

Homily based on the readings from December 25, 2024 (Isaiah 52.7-10; Hebrews 1.1-6; John 1.1-18)

*In the beginning was the Word, and the Word was with God, and the Word was God.* If there is any piece of prose – from any tribe, tongue, people, or nation – that is more majestic than the opening verses of the Gospel of John, I have yet to hear it. As we come together to celebrate the *birth* of the Son of God, let us take a moment to reflect upon the various *starting points* chosen by the four Evangelists to enter into their own accounts of Jesus' life and ministry.

The Gospel of Matthew begins with a lengthy genealogy – often read on Christmas Eve – which connects Jesus to the events and characters of the Old Testament. The Gospel of Mark starts in the middle of the action, with the ministry of John the Baptist and the Baptism of Jesus in the River Jordan. After a brief prologue, Luke's Gospel opens with the miraculous pregnancies of Saint Elizabeth and the Blessed Mother.

John's Gospel, however, literally goes all the way back to the beginning – before the creation of the universe itself.

In religious artwork and imagery, the Gospel of John is traditionally represented by an eagle. (In fact, you can actually see this symbol at the bottom this hanging, right here.) Besides being a powerful and dignified animal – one that features prominently in our own national iconography – an eagle possesses the ability to see great distances from high above the ground. In other words, the Gospel of John provides us with a “God's eye view” of the events it is describing. Matthew and Luke both depict Christ's Incarnation as it was experienced by human beings – referring to circumstances and events that *all* of us can understand: pregnancy, childbirth, travel, gift giving, and even taxes. In contrast, John presents *his* narrative from the perspective of God himself.

The point, of course, is that the story of Jesus did not actually begin *in the bleak midwinter in the little town of Bethlehem*. It did not even begin nine months earlier, with the Annunciation in Nazareth. The history of

Jesus Christ, the Eternal Word of God, goes back before the dawn of time – when “[t]he earth was without form and void” and “darkness [still] covered the deep.” Christ *predates* every living being in the universe – along with every star and every planet, every molecule and every atom. Not only is he ancient beyond comprehension, but he is fundamental to everything that has ever come into existence. He is the light that brought *order* out of chaos, the sound that made *music* out of silence, the idea that created *thought* out of emptiness. *All things came to be through him, and without him nothing came to be.*

For thousands upon thousands of years, human beings were afforded only faint glimpses of Christ’s true nature, perceiving it “in partial and various ways.” Suddenly, in a flash of brilliance, this primal being – *the true light, which enlightens everyone* – burst into our world. The Word became flesh; God became man; the infinite became finite. All that was left for us to do was to behold his glory. It was *that* power that John the Baptist recognized while he was still in his mother’s womb. It was *that* majesty that drew the Wise Men from the East into Bethlehem. It is *that*

light that still beckons to every man, woman, and child over 2000 years later.

As Christians, this fundamental truth underlies every doctrine we profess and every action we undertake. The core principles of Christianity – our moral and ethical standards, our philosophical and theological frameworks, even our basic understanding of the sacraments – all follow from fact that God himself *deigned* to become man. Our fellow human beings *matter*, our own bodies *matter*, the human intellect *matters*, the physical world *matters* because Jesus Christ – the only-begotten Son of God – took flesh and became one of us.

As we bask in the radiance of the Christmas season – the abundant food, the beloved family members and, of course, the presents under the tree – we must also remember to reflect upon this incredible gift that each and every one of us has received: Jesus Christ – the Son of God, the Bread of Life, the Light of the World, the Lion of Judah, the King of Kings – has chosen to make *his* dwelling among *us*. Joy to the World, indeed!