



*Jesse Tree*

# JESSE TREE DEVOTIONS

The Jesse Tree can serve as a very special kind of Advent calendar to help you change the Christmas conversations with your family and friends and prepare for the celebration of Christmas this year. On the first Sunday of Advent and each day until Christmas Day, you should read the story in this devotional and place the appropriate ornament on your “tree.”

If your family has some older children and adults, you might also take turns reading the suggested Scripture passages. The questions following the devotion are meant to stimulate conversation with your family members. The prayers at the end of the story contain a thought to challenge us to allow God to make a difference in our lives and the lives of those we know. Consider how you can put some of these challenges into action.

May God fill you with new joy as you consider how marvelous a gift we have been given!

## **First Church of God**

Devotions adapted from  
The Jesse Tree  
A Promise for Advent  
Written by Sally Baker

# THE SYMBOLIC ORNAMENTS FOR THE JESSE TREE STORIES

Each of the ornaments for the Jesse Tree has been chosen as a symbol of the story for that day.

**1. Adam & Eve**

Apple *(to represent the fruit of the "forbidden" tree)*

**2. Noah**

Rainbow *(the sign of the promise God made to Noah)*

**3. Abraham**

Ring *(to represent God's covenant or vow with Abraham)*

**4. Isaac**

Wool *(to represent the lamb God provided)*

**5. Jacob**

Ladder *(part of Jacob's dream)*

**6. Joseph**

Colored Coat *(the coat that Joseph was given by Jacob)*

**7. Moses**

Baby In A Basket *(to represent baby Moses in a basket in the river)*

**8. Joshua**

Horn *(to represent a trumpet calling the Israelites to conquest)*

**9. Rahab**

Red Bow *(to represent the red rope Rahab hung from her window)*

**10. Ruth**

Bundle of Straw

*(to represent the grain that Ruth harvested in Boaz's fields)*

**11. Samuel**

Vial of Oil

*(Samuel used a vial filled with oil to anoint Saul & David to be kings)*

**12. Jesse**

Tree *(Jesse's family tree was the family from which Jesus would come)*

**13. David**

Candy cane *(the candy cane looks like David's shepherd's crook)*

## **14. Solomon**

*Crown (Solomon was a great king)*

## **15. Jehoshaphat**

*Harmonica (to represent the battle won by praising God)*

## **16. Isaiah**

*Scroll (to represent the prophecies of the Messiah to come)*

## **17. Hezekiah**

*Snake (to represent the brazen serpent that Hezekiah smashed)*

## **18. Jonah**

*Whale (Jonah's "detour" on his way to Ninevah)*

## **19. Josiah**

*Broom (to represent Josiah's cleaning and repairing of the temple)*

## **20. Jeremiah**

*Heart (to represent Jeremiah's prophecies about changed hearts)*

## **21. Daniel**

*Lion (Daniel's experience in the lion's den)*

## **22. Esther**

*Tiara (Esther probably wore one in the beauty contest)*

## **23. Zerubbabel**

*Nail (to represent the rebuilding of the temple)*

## **24. Ezra**

*Bible (to represent Ezra's teaching God's law to the people)*

## **25. Zechariah**

*Gift (to represent how Zechariah came to understand God's "gift" of promises that were being fulfilled)*

## **26. John the Baptist**

*Coat (to represent the coat of camel's hair that John the Baptist wore)*

## **27. Joseph**

*Star (to represent that Jesus was the "star" which had been promised to come from David's family)*

## **28. Mary**

*Angel (it was an angel who revealed God's wonderful news to Mary)*

## **29. Jesus**

*Butterfly (Jesus was born to eventually die for our sins. The butterfly represents His resurrection from the dead and the reality of the new life we have because God's promises have been kept.)*



# DAY 1

**Scripture:** Genesis 2:4-9, 15-17

**Person:** Adam

**Ornament:** Apple

Back at the very beginning of things as we know them, after God had created the world and filled it with plants and animals, God created Adam and Eve. They were the most important part of creation because they were made in God's own image. God gave them the beautiful world and all the marvelous things it contained as their own to care for and enjoy. All God asked was that Adam and Eve obey God in not eating the fruit of one certain tree.

