

“Sinclair Ferguson knows how to write deep theology that helps simple people like me. And there is no deeper topic than the Advent of our glorious Lord in this broken world. *The Dawn of Redeeming Grace* is written by a wise author offering us rich insights, so that we journey more confidently from this world to that which is to come.”

RAY ORTLUND, Renewal Ministries, Nashville

“It is hard not to be a little envious of Sinclair’s uncanny knack of unpacking familiar material in a manner that causes one to say, ‘Why didn’t I see that?’ These short readings have helped me read my Bible with fresh insight, and in the process my heart has been strangely warmed.”

**ALISTAIR BEGG, Senior Pastor, Parkside Church, Cleveland;
Bible Teacher, Truth for Life**

“For many of us, the road through the Christmas story is very familiar territory: so familiar that we have a hard time seeing it through fresh eyes. In *The Dawn of Redeeming Grace*, Sinclair Ferguson is a worthy and helpful guide, pointing out insights we may have missed and guiding us toward wonder and worship.”

NANCY GUTHRIE, Author and Bible Teacher

“Walking Matthew’s narrative path with magnifying glass in hand, Sinclair Ferguson points out easily missed details and overlooked shifts in the plot. *The Dawn of Redeeming Grace* shows us what happens when God keeps his word to rescue lost humanity. Let’s follow the path to our own Advent discoveries.”

**SHERIDAN VOYSEY, Author, *The Making of Us*;
Presenter, Pause for Thought on BBC Radio 2**

“As Christmas gets more and more secularized, trivialized and sentimentalized (even in the evangelical church), we need a heavy dose of thinking deeply about the arrival of the Son of God. Sinclair Ferguson provides the spiritual riches that your heart longs for as you contemplate the birth of our Savior.”

JOHN MACARTHUR, Pastor and Teacher, Grace to You

“With fresh insight, Sinclair Ferguson unpacks the doctrine of the incarnation. A highly recommended read in the weeks leading up to Christmas. It will do your heart good!”

GAIL CURRY, Baptist Women’s Director, Association of Baptist Churches in Ireland

*Silent night, holy night!
All is calm, all is bright
Round yon virgin mother and child!
Holy infant, so tender and mild,
Sleep in heavenly peace,
Sleep in heavenly peace.*

*Silent night, holy night!
Shepherds quake at the sight:
Glories stream from heaven afar,
Heav'nly hosts sing, "Alleluia!
Christ the Saviour is born,
Christ the Saviour is born!"*

*Silent night, holy night!
Son of God, love's pure light,
Radiant beams from thy holy face
With the dawn of redeeming grace,
Jesus, Lord, at thy birth,
Jesus, Lord, at thy birth!*

Joseph Mohr (1792-1848)

THE DAWN OF
REDEEMING
GRACE



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FERGUSON

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INTRODUCTION



They say time is relative, and it can certainly seem that way as Christmas approaches. To a busy parent—with presents to wrap, cards to send, meals to prepare, and spare batteries to remember to buy—time seems to fly. There is not enough of it—and there is simply too much to do. But to a child, the days of December seem the longest in the whole year; they pass more slowly than the last few miles of a tedious journey. No wonder C. S. Lewis’s description of Narnia as a land where it was “always winter but never Christmas” resonates with children. They do not need to go through the back of a wardrobe to feel that—all you do is turn the calendar to the month of December!

Today’s children are not the first to think that Christmas can’t come soon enough. Indeed, that was the feeling of generations of Old Testament believers: a feeling picked up in the words of Charles Wesley’s hymn “Hark! The Herald Angels Sing”:

*Late in time behold him come,
Offspring of the Virgin's womb.*

“Late in time”? Jesus came late?

Our own experience sometimes gives certain words an atmosphere unique to ourselves. Perfectly innocent words can have a chilling effect on our emotions! For me, “late” is one of them. I cannot hear it without feeling that I am being accused! Perhaps it is because I can still hear in my mind the shrill voice of one of my teachers shouting at me, “Ferguson, you’re late” (when I wasn’t!). With that kind of memory, it is hardly surprising that to me the phrase “late in time” has a somewhat negative ring about it.

Was Jesus also “late”? No, Wesley did not mean Jesus came at the wrong time. But since God’s people had been hoping for his coming ever since the divine proclamation of Genesis 3:15 had promised the arrival of one who would bruise the serpent’s head, it must have seemed a very long time. The believers of the Old Testament were often heard crying out, “How long, Lord?” Would it always be winter but never the long-promised Christmas?

