

The Rev. Brandon C. Ashcraft  
Trinity Church in the City of Boston  
John 1:1-18  
1 Christmas A (December 28, 2025)

### **From Cosmos to Crib**

Every brass plate in the pews where you're sitting was polished last week to bring sparkle and shine to the celebration of our Lord's birth. You see, Christmas at Trinity Church is a case study in logistics. To welcome thousands of worshippers in less than 24 hours takes months of careful preparation as well as the work of our entire staff and a cast of hardworking volunteers. Because so much labor takes place behind the scenes, there are many unsung heroes. No sooner had our Christmas pageant ended than I caught a glimpse of one of them in action: a member of our facilities team, hauling bins of angels' wings and shepherds' crooks back into storage until next year. And in today's Gospel, the angels and shepherds have also been tucked away. Today, the Church gives us a Christmas story without the familiar cast of characters.

Instead, John's account says nothing about a manger—nothing about Mary and Joseph—no mention of a baby. But the Church reads this passage every year on the First Sunday after Christmas Day, making the claim that both Luke's Nativity<sup>1</sup> and John's Prologue are equally Christmas stories.<sup>2</sup> Both Christmas stories are true. Luke gives us a story we can picture—Christmas close to the ground. John gives us a cosmic story—Christmas before and beyond time. Luke tells the story of Jesus coming into the world at a particular place and moment in history: Bethlehem, in the days of Emperor Augustus. Meanwhile, John's poetic prologue reminds us that Jesus also transcends history: he is the eternal Word.

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<sup>1</sup>Traditionally, the appointed Gospel on Christmas Eve is Luke 2:1-14(15-20)

<sup>2</sup> The Revised Common Lectionary (RCL) appoints Matthew 2:13-23 as the Gospel passage on this day. The Episcopal Church follows an adapted version of the RCL and the First Sunday after Christmas Day is a commemoration where it diverges, always appointing John 1:18 on this observance.

Theologians sometimes call this paradox the “scandal of particularity”<sup>3</sup> —not “scandal” in the tabloid sense, but in its older sense: a stumbling block, something you trip over.<sup>4</sup> And the Incarnation is exactly that kind of stumbling block. The God who is constrained by neither time nor place *nonetheless* takes on our very flesh at a particular time and in a particular place. And on a Sunday like this—when the crowds are gone and Christmas is hushed—John’s story is a gift. It tells us that Christmas isn’t just one moment we recreate; it’s an eternal story we inhabit.

For Luke, Christmas begins in Bethlehem. For John, Christmas begins “in the beginning,”<sup>5</sup> echoing the Genesis creation story. Indeed, John’s story of Jesus’ origin is a *creation* story. The Word of God is the one through whom all things were made.<sup>6</sup> John invites us to peer through a telescope at the vast expanse of creation. And then he pulls us from cosmic heights down to ground level, as the Word becomes flesh and lives among us.<sup>7</sup> John declines to tell us how the Word-made-flesh enters the world. Luke gives us that scene while John gives us the meaning. And at our Christmas pageant this past Wednesday, I caught a glimpse of both stories at once.

From my seat in the balcony, I watched as our “real-life” baby Jesus began to squirm against the hay in the manger, anticipating the inevitable moment when this peaceful picture of the Holy Family would begin to unravel. Soon enough it came: the faint cry of the infant that gradually grew louder. While it’s a lovely sentiment—and we love to sing it—“the little Lord Jesus, no crying he makes”<sup>8</sup> obscures the theological heart of Christmas: the Word of God took on our flesh and

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<sup>3</sup> K J Drake, “The Scandal of Particularity, the Person of Christ, and Christmas,” *Modern Reformation*, December 23, 2022, <https://www.modernreformation.org/resources/articles/the-scandal-of-particularity-the-person-of-christ-and-christmas>.

<sup>4</sup> Strong’s Greek: 4625. *σκάνδαλον* (skandalon) -- stumbling block, offense, trap, Snare, accessed December 27, 2025, <https://biblehub.com/greek/4625.htm>.

<sup>5</sup> John 1:1

<sup>6</sup> John 1:3

<sup>7</sup> John 1:14

<sup>8</sup> “Away in a Manager” (stanza one of hymn #101 in the current authorized hymnal of the Episcopal Church, *The Hymnal 1982*).

entered the fullness of our human life. Which is to say, in the fullness of his humanity, *the infant Jesus most assuredly cried.*

The tears of our pageant Jesus may not have been scripted, but they conveyed a deep and profound truth about who Jesus is. The infant who cried against the wood of the manger in Bethlehem is the same Lord who cried out from the wood of the cross on Calvary. And John dares us to take this claim one step further: the One who cries in Mary's arms is also the Word through whom all things were made.<sup>9</sup> As our service ends today, we'll sing John's Christmas story in what may be the best line of Christmas theology in any of the beloved carols: "Veiled in flesh the Godhead see."<sup>10</sup> The carol sings the story: the Lord of the cosmos has come to the crib. Merry Christmas.

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<sup>9</sup> John 1:3

<sup>10</sup> "Hark the Herald Angels Sing" (stanza two of hymn #87 in *Thee Hymnal* 1982).