

THE JESSE TREE PROJECT

**Advent Reading and Reflection
Guide for Families**

December 2025



Written and produced by Allie Colp for the Youth and Family Ministry Team of the Diocese of Nova Scotia and Prince Edward Island, November 2025.

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TERRITORIAL ACKNOWLEDGEMENT

This resource was created by and for people living in Mi'kma'ki, the traditional and unceded territory of the Mi'kmaq. This land has been filled with stories since time immemorial, and as you spend this Advent journeying through stories of our faith to help you and your family grow nearer to God, consider too how your family might seek opportunity to hear the stories of this land and its people to help you grow as treaty people in this place.

WELCOME!

As I was working on the Jesse Tree Project, I got an email from someone with a ministry similar to mine in a diocese of New Zealand. The email was about something completely different, but we began talking about Advent preparations, and she said something that I had never considered before.

She said that so many of the symbols of the church year are based on the northern hemisphere, and so don't line up for them in the same way that they do for us.

While I absolutely get how out of place that must feel at times, I think it opens up a particular beauty for doing a Jesse Tree.

For us, Advent takes us deeper and deeper into the darkest time of the year, and then the Light comes into the world. But, the stories and symbols of the Jesse Tree help us remember all of the light that came before, and that fits so beautifully with what happens in the southern hemisphere - that day by day, Advent leads the people there into the brightest and lightest part of the year.

As you dig into this Jesse Tree Project, you and your family will be invited into 25 stories of our faith. Some of these stories will likely be familiar to you, some may be brand new, and others may fall somewhere in between.

Sometimes we hear these stories as separate, disconnected things

that all have to do with God, but otherwise are on their own, and we miss the through line of God's love for the people of God, and how all of these stories connect to one another, and how much meaning we can find when we look for those connections. When we journey through all of these stories, we can see that the light of the love of God is there all along, and has been in us all along too.

I hope that as you read through these stories this Advent, that you find sacred moments with your family, and that when we finally get to that very bright Light in the birth of Jesus, it will feel even more meaningful because of the journey that you are taking to get there this year.

With prayers for all of the hope, joy, love, and peace of Advent for you and your family,

Allie

Youth and Family Ministry Coordinator
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HOW TO USE THIS GUIDE AND PRINTABLE ORNAMENTS

Much of this guide and the printable ornaments that accompany it are pretty intuitive – there's an entry in this guide to read each day along with an accompanying ornament to colour, cut out, and add to your Jesse Tree.

Each daily entry has:

- a title for the day
- a reading from the Bible
- a recap of the reading (except for December 25!)
- reflection questions
- a prayer

Some of the scripture readings are quite long, so depending on the ages of the people in your family, you may choose to read the whole thing, just a few verses, or to not read it at all and only read the recap together. Or you may choose to do a shorter version with the whole family, and then the grownups do the full reading together at another time.

Think of the questions in a similar way. They are just an offering that you can use as you wish and as makes best sense for your family. Maybe you'll talk about them all together, maybe you'll just do one, maybe you really want to dig into that aspect of this, and add in questions beyond what's included in here, things like when you felt close to or far from God that day, or how can you pray for each other that day, or maybe more questions specific to that day's reading or ornament.

Everything in here has been put together to help your family practice your faith together at home - and exactly what that looks like is up to you. It's set up so that this can be a quick moment in a day, or could be an extended time of conversation and prayer.

It is set up as a daily activity, but again, do what's best for your family! If doing something every single day feels stressful, don't put that on yourselves! You could make this a once a week activity, or maybe you do it on the days that your kids don't have sports or other extracurricular activities, and catch up on the days that are just too busy to fit one more thing in.

Just like all of the ornaments in this package will look different from one another, likely how each family uses all of this will look a little bit different too!

SETTING UP YOUR TREE

This is another thing that you get to choose your own adventure on - sometimes people use a bare branch with lots of off-shoots, or you could put the ornaments on your Christmas tree if you set it up early enough, or you could hang them on a wall or a mantle, or maybe you just have one ornament out at a time and then you replace it each day. Do what makes sense for your family and your home!