When it has been my responsibility to arrange the items of praise for the first Sunday in Advent, I have always chosen to begin with a 12th-century hymn that captures this sense of waiting and longing:

*O come, O come, Immanuel
And ransom captive Israel,*

*That mourns in lonely exile here
Until the Son of God appear.*

*O come, Thou Rod of Jesse, free
Thine own from Satan's tyranny;
From depths of hell thy people save,
And give them victory o'er the grave.*

*Rejoice! Rejoice! Immanuel
Shall come to thee, O Israel.*

God may seem slow, but he is always on time. He has never been late. But if you read through the Bible from the beginning, there is something thrilling about turning over the blank page between the Old Testament and the New Testament. The first thing you encounter is Matthew's summary of the long years of waiting (1:1-17). But now the snow is melting, and winter is giving way to Christmas (1:18 – 2:23). The arrival of the Lord Jesus is the dawn of a glorious new era.

Matthew's Gospel begins with two chapters on the nativity. It may seem strange that he does little more than mention the actual event of that first Christmas Day. ("She had given birth to a son," 1:25, and "After Jesus was born..." , 2:1; that is all he says.) But he has his reasons. Births take place every day of the year, ever hour of the day. But this birth was different, and Matthew wants to spend most of his time helping us to understand why it was.

As this Christmas approaches, I invite you to join me in exploring what Matthew says about those days that

marked the dawn of redeeming grace and about how Christ's light breaks into our lives today.

I am grateful to The Good Book Company for allowing me the rare privilege of writing a book that perhaps many thousands of people in different parts of the world will read simultaneously, even reading the same pages on the same days. By doing so, we become a great company of individuals united by the shared experience of reflecting on Matthew's account of the birth of Jesus. It is the prologue to the greatest story of all—the story of Jesus. And it is one that will make many millions sing Joseph Mohr's famous lines again this Christmas:

*Silent night, holy night!
Son of God, love's pure light,
Radiant beams from thy holy face
With the dawn of redeeming grace,
Jesus, Lord, at thy birth!*

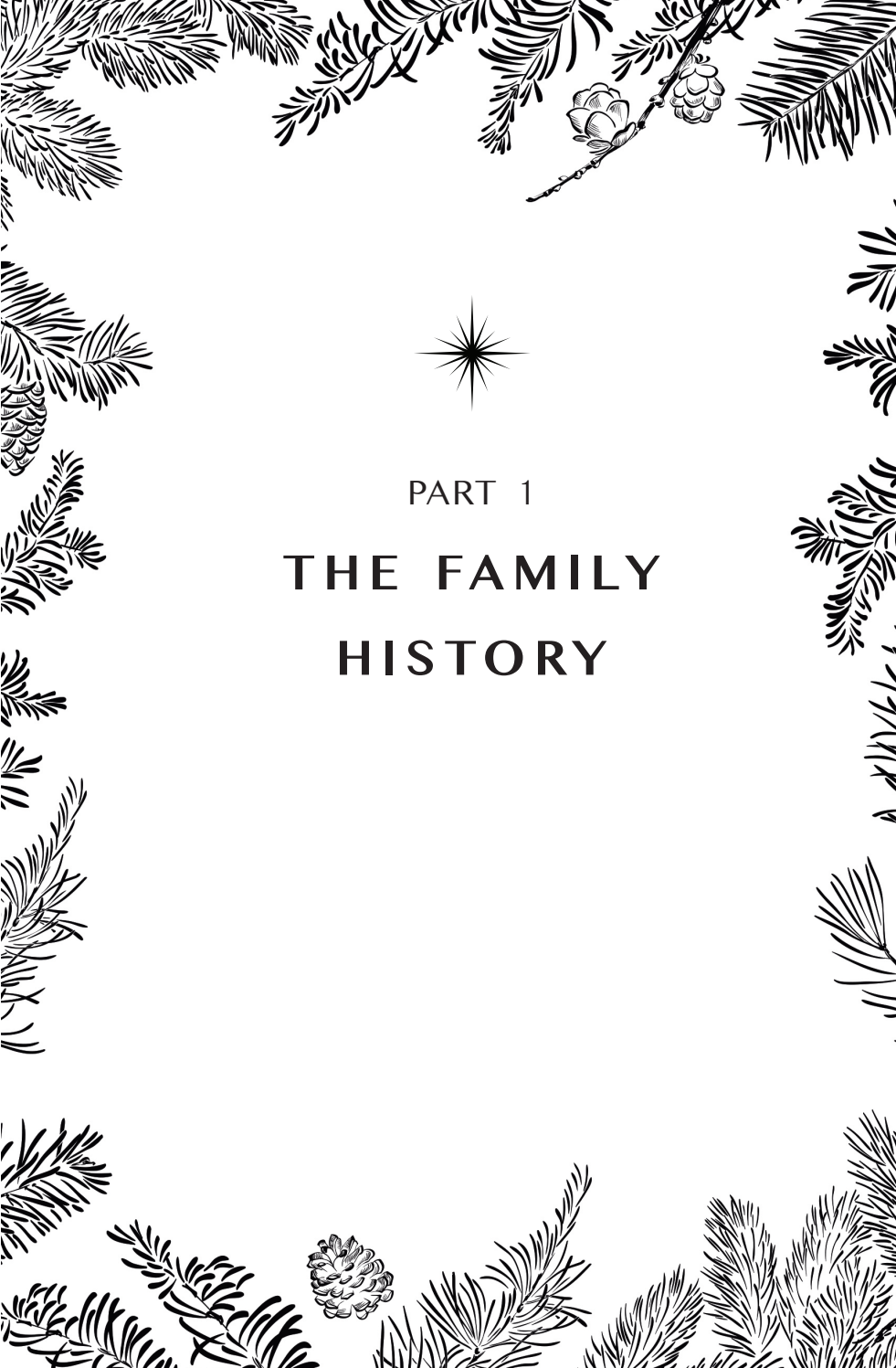
My prayer is that as you read, you will experience “the dawn of redeeming grace” because “Christ the Saviour is born.”