However, Satan's lies made Adam and Eve forget how important it is to obey God. They ate the forbidden fruit, and sin entered the world. Sin ruined their perfect world and even made them ashamed to face God. But God still loved them. Although their choice to disobey brought sorrow and death to the world, God promised that Satan's evil would not last forever. One day, God would send a child to conquer Satan and destroy the power of sin.

Just think! The promise of Jesus' advent or coming is as old as the first time Adam and Eve turned from God's love and chose to disobey. All through history, men have waited for God's promised child to come and offer salvation. Each day of Advent this year, we will look at one of the people that God used to prepare the way for His Son's coming. It will be like peeking little by little at the best of all gifts that God has given.

## Discuss:

1. What does this apple represent in today's story?
2. What temptations do we face that cause us to sin? How can we resist those temptations?

## Prayer:

Thank you, God for creating your lovely world for us to enjoy. Thank you for loving us so much that even when we sin and choose to disobey, you promise us Jesus and His love. Help us to understand how you prepared the world for the advent of Your Son. Amen.

## DAY 2

**Scripture:** Genesis 9:8-17

**Person:** Noah

**Ornament:** Rainbow

Year passed after the time of Adam and Eve. Some men chose to obey God and live for Him, but others chose to turn their backs on God and live for themselves. In time, mankind became so selfish and sinful that God found only one righteous man left on the earth. Although it made Him very sad to do so, God decided to destroy the wickedness He saw with a great flood. Only Noah, his family, and a few of each kind of animal would be saved from the tremendous flood.

Noah and his family never forgot how hard it was building the ark, being laughed at by people who didn't believe God, seeing the rain go on for months, and being adrift in a floating zoo. But God wanted them to remember something else too – that He keeps His promises. God promised Noah that He would never destroy the earth with a flood again. To remind Noah of this promise, God placed a rainbow in the clouds. So whenever we see a rainbow, we can be sure that God is still keeping His promise. The promised child was coming!

### Discuss:

1. What does the rainbow represent in today's story?
2. Can you name another promise that God has kept?

### Prayer:

Dear God, thank you for keeping Your promises. We are glad for rainbows and other reminders of how dependable You are. Amen.

## DAY 3

**Scripture:** Genesis 12:1-3; James 2:23

**Person:** Abraham

**Ornament:** Ring

Abraham lived in Haran, the biggest and most modern city of his time. God saw in Abraham, just as He had in Noah, a man who wanted to live a good life and obey God. But Abraham's city was a very wicked place – a hard place to live a godly life. So, God told Abraham to leave Haran and go to a faraway special land that God would give to Abraham and his children after him. God also told Abraham that He had chosen him to be the founder of a great nation. God promised that He would take care of Abraham and his family in wonderful ways.

God also promised that all the nations of the earth would be blessed through Abraham's family. Abraham's descendants were known as the Israelites or Jews, and the land God gave them was the Promised Land or Israel. Jesus, God's greatest gift to all nations, was born in the Israeli village of Bethlehem to Mary, who was a descendant of Abraham. Jews for thousands of years had been waiting for the advent of that special promise.

### Discuss:

1. What does the ring represent in today's story?
2. Name some ways that God shows you what He wants you to do.

### Prayer:

Thank you, God, that you called Abraham to the Promised Land and that you gave him such wonderful promises about the future. Help us to listen to You and do what You want us to do. Amen.

# DAY 4

**Scripture:** Genesis 22:1-14

**Person:** Isaac

**Ornament:** Wool

Isaac was a special boy, and his father, Abraham, loved him very much. But Abraham loved God even more than he loved Isaac. One day God asked Abraham to take Isaac on a journey. Abraham obeyed. God also asked Abraham to kill Isaac as a sacrifice, as a way of showing how much Abraham loved God. Abraham was sad, but he knew that he had to obey God. He trusted that even though he was being asked to do something terrible, God would make everything right. As he was getting ready to sacrifice Isaac, God sent an angel to stop Abraham and save Isaac's life. Then Abraham sacrificed a sheep as a way of honoring God, and to thank him for saving Isaac's life.

One day Jesus became Abraham's most faithful descendant. Just like it was with Isaac, all the promises God had ever made were wrapped up in Jesus. And God was willing to offering him as a sacrifice for our sins. Just as Abraham had hoped to with Isaac, God received Jesus alive back from the dead.

