

“If it looks like a Christmas book and if it sounds like a Christmas book, then it surely must be a Christmas book! But it’s even more than that. *Let Earth Receive Her King* shows us how the Christmas story explains God’s purposes from the dawn of time to the end of history. And it wouldn’t be an Alistair Begg book if it didn’t also show us how that story provides answers to the deepest needs of our hearts. Reading these pages will surely help all of us have a better Christmas. But I for one wouldn’t be surprised if it helps some readers have their best Christmas ever.”

**SINCLAIR FERGUSON, Ligonier Ministries Teaching Fellow;
Author, *Love Came Down* and *Union with Christ***

“There’s no better or more faithful companion than Alistair Begg to widen your gaze and deepen your understanding so that you will be glad to ‘prepare Him room.’ These devotions are full of scriptural insight and refreshment that will enhance and enrich your Christmas season.”

KEITH AND KRISTYN GETTY, Hymn-writers; Authors, *Sing!*

“In this just-right book for daily reading during the Advent season, Alistair Begg presents the compelling story of the need for Jesus, the coming of Jesus, and the beauty of Jesus that runs from Genesis to Revelation.”

**NANCY GUTHRIE, Bible teacher;
Author, *Blessed and Even Better Than Eden***



LET EARTH
RECEIVE HER
KING



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Published by:
The Good Book Company



thegoodbook.com | thegoodbook.co.uk
thegoodbook.com.au | thegoodbook.co.nz | thegoodbook.co.in

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Published in association with the literary agency of Wolgemuth & Wilson.

Cover Design by Faceout Studio | Art direction and design by André Parker

ISBN: 9781802541182 (hardcover) | 9781802541106 (paperback)

Printed in India

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*Joy to the world, the Lord is come!
Let Earth receive her King.
Let every heart prepare Him room
And Heaven and nature sing,
And Heaven and nature sing,
And Heaven, and Heaven and nature sing.*

*Joy to the earth, the Savior reigns!
Let all their songs employ
While fields and floods, rocks, hills,
and plains
Repeat the sounding joy,
Repeat the sounding joy,
Repeat, repeat the sounding joy.*

(Isaac Watts, 1719)

INTRODUCTION



I love the Advent season. I love its sense of anticipation, and I love the way it takes me back to Christmases as a child—the singing, the church, the gifts.

I love the preparations, too. Some of us are the kind of people who start getting ready for Christmas in September. I am not one of those. I am more of a December-preparer. As a pastor, I find myself each December still writing my Advent sermons, and envying those who planned theirs out months earlier. My approach to gift-buying is similar. Thankfully, my wife is very much more of an organized person, otherwise things would be chaos.

It is easy to look at the first Christmas as though God were a December-preparer—as though the story starts on the first page of the New Testament, with an angel suddenly showing up to a girl in Galilee. But the Bible is a two-act drama, and to start at the Gospels is to join at the interval. No, God's preparations for the moment when this earth would receive its King started where

John's Gospel does: not with angels and shepherds and wise men, but "In the beginning"—in fact from before the beginning. From eternity past God planned to send His Son so that we might have life with Him for eternity future.

And so in these pages we will start at the beginning, and follow God's preparations for the awe-inspiring event of that first Christmas night. We will trace His plans and purposes through the Old Testament, before we enjoy reflecting once more on the events surrounding the coming of the Word made flesh.

But we will not stop there. "Advent" comes from the Latin word "Adventus," which means "Coming." And we are meant to have two "comings" in view—Christ's arrival in the past and His return in the future. The King of creation has walked on this earth, in history. And this earth will receive its King once again, this time arriving not as an unheralded baby but coming gloriously, unmistakably, on the clouds of heaven. Children, of course, spend Advent looking forward to Christmas Day. We are invited to look beyond that, and to a far greater day—the day Jesus returns. So our time together will start with Genesis 1, and by Christmas Eve we will have reached the other end of the Scriptures and the final chapter of Revelation.

This Advent, then, I invite you to join me in looking back to the Lord's first coming—to how the wondrous gift was given, and how that gift is joy to the world, and joy for our hearts, today. And I invite you to join me in looking forward to His second coming—to what God

Let Earth Receive Her King

is still preparing to deliver in the future, and what that, too, means for us today.

My prayer is that these Advent devotions will cause you to wonder at all that God has done, and worship the one who lay in the manger that first Christmas night; and that they will foster within you a great sense of anticipation for Christ's return and prompt you to wait with joy for the day when earth once again receives its King. My prayer is that this Advent season, you and I would grow in our love for Him.



PART I
CHRISTMAS
IN THE BEGINNING



I. THE WORD IN THE BEGINNING

*“In the beginning, God created the heavens
and the earth.”*

GENESIS 1:1

When we think about Jesus, it’s inevitable that certain images come to mind—especially during Christmastime. It seems that we’ve largely moved past the era when most Western depictions of Him featured a blond-haired Jesus with striking blue eyes, holding a little lamb in His hands as He strolled through a blissful land where peaceful rivers flow. But although we may have left behind the idea of a blue-eyed, blond-haired Jesus, it may still be that most of our mental pictures owe more to artistic liberty than they owe to biblical theology.

