

Presented to: _____

By: _____

On the occasion of: _____

Date: _____

The Advent Jesse Tree

Meeting Our Messiah through the Promises of the Old Testament

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Using a Jesse Tree

Using a Jesse tree to celebrate Advent is a tradition originating in Europe. Families taught their children a biblical lesson each day of Advent and hung symbolic ornaments to represent the theme for the day. It's a wonderful way to both teach and celebrate with your children, and the tradition is enjoying a renewal of popularity.

You can hang the ornaments on your regular Christmas tree, but most families designate a separate tree as their Jesse tree. Use a small natural or artificial pine tree, a decorative tree designed to hang miniature Easter eggs, or place the ornaments on a banner or mobile. Put up this tree when you do the reading for the first day of Advent and hang an ornament each day after that.

Throughout the Advent season, use the daily reading in this book as part of your family devotions. Some families read it together over breakfast or supper, or some other time when everyone gathers together.

Read the scripture for the day, then the devotional reading, and then hang the ornament with the day's symbol. One popular idea is to wrap each ornament, label it with the day, and place them all in a basket near the Jesse tree. One child can then find and unwrap the correct ornament and another child can hang it on your Jesse tree.

We have included two comprehension questions after each reading but encourage you to make up your own as well. As your children get older, try to think of questions that ask them to analyze the meaning more than just remember facts. As you move through the book, remember to review the earlier ornaments and stories to help children see the bigger picture and continuous thread of God's promises and their ultimate fulfillment in Jesus Christ. You can use our coloring pages and other suggested daily activities to further reinforce the lessons.

May you have a blessed Advent season.

Daily Readings

Introduction to the Jesse Tree

Isaiah 11:1–10

Long before Jesus was born, a man named Jesse had seven sons. God chose David, Jesse's youngest son, to be Israel's greatest king. David was the first royal branch coming from Jesse's "tree."

Much later Jesus, the descendant of David, could be called a new "shoot" that was suddenly growing out of the apparently dead royal "stump of Jesse." That is, Jesus was evidence that the family tree of kings that descended from Jesse was not yet done.

The eternal promise to David that a descendant of his family would sit on God's throne was still true. In spite of Israel's history of sinfulness, God was going to restore the nation's kingship. When this time of restoration came, it would be wonderful.

Questions

1. Who did God choose to be Israel's greatest king?
2. Why is Jesus called a shoot from the royal tree of Jesse?

- God's Spirit would rest on this descendant of David so he would rule with God's own wisdom (verses 1–2).
- This king would judge with the perfect righteousness that only God had (verses 3–6).
- He would establish a kingdom of perfect, heavenly peace (verses 7–9).
- His kingdom would establish peace for *all* the nations, not just for Israel (verses 9–10).

From now until Christmas, we're going to remember the Old Testament promises that kept reminding the people that someone like Jesus would come to rule on earth as the "Son of David." Each day we'll hang up an ornament representing one of these Bible lessons. They'll be like branches on our Jesse tree.

Creation

Genesis 1:26–31

In the beginning God created the universe, and everything in it. When he created human beings he created them to be like him. That way they could rule over his earth for him. God gave them everything they needed to live a good life. And God told them to rule his world well.

God told them to fill up the earth with their children. He told them to take really good care of the world, so that it would be just like God's paradise.

Today's ornament has a picture of Adam and Eve on it. It helps us remember that they were created to be perfect ancestors for a great king like David. They could be wonderful ancestors for Jesus, the Greatest King ever.



Day 2

Questions

1. What did God create?
2. Who were the first two people created?

The First Sin

Genesis 3:1–19

God had created everything, and it was perfect. But Adam and Eve disobeyed God. They ate from a tree that God had told them to leave alone. When they did this, they felt guilty and hid from God when he came to talk with them.

God asked them what they had done. Instead of telling the truth and asking God to forgive them, they only made excuses. Adam blamed it all on his wife Eve. Eve blamed the serpent for tricking her. But God blamed them both and said they had not obeyed him.

He told them that this sin would make trouble for them. It would be hard to get enough food. Having new babies would be painful, and marriage would not be as kind and loving as it should be. This disobedience would even cause people to die.

Adam and Eve are the ancestors of everyone living today. Their sin caused us to have the same troubles now, which is why our ornament today has a picture of a snake and some fruit. We can be so glad that Jesus came to provide forgiveness so we can escape from these terrible troubles and live like we're supposed to live.