A FEW NOTES ON THE BIBLE READINGS

As I'm sure you know, many of the stories that shape our faith are **complicated**. There may be things that come up in some of these stories that you just aren't sure how to talk about with young kids in your family. Here are a couple thoughts that might help with that:

- The Bible is filled with all different kinds of stories, and it can be helpful to be clear about that with kids. Some stories are accounts of real things that happened, some are poems, some are stories that help people understand the world around them without being things that really happened. Regardless of the type of story that it is, there is Truth in all of them, and we can learn about God and the people of God through them.
- If you can find even just a few minutes to read ahead at what's coming for a day, it can help you get your head around how to approach the conversation with your kids.
- The recaps of the story are written to be a reflection of what's contained in the reading for that day, but they tone down some of the more mature content a little bit (things like death, destruction, romantic intimacy, etc.) to hopefully make things more accessible for people of all ages.
- It's ok to not have all of the answers. If your kids ask questions about hard or complicated things, it's ok to tell them that you don't know, and that you can try to learn more about it together. We are all growing in our faith all the time, and this is a really great way to take the pressure off yourself a little bit, and to show your kids that it's ok to ask questions, and how you can keep trying to learn more.

READINGS, QUESTIONS, AND PRAYERS

DECEMBER 1 - FROM THE ROOT OF JESSE

Bible Reading: Isaiah 11:1-2

This reading is a prophecy - a prediction of what is to come. It says that one day, from the family of Jesse, there will be someone who the spirit of God rests in. This is the first story of our Jesse Tree journey to the birth of Jesus - a story that tells us that people were looking for Jesus to be born, for God to come and live among people as part of the family of Jesse.

Questions:

1. Have you ever seen a shoot growing out of a stump like this? What was that like?
2. Jesus was the son of God, and also was born into a human family with a long history made of lots of stories - just like you were. What are some stories that you know about the people who came before you in your family?

Prayer:

Dear God,

Thank you for our family. Thank you for the reminder that Jesus was part of a family, and that Jesus is part of our family too. Be with us all through Advent as we unfold all of the stories of this Jesse Tree, and help our hearts and lives grow closer to you.

Amen.

DECEMBER 2 - MADE IN GOD'S IMAGE

Bible Reading: Genesis 1:26-31

God created the whole world, including the very first people and including each one of us. In this story, we hear that God made us in God's image - which means that each one of us, and every other person in the whole wide world is a reflection of God. It's also a reminder that the whole world is a gift from God, and one that we are called to work together to take care of.

Questions:

1. How does it feel to think about yourself as a reflection of God?
2. How does it change how you think about other people to see them as a reflection of God?
3. What is something that you can do to care for the world that God made?

Prayer:

Dear God,

Thank you for the gift of creation, and thank you that we get to be a part of it. Help us to remember how good of a gift it is, and help us to care for it, and for one another, just as you care for us.

Amen.

DECEMBER 3 - IN THE GARDEN

Bible Reading: Genesis 3

This is a story about the first people that God created. The two people lived in a garden that had everything that they needed, and they were very, very close to God. God told them that they could eat the fruit from any tree, except for one. God said that if they ate from that tree, they would die.

A snake came and told the woman, Eve, that God didn't want them to eat from that tree because then they would know all about good and evil, and they would become more like God. Eve wanted to become wise, so she ate the fruit from the tree, and her husband, Adam, ate some too. Sometimes people say that the fruit was an apple.

After they ate it, they did know about good and evil, and God knew that they had eaten it. After that, they did not dwell as closely with God anymore, and God sent them out of the garden.

Questions:

1. What do you think it would be like to live in a garden with everything that you needed, and to feel so close to God?
2. When do you feel close to God?
3. How do you think it would feel to be sent away from the garden, and to feel far away from God when you were used to feeling so close?

Prayer:

Dear God,

We know that we don't always get things right, and sometimes we make choices that can make us feel far from you. Help us notice what things make us feel far from you, and what things help us to feel close to you, and to choose more and more the things that help us feel close to you, and help us to live in the world in a good way.

Amen.

December 4 - God's Promise

Bible Reading: Genesis 6:11-14, 7:17-8:3, 9:8-13

The story goes that after Adam and Eve were sent out from the Garden, they had children, and those children had children, and those children had children, until there were lots of people on earth.