## Discuss:

1. What does the pile of sticks represent in today's story?
2. Have you ever had to do something really difficult? Explain.

## Prayer:

Thank you, God, for sacrificing your Son for our sins. Help us to listen to You and do what You want us to do. Amen.



## DAY 5

**Scripture:** Genesis 28:10-22

**Person:** Jacob

**Ornament:** Ladder

Jacob was feeling guilty and scared because he had just tricked his father Isaac and cheated his brother Esau. In fact, he was so miserable that he was fleeing for his life from the Promised Land. Exhausted and discouraged, he stopped to camp out for the night and had a wonderful dream. In the dream was a ladder with angels going up and down. Above it was God, who spoke to Jacob. Jacob realized that God loved him in spite of what he had done wrong. God promised him that wherever he went, God would go with him. God promised that Jacob would someday come back to Israel and the wonderful promises that God made to Abraham would belong to Jacob too.

When Jacob woke up, he still felt God's presence there. He called the place Bethel, which means the House of God. Jacob made an altar there and promised God that, if God kept His promises to him, Jacob would live his life as God's man. God changed Jacob's name from Jacob, which means trickster, to Israel, which means Prince of God.

### Discuss:

1. What does the ladder represent in today's story?
2. How do you know that God is always with you?

### Prayer:

Dear God, sometimes we do things that make us feel far away from you, just like Jacob felt. Thank you that you love us no matter what we do. Thank you that your promises are bigger than our mistakes. Amen.

# DAY 6

**Scripture:** Genesis 45:4-11; 50:19-21

**Person:** Joseph

**Ornament:** Colored Coat

Things were not going at all well for poor Joseph, son of Jacob. When he was a teenager, his jealous brothers sold him as a slave, and he had been taken to Egypt. They lied to his father Jacob, smearing animal's blood on Joseph's beautiful coat so that Jacob would think Joseph was dead. While in Egypt, Joseph was lied about and placed in jail.

But when it must have seemed to Joseph like even God had forgotten him, God gave Joseph a new lease on life. God showed Joseph the meaning of a troublesome dream that the Pharaoh of Egypt had dreamt. Pharaoh was so grateful to Joseph and so impressed with the wisdom that God had given him that he made Joseph a ruler in Egypt.

God told Joseph how to prepare for a terrible famine that was going to come and last for seven years. Joseph's dad and brothers also ran out of food and came to Egypt to buy grain. Because of his high position, Joseph was able to be God's instrument in saving the very brothers who years before had meant him such harm. God brought good out of what had once seemed so hopeless. Joseph forgave his brothers, and his whole family moved to Egypt, where there was plenty of food for them. Most important of all, Joseph's willingness to obey God let God use him to fulfill the promise of making Israel a great nation.

## Discuss:

1. What does the colored coat represent in today's story?
2. Is it difficult to forgive someone who has been unkind to you?
3. How can you be more forgiving?

## Prayer:

Dear God, thank you that you can take bad situations and bring good from them. Help us to obey you like Joseph did so that we can be blessings in the lives of others. Help us to forgive those that have been unkind to us and to love everyone. Amen.

# DAY 7

**Scripture:** Exodus 6:2-8

**Person:** Moses

**Ornament:** Baby In A Basket

Four hundred years had passed since the time of Joseph. A new dynasty of Pharaohs who did not like foreigners now ruled Egypt. During those years, the family of Israel had grown from less than a hundred to over two million. God had kept his promise to make Abraham's descendants into a great nation. The new Pharaoh of Egypt was suddenly very frightened of this huge, wealthy nation of foreigners. To control the Israelites, Pharaoh made them slaves and treated them badly even ordering them to kill all the baby boys in Israelite families.

But God had not forgotten his chosen people and his promises to them. He heard their urgent prayers and prepared a man to lead His people out of Egypt into freedom. As a baby, Moses was saved from Pharaoh's laws because his mother put him in a basket in the river Nile. Pharaoh's own daughter found Moses in the basket, loved him, and raised him as an Egyptian prince. But when Moses grew to a man, he became aware of how his people were being mistreated. His anger against Pharaoh's soldiers made him kill a man, and he fled for his life.

