

“The good news of Christmas did not begin—or end—with the Christmas story. *The One True Story* explores how the narratives and themes of the Old Testament find fulfilment in the coming of Christ. Tim Chester peels away the layers of familiarity that hinder us from seeing the babe of Bethlehem in all his glory. Are you longing to focus on something other than all you need to do and buy before Christmas? This book will draw you into the gospel story and help set your heart on Christ during this Advent season.”

**Betsy Childs Howard,**

*Author, blogger and editor for The Gospel Coalition*

“Every year our Advent candle builds expectation for Christmas, but it burns down to nothing. This wonderful book will create expectation and leave you feeling moved, joyful, thankful and awestruck. You will not be empty-handed or empty-hearted after spending a month with these devotions. Along the way, you will learn to see the riches of Christ in the Old Testament and feel a fresh impetus to see the centrality of the story of Jesus in the pages of your Bible.”

**Adrian Reynolds,**

*Director of Ministry, The Proclamation Trust*

“Have you become a Christmas cynic like me, jaded by a commercialised holiday? Instead of saying ‘bah humbug,’ let Tim Chester take you past the trees and tinsel to the ancient biblical drama that led up to Jesus’ birth. *The One True Story* connects the familiar Christmas story to God’s mighty works in the past, as well as to our lives in the modern world, with freshness and delight.”

**Jeramie Rinne,**

*Senior Pastor, Evangelical Community Church of Abu Dhabi*

“Every Christmas our hearts must be re-tuned to God’s glorious purpose for sending Jesus into this world. I heartily recommend Tim Chester’s *The One True Story* to do just that. Read it and you will once again resonate with the God of the universe who loves you through Jesus.”

**Barbara Reaoch,**

*Director, Children’s Division, Bible Study Fellowship*

“*The One True Story* made me marvel once again at God’s amazing salvation plan. I thoroughly enjoyed journeying with Tim Chester to discover how Jesus is the fulfilment of the Old Testament, the hope of the world and the Lord of all! This is a book that will help you worship God and love Jesus more. Surely there is no better way to prepare for the wonder of Christmas than that?”

**Marcus Honeysett,**

*Pastor, author and Director of Living Leadership*

“I confess to being a big fan of Tim Chester, which is why I’m a big fan of his books. There’s an authenticity in what he writes because there’s an authenticity about his life. He writes as someone who loves the Saviour, who wants you to love the Saviour too. If you read *The One True Story* with a humble heart, you most surely will.”

**Steve Timmis,**

*Executive Director, Acts 29*

Tim Chester

The  
One True  
Story

Daily readings for Advent  
from Genesis to Jesus

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# Introduction

## The One True Story

Everyone loves the Christmas story—Mary meeting an angel, being told she’s having a baby by the Holy Spirit, Joseph faithfully standing by her, travelling to Bethlehem while Mary is heavily pregnant, no room at the inn, the baby in a manger, God in human flesh, choirs of angels, shepherds on the hillside, Magi following a star.

But the Christmas story is not just a great story. It’s *the* great story. It’s the story that ties together a thousand other stories. Everything came together on that night in Bethlehem. “The fulfilment of the ages,” Paul calls it.

Matthew can’t get the old stories out of his head as he tells the Christmas story. Five times he says that what happened at the birth of Jesus took place to fulfil what the prophets had said (Matthew 1 v 22-23; 2 v 5-6, 15, 17-18, 23). Luke makes the same point in the four songs he records. The songs of Mary, Zechariah, the angels and Simeon all riff on “tunes” from the past. Mary ends her song with the words, “He has helped his servant Israel, remembering to be merciful to Abraham and his descendants for ever, just as he promised our ancestors” (Luke 1 v 54-55). As the

carol *O Little Town of Bethlehem* says, “The hopes and fears of all the years are met in thee tonight”.

The Christmas story is the one true story because it completes and fulfils *all* the stories of the Bible.

But it also *goes on* being the one true story. This is the story that makes sense of my story and your story. We were made to know God. All our longings only truly find their fulfilment in him and through him. The plotlines of our lives are meant to find their resolution in the enjoyment of God. But we’ve set our lives on other trajectories which always lead to disappointing endings.

But through the Christmas story God is rewriting the story of human history, bringing it to a glorious climax. In all the busyness of Christmas, don’t miss the opportunity to discover or rediscover how you can be part of the one true story.



