

# SEQUOYAH HILLS PRESBYTERIAN CHURCH

## “Dwell: Light Years”

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**1 John 1:2**

December 7, 2025

We continue in our Advent series “Dwell,” taking a very slow, close look at the opening verses of the First Letter of John, considering just one verse each week. Something we’ll touch on each week is the calling embedded within the good news of the Incarnation of God in Jesus Christ, embedded within Advent, and that is to be in a posture of patience, of waiting, of slowing down, even. Sit, stay a while, dwell, as the Lord dwelled (and dwells) with us.

Last week we considered the lengths we will go to to avoid doing that which feels undoable: slowing down. So instead of waiting, instead of patience, we’ll concoct all these other mechanisms to make it look, sound, smell like a season of the Lord, but our hearts aren’t there. They’re occupied with something else. Maybe the next thing on the calendar or the to-do list.

And this week we consider more of the miraculous unknowable declarations of this season, we go on to the second verse, proclaiming how the eternal became known and perhaps opening our eyes to all the ways we may not see the Lord...yet. Let’s go to God’s Word together.

[Read passage, 1 John 1:2.] The Word of the Lord. **Thanks be to God.** Will you pray with me?

Infinite God, in your glory, creation speaks to your presence and will. By your grace, you make yourself known in the universe, in Scripture, and most of all through your Son Christ Jesus. Reveal yourself anew through your Word this morning, we pray. And for the Word spoken and heard today, may it not be mine but yours. Amen.

On February 24, 1987, at about 2:40 in the morning, Ian Shelton, a Canadian astronomer noticed something different on one of the images generated at Las Campanas Observatory in the Atacama Desert of northern Chile. He discovered a previously undetected bright light in a photograph of the night sky. He figured, well there’s an easy way to check this, it’s of the sky right now, so he just went outside. He looked up at the sky and saw that indeed a bright light was shining in the sky where initially there hadn’t been.

He investigated further, bringing in other colleagues—not to mention other astronomers around the world who independently made the same discovery. And long story short, it was the discovery of a supernova, an exploding star, the first one visible to the naked eye in almost 400 years.

Its brightness increased over the next three months, peaking in May of 1987, and then waned, fading back into the night sky. The remnants of it now only observable through the most sensitive of telescopes.

This supernova was elegantly named SN-1987A. Through further research, it was discovered that the star that had collapsed and exploded to produce the supernova was what is known as a blue supergiant, just as elegantly named Sk-69 202. Astronomers are real romantics, obviously.

Among the interesting things about this particular blue supergiant is that it is (or was) 168,000 light years away. For the astronomically inclined, you already know this, but if we might remember back to school science class, we'll remember that a light year is the distance that light can travel in a year. It's a basic unit of measurement on an astronomical scale because the distances are so great, as a light year is over 5 trillion miles, but who's counting?

Here's why that's interesting. It means that by 1987, when to our eyes we first "discovered" the supernova taking place, we are seeing something that happened 168,000 years ago, and in reality, as far as what is in existence right now, that star was gone, blown up, long before we could ever see it.

And what were we doing as a species when the blue supergiant blew up? Pioneering the fascinating use of putting sharp stones on the ends of sticks to hunt things.

In fact, and this kind of screwballs the mind to think about, the last supernova to be visible by the naked eye, the one before SN-1987A, was observed almost 400 years early in the early 17<sup>th</sup> century. It was called Kepler's Supernova, named after the German astronomer who discovered it in 1604 and was visible around the world for a period of about three weeks—and actually gave some insight as to what might've been interpreted by the Magi in the period around Christ's birth as a new star.

That star was a lot closer. It blew up in our own galaxy, in the Milky Way. It was a mere 20,000 light years away. Here's how it messes with your head. 400 years separated the discoveries of these two supernovas. Kepler's Supernova? That's ancient history right.

And yet, even when Kepler's Supernova first happened, when that star blew up 20,000 years ago, the blue supergiant, the one that Ian Shelton discovered just 40 years ago, had already been dead and gone for 150,000 years.

Those notions of time and what we can see enter into this one verse in 1 John. They enter into how we consider something like the Incarnation, how we consider something like Christmas. How do we make sense of something eternal, something timeless, something that has no beginning and yet somehow is discovered?

1 John 1:2 reads: "This life was revealed, and we have seen it and testify to it and declare to you the eternal life that was with the Father and was revealed to us." Just that first phrase, "This life was revealed," is theological bombshell, right up there with the phrase in the opening of the Gospel of John, "The Word became flesh and dwelled among us," because they're both just about saying the same thing.

When 1 John says in v. 2, "This life," and then later in the first clarifying, "the eternal life that was with the Father," it's connected to the description right before it in verse 1, which some may remember from last week, "the word of life." It's the same kind of phrasing, referring to the same thing: the Word, the Word that was God and was with God in the beginning, as the very first verse in the Gospel of John declares. That's what "this life," "the word of life," "the eternal life that was with the Father," is referring to in 1 John.

So when 1 John says, "This life was revealed, and we have seen it and testify to it and declare to you," it's making the same claim as the Gospel of John, "The Word became flesh and dwelled among us." In other words, it's saying, that which was/is eternal, timeless, having no beginning, the cosmic, almighty God himself, was made known, revealed, "discovered" in a way.