It took forty more years before Moses was ready to listen to God and do things God's way. At last he returned to Egypt, knowing God had chosen him to rescue Israel from Pharaoh. Armed with God's mighty power, he led his people to the land promised to Abraham so long before. The promise was on the move! God was showing the whole world that He indeed is God, and keeps His word.

## Discuss:

1. What does the baby represent in today's story?
2. How does God help you when you cry out for help? Share a time when God helped you.

## Prayer:

Dear God, thank you that you hear us when we are in trouble and help us just like you helped the Israelites. When things are hard, help us to remember that you are God, and you also keep your promises to us. Amen.

# DAY 8

**Scripture:** Joshua 6; 24:14-15, 31

**Person:** Joshua

**Ornament:** Horn

God had done all He had promised to Moses. The Israelites had been freed from their horrible slavery. God had cared for the nation of Israel by giving them food and water on their journey through the desert. To help remind them how life should be lived, God had given Moses the Ten Commandments.

After Moses died, Joshua became the leader of Israel. Guided by God, it was Joshua who led Israel across the Jordan River onto dry ground. It was Joshua who led people to victory, conquering the city of Jericho. He led the Israelite army to march around the city walls. On the seventh time around on the seventh day, the priests blew their horns, the people shouted, and the walls fell down.

Joshua reminded the people that, just as God had been faithful to them, God expected them to be faithful to Him and obey His laws. Joshua told Israel they must never forget what God had done for them and must continue to choose to serve God if they were going to enjoy His blessing. "As for me and my house," Joshua said. "We will serve the Lord."

## Discuss:

1. What does the horn represent in today's story?
2. What does it mean to serve the Lord? Give an example of how you can serve the Lord.

## Prayer:

Dear God, help us to have the kind of faith that Joshua had. Help us to choose every day to serve You. Amen.

# DAY 9

**Scripture:** Joshua 2:8-13

**Person:** Rahab

**Ornament:** Red Bow

Rahab was a very sinful woman living in the army outpost town of Jericho. She was probably the most unlikely person in that Canaanite city to open her heart to God. Like everyone else in Jericho, Rahab had heard the amazing stories of how Jehovah God had delivered the nation of slaves from Pharaoh. Now the Israelites were camped at the Jordan River, not ten miles away, planning to take Jericho. She had no doubt that God would allow them to do just that. One evening, the two Israeli spies came to her house. Instead of sounding the alarm to turn them in, she hid them on her roof and helped them escape.

Rahab's heart had been touched with wonder and fear by what she had heard of Israel's God. She expressed her faith to the spies and urged them to spare her and her family when Jericho was conquered. The spies instructed her to hang a red cord from her window so that when the Israelites stormed the city, they would know whose house to spare. She and her family were saved.

But the story doesn't end there. Rahab went with the Israelites. In time, she married Salmon, a prince of Israel. They had a son named Boaz. Just imagine how Rahab's life had changed. She was no longer a wicked outcast in a Canaanite city. Her faith in God had transformed her into a princess of God's chosen people.

## Discuss:

1. What does the bow represent in today's story?
2. Tell about a time when God gave you courage to help someone.

## Prayer:

Dear God, thank you for loving us even when we are unlovable and for forgiving our sins. Thank you for helping our faith to grow. Help us to help others like Rahab did, even when it may be hard to do. Amen.

# DAY 10

**Scripture:** Ruth 1:16-18; 2:11-13

**Person:** Ruth

**Ornament:** Bundle of Straw

After Israel had lived in the Promised Land for many years, a great famine made life difficult for the people who lived around Bethlehem. After suffering for some time, Elimelech and Naomi and their sons moved away from family and friends to the land of Moab, where there was plenty to eat. The family stayed in Moab even when hard times back home ended. The boys grew up and married Moabite girls. Then eventually, Elimelech and his sons died. Poor Naomi – she was alone in a foreign land, far away from family and other people who loved God. She decided to return by herself to Bethlehem. But Ruth, one of her daughters-in-law insisted on going along to help her. Naomi was overwhelmed by Ruth's love and was thrilled that Ruth had chosen to forget the idols of Moab and to serve Jehovah God of Israel.

