

12/27–28/2025: John 1:1-18

First Sunday of Christmas

“Try It Again from the Beginning”

In the beginning was the Word, and the Word was with God, and the Word was God. He was in the beginning with God. All things came into being through him, and without him not one thing came into being. What has come into being in him was life, and the life was the light of all people. The light shines in the darkness, and the darkness did not overtake it.

There was a man sent from God whose name was John. He came as a witness to testify to the light, so that all might believe through him. He himself was not the light, but he came to testify to the light. The true light, which enlightens everyone, was coming into the world.

He was in the world, and the world came into being through him, yet the world did not know him. He came to what was his own, and his own people did not accept him. But to all who received him, who believed in his name, he gave power to become children of God, who were born, not of blood or of the will of the flesh or of the will of man, but of God.

And the Word became flesh and lived among us, and we have seen his glory, the glory as of a father's only son, full of grace and truth. (John testified to him and cried out, “This was he of whom I said, ‘He who comes after me ranks ahead of me because he was before me.’”) From his fullness we have all received, grace upon grace. The law indeed was given through Moses; grace and truth came through Jesus Christ. No one has ever seen God. It is the only Son, himself God, who is close to the Father's heart, who has made him known. (NRSVue)

When I was about eleven or so, my parents decided that we needed to have some Family Bonding, which resulted in a week-long trip to the Appalachian Mountains to camp. I don't mind telling you that I am an indoor cat; I have always been an indoor cat, and as such am not wild about the concept or reality of camping. Camping involves spiders, which I loathe; mosquitoes, which *love* me; sponge baths or spider-covered showers, which were even less fun in the throes of puberty; and sleeping in close quarters with family, who definitely kick.

I'm the youngest in my family, so when the three older siblings with me on that camping trip decided the sleeping arrangements of our shared tent, I was put near the door—smallest, easiest to step over (and less likely to win a fight after being stepped *on*), and absolutely the one to be sacrificed to any possible bears.

One of the first nights of the trip, it *poured*. There is nothing quite like rain in the mountains, if you've never been, and there is nothing quite like rain in the

mountains when you're the one in the sleeping bag near the leaky tent door. By morning, I was soaked, chilly, and miserable from having slept far less than I was awake, watching the rain inch its way up my sleeping bag fabric. I remember very little from the rest of that camping trip, but I can still clearly see my and my next-oldest sister's sleeping bags stretched out over a clothesline, just *streaming* water from the downpour of the night.

My eldest sister, who had been snugly protected in the middle while the rest of us unwittingly protected her, had slept like a charm.

I learned two things on that trip: one, always dig a trench around your tent so any water pools *away* from the tent cloth. And two, camping is a messy, uncomfortable, ridiculous business that only the truly dedicated should attempt.

We come to this first Sunday of the Christmas season—and yes, it is a season, not just a day—with the opening of the gospel of John. John does not have a birth narrative the way Matthew and Luke do; John does not have the heartwarming scenes of shepherds at a manger, of angels in the fields, of a star guiding people to Mary and Joseph and their beautiful new son. John, instead, has a creation story.

“In the beginning,” writes John, and anyone who has spent approximately two point eight minutes in the presence of Judaism or Christianity recognizes that opening. “In the beginning,” writes the author of Genesis, and John knew his Jewish texts, knew what he was referencing. Where Matthew and Luke spend time in Jesus' family graveyard giving us the lineage that makes Jesus acceptably human, John wants to remind people of the other half of the story: Jesus as acceptably *God*.

The gospel of John was written toward the end of the first century, some sixty or so years after the resurrection of Christ. There had been plenty of time for this fledgling faith to get its feet under it and start telling consistent stories of who

it was and what it believed. The gospels of Matthew and Luke had been around for about a generation, Mark even longer. People generally knew Who Jesus was, how He was born, what it meant for God to become human—but the story had started to focus almost entirely on Jesus’ crucifixion and resurrection, focusing on the defeat of death rather than the wonder of birth.

“If the season of Christmas is a celebration of God-come-near,” writes Professor Cody J. Sanders, “then John is preparing us for this enfleshing of the Divine in our midst by directing our gaze not to a manger or the holy family or the Christ child, but toward the cosmos, suffused with the light and life coming into the world, into time, into space, and into our lives.”¹ John reaches into the ethereal that is so far from a grubby tomb or a hay-filled manger and points to the very beginning of everything to say here, here is where God comes from; the rest of the story has to be anchored here. And this John the Evangelist, who is narrating, introduces another character, John the Baptist, who testifies to “the light”—not the person, but the Light. Jesus is the Word, the Light, the intangible, right up until the Word becomes “flesh.”

Sanders writes, “While our Christmas imagination is shaped most profoundly by the coming of God with us (humanity), we can have our too-small reading of the Gospel expanded again by John’s insistence upon the logic of God that suffuses the cosmos by becoming flesh, a category of being shared by all biotic life. The Good News is incarnate for all creation, perceived in ways that we cannot imagine with our limited space-time perspective.”² Sometimes we get caught up in the language that God became *man*, but that’s such a small portion of this. God became *flesh*, “sarx” (σάρξ) in Greek, which mostly means

¹[Commentary on John 1:\[1-9\], 10-18 - Working Preacher from Luther Seminary](#) 2026

² Ibid.

