

The First Sunday after Christmas
December 30, 2018
Preached by the Rev. Lisa M. Erdeljon
St Michael's Episcopal Church, Barrington, IL
John 1:1-18

In the beginning was the Word, and the Word was with God, and the Word was God. He was in the beginning with God... And the Word became flesh and lived among us...

And she gave birth to her firstborn son and wrapped him in bands of cloth, and laid him in a manger, because there was no place for them in the inn.

Merry Christmas! Jesus is born!

The baby whom we have all been waiting for, who the angels foretold of his arrival, who would be a Savior, who is the Lord, the Messiah.

He is wrapped in bands of cloth and laid in a manger.

Angels sang of His glory. Shepherds and wise men visited Him.

And we celebrate His birth on Christmas Day, like a birthday celebration for the greatest baby in time!

And we know His story. Everyone knows His story. The story of a baby, of a virgin birth, of angels proclaiming His arrival.

And on Christmas Eve and Christmas Day, we hear that story again.

In fact, throughout all of Advent, we are hearing that story... or at least the stories that lead up to, that await His coming.

His humble birth... the birth of a child, a baby, that will grow up to be a man. Albeit, a man who is fully and perfectly Incarnate AND fully and perfectly Divine.

But still, a man, all the same.

And we relate to this tiny baby, just as each of us has been a baby, has seen pictures of babies, has held a squirming, crying, screaming, cooing, sleeping baby...

We know what babies do and how they look and how they act.

And we know what men do and how men look and how men act.

But today, the first Sunday after Christmas Day, we learn of the other side of Jesus.

The fully and perfectly Divine part of Jesus. The <quote> "Christ" part of Jesus.

So, while we are getting all wrapped up in baby talk and fantasies of the relate-ability of an infant child, we are forced to face the fact that this infant child is nothing like any other infant we have seen or met or know of...

This infant child is the same as God the Father and the Holy Spirit.

This infant child was there “in the beginning”

This infant child was and is and will always be the source of all power and glory and dominion. The source of all salvation and light and truth. The source of our salvation.

...

In the beginning was the Word, and the Word was with God, and the Word was God. He was in the beginning with God.

If the Word is Jesus, as in today’s Gospel reading we hear, “The Word became flesh and lived among us,” then Jesus “was with God” and “was God” and “was in the beginning”

There is nothing more beginning than “the beginning,” right? For the very meaning of “the beginning” means there is nothing before it.

And so, Jesus, the Word, was there, “in the beginning,” with God, and as God.

“In the beginning”...

This sounds like another passage, a passage that we may know just as well... or at least the beginning of a passage (no pun intended):

In the beginning when God created the heavens and the earth, the earth was a formless void and darkness covered the face of the deep, while a wind from God swept over the face of the waters.

“In the beginning.”

“When God created.”

Even then, even as far back as that moment, **that** beginning...

Even then, Jesus was with God.

Because there is only one beginning. There can only be one beginning.

And so, while we’re looking at that sweet little baby, wrapped in swaddling cloth, laid in a manger.

We must also reconcile that **that** same baby was also there, with God, “in the beginning”.

And the passage from Genesis (this is, after all the very first lines of the Bible—Genesis 1. Specifically, Genesis chapter 1, verses 1 through 5)

Genesis continues with God’s creating power:

Then God said, “Let there be light”; and there was light. And God saw that the light was good; and God separated the light from the darkness.

God said “Let there be light”... and God saw that the light was good... and God separated the light from the darkness...

Just as today’s Gospel reading says, “The life was the light of all people. The light shines in the darkness, and the darkness did not overcome it.”

Jesus was the Word, who became Incarnate and lived among us, and His life was the light of all people.

A light that shines in the darkness.

A light that can not be overcome by the darkness.

A divine light, a divine life, a divine existence that existed “in the beginning,” with God, as God created.

...

This is the eternal and infinite existence of God as Christ.

This is not a created man, like you or me. This is Christ, a Savior, who is the Lord, the Messiah.

This is God’s only son, “begotten, not made. Of one being with the Father,” as the Nicene Creed states.

“Through Him all things were made.”

The Nicene Creed even states this.

We recite this every Sunday.

Jesus is God, was with God in the beginning, was part of the journey of creation. Was required for creating to happen.

The Gospel reading says, “All things came into being through him, and without him not one thing came into being.”

Because Jesus Christ, the same baby that we celebrate this season... He was also there, fully and perfectly Divine, from the beginning of creation.

...