Day 3

Questions

1. How did Adam and Eve disobey God?
2. What did God say when they made excuses?

The Flood

Genesis 6:11–14; 7:7; 9:8–13

After Adam and Eve sinned, people became more and more wicked. Finally, God could not be patient any longer, and he made a plan to judge evil people and to save the people who still loved God. He planned to send a flood. He told his friend Noah to build a really big boat so Noah's family and some animals would be safe when the flood came.

Noah obeyed, and his family was safe. Then God made a wonderful promise to Noah, to his descendants, and even to the animals. He promised that he would never flood the earth and kill everything again. Whenever it rains, a beautiful rainbow reminds us that the rain is not going to flood and destroy the earth.

Just like we are all the descendants of Adam and Eve, we are also all the descendants of Noah. We still have God's promise that he will not destroy our earth in a great flood. Today we will hang a rainbow on our Jesse tree to remind us of God's promise of mercy and patience.



Day 4

Questions

1. What did God tell Noah to build?
2. Why did God put a rainbow in the sky?

The Promise

Genesis 12:1-7

A long time after Noah died, God had another friend named Abraham. Abraham trusted God and obeyed when God told him to do anything. But Abraham and his wife Sarah lived around people who were so wicked that God wanted to protect Abraham from them. So he told Abraham that he would give him another country if he would move there.

God promised to bless Abraham and Sarah. He said they would be very famous. Their descendants would become a great nation that could bless the whole world by teaching them about God's goodness.

God kept that promise. When Jesus was born, he became the most important descendant that Abraham and Sarah would ever have. And Jesus taught the people about God's love for all the nations. He really blesses the nations. Today we will hang a tent on our Jesse tree to remind us of Jesus' great ancestors named Abraham and Sarah.

Questions

1. Why did God tell Abraham to move?
2. What did God promise to Abraham and Sarah?



Day 5

Abraham's Offering

Genesis 22:1-14

Abraham and Sarah waited a long time for the baby boy God had promised them. When Isaac was born, the new parents cherished him. Imagine how surprised and sad they were when God told them to offer this son as a sacrifice to God! How could this be? Everything God had ever promised Abraham and Sarah depended upon the survival and success of Isaac.

But Abraham still trusted God. He thought, God will provide a future for Isaac and his descendants. Maybe he will even raise him from the dead (Hebrews 11: 19). Or maybe he will provide a substitute sacrifice so Isaac can live. Abraham knew God would provide something.

So Abraham obeyed God and began to prepare the sacrifice. But God stopped Abraham and provided a ram for a sacrifice instead of Isaac. But just like God, who offered his beloved only Son for us, Abraham had been willing to offer his only son—even if it looked like that would be the end of all the promises God had ever made to Abraham. He trusted God to keep his promise anyway.

So we call Abraham the ancestor of the faithful. One day, Jesus became Abraham's most faithful descendant. Just like Isaac, all the promises God ever made find their fulfillment in Jesus (2 Corinthians 1:20). And God was still willing to offer him as a sacrifice for our sins. Just as Abraham had hoped, God received Jesus alive back from the dead. Today we will hang a ram on our tree to remind us of Abraham's offering.

Questions

1. What did God tell Abraham to do?
2. Why is Abraham called the ancestor of the faithful?



Day 6

Assurance

Genesis 28:10–22

Jacob was one of Abraham's promised descendants. He wasn't always a good man, but he finally learned to trust and obey God. One day Jacob was on a trip to see his brother Esau. Earlier Esau had gotten furious because Jacob cheated him. So Jacob was scared of his brother.

One night when Jacob was sleeping, God gave him a dream about angels going up and down a ladder that reached clear to heaven. God told Jacob that his dream meant that God still remembered the promises he had made to Jacob's grandfather Abraham. God had promised to give Abraham the land where Jacob was now sleeping (Genesis 12:1; 15:7). Several times God had promised to make Abraham's descendants very numerous (Genesis 12:2; 13:16; 15:5; 22:17; 26:4). And he had promised Abraham that his descendants would bless the whole world (Genesis 12:3; 18:18; 22:18; 26:4; 28:14).

Jacob realized that he was in God's own land, right at the front gate of God's heavenly house. So Jacob called that place Bethel, because the Hebrew word *Beth* means 'house of' and *El* means 'God'. He remembered that God had promised all of this to his grandfather Abraham. He knew that God was reminding him that he will keep that promise. Jacob promised to make The LORD his God and trusted God to keep him safe.

And God did keep him safe. His brother Esau was happy to see him again when they finally met on the road. Jesus became Jacob's most famous descendant, and now Jesus blesses all the nations when they obey him. Today we will hang a ladder on the Jesse tree to remember Jacob and his dream.



