

“This is a book that churches should be handing out in bulk for Advent. With lucid biblical content, helpful application and superb prayers for each day, it surges with the comfort and joy of Christmas.”

Michael Reeves,

*Director of Union and Senior Lecturer at
Wales Evangelical School of Theology*

“It’s a sad paradox in the Christian life that, at the very time when we should be full of joyful anticipation of Christ’s coming, we are often at our most jaded, tired and cynical. In a compelling, fresh and concise way, Tim Chester provides a wonderful selection of readings which will inspire our weary hearts and refresh our vision of Jesus. Following these daily readings will be a great preparation for a Christ-focussed Christmas.”

Jonathan Lamb,

CEO and Minister-at-Large, Keswick Ministries

“If you’re looking for a fresh, creative, insightful, and thoroughly biblical and Christ-exalting guide for Advent, look no further. Tim Chester’s book, *The One True Light*, applies biblical theology to the first 18 verses of John’s Gospel to show us how the incarnation affects every aspect of our lives. Brief and simple enough for children, yet deep and rich enough for mature Christians, this is a book that inspires awe, wonder, and praise for Emmanuel, God with us.”

Bob Kauflin,

Director of Sovereign Grace Music

“In this short, accessible book, we are invited to ‘join John in fixing our eyes on Jesus, the one true light’. As I read it, that’s exactly what I found myself doing. Buy it and read it. Buy another and give it as a gift. It’s an investment not an expense.”

Steve Timmis,

Executive Director, Acts 29

“Advent is a great time to remember and retell the Great Story. In short meditations Tim Chester takes us day by day on an advent journey to meet the lovely Jesus of the Bible—’not just a preacher or healer but the Creator walking into his creation.’ Come and meet the Word of God remaking the World of God. A super series of short meditations introducing the Jesus who brings us into the loving arms of his Father. All warmly illustrated with stories from life about problematic plumbing, Chelsea Football Club, enjoying the sky at night, the city of Sheffield and fist-fighting bishops!”

Marcus Honeysett,

Director of Living Leadership

“Most of us struggle to keep the main thing the main thing—and at Christmas, even more so! In this Advent devotional Tim strips away all the unnecessary distractions and helps us focus on Christ. Journeying daily through John 1 we catch a fresh glimpse of Jesus and are invited into a deeper relationship with him—essential if we are to recapture the true meaning of Christmas.”

Elizabeth McQuoid,

Commissioning Editor and Trustee of Keswick Ministries

“Many Christians are so taken up with busyness and Christmas preparations that they fail to make the most of the spiritual opportunities of Advent. These daily readings and prayers for advent are short, easy to read, and make the profound eternal truths of John 1 v 1-18 accessible and relevant. They combine deep theological reflection with accessible illustration, and help Christians to appreciate afresh the glory of Jesus and all that he has done for us. They will feed your soul and stir your prayer life. They are ideal for personal use or for reading together as a family. I look forward to using them.”

John Stevens,

National Director of the Fellowship of Independent Evangelical Churches (FIEC)

Tim Chester

The
One True
Light

Daily readings for Advent
from the Gospel of John

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Approaching Christmas

I used to be a big curmudgeon about Christmas. Not quite Ebenezer Scrooge—but close.

I moaned about the rubbish on the television. I moaned about the terrible Christmas songs that get repeated every year. I moaned about all the tatty decorations—tinsel and snow globes and illuminated reindeers. In my mind, Christmas was unavoidably associated with the oppressive warmth of my in-laws' home.

In my high-minded moments I moaned about the commercialism that seems to be replacing the Christmas message. Or I moaned about versions of Christmas that sanitise Jesus and make him “safe”.

But, of course, by “high-minded” I really mean “self-righteous”. I used to be a curmudgeon—a proud one.

However, I've noticed a change over the past few years. As I slide into middle age, I've somewhat given up the fight. I let Christmas happen to me. I embrace the festivities. I even sometimes allow myself to have fun.

But, whether being curmudgeonly or celebratory, it is easy to get distracted from the wonder of God becoming man. The build-up to Christmas is a busy time. There are presents to buy, parties to attend, food to prepare, cards to send and relatives to visit.

So it's easy to forget about Jesus, even at Christmas—*especially* at Christmas. But the truth is that we'll never enjoy Christmas properly unless we understand who it is who was born in Bethlehem that night. Indeed, we won't enjoy life to the full until we see God in a manger.