Those people continued to make choices that took them further and further away from God. Or, almost all of those people did. All of them except for one family. Noah and his family were faithful and followed God, even when the rest of the world didn't.

So, God told Noah to build a big boat - an ark - and fill it with two of every animal on earth, and with his family. Then it rained for 40 days and the whole earth was flooded, and everything and everyone, except those in the ark and the fish in the sea, died.

After 150 days, the flood waters went away, and God made a special kind of promise called a covenant to never flood the earth again. God put a rainbow in the sky as a symbol of that promise.

Questions:

1. Have you heard this story before? Do you remember where or when you heard it for the first time?
2. How do you feel when you see a rainbow?

Prayer:

Dear God,

A rainbow is a symbol of your promise from the story of Noah's ark. Help us to see rainbows as a reminder of your promise to love us always, and help us to love others as you love us.

Amen.

DECEMBER 5 - CALLED TO A NEW PLACE

Bible Reading: Genesis 12:1-7

Each day we get a new piece of the great big story of God and God's people. Today's is about a follower of God named Abram. When Abram was very old, God called him to leave his country and his people and go to a new place, and God promised that Abram would be blessed and would be a blessing.

So Abram went, with his wife Sarai and his brother's son, and all their servants and all of their things (like their tents and camels!) and followed where God was leading them.

Questions:

1. Have you ever gone to a new place where you didn't know what it would be like? How did that feel?
2. What do you think you would do if God called you to do leave everything that you know and go to a new place like Abram did?

Prayer:

Dear God,

Thank you for always being with us, and for going ahead of us. Wherever we may lead us, you are already there. Help us to be as brave and as trusting as Abram, to listen for the ways that you lead and call us in our lives.

Amen

DECEMBER 6 - MORE THAN ALL THE STARS IN THE SKY

Bible Reading: Genesis 15:1-6

God continued leading Abram to new places, and everywhere Abram went, there God was. God promised that many good things would come to Abram and his descendants, his children and his children's children and his children's children's children and so on.

You probably remember from yesterday that Abram was very old, and he had no children. When Abram asked God how anything could be promised to his children when he didn't have any. God promised that Abram would have as many descendants as all the stars in the sky.

Questions:

1. How many stars do you think there are in the sky?
2. How do you feel when you look up at a starry sky?
3. Abram had already trusted God so much before God made that promise about all those descendants. How do you think Abram felt when he heard that promise from God?

Prayer:

Dear God,

Thank you for the stars in the sky and for all of the other parts of the world that feel so magical and incredible. Thank you for the great big family of your people that we are part of, for all of the ways that we are connected to one another, and the ways that we can care for and support one another, that feels pretty magical and incredible too.

Amen

DECEMBER 7 - JOSEPH AND HIS VERY SPECIAL COAT

Bible Reading: Genesis 37:1-36

God gave Abram a new name - he became Abraham, and he did have children, and those children had children, and one of those children (Abraham's grandson) was a man named Jacob (who was also called Israel), who had many sons.

The son Jacob loved most was named Joseph. Joseph had a very special gift of being able to interpret the meaning of dreams. Because Jacob loved Joseph so much, he gave him a very special coat with lots of different colours. His brothers were very jealous of the coat, and they were jealous because their father loved him so much, so they decided to get rid of him. They left him in a pit with no food or water, and they took his coat.

The brothers later realized they made a mistake and went back to get him, but discovered that he was gone. People had taken him out of the pit and sold him to a group of people called Ishmaelites, who took him to Egypt. The brothers told their father that Joseph had been killed by an animal, and the father was distraught and refused to be comforted.

In Egypt, Joseph was sold to a man named Potiphar - one of the Pharaoh's officials, and he became a very important person there.

Questions:

1. How do you think Joseph's brothers felt when their father gave him the coat? Have you ever felt something like that?
2. What could you say to God when you feel like that?
3. What do you think happens next in Joseph's story?

Prayer:

Dear God,

This special coat is a reminder of Joseph – someone whose story had so many parts, just like the many colours in the coat. Help us to see the many parts of our lives and how they all come together to shape who we are. Be with us in the parts that are hard or sad or scary, and in the parts that are joyful and happy too.