And how was this life, this eternal life, this Word revealed? By astronomers looking through a telescope out into distant space? No, by a baby being born.

Now that's even more confusing, because now you're saying that that which was/is eternal is now fully embodied and revealed, not partially, not like this baby is kinda God but not completely God, not like a spiritual possession like God's Spirit possessed a human body and walked around in it, but fully God, fully embodied, fully revealed in what by definition has limits, in what by definition has a beginning.

Even the simple stuff like saying Jesus walked or sat in one place or another starts to boggle the mind. If Jesus was sitting in one place, it means that by default he wasn't sitting in another place. But how can the eternal, omnipresent God who has no limit be in one place but not another?

Or even declaring, as we do in particular during this season, "God was born," "The eternal God was born"—it's a contradiction, a paradox, just in saying it. How can the eternal God have a birthday?

It begs the question, actually a question Frances brought up the other day, "So if Jesus was born, but if Jesus is eternal as God, what was Jesus doing before Christmas?"

These aren't new questions, by the way. These are questions that theologians grappled with for centuries in the early church. We are called and stirred by the grace of God and the Spirit of God to follow and serve this Jesus who died on the cross, who rose from the dead, the Son of God. But how do we make sense of worshiping Jesus as Lord, as God?

Because you can square things if Jesus is slightly less than God, if Jesus weren't on equal footing, like in the Trinity, Father, Son, and Holy Spirit. If the Son is slightly less God than, say, God the Father or just God in general, then this is easier to make sense of. The Son of God was born. And yes, the Son of God is divine, but not quite as divine as, you know, "Big God." That's easy. And that's the conclusion some early theologians reached.

But then you have to ask, well if Jesus is somehow less God than "Big God," then why bother worshiping him? Didn't that same God declare to Israel, "I am the first and I am the last; besides me there is no God" (Isaiah 44:6)? If Jesus is less God than "Big God," then let's dispense with the middlemen, just worship Big God.

But then if you say that, you start taking away from the centrality of Jesus, from the claims of Christmas, of the Resurrection, of the good news of the cross.

Confusing at all? You should be. I'm confused by it. Christians should be confused by it. It's a paradox. And if you find your head spinning a bit right now by all the lofty theological questions about eternity and time and all that, it's okay. In fact, it's kind of a good thing. It means we should approach Christmas and this season leading up to it with a deep reverence and humility, because it can't be confined to just a cute little story about a baby being born in a stable. There is deep mystery and miracle about it that we can never presume to understand, and even as we reflect upon it, it should bring to a point of awe and wonder.

It makes me think about light years and supernovas and exploding stars, about how that blue supergiant supernova discovered 40 years ago actually happened 168,000 years ago. It makes me wonder if there were distant star 5 billion years old, about the same age as our sun, astronomers think. But it's 5 billion light years away. Meaning, all this time, we haven't seen it, but maybe tomorrow, some astronomer gazing through some telescope into a tiny pocket of the night sky may see new light blink into existence. A grand discovery, a great revelation, to be sure. But in reality, it's been there the whole time. We only just now were given eyes to see.

It makes me wonder about all the ways that God may be with us, and all the ways that God has been with us, but that we just couldn't see at the time.

Shasta is the titular boy in the C. S. Lewis book *The Horse and His Boy*. It's one of the books in *The Chronicles of Narnia*. If you know those books at all, it takes place during the reign of the four Pevensie children, you know the kids from *The Lion, The Witch, and the Wardrobe*, but when their grown up as kings and queens.

Anyway, *The Horse and His Boy* is a beautiful story, often overlooked in the Narnia stuff. Parts of it haven't aged so well, but that's a separate topic.

Shasta, the boy, has had a difficult life, raised by an abusive father and thrust onto a perilous journey. He's in danger. He's chased by lions, hunted by jackals, but eventually he meets and befriends a kind of regional king named King Lune.

Then one night he finds himself separated from his group and caught in a deep fog, and within the fog he senses a mysterious presence alongside him, and somehow he and this presence start talking. As it happens, that presence turns out to be Aslan, the lion who's more or less the Jesus figure in the Narnia stories.

Shasta laments to this presence why he had to have such a hard life. To him, Aslan replies, "I was the lion who forced you to join with [your friend]. I was the cat who comforted you among the houses of the dead. I was the lion who drove the jackals from you while you slept. I was the lion who gave the horses the new strength of fear for the last mile so that you should reach King Lune in time. And I was the lion you do not remember who pushed the boat in which you lay, a child near death, so that it came to shore where a man sat, wakeful at midnight, to receive you."

In other words, Aslan reveals all the ways he had been present and at work throughout Shasta's life to bring him to this point, this all-important juncture for him. He was there the whole time. It was only just now that he could see it, and even then only in a fog.

Friends in this mystery of Christmas, we are given the good news of a light shining, a light breaking out, this good news of the eternal God made flesh, born in a manger. It's not something we should so conveniently seek to brush off as commonplace, because it's not.

But like a distant star or supernova that we've only just now discovered, or like a magical lion pushing a child in a boat toward survival, I wonder about all the ways Christ is and has been with me, with you, and at work within my life, within your life, that you are only now beginning to see.

In the name of the Father and of the Son and of the Holy Spirit. Amen.