*Each day we’ll look at one or two stories from the Bible to see how they find their fulfilment in the Christmas story and to explore how the Christmas story connects with our stories. I’ve identified the storyline for each chapter. Do try to read the Bible passages for yourself. But don’t worry if you don’t have time to read any or all of them, as each story is summarised as we go along.*

*Each chapter ends with a meditation and a prayer. Where no source is given, I’ve written them myself.*



# The firstborn

*“The Son is the image of the invisible God,  
the firstborn over all creation.”*

Colossians 1 v 15

## Storyline

*Proverbs 8 v 22-31 and Colossians 1 v 15-20*

What is it about small babies that makes us go gooey? They're not very useful. In fact there's almost nothing they can do except wail and poop. And, to be honest, they're not always that pretty. Most of them look like a miniature version of Winston Churchill.

Yet when we hold them in our arms, our hearts melt. And when they smile, even the hardened cynic is won over.

The evolutionary biologists tell us this is about the instinct to preserve our genes. Perhaps. But we have similar feelings about other people's children. Indeed, we go a bit gooey about chicks, puppies, kittens, lambs, calves and foals. There's something about the newness of life that captures our hearts.

Perhaps that's one reason why we love the Christmas story.

But Christmas is not the *beginning* of the story of the baby in the manger. The baby in the manger was old and new and always

new. When Paul writes to the Colossians, he includes a hymn about Jesus. It begins:

*The Son is the image of the invisible God,  
the firstborn over all creation.* Colossians 1 v 15

Jesus was born into our world on the first Christmas Day. Thousands of people had already been born before that date. But Jesus is the “firstborn” because he existed before any of them. Abraham was born at least 2,000 years before Jesus. But Jesus said, “Before Abraham was born, I am” (John 8 v 58). His birth into this world came *after* Abraham’s birth. But his existence came long *before* Abraham. Indeed so long before that it has no date. That’s not just because it was in some forgotten pre-history. It’s because Jesus has *always* existed. He doesn’t say, *I was born before Abraham was born*. He says, “Before Abraham was born, I am”. I AM was how God described his external existence to Moses from the burning bush in Exodus 3. And Jesus is God: he is one of the three Persons of the triune God.

From the earliest times the church has said that Jesus is “eternally begotten”. He wasn’t born in the sense that there was time before he existed and then he was born into existence. No, he has eternally been given life from God the Father. It’s a tough idea for us to get our heads round. Jesus himself says, “For as the Father has life in himself, so he has granted the Son also to have life in himself” (John 5 v 26).

The early church fathers described the Father as the fountainhead of the triune God. Imagine an eternal fountain, eternally pouring out clear, clean water. Around it is an eternal pool. The pool receives its water from the fountain. But, because the fountain is eternal, the pool is also eternal. Although it depends on the fountain for its water, there was never a time when it didn’t exist. In the same way the Son receives life from the Father—and in that sense is begotten.

But there was never a time when the Son did not exist—and so he is eternally begotten.

This eternal begetting means the life of the Son is always new. He never grows old. There is always a freshness to his life. And he is full of joy.



Children love doing the same thing over and over again. My two-year-old friend Tayden loves it when I throw him over my shoulder, and dangle him down my back with one hand while I reach round with the other hand so I can scoop him round, flipping him over in the process, to land him on his feet by my side. “*Again!*” he cries. “*Again!*” “*Again!*”

His capacity to do it again always exceeds mine. His joy is undiminished by repetition. It’s as if it’s always new for him. Children have a delight in the world because to them it’s new. Too often the rest of us have grown old and weary of the simple joys of life.

But the life of Jesus is *always new*. And the joy of Jesus is always fresh. Proverbs 8 personifies Wisdom and celebrates its role in creation. The New Testament suggests Jesus is that Wisdom. And in Proverbs 8 v 30-31 Wisdom-Jesus says:

*Then I was constantly at his side,  
I was filled with delight day after day,  
rejoicing always in his presence,  
rejoicing in his whole world  
and delighting in the human race.*

“Delighting day after day.” “Rejoicing always.”



But the Jesus born in the manger was not “rejoicing always”. Sometimes he wept; sometimes he was angry. That’s because death had entered the world because of human rebellion. So now the world is subject to decay. There’s still plenty to bring delight. But there’s also sorrow and pain. Christmas can be a time when we’re reminded of a lost loved one or a time when family conflict reaches fever pitch.

The good news is that the hymn in Colossians goes on. Not only is Jesus the firstborn over creation; he’s also the firstborn over a *new creation*. Colossians 1 v 18 says Jesus...