Amen

DECEMBER 8 - HOW TO LIVE

Bible Reading: Deuteronomy 5:1-22

Moses is another person in the family that these stories are about. He's part of the family of Jacob.

In this story when it says Israel it means the people of God. Don't worry if you read it and were confused, it's confusing! The people of God were slaves in Egypt, and then they finally became free, and were walking together through the dessert.

When they were slaves, they were told everything about how they needed to live and everything about what they needed to do. Once they were free, they needed to find new ways to live.

So, in this story, Moses goes up on a mountain and meets God. God gives Moses ten commandments written on two stone tablets. The commandments told the people of God good ways to live. You can read them all in that reading, and they can be split up into three categories: Love God, Love other people, and take time to remember that God loves you.

Questions:

1. How do you think Moses felt when he was up on a mountaintop with God?
2. Which of the 10 commandments do you think is the most important?
3. What rules does your family have that help you to live in good ways?

Prayer:

Dear God,

Help us to remember good ways to live in the world. Help us to love you, to love one another, and to remember that you love us.

Amen

DECEMBER 9 - A RED ROPE

Bible Reading: Joshua 2:1-21

Joshua is another person in this family whose story runs right through the Bible. And in the big family of God, so many other people and their stories are part of the family too.

Joshua sent two spies into Jericho, to see land that God had promised to them. They went to a woman named Rahab's house for the night. When the King of Jericho found out that they were there, he ordered Rahab to send the spies out. Instead, Rahab hid them on her roof, and told the king that they had already left.

Rahab told the spies that she and others had heard the story of their people, about their God, and knew that God had promised them this land. She believed that their God was true. She made them promise that she and her family would not be harmed, and they agreed, telling her to hang a red rope by the window as a symbol of the promise.

Rahab told them where they could go to stay safe, and then left them down from her roof with a rope. Then she hung the red rope by her window.

Questions:

1. What do you think Rahab was thinking when she hid the spies up on her roof?
2. What do you think the spies were thinking while they were up there?
3. What do you think God is saying to us in this story?

Prayer:

Dear God,

Rahab was brave and helped people even when she knew it was dangerous. Help us to be brave like Rahab and hold true to the things that we believe.

Amen

DECEMBER 10 - NAOMI, RUTH, AND BOAZ

Bible Reading: Ruth 2:1-4:12

Ruth was a woman who married a man who came from a different place than her. When she married him, she left her family and her home behind. Then, her husband died and she was a widow. Her husband's father had also died, so her mother-in-law, Naomi, was also a widow.

In those days, a woman without a son was on her own. So Ruth pledged to stand by Naomi and to continue to be her family, so that neither of them needed to be alone.

When a field gets harvested, there is always some crop that gets left behind. Sometimes it's left behind on purpose for people who are in need, and sometimes it's left behind just because it's not worth the effort to get every last bit. So, after the harvest, people glean the fields, which means collect up the crops that have been left behind. Ruth was a widow, and so was someone in need, so she went to glean a wheat field that belonged to a relative of Naomi's husband. His name was Boaz.

When Boaz saw Ruth, he offered her water, food, and wine. He arranged for her to not just glean the leftovers, but to get a good harvest of wheat. Boaz fell in love with Ruth and married her, and Naomi remained part of their family.

Questions:

1. It used to be a common practice for some harvest to be left behind on purpose for gleaners, why do you think they did that?
2. What does it mean for someone to be part of your family?

Prayer:

Dear God,

There are many kinds of love in the world, and many kinds of love in a family, just like the love between Ruth and Boaz, and the love between Ruth and Naomi are both important parts of their family and of this story. Thank you for all of the kinds of love in our lives, and help us to remember that all of that love starts with you.

Amen

DECEMBER 11 - THE SHEPHERD KING

Bible Reading: 1 Samuel 16:1-15

Samuel was a prophet. We've talked about those before! Sometimes prophets tell people the truth about what will come in the future, and sometimes they tell the truth of right now. Samuel was a right now prophet, he helped people hear what God was saying.

Samuel listened to God, and believed that Saul should be the first King of Israel (the king of the people of God). When Saul died, Samuel was very sad. God spoke to Samuel, and told him what to do and where to go to find the next king.

