to reconnect you, heart, mind, and spirit to the life of your Heavenly Father. That’s why I’m here... and that’s the gift that I’ve given you. Don’t forget to open it... and to be blessed by it... and to allow your life to be changed by it, forever!”*

This morning, we stand together on the threshold of a new year. As we make our way forward to the challenges and opportunities that are ahead... let’s never forget that that baby in a manger is always right before us: reminding us of who we are... reminding us of why we’re here... reminding us of the love of God which will never fail us or forsake us.

In 2015, let’s make sure that we never stop looking at Jesus... because we **can** be sure that He’ll never stop looking at us. That’s His promise... and that’s our hope! Today, tomorrow, and all the days of our lives! In the name of the Father, and the Son, and the Holy Spirit, amen!