*is the beginning and the firstborn from among the dead.*

Jesus died bearing the penalty of our sin. But at his resurrection he was, as it were, reborn—the beginning and promise of a world made new. At Christmas the story of creation starts a new chapter. It becomes the story of re-creation.

Jesus said, “I have come that [you] might have life, and have it to the full” (John 10 v 10). The life that flows from the Father to the Son flows to us through the death of the Son. That means we can look forward to eternal life instead of eternal death. But it also means new life. “If anyone is in Christ,” says 2 Corinthians 5 v 17, “the new creation has come: the old has gone, the new is here!” One day we will be people made new in a world made new. But even now we have life. And that includes a new perspective on the world. We see the world as a gift from God.

It’s not hard to be a curmudgeon at Christmas: the same old decorations, the same old routines, the same old television programmes, the same old family arguments. This Christmas try to rediscover the joy of simple things. Try to see the world through the

## *The One True Story*

eyes of a child. Try to look at the world filled with the wonder and newness of God's Son and cry, "Again!"



### **Meditate**

*"The Son is the image of the invisible God,  
the firstborn over all creation."*

*Lo, within a manger lies  
He who built the starry skies ...  
Sacred Infant, all divine,  
What a tender love was thine,  
Thus to come from highest bliss  
Down to such a world as this.*

*(From "See, amid the winter's snow" by Edward Caswall)*



### **Prayer**

*For the beauty of the earth,  
for the beauty of the skies,  
for the Love which from our birth  
over and around us lies:  
Christ, our God, to thee we raise  
this our Sacrifice of Praise.  
Amen.*

*(From "For the beauty of the earth" by Folllott S. Pierpoint)*



# The new 2 Adam

*“But we do see Jesus, who was made lower than the angels for a little while, now crowned with glory and honour because he suffered death, so that by the grace of God he might taste death for everyone.”*

Hebrews 2 v 9

## Storyline

*Genesis 1 v 26 – 2 v 7; Psalm 8 and Hebrews 2 v 5-18*

Someone has decided to destroy the earth to make way for an intergalactic bypass. And they forget to tell us. That’s how Douglas Adams’ comic classic *The Hitch-Hiker’s Guide to the Galaxy* begins. It’s Adams’ way of highlighting how insignificant our small planet is compared to the vastness of the universe.

**Marvel #1.** Three thousand years ago King David looked up at the stars and come to much the same conclusions.

*When I consider your heavens, the work of your fingers,  
the moon and the stars,  
which you have set in place,  
what is mankind that you are mindful of them,  
human beings that you care for them?* Psalm 8 v 3-4

We are small-part players on an insignificant planet orbiting a small star in an insignificant part of the universe.

**Marvel #2.** But David says the bigger marvel is this:

*You have made them a little lower than the angels  
and crowned them with glory and honour.*

*You made them rulers over the works of your hands;*

*you put everything under their feet.* Psalm 8 v 5-6

The bigger marvel is that God has honoured humanity in an extraordinary way. We're up there with the angels. Some modern Bible translations use the words "them ... them ... them ... their" because the psalmist is talking about human beings. But it's literally "him ... him ... him ... his." That's because the psalmist is speaking of the first man, Adam, as the representative of humanity.

On the sixth day of creation God made Adam. The word "adam" means "humanity". The first man was the beginning and representative of all humanity. God formed him from the dust, creating a mannequin of inert clay. And then God breathed his "breath" or "Spirit" into the clay so that Adam became a living being. And God placed all things under his authority and care.

**Marvel #3** is the reality check. The writer of Hebrews meditates on Psalm 8. But his conclusion is, "At present we do not see everything subject to him" (Hebrews 2 v 8, see NIV footnote). Something went badly wrong. The world is not under our control. Last Christmas the river in our town burst its banks. A number of houses were flooded. The bridge was closed. Groups of people walked around to marvel at the power of nature. For all our technological advances, this world is not under our control.

What went wrong was Adam's rebellion against God. Adam sinned against God and that sin brought death and judgment into

the world. The ground was cursed and our relationship with the world around us became a struggle. Sometimes we exploit the planet. Sometimes the natural world turns on us.