God told Samuel that one of Jesse's son's would be the next king, but God told Samuel not to just look at how big and strong they were, but to look at their hearts. So Samuel went to Jesse, and Jesse showed Samuel his sons. Samuel knew that none of those sons were meant to be king, so he asked Jesse if he had any other sons.

As it turns out, Jesse did have one more son. The youngest and smallest of his sons, David, was out in the field with the sheep. When Samuel saw him, he knew that he was the one to be king.

Questions:

1. How do you think David felt, when he went from taking care of sheep to finding out he was going to be king?
2. Would you rather be a shepherd or a king?
3. How can you show that you have a heart filled with God's love?

Prayer:

Dear God,

David was out in the field with the sheep when Samuel was looking for the king. He wasn't the biggest or the strongest, but he had the right heart to lead God's people. Help us to remember that we don't need to be the strongest or the most important or the prettiest, what matters is what is in our hearts. Fill our hearts with good things, so that when people see our hearts, they see your love.

Amen

DECEMBER 12: A SHEPHERD ALL HIS LIFE

Reading: 2 Samuel 5:1-5

Sometimes things in our lives change, but we carry with us things from before the change happened. As you grow up and move from daycare to elementary school, elementary school to middle school, middle school to high school, and then to whatever is next, in some ways you might feel really different, but you will still have all of the things that you learned, the memories and friends that you made, and you will still be the same you, maybe just a little bit different.

That's what it was like for David. He was a shepherd, and at this point in the story he is a King. Maybe he wasn't out in the field tending the sheep any more, but all that he knew and learned and was as a shepherd was still part of who he was as a king. Shepherds care for their flock and bring them together, and that's what King David did for the people of God. He was their king for 40 years.

Questions:

1. What's something that you used to like or that you used to like to do that you don't any more?
2. What's something that you have learned that you hope is always with you?

Prayer:

Dear God,

You loved each one of us before we were born, on the day we were born, and on every day since then. You have loved every version of

us, and will continue to love every version of us. Help us to love every version of ourselves too, and to remember that we carry all that we have been with us.

Amen

DECEMBER 13: BUILDING THE TEMPLE

Reading: 1 Kings 5:5, 1 Kings 6

David was king for a long time, and then there were many kings of the people of God after that. When Solomon was King they spent 7 years building a temple. They made every part of the temple special. The people of God had been slaves for so many years, and then spent many years in the desert, and after all of that, and after many years of figuring out how to be the people of God, now they had a beautiful and sacred place to go and meet God.

Questions:

1. What makes your church beautiful and sacred?
2. Where do you go to feel close to God?

Prayer:

Dear God,

Thank you for being near to us every day and everywhere that we go. Thank you for the special places that we can go to worship you and feel especially close to you, just like the temple in this story.

Amen

DECEMBER 14: QUEEN ESTHER

Reading: Esther 4

We're more than halfway through the Jesse Tree! You can see the ornaments adding up, the Jesse Tree Project box is getting emptier, and if you are reading the stories each day in a bible, probably you can see that as we read each day we are getting further and further into the bible.

We've heard about lots of kings so far, and now we hear about a queen. Esther was Jewish, and she married a king who was not Jewish. Mordecai was Esther's cousin, and he told her that the one of the king's men, Haman, made a decree saying that all of the Jewish people were to be killed, so he asked her to go to the King to get him to stop. The Jewish people are the people of God that we've been hearing about.

This was very scary for Esther, because it was dangerous to speak to the King without being asked to, even for the queen. She could even be killed for it! And the king didn't know that she was Jewish, so it would be extra dangerous for her to reveal that to him. But Mordecai told Esther that maybe she was meant to the queen for this moment. So, Esther decided to go to the King, even knowing what could happen to her.

When someone spoke to the King, if they were going to be allowed to live, he would point his sceptre at them. Esther told the King about Haman's decree and begged him to spare her people. The king was angry at Haman, and agreed to spare the people of God.

The sceptre reminds us of Esther's courage, and of how important it is to speak up when the moment calls us to.