It’s striking that none of the New Testament writers—nor God Himself, as He inspired their words—found it important to describe Jesus’ looks. All we know is that “he had no form or majesty that we should look at him,

and no beauty that we should desire him.”¹ Why is such a description so conspicuously missing? Well, perhaps a key reason is that every human portrayal of Jesus misses what the Father desires for us to know about His Son. Even the greatest paintings and video productions will not allow us to conceive of Jesus in the awesome way in which He is introduced to us in John’s Gospel, where we are invited not to wonder about how He might have looked but to wonder at His eternity, His personality, and His divinity:

“In the beginning was the Word, and the Word was with God, and the Word was God. He was in the beginning with God. All things were made through him, and without him was not any thing made that was made.” (John 1:1-3)

No matter how far back we consider the beginning of time to be and no matter what model we may have in our minds of how time began, there we will find the preincarnate Son of God already existing. “In the beginning,” there was already God—and there was already God the Son, the “Word.” John connects the dots to Genesis 1 for us. This Jesus was not created, for He is the very Creator of the universe. The child in the manger was the very same person who put the stars in the sky—including the very star which led the wise men from the east to come and worship Him.

1 Isaiah 53:2.

In His eternity, this Word, Jesus, is distinct from the Father and from the Spirit, not in essence but in person. He “was with God,” yet He “was God.” Both statements are true. Though it may sound puzzling, John wasn’t writing in abstractions. He was presenting a person with whom he had laughed, wept, feasted, prayed, served, traveled, and far more—a person who nonetheless was also present at the creation of the world, as the Creator of the world.



It’s somewhat obscured in our English translations, but John’s use of verb tenses is masterful. He uses the imperfect tense (indicating an ongoing action) as he’s describing the preexistent location of the Son: He “was with God, and ... was God.” But then he switches to the aorist tense (indicating a decisive moment in time) when he says, “The Word became flesh.”²

There was a point in time, over 2,000 years ago, when the second person of the Trinity, Jesus, who existed before time began, was delivered into this world like billions of other babies have been. That is what we call Christ’s first advent and what millions celebrate each Christmas. There was a point in time when He obediently gave up His life to bear the penalty of our sins, and a point in time when His dead body came back to life, and a point in time when His resurrected body ascended into heaven. And there will be a point

² John 1:14.

in time when this same Jesus comes again to make all things new.



Christ's divinity, then, has no starting point in time. He always was. He was God before time began. He is God at this very moment. And He will continue to be God forever.

If I am honest, I find it is easy to fall into the trap of spending each Advent season so busy with preparations that I do not dwell on the truth that the Creator became a creature and lived in this world. Perhaps you struggle with that too. There is a better way—not just during December but every day: “We are called to worship him without cessation, obey him without hesitation, love him without reservation and serve him without interruption.”³ To the extent that we ensure that we pause to gaze with the eyes of faith at the Word become flesh, we will find ourselves moved to worship, obey, love, and serve the Lord.

Christmas comes truly alive when we make time to think about the Lord Jesus. Remember, His physical appearance did not matter one bit—but, at the same time, enjoy the fact that He physically appeared, there at that first Christmas, to be our great hope in life and death.

³ Bruce Milne, *The Message of John: Here Is Your King!*, *The Bible Speaks Today* (InterVarsity Press Academic, 1993), p 36.

For Reflection:

How do the truths about Jesus' divinity and humanity prompt you to worship Him now?

*Ere the blue heavens were stretched abroad,
From everlasting was the Word;
With God He was, the Word was God,
And must divinely be adored.*

*By His own power were all things made;
By Him supported all things stand;
He is the whole creation's head,
And angels fly at His command.*

*But lo! He leaves those heavenly forms;
The Word descends and dwells in clay,
That He may converse hold with worms,
Dressed in such feeble flesh as they.*

*Mortals with joy beheld His face,
The eternal Father's only Son:
How full of truth, how full of grace,
The brightness of the Godhead shone!*

*The angels leave their high abode,
To learn new mysteries here, and tell
The love of our descending God,
The glories of Immanuel.*

"The Deity and Humanity of Christ"
Isaac Watts

God's covenant promises that had prompted Abraham to pack up and leave behind his old life enabled him to be obedient even in the midst of an inconceivable trial that threatened those very promises.¹¹

After journeying nearly 45 miles with his son, on the third day, Abraham looked up and saw the mountain to which he had been sent: Mount Moriah. And as they moved closer, he surely anticipated the question that eventually came from Isaac: "Behold, the fire and the wood, but where is the lamb for a burnt offering?" Yet still Abraham trusted God: "God will provide for himself the lamb for a burnt offering, my son."¹²

As the story reaches its climax, with the son bound upon a sacrificial altar and the father ready to do the unthinkable because of his faith in and fear of the Lord, God intervenes, sending an angel to halt the sacrifice of Isaac. Abraham looked up and saw a ram caught in the thicket "and offered it up as a burnt offering instead of his son."¹³

Abraham had said God would provide a lamb—but instead He provided a ram. Isn't that a bit odd? Perhaps not. Perhaps Abraham's prophetic word was reaching beyond Moriah that day and into the cradle in Bethlehem, near where an angel would interrupt some shepherds watching their flocks at night. Those shepherds would leave their lambs to go and see another: "the Lamb of God, who takes away the sin of the world!"¹⁴

11 Genesis 22:1-5.

12 Genesis 22:7-8.

13 Genesis 22:13.

14 John 1:29.