**Marvel #4.** At the first Christmas a second Adam was born into the world. At Christmas the story of humanity was replayed, but this time with a different outcome. The central act first time round was disobedience and the outcome was conflict and judgment. The central act second time round was obedience and the outcome is victory and peace. Reworking the language of Psalm 2, Hebrews 2 v 8-9 continues:

*At present we do not see everything subject to them. But we do see Jesus, who was made lower than the angels for a little while, now crowned with glory and honour because he suffered death, so that by the grace of God he might taste death for everyone.*

Jesus is the Son of God, “as much superior to the angels as the name he has inherited is superior to theirs” (Hebrews 1 v 4). But at the first Christmas he was made lower than the angels. He became human, lived on earth, suffered what we suffer. He was hungry, thirsty, tired. He was rejected, abused, betrayed. Hebrews 2 v 10 says he was made “perfect through what he suffered”. That doesn’t mean he had a fault that needed straightening out. It means he became perfectly equipped to save us. He fully experienced what it is to be human. “Since the children have flesh and blood, he too shared in their humanity” (Hebrews 2 v 14). Jesus wasn’t playing at being human. He wasn’t like an actor who can step out of his part at the end of the performance. Jesus is fully, truly, perfectly human. He is the new and true Adam.



*So what?*

**First**, Jesus subdues our world. Everything has been placed under his feet. He reigns now in heaven and one day he'll reign on earth. Jesus is the true Adam through whom our humanity is restored and through whom our care over the world will be restored.

**Second**, he shares our pain.

*For this reason he had to be made like them, fully human in every way, in order that he might become a merciful and faithful high priest in service to God, and that he might make atonement for the sins of the people. Because he himself suffered when he was tempted, he is able to help those who are being tempted.*

Hebrews 2 v 17-18

Are you suffering? Jesus knows what it is to suffer. Are you tempted? Jesus knows what it is to be tempted. And he is a merciful high priest. He's not saying, *You have no idea what it is to suffer—if you only knew how much I suffered.* Quite the opposite. He's saying, *I have an idea what it's like for you—I know how much you're suffering.* Or maybe you're weighed down by guilt. Know this for certain today—Jesus makes atonement for your sin.

As we prepare to celebrate the birth of the new, true Adam, we can confidently rejoice in sins forgiven now, and the renewal of everything in the new creation.



## Meditate

*“But we do see Jesus, who was made lower than the angels for a little while, now crowned with glory and honour because he suffered death, so that by the grace of God he might taste death for everyone.”*

## *The One True Story*

*O loving wisdom of our God!  
When all was sin and shame,  
A second Adam to the fight  
And to the rescue came.*

*O wisest love, that flesh and blood,  
Which did in Adam fail,  
Should strive afresh against the foe,  
Should strive and should prevail.*

*(From "Praise to the Holiest in the height" by John Henry Newman)*



## **Prayer**

*Now display thy saving pow'r,  
Ruin'd nature now restore;  
Now in mystic union join  
Thine to ours, and ours to thine.*

*Adam's Likeness, Lord, efface,  
Stamp thy Image in its place.  
Second Adam from above,  
Reinstate us in thy love.  
Amen.*

*(From "Hark, the herald angels sing" by Charles Wesley)*



# The dragon-slayer

*“She gave birth to a son, a male child ...  
The great dragon was hurled down—that ancient snake  
called the devil, or Satan, who leads the whole world astray.”*

Revelation 12 v 5, 9

## **Storyline**

*Genesis 3 v 1-15 and Revelation 12*

**W**e're all familiar with the historical version of the Christmas story—the angelic messengers, the journey to Bethlehem, the child in the manger, the visit of the shepherds and so on. This is the version told in the Gospels.

But there is another version of the story—a mythological one. This is the version told by John in the book of Revelation. By “mythological” I don't mean untrue, though it's certainly very different from the historical versions in the Gospels. This version is rich with symbolism. John speaks of “signs”. Instead of the story from a historical perspective, this is the story from an eternal perspective.



But before we get there, we need to go back Adam and Eve in the garden. The serpent, we're told, came to Eve, inviting her to question God's word and reject God's authority. At this point Adam should have stepped in. God had told him to protect the garden. He should have stamped on the serpent and that would have been that. But Adam was strangely silent. Culpably silent. As a result Adam and Eve disobeyed God and were exiled from God's presence in the garden. And that might have been that. But God gave a warning to the serpent which was really a promise to humanity—the promise of a serpent-crusher:

*I will put enmity  
between you and the woman,  
and between your offspring and hers;  
he will crush your head,  
and you will strike his heel.*

Genesis 3 v 15

This is the background to John's mythological version of the Christmas story in Revelation 12.