I know this is heavy theology. I hope you are following. It only gets heavier from here.

John writes this prologue as almost an introduction to the Gospel—the Good News—of Jesus Christ.

With Matthew and Luke, we begin with lineage and with angels and a pregnancy and a birth in a manger.

In Mark, we begin with a baptism—the baptism of a man about to begin his journey of adulthood—his ministry in the world that existed around him.

In John, today, we get the beginning. The theology of the Divine Hypostasis—the existence of Jesus Christ’s full Divinity, which must at all time and in all place perfectly parallel, and take up the same space as Jesus’s full humanity.

While Matthew, Mark, and Luke are telling the story of Jesus’s incarnation... from the beginning of their understanding of the man’s story—the story of a man named Jesus.

John tells the story of the Incarnation of God. There is no mistaking that Jesus is just a baby in a manger, but Jesus is the Word. Jesus was with God. Jesus was God. Jesus was the light of all people. Jesus comes into the world. Jesus is who has made God known to us.

From the beginning, and throughout his whole Gospel, John reminds us that Jesus was there in the beginning. That Jesus began with God. That Jesus sojourned to earth, to walk among us as one of us, and then, Jesus returns to be with God eternal. Uncreated. Imperishable.

That infant baby is only one small piece of the big picture of who Jesus is.

But that infant baby is how we can know God through Jesus.

Because without that infant baby, would we ever be able to comprehend who God is, what God is capable of doing, how God saved each and every one of His creation and continues to save us for eternity?

John attempts to offer us a definition of Jesus Christ as “God’s infinite reconciliation entering into time and space”—our time and our space. Our existence, which is limited to the finite.

...

I could spend hours studying and restudying today’s Gospel reading. I could spend hours and hours extrapolating meanings and layers of understanding.

I could spend my whole life, my whole career, just looking at and reading and praying and studying this passage... what is called “the prologue” of John’s Gospel.

This isn't even the story—this is like the overture of the symphony that will become John's Gospel. In it, we hear snippets of John's theology, John's message, John's understanding of the Good News.

And as we read through the rest of John's Gospel, we will hear those same snippets. Those same repeated lines, like a chorus—repeated throughout a song.

It's probably telling that one of my commentaries had more than 50 pages of writing on this passage. More than any other passage in any other book of the Bible.

It even included 2 whole pages of commentary simply on the word “was!”

Scholars and theologians, everyday Christians, and those first learning about Christ's story... we can all spend hours and days on this passage, on today's Gospel, and still never fully and truly know all of its meanings.

And that's the beauty of it.

Because I feel the same way about Jesus Christ. We could spend hours and days on the idea of Jesus, on the concept of Jesus, on the second person of the Trinity, on the dual existence of Incarnate and Divine, on He who is the greatest and the least...

And we can still never fully and truly know all of Jesus's meanings.

...

Yes, we celebrate Jesus Christ's birth as an infant, wrapped in bands of cloth, and laid in a manger, because there was no place for them in the inn...

We can celebrate the relate-ability of a newborn baby, who will grow up to be a man. Who could look like any one of us, sitting here, now.

But we must also remember that this is not the beginning of Jesus's story.

Jesus's story began in the beginning, with God, as God.

While Jesus is born of a virgin—incarnate in human form and celebrated as a baby—He existed as Jesus well before He took our form upon Him... and He will continue to exist well after we are all reunited with God at that heavenly banquet.

But what does all this mean?

Why do we care?

Should we even care?

Or is this just a futile study of theology that even those who have studied it for decades still cannot fully grasp?

But can we, any of us, fully grasp the concept of who Jesus was and is: as both fully and perfectly Incarnate while also being fully and perfectly Divine.

And perhaps, rather than trying to understand... trying to make sense of what logic says is impossible... rather than trying to force a concrete and definite definition of the Divinity of that infant baby...

We must, instead, ask ourselves, if we are willing to stand with the light of Christ as it continues to shine in the darkness?

Are we willing to be children of God in response to God's willingness to be born a child for us?

Are we willing to rejoice in the good news of great joy—the Gospel of Jesus Christ our Lord and Savior—the innocence of a newborn baby and the reality that one day, He will grow up to become our savior, our salvation, the absolution of all our sins?

While we celebrate the joy of a newborn baby, I also invite you to enter into the joy of an infinite and eternal God who is both creator and redeemer. Who is both fully man, fully as one of us, and also so fully Divine that even as He was wrapped in bands of cloth, and laid in a manger, He was worthy of angels singing His praise.

Amen.