Questions:

1. Have you ever spoken up when something unfair or horrible was about to happen? How did that feel?
2. Mordecai tells Esther that maybe she was meant for a time such as this, and that helps her to feel courageous. What helps you to feel courageous when you need to do something scary?
3. What could you say to God to ask him to help when you need to speak up or take action to help others?

Prayer:

Dear God,

Esther was queen for such a time as the one that she lived in, and we are people for such a time as this, right now. Help us to be brave and courageous and be true to who we are, who you call us to be, and for what is right. Even though we aren't as powerful as queens, we can make a difference.

Amen

DECEMBER 15: WAITING FOR THE LIGHT

Reading: Isaiah 9:2-7

The people of God have been through so much in the stories that we have heard so far. Today's story tells us of the prophecy that they heard that told them that a light was coming. That a child would be born who would bring peace that would last forever. Jewish people still read this as a prophecy of what is to come, and for Christians we read this as being about Jesus.

Today is December 15, and in the part of the world where we live, the days are getting shorter and shorter, and we are getting closer and closer to the longest night of the whole year. That day has more darkness than any other day, and can feel like a day where we need more of a reminder that the light will come. Longer days, with more sun in the sky will come here soon, and Jesus will come soon in this Jesse Tree story. But God is with us, even in the dark, and God will stay with us in the dark while we wait for the light to come.

Questions:

1. Have you noticed that the sun rises later and sets earlier this time of year? How does that make you feel?
2. How do you think it made the people of God, who had been through so many hard times, to hear this promise that this Light, a Prince of Peace would one day come?

Prayer:

Dear God,

You made the sun, the moon, and all the stars that bring light to the

darkness. Thank you for all of the light, and especially for the Light of the World in Jesus. It's hard to thank you for the darkness, or for the times in our lives that feel dark, but thank you that you are with us in the darkness. Help us to always remember that the light will come again.

Amen

DECEMBER 16: TURNING THINGS UPSIDE DOWN

Reading: Isaiah 11:6-9

Today's reading is more of the prophecy, of the promise, of what it will be like when this Prince of Peace is born. The promise is that all things will be changed, and things that seemed impossible will be possible. A wolf will live with a lamb, instead of the wolf eating the lamb. It's hard to imagine that! It talks about animals that are powerful and strong living in peace with animals that they might usually hurt or eat, and we can also think about how people who are powerful and could make choices to hurt other people might instead make choices to live in peace with one another. And the whole world will be filled with the love of God. It's a pretty wonderful promise!

This promise isn't just a magic promise, God won't just flip a switch and have all of this come to be. That might feel a little disappointing, but it also means that we get to be part of making this promise come true. When we are powerful like wolves, we can make sure that we act in ways that make people who maybe feel meek like lambs feel safe, and we get to be part of filling the whole world with the love of God!

Questions:

1. How do you think it would feel to be a little lamb living with a big scary wolf?
2. How can you help fill the world with God's love?

Prayer:

Dear God,

Thank you for the promises that you have given us that fill us with hope of how the world can and will be. Thank you for the ways that you invite us to help bring it to life.

Amen

DECEMBER 17: JONAH AND THE WHALE

Reading: Jonah 3:1-5

There are some stories in the bible that are just so weird and wild, and this is one of them. God asked Jonah to go to Nineveh (there are two places called Nineveh in Nova Scotia, but it wasn't either of those!) to share the word and love of God to help them turn back to God.

Jonah didn't want to go! He thought that the people who lived there didn't deserve a chance to turn back to God, so instead he ran away. Jonah got on a boat and sailed off to sea. The wind and waves were huge, and the crew of the ship knew that there was a reason why. They found out that Jonah hadn't listened to God, so they threw him overboard so that the wind and waves would stop.

In case that isn't enough for a wild story, there's even more.

After being thrown into the sea, Jonah is swallowed up by a big fish, we usually call it a whale. While in the belly of the whale, Jonah prays to God and asks for forgiveness, promising to do what God wants him to do. Then the whale throws up, spitting Jonah out on land, so that he can make his way to Nineveh and ask them to turn back to God.

Questions:

1. Has there ever been something that you didn't want to do, but you had to do it? How did that make you feel?
2. When you do something that you shouldn't, or don't do something you should, how can you make it right?