Day 7

Questions

1. What did Jacob see in his dream?
2. What did his dream mean?

God's Providence

Genesis 37:2–4,23–28; 42:1–3; 45:1–11; 50:19–21

Joseph was Jacob's favorite son. That made his brothers jealous, so they decided to get rid of him. One day they sold him to be a slave in far-away Egypt. When they returned home to their father, they pretended to be sad and lied that a wild animal had killed Joseph.

This was a terrible thing to do to their little brother. But God was with Joseph in Egypt. In fact, God blessed Joseph with a very important job in Egypt. He took care of all the food so Egypt would have enough to eat when a famine came.

Finally this famine came, and even in Canaan there wasn't enough to eat. Joseph's brothers had to come to Egypt to find food. At first they didn't know who this important man was that was in charge of all the food. When they found out it was their little brother Joseph they were frightened. Now that Joseph was so powerful and important, they were sure he get even with them and get them in a lot of trouble.

But Joseph told his brothers even though their plan had been evil, God made this all work out to keep their family alive. No matter what happened, God's promise to Abraham would never fail. His family would keep on growing until one day, Jesus, his greatest descendant, would come to save all the families of the earth. The picture of the coat on today's ornament reminds us of Joseph and his part in God's plan.



Day 8

Questions

1. What did Joseph's brothers do to him?
2. How did God use Joseph to keep his promise to Abraham?

The Royal Promise

Genesis 49:1, 8–12

One day when he was old, Jacob gathered all his sons around him to tell them God's plans for their future. For some, he warned that their descendants would have a difficult future. But he told Judah that his descendants would become kings over the tribes of Israel.

He said a great descendant would be a mighty warrior that could defeat all of Israel's enemies, and he would then be a powerful king. He would even reign over other nations besides Israel. Indeed, King David did come from the tribe of Judah. And he reigned over many nations. But more importantly, Jesus the Son of David was from that tribe.

Today, when we think of Jesus' rule over all the nations, we can remember that God promised that ages ago, when Jacob was describing the future of all his sons. The branch of Jesse was to come from the tribe of Judah. We will hang a picture of a king's scepter on today's ornament to remind us of God's promise.



Day 9

Questions

1. What did Jacob tell Judah about his descendants?
2. What tribe was Jesus descended from?

The Servant Leader

Exodus 3:1–22

Moses was a special descendant of Abraham. His mother knew this even when he was only a baby. So she took extra care to protect him from the Egyptians, who wanted to kill him (Exodus 2). When he grew up, he wanted to help save the Hebrews from their slave masters. But first, he had to wait in the desert until the time was right for God to save the Hebrews.

One day, God met Moses at a burning bush and told him, "I am the God of your ancestors—the God of Abraham." Moses didn't even know if the people remembered who their God was after all those years in slavery. But God promised Moses that he would use him to lead the people out of their slavery in Egypt.

God promised that he would do miracles to make the Egyptians let them go. In fact, God would even make sure the Egyptians gave them "silver and gold jewelry and fine clothing" so they would be well prepared for their journey from Egypt to the Promised Land that God was giving them.

God had promised Abraham that he would bless him and give his descendants a land. The burning bush on today's ornament reminds us that he was still keeping that promise.



Day 10

Questions

1. How did God get Moses' attention?
2. What did God promise Moses?

Sinai

Deuteronomy 5:1–22

After God delivered his people from slavery, he gave Moses ten very important commandments so the people would know what God wanted them to do. He reminded the people that he was their God, and that he loved them enough to deliver them from slavery. These commandments showed the people how to do two things: *First*, they taught them “Love the LORD your God with all your heart and with all your soul and with all your strength” (Deuteronomy 6:5). So God told them:

- Do not worship any other gods besides me.
- Do not make idols.
- Do not misuse the name of the LORD your God.
- Observe the Sabbath day by keeping it holy, because it’s the LORD’s day (Exodus 20:8–11).

Second, these commandments taught the people, “love your neighbor as yourself” (Leviticus 19:18). So God told them:

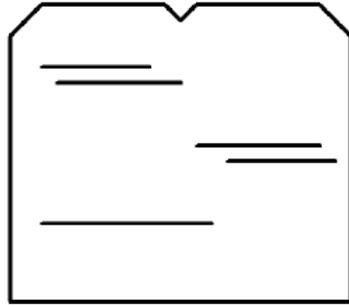
- Observe the Sabbath day so your servants can have some rest.
- Honor your father and mother.
- Do not murder.
- Do not commit adultery.
- Do not steal.
- Do not testify falsely against your neighbor.
- Do not covet.