In these Advent readings, we're going to look at John's version of the Christmas story. It's not the Christmas story as we've come to expect it. There's no stable, no donkey and no star. There are no angels, no shepherds and no wise men. Even Mary and Joseph don't get a look in. Instead the focus is entirely on Jesus, the God-become-man. This is Christmas stripped bare. All that's left is Jesus. And that's all you need to make your December explode with joy, and your life revolve around the One who brings truth, life, community, reality, clarity—light.

So by all means make sure you've bought your presents, ordered the turkey, attended your parties and ticked off seeing the relatives. But see the 24 daily readings in this book as an opportunity to focus not on the to-do list, or even on Christmas as such, but on Christ—to join John in fixing your eyes on Jesus, the one true light.



In the beginning

“In the beginning...”

John 1 v 1

My father’s father was a butcher from North Yorkshire. He would collect animals from the train and then drive them through the village to be slaughtered behind his shop. My mother’s father was Scottish. He moved to Darlington in County Durham to work at the steel mill. He would come home each evening with livid burns up his arms...

Many biographies start a generation or two back with the subject’s parents or grandparents. The aim is to build a picture of the kind of family and conditions a child was born into.

Not John’s Gospel.

As John settles down to write the story of a man called Jesus, he thinks of his earthly parents, and of their fathers and forefathers. But the clock keeps spinning backwards until he draws breath and slowly writes, *“In the beginning”*.

Immediately, we understand that this is not an ordinary story of an ordinary person.

John's "in the beginning" is not the start of one person's life. This is the start and source of all life. This is the story of creation. The words echo the opening words of the opening book of the Bible. Genesis 1 v 1 reads, "In the beginning God created the heavens and the earth". John is retelling the story of creation with Jesus the Word at the centre.

So this is a big story. It's not the story of *one* person, but of *every* person. This is *my* story. And *your* story. This is the story of the universe, and specifically of planet earth.



The story of creation in Genesis 1 came to a climax when God formed the first human being, Adam. John's "Christmas story" will also come to a climax with a man taking on human flesh. Genesis shows us the first man—Adam. But Jesus will be "the last Adam". In both cases a man enters the world. Jesus is coming as the true Adam or the true man.

But Jesus is more than a new, improved human being. This is not simply "*Humanity 2.0*". John could have started with the story of the birth of Jesus. That's what Matthew and Luke do. But John wants us to realise that, unlike the story of any other human being, the story of Jesus does not begin with his human conception. It's true that Jesus was born as a human being in our world. But that's not when his story begins. His story goes back to the beginning. Indeed the story of Jesus doesn't even start "in the beginning". For, as John will go on to say, Jesus already "was" in the beginning. His story has no beginning for he "was" in eternity. He has been for ever.



Did you know that Santa once threw a punch? The name “Santa Claus” is derived from “Saint Nicholas”. Nicholas was a bishop who attended the Council of Nicea in AD 325. The council had been called in response to the teaching of a man called Arius, who claimed that Jesus was a created being. He was willing to affirm that Jesus was the first created being and so supreme in creation, but, according to Arius, he was created. In other words, there was a time when Jesus did not exist.

The story goes that at first Nicholas listened quietly to the arguments of Arius. But in the end he could take it no longer. He stepped across the room and slapped Arius across the face. So maybe on Christmas Day we should punch heretics instead of giving presents. (Or maybe not.)

The point is that this truth mattered deeply to Nicholas. It was not just a debating point—it was of crucial importance for the salvation of our souls. If Jesus was created, then he is not truly and fully divine. And John is clear: Jesus the Word already “was” in the beginning.

But why does John start here, looking back to the beginning of creation? Because the story John is about to unfold is the story of *re-creation*. The world God made is no longer the same world in which we live. God made a good world, a beautiful world. And there are still signs of that all around us. But there is also evil and pain.

Our world is broken. And we are the ones who broke it.

John starts “in the beginning” to give us a hint of what Jesus will do. Jesus is going to mend the brokenness of our world. The story of creation went into reverse when humanity rejected God. Creation gave way to de-creation. God’s beautiful world began to unravel. But Jesus is about to pick up the pen, as it were, and write the next chapter—another chapter of creation.

Tim Chester

Meditate

In the beginning...

