

Albany Presbyterian Church
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In the beginning...

What do you think when you hear these words 'in the beginning'?

Beginning ... of heaven and earth... of life at birth, the first day of school, a beginning at a new job, ... we have so many beginnings in our life...

Like many of you, I stayed up late last Tuesday, waiting for the new year to start. I watched the clock strike midnight, compared fireworks through media from around the globe, and gradually saw New Year greetings appearing on social media feeds. The last place to welcome the arrival of 2025 was Baker Island in the Pacific Ocean, near Honolulu.

In the beginning...

For Christmas, I received a fiction written by a Korean author who won the Nobel Prize in Literature last year. I read a few pages where the author set the scene for something—I'm not sure what—but I look forward to reading more than I have so far.

It is different from the Gospel, which is also considered a genre. The Gospel means "good news." It consists of stories about Jesus, a historical and religious narrative, often beginning with a prologue.

All four gospels start with a different prologue, a different beginning.

In Luke, an introduction, as in the letter, says, "Therefore, since I have carefully investigated everything from the beginning, it seemed good also to me to write an orderly account for you, most excellent Theophilus, so that you may know the certainty of the things you have been taught."

Matthew starts his gospel with the genealogy of Jesus from Abraham to King David, through Babylonian exile to Joseph and Jesus.

Mark begins with the prophet Isaiah: "I will send my messenger ahead of you, who will prepare your way. A voice of one calling in the desert, prepare the way for the Lord, make straight paths for him."

But John presents a grand theological declaration. We read from John 1 on Christmas Day as theological prose—a profound statement about Jesus. In this prologue, John writes as the one who has witnessed and experienced everything about Jesus. He uses the symbolism of light and darkness, day and night, and also the concept of logos, the idea of a divine reason that orders and gives meaning and forms the Cosmos. They all reflect the Hellenistic and Greco-Roman culture and philosophy of the when John wrote his gospel, all concerning Jesus, which is the theological thread running through the Gospel of John. In these few verses, John already encapsulates the essence or theme of his gospel, also reflecting John's worldview, echoing Revelation 21:5, where He, seated on the throne, said, "I am making everything new," and declared, "I am the Alpha and the Omega, the beginning and the end."

What are the essences or themes of the gospel we can glean from these verses?

First, it tells us that all things came to be through Jesus, and Jesus is how all things are to be reconciled.

John 1:1 says, "In the beginning was the Word, and the Word was with God, and the Word was God. He was with God in the beginning. Through him, all things were made; without him, nothing was made that has been made. In him was life, and that life was the light of all humanity, but the darkness did not understand it; in Verse 9, the true light that gives light to all humankind was coming into the world."

As verse 11 says, He came to that was his own, but his own did not receive him, yet to all who received him, to those who believed in his name, he gave the right to **become children of God**. And the Word became flesh and made **His dwelling among us**. He revealed **His glory**, the glory of the One and Only, who came from the Father, full of grace and truth, as noted in verse 15.

In other words, Jesus, the Logos, the Word, came into the world so we could live as God's children, trusting He is with us. Through His deeds and words, He has revealed the glory of the Father and taught us how to live in grace and truth so that we may align our lives with God's desires as His sons and daughters.

Because, as in verses 16 and 17, **we are all blessed with one blessing after another from the fullness of His grace**. The law was given through Moses; grace and truth came through Jesus Christ. Verse 18, no one has ever seen God, but God, the One and Only, who is at the Father's side, **has made Him known**.

Secondly, it tells us that all people belong to God, yet some are unaware of the Light and the Word and do not receive or believe. All those who accept Him and believe in Him have been granted by God the right to become His children and are blessed by the fullness of His grace. But some choose not to or are ignorant of this blessing. Yet, it is out of our own volition that we choose to believe. And that God has reached out to us first so we can reach out to him and become the children of God and have blessings from God in the fullness of his grace. But this might also compel us—those who have been blessed and have seen the glory of the Father in Jesus, who has revealed God to us—to consider sharing this with others so that they, too, may become children of God. To participate in the reconciliation of God and be the light of Christ...

My heart has felt heavy for the past few days and weeks, especially leading to New Year's Day. So much tragedy surrounds us that it's hard to ignore. Like you, I have been feeling the despair of those who lost loved ones in the plane crash in Mo An. And tragedy elsewhere... It is true that we live in a world where loss is part of life, and grief is a shared experience, whether it's public or private.

How do we make sense of this world? How do we go about living?
How do we begin again?

As you know, Jeremiah, the prophet from the Old Testament, earned the title "Weeping Prophet" because he was deeply sorrowful over his people's sins and their reluctance to heed God's warnings. And yet, in Chapter 31, Jeremiah sings a different tune. To the weeping prophet, who had little to be joyful about, the light of God shines and reveals God's plans for reconciliation and restoration. God says, "I have loved you with an everlasting love; I have drawn you with loving-kindness; I will build you up again." God says he will reconcile with His people—those who endure the occupation and the exiles who will return to experience God's rest. He declares, "Once more, you will take up your tambourines and dance joyfully. Once more, you will plant vineyards on the hills of Samaria; the farmers will plant them and enjoy their fruit."

Perhaps God invites us today to view the world in a new light—seeing it as God sees it with so much love and seeing ourselves as God sees us—as the people of God and as children of God, born of the Spirit. A simple and uncomplicated view of the world, where God is the beginning and the end, the Alpha and Omega. Maybe we begin with God, who was in the beginning. We begin with God came to dwell among us in Christ; we begin with God who fathered us all through the Holy Spirit and made us His sons and daughters—God who blesses us from the fullness of His grace, who loved us with everlasting love and will continue to draw us with loving-kindness to reconcile all His people until all things come under His reign of love and compassion. And so, as Sons and daughters of the living God, we can begin living confidently and boldly again, even reach our potential, embrace our possibilities, and recognize that we are gifts of joy to one another and the world.

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

Glory to the Father, the Son, and the Holy Spirit, as it was in the beginning, is now and will be forever. Amen.