All of these commands would help Israel please God. And their neighbors could see this and wish that they too had a good relationship with God (Deuteronomy 4:6). The shoot from Jesse’s tree was going to grow from a nation who knew how to please God.

The tablets on today’s picture remind us of those commands.

Questions

1. What did God give Moses?
2. What did these commandments teach us?



Day 11

The Messianic Promise

Numbers 22:4–6, 21–35; 24:8–9, 15–19

Balaam was a strange prophet who liked to prophesy for money. When a foreign king wanted to hire Balaam to curse Israel, God was very angry. God sent an angel to keep Balaam from going to King Balak and taking his money to curse Israel. But Balaam kept trying, until finally even his donkey objected. After God made it clear to Balaam that he could only say whatever God told him to say, he allowed Balaam to go on to Balak.

When he got there, Balaam warned the evil king that he could only say what God told him to say. But Balak was still furious when he heard Balaam blessing God’s people instead of cursing them. God had promised Abraham long before that, “I will bless those who bless you, and curse those who curse you” (Genesis 12:3). That was still true, even if a strange prophet wished to curse them so he could make some money from a wicked king.

The branch from Jesse’s tree was going to come from a people who enjoyed God’s blessing, no matter what evil people around them tried to do to destroy them. The donkey on today’s ornament to remind us of Balaam.



Day 12

Questions

1. What did King Balak want Balaam to do?
2. What did God tell Balaam?

The Conquest

Joshua 2:1–21

Joshua sent some spies to see who they would be fighting when they entered the land God was giving them. One of the women in Jericho hid these spies to protect them from men who wanted to kill them.

Rahab had seen how strong God was making his people Israel. But rather than trying to curse Israel like Balak, she decided to ask for God's protection. She told Joshua's spies, "I've been kind to you. Now you should promise to be kind to me and all my family." The spies agreed, because they knew that God had promised Abraham, "I will bless those who bless you, and curse those who curse you" (Genesis 12:3).

So they told her to make a signal so all of Israel's soldiers would know that this was a house that God wanted to protect. This would be like the sign that God had them put on their doors on Passover night, so their houses would be protected from God's judgment (Exodus 12:9, 13).

God would be gracious to anyone who would turn to him. The wall and red cord on today's ornament reminds us that he protects not only his people Israel, but anyone who asks for his protection and follows his ways.



Day 13

Questions

1. What did Rahab tell Joshua's spies?
2. What signal did she put out her window?

Unlikely Heroes

Judges 6:1–6, 11–16; 7:12–22

Israel kept sinning and getting into trouble. God still loved them so much. Whenever they were sorry for their sins and asked for help, God would help them, no matter how bad they had been before.

When they needed this help, God would appoint someone to be their leader, to help them get out of trouble. One time he appointed Gideon. Even though Gideon was not an important man, God wanted to use him. God promised him that he would become a powerful warrior and save his people.

When it came time for war, God directed Gideon to send home all but a few men in his army. He made sure that everyone would understand that God was the one winning the battle, not Israel or Gideon's army. Sure enough, God gave Israel a great victory over their enemies so they could again live safely in the land that God had given them.

God would keep on delivering his people, even when they were to blame for getting into trouble in the first place. One day, the Branch from Jesse's tree would become an even greater deliverer than Gideon. Today we are going to hang a picture of a water pitcher to remind us of Gideon's victory.



Day 14

Questions

1. What did God promise Gideon?
2. What did God tell Gideon to do?

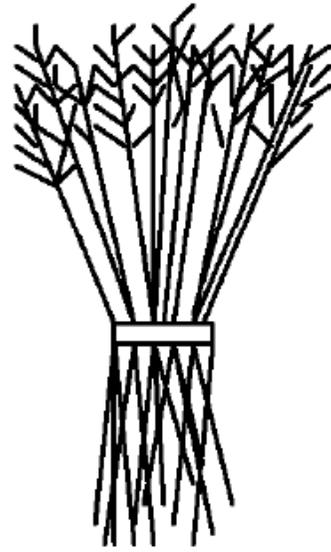
The Messiah's Family

Ruth 1:1–9a, 16, 19a; 3:1–9; 4:13–17

From time to time, famines would force Abraham's descendants to leave the Promised Land for awhile. When they did that, Israelite men would occasionally marry women from other nations, just as Elimelech and Naomi's sons did. But these sons died, leaving young Midianite widows.