Sinclair B. Ferguson



PART 1

**THE FAMILY
HISTORY**



Matthew 1:1-17

¹The book of the genealogy of Jesus Christ, the son of David, the son of Abraham.

²Abraham was the father of Isaac, and Isaac the father of Jacob, and Jacob the father of Judah and his brothers, ³and Judah the father of Perez and Zerah by Tamar, and Perez the father of Hezron, and Hezron the father of Ram, ⁴and Ram the father of Amminadab, and Amminadab the father of Nahshon, and Nahshon the father of Salmon, ⁵and Salmon the father of Boaz by Rahab, and Boaz the father of Obed by Ruth, and Obed the father of Jesse, ⁶and Jesse the father of David the king.

And David was the father of Solomon by the wife of Uriah, ⁷and Solomon the father of Rehoboam, and Rehoboam the father of Abijah, and Abijah the father of Asaph, ⁸and Asaph the father of Jehoshaphat, and Jehoshaphat the father of Joram, and Joram the father of Uzziah, ⁹and Uzziah the father of Jotham, and Jotham the father of Ahaz, and Ahaz the father of Hezekiah, ¹⁰and Hezekiah the father of Manasseh, and Manasseh the father of

Amos, and Amos the father of Josiah, ¹¹ and Josiah the father of Jechoniah and his brothers, at the time of the deportation to Babylon.

¹²And after the deportation to Babylon: Jechoniah was the father of Shealtiel, and Shealtiel the father of Zerubbabel, ¹³ and Zerubbabel the father of Abiud, and Abiud the father of Eliakim, and Eliakim the father of Azor, ¹⁴ and Azor the father of Zadok, and Zadok the father of Achim, and Achim the father of Eliud, ¹⁵ and Eliud the father of Eleazar, and Eleazar the father of Matthan, and Matthan the father of Jacob, ¹⁶ and Jacob the father of Joseph the husband of Mary, of whom Jesus was born, who is called Christ.

¹⁷ So all the generations from Abraham to David were fourteen generations, and from David to the deportation to Babylon fourteen generations, and from the deportation to Babylon to the Christ fourteen generations.

1. IN THE BEGINNING



The first words of a book are important. They can make you read it or make you close it!

Some time ago I began to read the biographies of two contemporaries who were on opposite sides of the American Revolution. One biography began with an explanation of the subject's complex family tree and varied royal connections; the other with these words:

*In the cold, nearly colorless light of a New England winter, two men on horseback travelled the coast road below Boston, heading north.*¹

You can guess which book I kept reading. The first quickly lost my interest. Family connections can be very confusing and—at least outside the family—are interesting to only a few. But I wanted to know more about the two men on the Boston coast road; who were

¹ David McCullough, *John Adams* (Simon & Schuster, 2001), p 17. In the interests of full disclosure, the book is prefaced by a double spread of the Adams family tree!

they and why were they there in the first place? My attention was captured immediately (and sustained to the last page).