Things were hard for Ruth and Naomi when they returned. Ruth had to work hard to gather enough grain for them to eat. Then God led Boaz, a rich relative of Naomi's husband, into their lives. Boaz was impressed with the unselfish love Ruth showed to Naomi. Boaz married Ruth and paid off the debts left by Naomi's husband. When Ruth and Boaz had a baby boy, who they named Obed, the Bible says that Naomi moved in and became a live-in babysitter! When Obed grew up, he was the father of Jesse, and Jesse became the father of David. There in that little village of Bethlehem, God was preparing the very family into which His Son would eventually be born.

## Discuss:

1. What does the bundle of straw represent in today's story?
2. When do you feel really sad? What can make you happy?

## Prayer:

Dear God, thank you that when we trust You and live for You, You can turn our disappointments and sadness into joy. Amen.



# DAY 11

**Scripture:** 1 Samuel 2:35; 3:19-4:1a; 10:1

**Person:** Samuel

**Ornament:** Vial of Oil (Bubbles)

Samuel could not remember a time in his life when he had not been aware that God had something special in mind for him to do. The first story he could recall was his mother Hannah telling him about how she had gone to the Tabernacle to pray for a son. Then, she had promised God to give her son – Samuel – to Him. So from the time he was small, Samuel lived at the Tabernacle in Shiloh with the old priest Eli. One night, while lying in bed, God spoke to Samuel. Samuel had been both afraid and yet excited, for God had told him that there was much he wanted Samuel to do. When he grew up, Samuel would be the high priest in the Tabernacle, like Eli, and would be God's spokesman to Israel.

Samuel lived a long life and served God faithfully even though times were hard in Israel. Great armies from Philistia tried to destroy the nation. The people were poor and discouraged. Samuel anointed King Saul, Israel's first king. Saul eventually turned his back on God. But at last, when Samuel was an old man, God sent him to Bethlehem on an important mission that would revive Israel's hope in all the old promises about a Messiah.

## Discuss:

1. What does the vial of oil represent in today's story?
2. What special job does God have for you?

## Prayer:

Dear God, thank you for giving us special jobs to do. Help us to do our best at these jobs because we know we are working for You. Amen.

# DAY 12

**Scripture:** Isaiah 11:1-10

**Person:** Jesse

**Ornament:** Tree

Jesse's whole life had been living in the rolling hills around Bethlehem. In fact, his family had lived in Bethlehem sowing crops and raising flocks of sheep and goats on the same farm since the days of Joshua. But Jesse had not only inherited land, he had also received a rich heritage of faith in God. His great grandparents had been Salmon, the prince, and Rahab of Jericho and his grandparents were Ruth and Boaz. Just as he had grown up knowing of God's love and faithfulness, he had taught his eight sons to believe God's promises and obey God's laws.

But one day all the routine of life in Bethlehem was changed forever. Samuel, the old and beloved prophet and priest of God, came down to the home and invited Jesse and his family to join him in worship. Samuel asked Jesse to bring his sons before him because God had a special blessing for one of them. One by one, Samuel looked at these good-looking, strong young men and was sure each must be God's choice. But none of them was. Finally, Jesse said there was yet one young son out watching the sheep. They waited while he was called home. As soon as Samuel saw David, even dressed as he was in rough shepherd's clothes, he knew this was the boy he has been sent to anoint as God's chosen one.

Jesse would never be king himself – in fact, history hardly remembers his name. But he was the man God chose to father and train David, who would become Israel's greatest king. He was like a strong tree with deep roots of faith. The fruits that came from his family ripened into the fulfillment of beautiful promises from God. In fact, years after his death, the prophet Isaiah reminded the nation of Israel that God was still going to bring something wonderful from Jesse's family tree.

## Discuss:

1. What does the tree represent in today's story?
2. How can you pass on your faith to your family and friends?

## Prayer:

Dear God, we will never be kings, but help us like Jesse did, to live lives that are full of faith. We want our families to be so full of Your love that we can touch the lives of our friends and neighbors. Who knows what you may grow from our family tree? Amen.

# DAY 13

**Scripture:** 2 Samuel 22:32-38, 47, 50-51

**Person:** David

**Ornament:** Candy Cane

Many years passed before David the shepherd became David the King of Israel. They were years during which David learned to trust God and discovered that God keeps His promises. When David did become king, he kept on doing what God wanted, and God blessed him. Israel's enemies were defeated, lost land was won back, and new territories were conquered. David built a new capital city in Jerusalem and rebuilt the many cities that had been damaged in years of war. He brought the Ark of the Covenant to Jerusalem and made plans for a new temple to honor God. The land was finally at peace. Israel grew strong and wealthy.

