

First Sunday after Christmas

- There are, in a sense, two beginnings to our story – two different but very similar beginnings
- Both are familiar tales to us, I would imagine – both are the sort of fundamental stories of our faith that we tell time and time again
- And, at least to John, they both begin the exact same way: “In the beginning...”
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- One of the most interesting things about looking at the different Gospels, in my opinion, is where they decided to begin their stories
- When we tell a story, our starting point helps to frame the story
- Mark – John the Baptist – preaching repentance
- Matthew – genealogy, back to Abraham – Jesus is true inheritor and fulfillment of Covenant
- Luke – foretelling of Jesus’s birth, annunciation, and then genealogy going all the way back to Adam – Christ is, as Eucharistic Prayers say, “firstborn of all creation,” and meant to be the new Adam, undoing sin for good
- John – back further than any of them
- For John the Evangelist, story doesn’t even have a beginning, in the traditional sense
- His begins with poetry, as though prose was too mundane to express it, and he picks up in the middle of the story – In the beginning **was** the Word, in the beginning **is** the Word – the Word already is, even in the beginning
- It is central to John’s narrative that God predates human history, and that Jesus Christ, the Word of God, was right there, too, before it all began
- John’s famous prologue is meant to evoke another familiar story, and you probably know the one I mean
- “In the beginning when God created the heavens and the earth...”
- Only even there the tense is tricky – more like, “in the beginning, God **was creating**...”
- God was already acting when the story began
- John’s prologue is meant to remind us of that story of creation – that even before our story begins, God was at work – even before our story begins, the Word was right there with God, at work
- John wants us to have no doubt whatsoever, from word one of his Gospel, about the divinity of Jesus Christ, about how he is the pre-existent Word of God, present at creation,

through whom creation was worked

- And he wants us to know that before we get to that second beginning, the beginning of Christ's earthly existence, the one we all likely know just as well: "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."
- Because if you don't connect those two beginnings, the Word at creation and the Word made flesh, it's easy to read the nativity story we're most familiar with, from Luke's Gospel, the one we heard a few days ago at Christmas – or to sing some of our favorite hymns like "Away in a Manger" – and think of Jesus Christ as **merely** a baby lying in a manger
- The fact that Jesus of Nazareth was an infant is, on its own, not necessarily surprising, even something of a foregone conclusion, until and unless we also remember at the same time that Jesus of Nazareth is that pre-existent Word of God – he is himself our Lord and Maker of heaven and earth
- When we think about the God who created all of reality appearing within said reality, though, the infant Jesus seems like less a foregone conclusion, no?
- The God who made everything could surely have appeared in any guise imaginable, could have plunked down in our midst in just about any situation under the sun – God could have been present within God's creation in an infinite number of ways
- Even once we grant that God came as human, became incarnate, God could have come as a fully-grown conqueror, or a rich emperor
- But how absurd is it to think of the maker of heaven and earth in a diaper, dependent upon his mother Mary and foster father Joseph for all of his needs
- There is no better conceivable illustration of outright and obvious dependence upon others than a baby – if you've ever even been around one for any length of time you know what I mean – they have a surprising number of needs and they are capable of fulfilling exactly none of them themselves
- The single most bone-chillingly terrifying night in my entire life was the first night my son came home from the hospital, because of the knowledge that this tiny human absolutely depended on me, not just for comfort but for survival
- That is what it means for the Word of God, the Word who already was before the beginning was begun, to be made flesh
- This is the way the God upon whom we depend for everything came to us – as a babe, depending on humanity

- Since John begins with poetry, there's another poem I'd like to share with you, because John the Evangelist is right, sometimes prose is simply too mundane
- It's called "Mary" by Joan Rae Mills:
- It wasn't that long ago that he'd spoke these stars into being
 And this woman's life
 Was just a thought in his mind.
 He'd smiled down on her birth and entered her name in his pages
 Perhaps with an asterisk
 Denoting plans too sacred to be spoken
 But pondered in his heart.
 Now newborn,
 In wide-eyed wonder
 He gazes up at his creation.
 His hand that hurled the world
 Holds tight his mother's finger.
 Holy light
 Spills across her face
 And she weeps
 Silent wondering tears
 To know she holds the One
 Who has so long held her.
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- Jesus Christ, our great high priest, the Creator of the stars of night, the eternal Word of God, spoken from before the universe began, came down among us, came to dwell among us
- To make a home here, among all of our vulnerability and need and dependence
- And, as a tiny child, lived out even that part of our existence so that we could not say there was one human experience where God was not present with us
- This is how our story truly begins – with a power great enough to accomplish that, and a love great enough to want to, for all our sakes
- Never doubt it: God loves us, God will always love us, God has always loved us
- From the very beginning.