When it was safe for Naomi to go back to the land of Abraham, she told her Midianite daughters-in-law that they should stay home and marry someone else from Midian. One agreed, but Ruth didn't. She protested, "I will go wherever you go and live wherever you live. Your people will be my people, and your God will be my God."

Whenever other people chose Israel's God for their own, God blessed them. God gave Ruth a wonderful husband named Boaz, who protected and loved her. And he gave her a fine son named Obed. In fact, Obed became the father of Jesse and the grandfather of David. The wheat sheaf on today's ornament reminds us that God was using even foreigners to plant the seed that would become the Jesse tree.



Day 15

Questions

1. What did Ruth tell Naomi?
2. How did God bless Ruth for choosing God?

The Shepherd King

1 Samuel 16:1–13

Saul was Israel's first choice for a king. Even though he started out pretty well, he did not value the things that God valued. So God rejected Saul as king. God told his servant Samuel to go to Jesse's house, because God wanted to use one of Jesse's sons as his own choice for king.

Samuel was ready to pick Jesse's oldest son, who looked quite impressive. But God warned that a man's spiritual and thought-life were more important than a man's appearance. So God had Samuel look at Jesse's other sons.

Just when it looked like none of Jesse's sons would be the one that God chose, Samuel found out about the youngest son named David. David was just the family shepherd boy, so he hadn't even been invited to the meeting with God's servant. But God told Samuel to anoint David as the true king over Israel. And the Bible says that the Spirit of the LORD came on him from that day on.

Finally, here was the first important branch from the Jesse tree! Today we are hanging a picture of a jar of anointing oil to remember that God chose David. He was such a fine king that people learned to hope for the perfect king that would one day sprout from the Jesse tree, who would be Jesus the Son of David.



Day 16

Questions

1. Who was Israel's first choice for a king?
2. Why did Samuel not choose Jesse's oldest son?

A King on God's Throne

Psalm 2:1–12

David was the first branch of the royal Jesse Tree. God was really Israel's king, but he wanted someone to rule for him. Just like a king passes on his throne to his son, God passed along his throne. When David was crowned king, he became God's royal Son. This allowed him to sit on God's throne on God's holy mountain and to rule over God's people.

In fact, it even allowed David to rule over other nations, because the whole earth belonged to God—and everyone in it. Because David represented God's divine rule over his own world, the nations were supposed to acknowledge David's right to rule. When they tried to rebel, God would laugh at their foolish attempts to avoid God's rule. Then God would warn them, "I have placed my chosen king on the throne in Jerusalem, my holy city."

The son from the Jesse tree was supposed to be a blessing to the nations. But if people rebelled and cursed him, that would be dangerous. Even today, God tells the nations, "Submit to God's royal son, or he will become angry." The crown on today's ornament reminds us that God also comforts those who obey his Son, saying "What joy for all who find protection in him!"



Day 17

Questions

1. What happened when David was crowned king?
2. What happened when people tried to rebel against David's rule?

Threat of False Gods

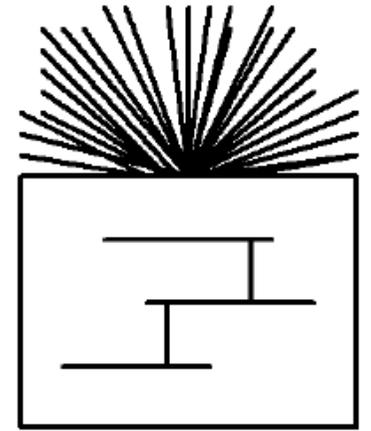
1 Kings 18:17–24, 36–39

Elijah was a faithful prophet in hard times. Many of the people of Israel had begun to follow a false god named Baal. This caused lots of trouble for Israel. The wicked king accused Elijah of being a troublemaker. Elijah knew that it was the wicked king and his followers who were really making trouble for God's people.

Elijah decided it was time for the people of Israel to choose who they were going to follow, God or Baal. The king agreed that the nation would decide this on Mount Carmel. Elijah proposed that they would let the gods decide. The one who sent fire from heaven to light a flame on the altar was the real God. The wicked people agreed. They probably thought their storm god Baal would just send lightning when they prayed. But nothing happened when they prayed to the false god.

Then it was Elijah's turn. He prayed to the real God, the God of their ancestors Abraham, Isaac, and Jacob. He asked God to send fire so the confused people would understand who Israel's real God was. When God sent down fire, the people realized "The LORD is God! The LORD is God."