Then God made David a new promise – his family would always be the kings of Israel. David was victorious in the battles he fought. He ruled fairly and justly. When he sinned, he came to God with a broken heart and God forgave him. Some of the most beautiful hymns we still sing today are the words that David wrote in the Psalms, thanking God for His love and goodness.

It must have seemed to the people of Israel that things could hardly get better. The things promised to Abraham had surely come true during the reign of David. Even David could not have dreamed that God's best gift was yet to be given. Israel would still have to wait for almost a thousand years, but the promised Messiah would be born into David's royal family.

## Discuss:

1. Think about the shape of the candy cane. What does it represent in today's story?
2. How has God blessed your life? Name some of the blessings.

## Prayer:

Thank You, God, for a man like David, who was not afraid to let everyone know that he loved you. As we sing Christmas hymns, help us to remember to sing with joy so people will know we love you too. Amen.

# DAY 14

**Scripture:** 1 Kings 9:3-7

**Person:** Solomon

**Ornament:** Crown

Solomon became king after his father David, and it looked like he was certainly following in his famous father's footsteps. He built God a glorious temple that shone with gold and ivory and beautiful wood. He made peace treaties with all the nations around Israel. He grew so powerful and wealthy that his riches couldn't be counted. He asked God for wisdom and became known as the wisest man who had ever lived. He wrote books and songs and beautiful poetry. During his reign, Israel became the greatest kingdom in the world. Indeed, it appeared that as great a king as David had been Solomon was even greater.

But something sad happened to Solomon – something that God had warned him about when he first became king. Solomon forgot who had given him his power and wealth and wisdom. He began to love his money and power more than God. Solomon turned his back on God and built temples to pagan idols right in Jerusalem. God had told Solomon that worshiping idols would result in punishment for Solomon's family and the nation of Israel. The time might even come when the land they loved would be taken away. How could such a wise man become so foolish and forget that all God wanted was for Solomon to show his love by obeying? What would happen to the blessings and promises when Israel turned away from God?

## Discuss:

1. What does the crown represent in today's story?
2. What temptations do you have that cause you to disobey God and his commands? How can you be more obedient?

## Prayer:

Thank You, God, for all the wonderful things that you give to us. Help us to never forget that all we are and have comes from you. Amen.

# DAY 15

**Scripture:** 2 Chronicles 20:15-17

**Person:** Jehoshaphat

**Ornament:** Harmonica

When Solomon died, civil war broke out in the land of Israel, and the nation was cut in half. The kings of the north, called Israel, were all evil and wicked and led the people away from God. In the south, called Judah, some kings loved God and ruled as David did. Others were selfish and cruel. Little by little, the enemies of the Israelites grew stronger; more and more land was lost. As time passed, it became harder and harder for even the good kings to lead the people in God's ways.

One good king named Jehoshaphat found himself, and his people, in a terrible spot. Three powerful foreign kings had banded together and were coming to destroy the kingdom of Judah. Jehoshaphat's army was small and could not possibly win against such a powerful military force. But Jehoshaphat remembered how God had helped his people before, and he prayed for God to continue keeping the old promises. He prayed for God to win the battle for them so that everyone would be sure it was God's victory.

Then, because he had such faith in God's power and care for Israel, Jehoshaphat did an incredible thing. Instead of taking his army and chariots to the place of the battle, he first took families, children, and the Temple choir. They prayed and sang psalms of thanksgiving as they walked. Even while they praised God and sang, a miracle happened – the armies of the three kings turned on each other and destroyed themselves. Jehoshaphat's army didn't even have to fight! God won the battle for them. Once again, the people saw how God keeps His promises to care for those who love and obey Him.

## Discuss:

1. What does the harmonica represent in today's story?
2. Tell about a time when God answered your prayer.

## Prayer:

Dear God, it is hard to sing and thank you even before you answer our prayers. Help us to have faith like Jehoshaphat to give our troubles to you and to trust you to care for us. Amen.