3. If you were Jonah in the belly of the whale, what would you say to ask for forgiveness?

Prayer:

Dear God,

You always love us, but sometimes we forget that, or make choices that turn us away from you. Thank you for always loving us, and always being there when we turn back to you. Help us to stay turned to you, and to answer the calls that you give us.

Amen

DECEMBER 18: IN THE LION'S DEN

Reading: Daniel 6

Daniel was a person God who could see the meaning in dreams. That's a really special gift and made him really important. The king at the time, Darius, wanted to give him some authority over the whole kingdom, but other important people didn't want to see that happen. They tried and tried to find something that Daniel had done wrong to prevent that from happening, but there was nothing. The only thing that they had to go on was his faithfulness to God.

So, those important people suggested that King Darius should declare that no one should pray to anyone except for him for 30 days, and if they did they should be thrown into a den of lions. Lions who would certainly eat anyone who was put into their den! So, King Darius made and signed the decree.

Daniel knew about this decree, but he faithfully prayed to God anyway.

Those important people told King Darius about Daniel praying to God, and even though the king was upset about it, he had signed the decree, so Daniel had to be thrown into a den of lions. The king told Daniel that his God would need to protect him and then sealed him in the den with the lions.

The next morning, Daniel was alive! The lions hadn't harmed him at all.

King Darius saw this, and wrote to the people in the whole world in every language that God had done this. God had saved Daniel and that the kingdom of God would last forever.

Questions:

1. Why do you think Daniel kept praying to God when the rules told him that he shouldn't?
2. How do you think Daniel felt when he was in the lion's den all night?
3. How do you think the king felt when he saw Daniel alive the next morning?

Prayer

Dear God,

Daniel kept on praying, even though it meant he would be punished for it. Help us to remember how important it is to pray, and to make time for it every day.

Amen

DECEMBER 19: THE CITY OF BETHLEHEM

Reading: Micah 5:1-5

Today's story isn't about a person - it's about a place. This is a prophecy about Bethlehem. It says that the one who will be filled with the strength of God and who will lead the people of God will come from Bethlehem, and that the people of Bethlehem will be his family.

Questions:

1. Have you heard of Bethlehem before? What do you know about it?
2. Does the picture on the ornament look like any place that you have seen before?
3. Who do you think this prophecy is about?

Prayer:

Dear God,

The places that we come from are part of what shapes who we are. Bethlehem is an important place in the story of our faith, and in the story of Jesus. We pray for Bethlehem, that it will be a place filled with peace, and we pray for this place where we live, and the places where we come from, that they may be filled with peace too.

Amen

DECEMBER 20: ZECHARIAH AND ELIZABETH

Reading: Luke 1:5-25

Zechariah and his wife Elizabeth are more people in the family of God, and their story is one more piece of us learning the story that leads us to Christmas.

Zechariah was a priest, he and Elizabeth were very old, and they had no children. They prayed and prayed for a child. One day, an angel appeared! The angel told Zechariah that she would have a son, that they should name him John. The angel told Zechariah that John would be filled with the Holy Spirit and would help more people know God. Zechariah did not believe the angel, so the angel told him that because he did not believe, he would not be able to speak again until the baby was born.

And, it all was true! Elizabeth did have a baby, they did name him John, and Zechariah couldn't speak until after John was born!

Questions:

1. How do you think Elizabeth and Zechariah felt when John was born?
2. What do you think it means to be filled with the Holy Spirit?
3. Do you ever feel full of the Holy Spirit?

Prayer:

Dear God,

Today is another story about how prayer changes things. Help us to keep on praying, to keep on talking to you, together as a family, and on our own too. Help us to believe that with God, even things that seem impossible could be possible!

Amen

December 21: John the Baptist

Reading: Matthew 3:1-6

The baby John grew up into a man who lived in the wilderness, wore clothes made out of camel's hair, and ate locusts and honey. But, as the angel promised, he was filled with the Holy Spirit and he baptised people.

When John was born and as he grew up, he filled the promise of a prophecy that said that someone would come to prepare the way of the Lord, John was the one who came to prepare the way for Jesus.

Questions:

1. Do you know what baptism is? What do you know about it?
2. What do you think it means that John prepared the way for Jesus?

