

A 1 Christmas 2025
Saint Barnabas's Church, Falmouth MA
The Rev David Rider
December 28, 2025

Merry Christmas and Almost Happy New Year!

We gather for Sunday worship on the First Sunday after Christmas and also known as the Holy Name of our Lord Jesus Christ

We do a metaphorical toast to the year ahead, with all its promise and ambiguity, while tying a bow around 2025

Living into the Twelve Days of Christmas, we also take one more trip around the manger to reflect theologically on the outsized role of the nativity story in our lives

Christmas Eve and Christmas Day may embody too much adrenaline and stress, so the First Sunday after Christmas offers unique opportunity for spiritual reflection

At Saint Barnabas's Christmas worship, we heard LK's more bucolic version, the only story that mentions a manger, the inn, or bleating sheep

MT's nativity story is much more dramatic, so much so that churches routinely delete scenes like the Slaughter of the Innocents and mad King Herod from the Christmas pageant

For MT, the coming Messiah suffers from the same human contingency as the rest of humankind, attaining refugee status and narrowly avoiding infanticide before he's out of diapers—there is no time to sing Silent Night, Holy Night, as Joseph grabs mother and baby Jesus by the diaper for a harrowing midnight journey into a foreign land

Next Sunday, we'll conclude Christmas with the Epiphany story—found only in MT—that celebrates gift-giving and colorful Magi but also tells a harrowing story about Herod's rage and malevolent slaughter of innocent children

For all the enchantment of Christmas, these nativity stories remind us that some come to pay Jesus homage while others seek to do him harm—a fugal theme of the gospels if ever there were one

Bible scholars often call these four chapters the Infancy Narratives that play important but different roles in our Christian witness

Everyone needs a birth story, not just for fun but to reveal core dynamics of personality and vocation

This became especially important in the early Jesus movement when heretics argued that God would never get His hands messy with humanity

For these heretics, known as the decetics, Jesus was God but only seemed to be human, never truly suffering or sullyng himself with the human condition

No, the Church argued forcefully, Jesus was born of Mary, placenta and all and, at least for MT, was the subject of human murderous rage from his first to his final moments on earth, and Christmas drove home the point

So where does today's Gospel, taken from John, fit into this holy season?

In our liturgical rhythm each year, the Church seeks to proclaim both the nativity story from MT or LK along with the sublime poetry of John to capture the cosmic meaning of Jesus' Incarnation

While MT and LK have similar if distinctive ways of telling Jesus's vocational coming of age, JN takes a quantum leap beyond his colleagues, connecting Jesus' origins to the Big Bang itself

In today's poetic and mystical text on the Word—or Logos—we find not a syllable of obstetrics, sheep, manger or Magi

Rather, John swings for the cosmic fences

What did Jesus know, and when did he know it?

While more tepid evangelists tie Jesus's vocation to the crucifixion, the Transfiguration, or even colorful Magi paying homage to an infant, John equates the Christ—whom he calls the Word or the Logos, directly to the beginning of creation—read those first two sentences again

John completely ignores gestation, lactation, or a manger to witness Christmas as the concrete incarnation of God's love for all humanity that began with Big Bang and takes on human flesh at Christmas

John also connects the cosmic with daily life, employing his favorite metaphors of light and darkness to remind us that some will receive Jesus while others will receive him not.

Not a word of John's Prologue ever makes into a Christmas Pageant, yet his Prologue provides mature, deep and mystical witness for what it means that God to take on human flesh and dwell among us, full of grace and truth

So how do we integrate bucolic LK, caffeinated MT and cosmic JN to propel us forward spiritually into a new year?

Do we quietly put away the decorations in the coming days and hope for the best in 2026, or do we dream for something bigger and bolder in the spirit of JN?

From his first to his final breaths, the Jesus story fills us with aspiration as Jesus proclaims a Kingdom of God that surrounds us in this earthly journey

Scour the scriptures in vain for incremental improvement, self-help, or the mere buffing of one's soul

Jesus quickly assumes adult stature and cries out for redemption, transformation and spines of steel to confront the broken, dark realities of this world

Early Christians saw the power of community to support and challenge one another to become disciples of the Risen One

Redemption. Transformation. Resurrection. Reconciliation. God's reign on earth. While some would call this utopian, we call it the holy way of life as followers of Jesus

It is my honor to walk alongside you in the coming months of 2026 as we exercise communal discernment regarding our parish's mission, culture and strategic vision

On the cusp of 2026, let's ponder how we might re-imagine parish life and our future vocation to worship and serve God on the Upper Cape

Will 2026 be same-old, same-old, or will we absorb even a whiff of John's cosmic vision to serve more boldly as fallible vessels of light piercing the darkness of this world?

Next Sunday at the first forum of the year, I invite each of you to share your hot BHAG—Big, Harry, Audacious Goal for this church in 2026

Under the umbrella of Stop/Start/Continue, tell us what we should put to rest, where we should make a new leap of faith, and what's working quite well and should be left alone in the coming year

Our choir gets first dibs, since it has a day off next Sunday but otherwise misses out on our Forum conversations

Next week's Epiphany Magi story ends by noting that the Magi return home by a different way, so I hope that inspires you to think—and share—your best sense of how this parish moves in a different way toward greater health and vitality

I hope you will get in touch with the spirit of John's Prologue from today and swing for the spiritual fences in 2026

With the winter's solstice behind us, let's celebrate John's vision that the light shines in the darkness, and the darkness did not overcome it—both meteorologically and spiritually

In this spirit, I wish you a joyous Christmas and an adventuresome 2026