The opening section in Matthew's Gospel isn't exactly an attention-grabber for most of us. It is a long list of largely unfamiliar names. Some of them we may not even be sure how to pronounce. We don't usually read this part of Matthew in Christmas services!

But these opening words would have grabbed the attention of Matthew's first Jewish readers and hearers (and most of them were hearers). Literally they read, "Book of [the] genesis of Jesus Christ, son of David, Son of God." To a certain generation, "Genesis" is a famous band from the 1980s and 90s; but for Matthew's audience "genesis" meant "beginning." It is the name of the first book of the Bible, the story of the original beginning.

This word choice was not accidental. Matthew's book is the story of a new genesis—of a new beginning. His Gospel, and indeed the Christian gospel message as a whole, is about God establishing his kingdom and beginning what Paul called a "new creation" (2 Corinthians 5:17).

Matthew's Gospel has sometimes been described as "The Gospel of the kingdom." He tells us how Jesus taught about "the kingdom," how his miracles were signs of its presence, and how he explained the new and different lifestyle of its members (Matthew 4:23 – 7:29). Matthew also ends his Gospel with an indication of Jesus' kingship. Jesus' last words to the apostles are these: "All

authority in heaven and on earth has been given to me...” (28:18). Now his rule will be extended to the ends of the earth and to the close of history.

The gospel story is all about how Jesus Christ, the son of David, in God’s kingdom restores life to what it was meant to be. In other words, it is about a new genesis.

Think back to the original creation. In that first beginning, God created mankind, male and female, as his image and likeness. He said, “Let them have dominion...” (Genesis 1:26). They were royal children appointed to reign over the kingdom of creation. But Genesis tells the story of their tragic fall from that privileged role. Their calling was to turn the dust of the earth into a garden (1:26 – 2:25). Instead, they sinned and became part of that dust themselves (3:17-19).

But now, as we stand in the opening pages of Matthew’s Gospel, God is bringing about a grand reversal. The whole story of the Old Testament has been a preparation for it. Now the new beginning has begun. What follows will tell the story of how Jesus undid the effects of Adam’s fall, and accomplished what Adam and we have failed to do. The result will be a “new creation”: what Matthew calls “the new world” (Matthew 19:28)—literally the *palingenesia*—the beginning again!

So, Matthew’s opening words are good news for anyone who needs a new beginning. That’s why his Gospel ends with Jesus telling his apostles (who were all Jews) that they were to go to the ends of the earth with the message that the dominion, and authority, and the kingdom of God, have all been restored. Christ

has inaugurated a new genesis in which all who come to faith in him will share.

But still, we're left with the question: why then this seemingly endless list of names?

The answer lies in the three ways in which Matthew describes Jesus.

First, Jesus is the Christ. Matthew mentions this fact four times here (1:1, 16, 17, 18). "Christ" is the Greek equivalent of the Hebrew word "Messiah," meaning the anointed King whom God had promised to send to deliver his people from bondage. That's who Jesus is.

But Jesus is also the son of David (1:1). Why is that important? Because God had promised that a descendant of David would reign over a kingdom that would stretch from one end of the earth to the other. That king would restore the world Adam marred.

And Jesus is also a son of Abraham (1:1). For even earlier God had promised that this same person would be descended from Abraham, and in him all the nations of the earth would be blessed—they would experience the blessing that Adam had forfeited through his sin (Genesis 12:1-3).

There is more to come in Jesus' genealogy. It isn't at all what you might expect. But that will need to wait. For today let us ponder the fact that Advent is all about the new beginning God has made possible by sending his Son for us.

Perhaps a new beginning is what you need most. As you reach the end of another year, is there some aspect of the previous twelve months in which you wish you

could start over? If so, Matthew wants you to know that you can find that new beginning in Jesus Christ.



*Earth was waiting, spent and restless,
With a mingled hope and fear;
And the faithful few were sighing,
"Surely, Lord, the day is near;
The desire of all the nations,
It is time he should appear."*

*Earth for him had groaned and travailed
Since the ages first began,
For in him was hid the secret
That through all the ages ran—
Son of Mary, Son of David,
Son of God, and Son of Man.*

"Earth was Waiting, Spent and Restless"
Walter Chalmers Smith (1824-1908)



Lord Jesus, you came into the world so that we might have a new beginning. Thank you that your word assures us that everyone who belongs to you becomes part of a new creation. Work in us your new creation so that your kingdom may come in our lives. Amen.