*Of the Father's love begotten,
Ere the worlds began to be,
He is Alpha and Omega,
He the source, the ending he,
Of the things that are, that have been,
And that future years shall see,
Evermore and evermore!
(Of the Father's Love Begotten)*



Prayer

*Lord Jesus,
thank you that you have rewritten the story,
thank you that you are reordering our world.*

*In your mercy,
come and rewrite my story;
come and reorder my world.*

Amen.

The 2 Word

“In the beginning was the Word...”

John 1 v 1

Have you ever wrapped a Christmas present for your cat? Have you ever watched a TV programme simply because you didn't want to disturb the cat on your lap by reaching for the remote? Have you ever stood shivering at an open door while your cat decided whether it wanted to go out? Are you a cat person?

I live among cat people. We live under the delusion that we own our cat. But our cat acts as if she owns us. And our next door neighbour. And pretty much everything and anyone she comes into contact with...

Personally, I'm more of a dog person. Dogs appear to understand a wider vocabulary of human words and pick up on our emotions more. Maybe cats understand as much, but they just don't care. We can have some kind of meaningful relationship with a dog. But even with dogs, we can't do things like share our hopes for the future.

So what about single-celled organisms like bacteria? You already have millions of them as pets: in your house, on your body and in your gut. But imagine trying to communicate with your pet bacteria. Imagine them sitting on the back of your hand now. How do you speak to them? You can't write a letter. They can't follow you on Twitter. You could whisper to them, or even shout. But can they hear? And how would you know that the message had got through? I guess you could do the chemical equivalent of poking them. But it's hardly meaningful communication. They don't know your name or the names of your family.

And even if you could get through to them, what language would you speak? Even if you could say something, would they understand any of the concepts you used?

Suppose you manage to say, "I'm just off for brunch with my family". Would they understand what brunch is? Or a family? Or even what it means to be a conscious individual, an "I"? Probably not. (Or maybe they would ask you to pass on regards to their extended family living in your partly-cooked burgers!)

We can have a limited relationship with a dog. But any meaningful relationship with a bacterium is impossible because *we are just too different*.



This is something like the problem involved in God communicating with humanity, because God and humanity are so different. Before God we're the equivalent of bacteria on a Petri dish. How can God communicate to us? What language can he use? Even if we could hear words from him, how could he say anything that we could comprehend?

The good news is that Jesus is *the Word of God*, in whom we hear

God. John's Gospel begins, "In the beginning was the Word". The man Jesus, says John, is the Word. God has accommodated himself to us in the most incredible way. He has become one of us. It's as if I transformed myself into a bacterium to communicate with other bacteria.

Think for a moment about doing that. Think about the massive implications that would have for you. Think of everything you would give up. Think of the incomprehension of others at your choice. Think of how strong the driving force would need to be for you to make that choice.



What does that choice mean for us? We can't see Jesus in the flesh. We can't hear him teaching by Lake Galilee or see him performing a miracle. Do you ever wish you had been there, standing in the boat as water ran across your feet, feeling your stomach turn with the swell of the waves, smelling the spray as sweat ran down your face? And then hearing the words, "Be still"?

But we weren't there and we can't hear the calm, commanding voice of Jesus. We can't stand open-mouthed in fearful wonder as the waves lie flat at the sound of his voice. So how can we hear God today?

The answer is that we can encounter Jesus the Word in the promises of the prophets in the Old Testament and the testimony of the apostles in the New Testament. The Spirit-inspired Bible gives us access to Jesus the Word. We encounter him as his story is retold. We encounter him as his message is preached. We encounter the Word in the words of Scripture.

And whenever we encounter him, we encounter God. Whenever we hear the message of Jesus, we hear the voice of God.

Tim Chester

Meditate

In the beginning was the Word...

Yea, Lord, we greet thee, born that happy morning;

Jesus, to thee be glory given!

Word of the Father, now in flesh appearing!

O come, let us adore him,

O come, let us adore him,

O come, let us adore him,

Christ the Lord.

(O Come, All Ye Faithful)



Prayer

Blessed Lord,

who has caused all holy Scriptures to be written for our learning:

Grant that we may in such wise hear them,

read, mark, learn, and inwardly digest them,

that by patience and comfort of your holy Word,

we may embrace, and ever hold fast

the blessed hope of everlasting life,

which you have given us in our Saviour Jesus Christ.

Amen.

(The Book of Common Prayer,

the Collect for the second Sunday in Advent)