Prayer:

Dear God,

Thank you for John, and for all the people in the world and in our lives who prepare the way and who share God's love with others.

Amen

DECEMBER 22: MARY

Reading: Luke 1:26-38

There are hardly any days left until Christmas, and so our stories and the people in them are all getting closer to Jesus.

Today our ornament is Mary, the mother of Jesus. And the story is about when an angel appeared to hear to tell her that she would have a baby, that the baby would be a descendent of King David, that he would be the Son of God, and that she should call him Jesus.

Mary was a teenager, and wasn't married, so having a baby seemed impossible, let alone a baby who was the Son of God! The angel told Mary about her cousin, Elizabeth, who was also expecting a baby, and also thought that was impossible! Remember that story? Mary said "Here I am, a servant of God. Let it be as you have said."

Questions:

1. What do you think it would be like if an angel appeared to you? What would you hope they would be there to say?
2. How do you think Mary felt when she heard what this angel had to say?

Prayer:

Dear God,

Thank you for Mary. Help us to find ways that we can say "Here I am, a servant of the Lord", just as Mary did.

Amen

DECEMBER 23: JOSEPH

Reading: Matthew 1:18-25

Joseph was meant to marry Mary, so an angel appeared to him in his sleep to tell him about the baby who would be the Son of God, and that he should still marry her. So, he did!

Questions:

1. Do you remember other stories and ornaments in this Jesse Tree that had to do with dreams?
2. What about ones that had to do with angels?
3. How do you think Joseph felt when he woke up from his dream?

Prayer:

Dear God,

Thank you for the faithfulness of Joseph, who trusted in what the angel told him, and in your plan for Jesus to be born, Help us to be faithful and to trust in you.

Today we pray especially for Debbie, Garett, Eva, and Sylvia. Help them to feel your love today and every day.

Amen

DECEMBER 24: A LONG JOURNEY

Reading: Luke 2:1-5

It was almost time for Mary's baby to be born, and a decree was sent out by the Emperor. Everyone in the world needed to be registered, and they needed to go back to their hometown to do it. So, Mary and Joseph strapped on their sandals and headed to Bethlehem, because Bethlehem was the city of David, and Joseph was descended from the house and the family of David.

Questions:

1. Do you remember hearing about Bethlehem in another story? Can you find the ornament?
2. What was the story of David?
3. What do you think is going to happen next in the story?

Prayer:

Dear God,

We have journeyed together through all of these stories, just like Joseph and Mary journeyed to Bethlehem. Help these stories take hold in our hearts, help us to remember the people and their stories that we learned about, and help us to continue to learn and grow in faith and in your love.

Amen

DECEMBER 25 THE BIRTH OF JESUS

Reading:

Luke 2:6-2 (from the New Revised Standard Version):

While Mary and Joseph were there in Bethlehem, the time came for her to deliver her child. And she gave birth to her firstborn son and wrapped him in bands of cloth, and laid him in a manger, because there was no place for them in the inn.

In that region there were shepherds living in the fields, keeping watch over their flock by night. Then an angel of the Lord stood before them, and the glory of the Lord shone around them, and they were terrified. But the angel said to them, 'Do not be afraid; for see, I am bringing you good news of great joy for all the people: to you is born this day in the city of David a Saviour, who is the Messiah, the Lord. This will be a sign for you: you will find a child wrapped in bands of cloth and lying in a manger.'

And suddenly there was with the angel a multitude of the heavenly host, praising God and saying,

'Glory to God in the highest heaven,
and on earth peace among those whom he favours!'

When the angels had left them and gone into heaven, the shepherds said to one another, 'Let us go now to Bethlehem and see this thing that has taken place, which the Lord has made known to us.' So they went with haste and found Mary and Joseph, and the child lying in the manger.

When they saw this, they made known what had been told them about this child; and all who heard it were amazed at what the

shepherds told them. But Mary treasured all these words and pondered them in her heart. The shepherds returned, glorifying and praising God for all they had heard and seen, as it had been told them.

Prayer:

Holy Jesus,
by being born one of us,
and lying in a manger,
you show how much God loves the world.
Let the light of your love always shine in our hearts.

Amen.

Adapted from the Church of England Prayers for Christmas.