“embodied.”³ God poured Godself into physical form, reaching five fingers out to the creation God had made and calling all of it *good*.

The Church of the turn of the first century and the Church of the weird space between Christmas and Epiphany can so easily get stuck in Jesus-as-human *or* Jesus-as-God, slotting days for one or the other like Jesus is switching back and forth between limited body and unlimited Being. Especially in modern times, it is so tempting to talk about Jesus as a very enlightened guy, some dude who had lovely ideas we should follow. But John the Evangelist wanted to remind everyone that Jesus was human *and divine, all the time*. Being born was not the trick, the miracle; after all, all of us have managed to be born, and none of us are God.

(If this is news to you, let’s chat.)

Birth was not the miracle. *Being God* was the miracle, joining the infinite holy with the very finite mortal, taking the mind of One Who created planets and learning the experience of shivering. From the *beginning*, John insists, Jesus was there. When the world was formed, Jesus was there. When John the Baptist started telling everyone that God would be coming around, Jesus was there. And when God put on flesh as part of this creation, *Jesus was there*.

“The Word became flesh and lived among us,” and Meda Stamper writes, “[t]he verb for ‘lived’ in 1:14 is based on the noun for ‘tabernacle’ or ‘tent.’ This evokes the tabernacle in which the glory of God dwells with the Israelites in the wilderness (Exodus 25:8; 40:34), and it points forward to the coming of God in Revelation 21:3, where this verb appears again. The word for ‘tent’ or ‘tabernacle’ appears in the Synoptic accounts of the Transfiguration, when the disciples see the glory of Jesus in conversation with Moses and Elijah. In John 1:14, the glory of the

³ [John 1:14 - Original Greek Text](#)

Word is fully present and vulnerable in flesh, a word that encompasses all of what it means to be human, but because this remains the life-giving Word, he is also full of grace and truth.”⁴

In the beginning was the Word, was Jesus-as-God, was the Almighty Everlasting, and then Jesus-as-God-the-Almighty-Everlasting came and pitched a tent among God’s creation. Jesus-as-God-the-Almighty-Everlasting hung out in the manger, yes, but that was a beginning in everything that camping out among humanity implies. Jesus was here for the soaked sleeping bags and the miserable nights without sleep, the family squabbles and the mosquitos, the spiders and the sponge baths, *and* Jesus was here for the presentation of a new kind of kingdom, the fierce adherence to love that costs something and is absolutely priceless, the defeat of death at the very last. John is trying to remind the Church two generations removed from the man they’re worshipping that it means something that the Word became flesh. It means something to go back to the beginning of the story and remember that it is absolutely about the manger and the shepherds and the forgotten people whom God prized enough to bring to the forefront of the miracle, *and* it is absolutely about the God Who said, “Let there be light,” and there was.

God holds the muck and the miraculous together because that’s Who God is: Someone deeply, wholly, incredibly in love with this creation, unwilling to let it be separate no matter how much we hack at the connection we have, refusing to watch us wander off into darkness alone, absolutely ready to reach us in whatever way will work. The Reverend J. Barrett Lee puts it as, “The light that makes all things visible did not stay abstract. The wisdom that shaped the universe did not remain distant. It took on flesh. It moved into our neighborhood. It became a human life.

⁴ [Commentary on John 1:\[1-9\], 10-18 - Working Preacher from Luther Seminary](#) 2025

And because of that, Jesus is not where we stop looking for God—it's where we start. Jesus becomes the lens, not the limit.”⁵

John was reminding his readers that there is nowhere we go, from the beginning to the end, without God alongside us. As we move through the Christmas season, we do not leave Jesus in the manger being adorable and slightly itchy from the hay; Jesus goes with us as we go back to work, or back to school. Jesus goes with us as we remember again that camping comes with dirt and spiders, that it comes with freezing rain and snow that becomes an awful grey, and we have to learn where the holiness is in them. Jesus goes with us as we encounter this next year's forms of bigotry and evil, of racism and sexism and homophobia and transphobia and classism and the arrogant cruelty of white Christian nationalism, all while we still carry the open wounds of last year's battles. Jesus goes with us as we discover new forms of justice work to which we are called, new ways to be inclusive that we'd never thought of before, new courage to rest and then renew our refusal to be complicit in the devaluing of this good creation God has made—yes, even the spiders and the freezing rain. Jesus goes with us; the Light shines; the Word becomes flesh. In the beginning. Until the end.

It is Christmas, a time of celebrating God's incarnation, God's taking on flesh. And it is Christmas, a time of returning to the beginning in which the Word was, and the Word was Light, and Light shone on the sinner and the saved alike, and the world was invited over and over and over again to see that grace is always so much bigger, so much wider, so much *more* than we had thought.

Merry Christmas; may this beginning be a reminder of the God Who walks beside you, Who lives in the infinite and the enfleshed, Who makes the very heart of the Divine known. Amen.

⁵ [The Light by Which We See – Hopping Hadrian's Wall](#)