John sees a woman in heaven clothed with the sun, with the moon under her feet and a crown of stars on her head. At the same time he sees an enormous red dragon with seven heads and ten horns. Its tail sweeps a third of the stars from the sky. The woman is pregnant and the dragon stands poised to catch her child the moment he is born. But at the last minute the child is snatched up to God. War breaks out in heaven between Michael (God's chief angel) and the dragon. Eventually Michael overpowers the dragon, who is thrown down to the earth. Meanwhile the woman escapes into the wilderness. The dragon pursues her, but she's given two eagle-

wings to fly out of his reach. The dragon spews a great flood of water out of his mouth to overwhelm her. But the ground opens up to swallow it and she escapes. So the dragon is left furiously waging war against the offspring of the women.

Not the version of the Christmas story you get on Christmas cards! Both Matthew's and John's accounts have the words, "She gave birth to a son" (Matthew 1 v 25; Revelation 12 v 5). But not much else is the same.

Fortunately, John decodes enough of the story for us to get the point. The dragon, he says, is "that ancient snake called the devil, or Satan, who leads the whole world astray" (v 8). The dragon in the story is the serpent in the garden. The woman represents God's people and her child is Jesus. God promised the serpent-crusher would come from the family of Abraham and the nation of Israel, his people in the Old Testament. And so it was. God's people (in the person of Mary) gave birth to Jesus. Here are the events of Christmas Day played out on the stage of history and eternity.

But the story is not yet over. It seemed that Satan was going to crush Jesus at the cross. In fact he only bruised his heel, as it were. For God raised Jesus from the dead and Jesus ascended to heaven. "The child was snatched up to God and to his throne," says John (v 7). The battle in heaven is the fruit of the battle that took place on earth at the cross. The bruising of Jesus turns out to be the crushing of Satan. So Satan turns his attention on God's people, the church. And he would have destroyed the church long ago if God were not protecting it. John pictures this protection as the gift of eagle's wings and the ground swallowing up Satan's flood of water. The church itself is safe, though many of her members (her "children") are cruelly persecuted.

It's all a bit breathless. The scale of this story is vast and the pace

is relentless. You might want to take a moment to let it sink in. John wants to capture our imaginations. He wants us to see our lives on the stage of history and eternity. We, too, feel:

- ☺ the **seductions** of the serpent as he encourages us to question God's word and reject God's rule.
- ☺ the **accusations** of the serpent as he points to our sin and encourages us to doubt God's grace (v 10).
- ☺ the **threats** of the serpent as he wages war against the church.

But the message of John's epic version of the Christmas story is this:

*They triumphed over him  
by the blood of the Lamb  
and by the word of their testimony;  
they did not love their lives so much  
as to shrink from death.*

v 11

*What do we do when temptation comes our way and Satan portrays God's rule as restrictive?* We look in the manger and see God's generosity.

*What do we do when we sin and Satan accuses us?* We look in the manger and see God's rescue mission for sinners.

*What do we do when we're under pressure as Christians?* We look in the manger and see the serpent-crusher.

And we look from the manger to the cross, and from the cross to heaven, where Christ already reigns. For we have overcome through the blood of the Lamb. And then we testify. We proclaim the victory of Christ's blood. For we overcome through the word of our testimony.

You may not feel that you are particularly under threat at the moment. But there are many others in your church, in this country, and around the world who feel the fiery breath of the dragon on their necks today. In fact, Christmas is a time of *increased* danger for

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some Christians. So in the midst of the festive rush, why not take some time to pray for our persecuted brothers and sisters throughout the world who feel the rage of the ancient enemy most today (v 17)?

**Meditate**

*She gave birth to a son, a male child ...*

*The great dragon was hurled down—that ancient snake called  
the devil, or Satan, who leads the whole world astray.*

*Faith, see the place, and see the tree  
Where heaven's Prince, instead of me,  
Was nailed to bear my shame.  
Bruised was the dragon by the Son,  
Though two had wounds, there conquered One –  
And Jesus was his name.*

*(From "In Eden—sad indeed that day"*

*by William Williams, translated by R. M. Jones)*



Tim Chester

### Prayer

*God of love, whose compassion never fails;  
we bring before thee  
the troubles and perils of people and nations,  
the sighing of prisoners and captives,  
the sorrows of the bereaved,  
the necessities of strangers,  
the helplessness of the weak,  
the despondency of the weary,  
the failing powers of the aged.  
O Lord, draw near to each;  
for the sake of Jesus Christ our Lord.*

*(Anselm of Canterbury)*