So they turned back to the true God. Our ornament for today reminds us that we can only serve a real God. In Elijah's time, people could know because God sent faithful prophets to make sure they never forgot the true God. Now we know God because he became a human being like us.



Day 18

Questions

1. Who did the people of Israel want to worship?
2. How did they decide who to worship?

Faithfulness and Deliverance

2 Kings 18:1, 3–7a; 19:14–20

King Hezekiah did just what God wanted Judah's kings to do. He pleased God just like his ancestor King David had when he ruled. He trusted God and obeyed the commands that God had given through Moses. He stopped all the pagan practices that earlier kings had begun to allow in Judah. He even smashed something that Moses had made, because the people had started worshiping it like an idol. God made Hezekiah successful.

When their enemies the Assyrians began threatening Jerusalem, Hezekiah prayed. He asked for two things. *First*, he asked for deliverance so the Assyrians wouldn't conquer them like they had conquered so many other places. *Second*, he asked for God to do this so that the whole world would know who the true God was.

God heard Hezekiah's prayer and rescued the people of Judah just as it looked like Assyria was going to conquer them. Hezekiah was another branch on Jesse's tree. The broken idol on today's ornament reminds us of Hezekiah's faithfulness. Because he was faithful, God kept his people safe in a time of peril.

Questions

1. What did Hezekiah do that pleased God?
2. What did Hezekiah pray for?



Day 19

Hope for All People

Isaiah 9:2, 6–7

Isaiah the prophet not only announced God's encouraging words to the faithful king Hezekiah. He also told about a future when a righteous branch from Jesse's tree would rule the world. This was a marvelous promise.

Sin makes life dark with the shadow of death, but this branch would bring light and life. God promised the birth of a wonderful child who would rule. He would have all kinds of royal titles.

- As *Wonderful Counselor*, he would rule God's people wisely. This branch from Jesse's Tree would rule on David's throne.
- He would be more than just a human descendant of David. He would be *Mighty God*, born in the line of David.
- He would be the *Everlasting Father* come to live as a child among us.
- As *Prince of Peace*, he would come to make peace between rebellious people and the God who loves us.

People remembered Isaiah's important prophecy. When Jesus was born, they realized that he was the wonderful child born for us (Luke 1:78–79). Our ornament for today has a throne on it to remind us that God keeps his promises.

Questions

1. What did Isaiah say God had promised?
2. What are some of the royal titles Isaiah used to tell about this wonderful promise?



Day 20

National Judgment and Exile

Jeremiah 8:1–9:1; 31:31–34

Jeremiah had the heartbreaking duty of prophesying during a time when Judah had to suffer God's punishment for their long sinful history. He was so miserable that he cried day and night over what Judah was suffering because of their sins. He probably thought he would weep forever because the people had broken their covenant with God.

But God also gave him a hopeful message. One day God would make a new covenant with his people. He loved them as husband loves his wife, so he would reestablish a relationship with his people. He would give people a new heart so they would love and obey God. Once again he could say, "I will be their God." And once again the people would love God and their neighbors like they should.

We know the branch from Jesse's tree came to establish that new covenant. So today, we remind ourselves that God keeps loving his people. He brings them back when they go away from him. We hang a heart with the law written on it to remind us that Jesus writes his will in our hearts.



Day 21

Questions

1. Why did Jeremiah cry day and night?
2. What hopeful message did God give Jeremiah?

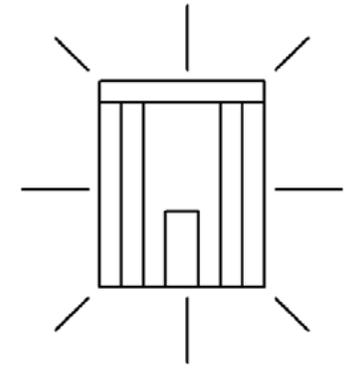
The Glorious Temple

Haggai 2:1–9

Haggai the prophet asked if anyone in his audience could remember the temple that the invading Babylonians had destroyed. Long before, David had collected all kinds of expensive material so that his son Solomon could build the temple like a grand palace for God to live in.

Now the small group of people who had returned from Babylon were struggling to build a modest little temple to replace what the Babylonians had burned down. It seemed like nothing compared to what they used to have. But God told Haggai to encourage the people. He told them to take courage and work on this temple. Haggai reminded the people that God was with them and said that he will come into this temple. So the glory of this temple would be greater even than that of Solomon's splendid temple.

And one day Jesus did enter the temple in Jerusalem, and his presence spoke of the hopes for peace that God promised. Today's ornament has a picture of a glorious temple on it to remind us that Jesus was able to keep alive the promise, "In this place I will bring peace."



Day 22

Questions

1. What were Haggai and the people trying to build?
2. What did God tell the people through Haggai that encouraged them?

Hopeful Anticipation

Luke 1:5-7, 11-13, 16-17, 39-45, 67-75

Around the time of Jesus' birth God sent another important child into the world. His parents were a very old couple from priestly families. They were godly people, but they had never been able to have children. In their old age, God promised them the gift of a son, much like he had done for Abraham and Sarah in their old age. This son was to become John the Baptist. When he grew up, John's ministry would prepare the way for Jesus message and works of salvation.

Day 23

Before either John or Jesus were born, their mothers visited with each other. Mary and Elizabeth greeted each other gladly. But Mary's visit prompted prophecies from both of John's parents. Even though John wasn't born yet, he jumped inside his mother, because the Holy Spirit had come to Elizabeth so she would prophesy. She prophesied that Mary would forever be a blessed mother, because her baby Jesus would bring salvation to Israel.

When the Holy Spirit came to Zechariah, he prophesied that Mary's baby Jesus was the mighty Savior from David's royal family. Because of the Holy Spirit, John's parents knew that the branch from Jesse's tree was finally coming. It was the baby boy who was still inside his mother Mary. We are hanging a picture of Zechariah and Elizabeth today to remind us of their hope.

Questions

1. What gift did God promise Zechariah and Elizabeth in their old age?
2. What did Zechariah prophesy about Mary's baby?



Repentance

Luke 1:57-66, 76-80

Elizabeth finally had her long-awaited son. All the friends and neighbors thought the parents would name him after his father Zechariah. But both parents insisted his name must be John. That was what God had told them when he promised them a son (verse 13). Zechariah had lost his speech when he doubted that it was possible for them to have a baby in their old age. But as soon as he gave the directions to name the boy John, God gave him back his speech.

Day 24

This amazed everyone, and made them think that God was preparing baby John for an important ministry. Once again, Zechariah prophesied. The Holy Spirit made him help everyone understand that important Old Testament promises were going to be fulfilled in his son John. God had promised that a prophet would prepare the way for the coming Savior's ministry (Malachi 3:1; 4:5; Isaiah 40:3-5). And John would do this preparation for Jesus.

The Old Testament had also promised that one day a great light would shine on everyone who was living in the dark night of sin (Isaiah 9:2; 49:6, 9; 60: 1-3). He would be the Savior. John was not that Savior, but Jesus was going to be the Light of the World. The dove on today's ornament is for John, who called everyone to repentance, preparing the way for Jesus.

Questions

1. What did Zechariah and Elizabeth name their son?
2. After he could speak again, what did Zechariah prophesy about his son?



God's Plan Revealed

Luke 1:26–38

Gabriel, one of God's important angels, came to Mary. He greeted her and said God was going to show her great favor. This visit scared the young village girl, but Gabriel told her not to be afraid. Then he told her that she was going to have a very important baby boy. This confused her.

The angel said this would be a miracle. He reminded her that Mary's old relative Elizabeth was going to have a miracle baby. This showed that God could do anything. Gabriel said God's Holy Spirit would make a miracle child grow inside Mary. Mary's little boy would actually be the Son of God. Her boy would be the greatest branch ever from the Jesse Tree. He would inherit the throne of his ancestor David and rule forever and ever.

After hearing this explanation, Mary agreed and said she would obediently serve God as the mother of his Son Jesus. Then she waited to watch it happen. The white lily on today's ornament reminds us of Mary's purity.



Day 25

Questions

1. Who came to Mary?
2. What did Gabriel say was going to happen?

Trust in God's Way

Matthew 1:18–23; Luke 1:46–55

Joseph was a humble village carpenter, but he was descended from the royal family of David. He was planning to take Mary for his wife. Then he discovered that she was going to have a baby. He knew he wasn't the father. Disappointed, he decided he couldn't marry her. But he was a decent man and didn't want to embarrass Mary by treating her like an evil woman. So he planned to be polite and kind even when he stopped all wedding plans.

While he slept, an angel of God told him that Mary had not sinned against their coming marriage. God's Holy Spirit was making the baby boy grow inside of her. This boy would be the most important baby ever born on earth.

They should name the boy *Jesus*, which means "the one who rescues people." Jesus was going to rescue people from their sins. Long ago God had promised that a woman who had never had a husband would have a baby boy as a sign of God's promise to be with his people. The promise said that boy should be called Immanuel, which means "God is with us."

Now Joseph knew that their son would be the greatest branch ever from Jesse's tree. Their son Jesus was going to be God himself, coming to live with people to rescue them from their sins. The carpenter's tools on today's ornaments remind us of Joseph, who trusted in God's plan.



Day 26

Questions

1. Why did Joseph think he shouldn't marry Mary?
2. What happened that made him trust in God's way?

Worship

Matthew 2:1–12

Wise men from palaces in the eastern lands came to Jerusalem, searching for baby Jesus. They were following a star that God had given to guide them to where Jesus was. They knew he was supposed to be the king of the Jews, so they began asking questions about him in the Jewish capital Jerusalem. They kept asking where the new baby king of the Jews was.

King Herod heard about these foreigners asking these alarming questions. He figured that he was the only king of the Jews, so he better investigate before anyone could challenge his rule. First, he called for all the Scripture experts to tell him where this Messiah-King was supposed to be born. That was an easy question, since the Old Testament had foretold that he would come from David's little village of Bethlehem.

The prophecy said Bethlehem was going to become more than just a lowly Judean village. It would be the birthplace of the greatest branch ever to come from Jesse's Tree. He would be the great royal Shepherd from God's people Israel.

Well, Herod wanted to put a stop to that idea right away! He was sneaky, so he didn't admit it when he talked to these foreign wise men. He asked for their help in find this little boy. He told them we would like to worship his new king too, if only he could find him. But he was lying, because he wanted to kill him so he could stay on Israel's throne himself.

Following the Bible teaching that they had just learned about, and following the star that God provided, the wise men finally found Mary with her baby boy. Rejoicing, they opened their treasure chests to give Jesus presents from their lands. Inside were all kinds of gifts fit for great king in the line of Jesse's tree.

God was protecting his Son Jesus, so he warned the wise men not to help the evil king Herod. So they went home another way, avoiding Jerusalem this time. God helped Joseph and Mary keep Jesus safe so he could grow up to rule Israel. We are putting a star on our Jesse tree today, which reminds us of the wise men who wanted to worship Jesus.

Questions

1. Why was King Herod upset about the questions the wise men were asking?
2. How did God keep baby Jesus safe?



Day 27

The Birth of Jesus

Luke 2:1–20

Roman tax time had arrived. Everyone had to go back to wherever their family originated to pay their taxes. So off to Bethlehem went Joseph and his fiancé Mary—even though it was time for her baby to come. And the baby was born there in Bethlehem, just like God has promised.

God didn't announce Jesus' birth first to international leaders in palaces. Instead, he told humble Judean shepherds about it while they were doing their duty in Israel's own fields. He sent heaven's angelic army choir to sing the first gospel song. They sang out, Glory to God in the highest heavens!

They told the shepherds about the new son from the Tree of Jesse. He was going to bring peace everywhere God's favor went. So then the shepherds went away and became the first gospel preachers. They told everyone they met about this good news. Maybe that's how the wise men ending up hearing about Jesus. And we're still hearing about this good news. When we hang today's manger ornament on the Jesse tree, we now know that tomorrow's ornament will be the most important one we ever hang on the tree.

Questions

1. Why did Joseph and Mary go to Bethlehem?
2. Who did God announce Jesus' birth to first?



Day 28

The Son of God

John 1:1–18

At long last! The branch from Jesse's tree has come. And now we find out that he has existed all the time. He was with God in the beginning—in fact, he is God. He created everything there is. And he gives life to everything that lives. In the place of lies and dark confusion, he brings truth and clear light.

Not everyone welcomes him. But everyone who accepts him gets a new privilege. They get new life so they become children of the living God. In fact, the Bible says that we who receive him get “one gracious blessing after another” through Christ Jesus. Jesus is revealing God's love and faithfulness to us.

No wonder the patriarchs of old looked forward to this offspring of Abraham. No wonder the prophets of old looked forward to this shoot from Jesse's tree. No wonder Christmas gives us so much reason to rejoice in God's great gift to us, his Son Christ Jesus.

Today's ornament has the *Chi Rho* on it. These are the first two letters in Jesus' title *Christ*.



Day 29

Questions

1. What did we just find out about Jesus?
2. What does everyone who accepts him receive?

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<http://www.jesse-trees.com>

I've also included a parents' version of these devotions. They include a little more substance than your children would be able to absorb each day.

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