# DAY 16

**Scripture:** Isaiah 9:2-7

**Person:** Isaiah

**Ornament:** Scroll

Isaiah was a prophet who lived in Judah during the reigns of both good and wicked kings. He understood that the hard times Judah was having as a nation were because the people had chosen to worship idols instead of God and were not obeying God's law. He warned them that God could not give them the blessings He had promised if they lived such wicked lives. Isaiah pleaded with the people to repent and turn back to living for God because he knew that God would not continue to protect them if they refused to obey. Isaiah reminded them that God had warned Solomon that even their beloved land would be taken away by other nations if the Israelites worshipped other gods.

Sometimes people seemed to listen to Isaiah, but more often he felt like he was talking to the wind. How discouraging! But God filled Isaiah's heart with joy instead of gloom – He gave Isaiah a new promise for the future. These bad times would not last forever; the people would turn from darkness to the light again. There would be rejoicing instead of hardship. A Messiah, or Savior, would be born from David's family and rule in a way far greater than David did. And His kingdom would never end. From then on, God's people hung on to this promise that Isaiah had given them from God. They prayed for the coming of the one who would make things right again. Times were dark, but the promise shone like a light in the darkness.

## Discuss:

1. What does the scroll represent in today's story?
2. Have you ever forgotten a promise? What happened?

## Prayer:

Thank You, God, for your promises. As we see the beautiful Christmas lights, help us to remember that Jesus is the light that you sent to take away the darkness of sin. Amen.



## DAY 17

**Scripture:** 2 Kings 18:1-8; 19:32-36

**Person:** Hezekiah

**Ornament:** Snake

King Hezekiah was the great-great-great grandson of King Jehoshaphat. Hezekiah pretty much did what the Lord wanted of his kings throughout his reign. He patterned his life after King David, stopping the pagan practices of his father Ahaz. Like David, he showed due regard for the temple. He even smashed up the bronze serpent that Moses had made because the people had eventually turned it into an idol rather than a memorial. When he saw that the temple needed repair again, he had the doors fixed and the inside cleaned. He also told the people to make themselves clean on the inside. They told God they were sorry for all the things they had done wrong. God was very happy with the people and all that Hezekiah did.

King Hezekiah put his trust in the Lord. Through his faithfulness, his people were saved and his enemies destroyed. God gave Hezekiah wisdom and understanding to protect God's people. He had his men dig a tunnel from a spring of water to the city. It was a special tunnel that would let the water flow into the city so that their enemies could not cut off their water supply. Another time, God sent an angel to destroy the enemy king's army. Many, many people died that night. God took care of Hezekiah and His people when they prayed and asked for help.

### Discuss:

1. What does the snake represent in today's story?
2. What can you pray for and ask God to help you with?

### Prayer:

Thank You, God, that we can pray to You and You will help us. Help us to put our trust in You, especially in difficult times. Amen.

# DAY 18

**Scripture:** Jonah 3:1-10

**Person:** Jonah

**Ornament:** Whale

About the same time, God spoke to another prophet named Jonah. God told him to go to the city of Nineveh to tell its citizens that they would be destroyed for their wickedness unless they repented and worshipped God. God was asking Jonah to be a blessing to another nation and help them to be saved – that had been part of what God had promised Israel since the days of Abraham. However, Jonah didn't want Nineveh saved because it was the wicked capital of the cruel Assyrians, the worst enemies of Israel. Instead, he tried to run away from God, taking a boat to a city as far away from Nineveh as he could get. Of course, God knew what he was up to and had to use a terrific storm and some time alone inside a huge fish to get Jonah turned around and ready to listen. When God asked Jonah again to preach in Nineveh, Jonah went.

God was really asking Jonah to do something wonderful – to share the blessing of forgiveness and life with thousands of people who had never heard the Word of God. What a message God must have given Jonah to preach! Even the powerful king of Nineveh heard and believed. There was a great revival in that wicked city. Poor Jonah – he should have been happy that God had used him to spare lives and bless so many people. But he wasn't. He missed out on the joy God had for him because he didn't want God to bless someone else.

## Discuss:

1. What does the whale represent in today's story?
2. What way are you bringing joy to others this Christmas season?

## Prayer:

Thank You, God, that you give us opportunities to be the means by which you bring joy and salvation to others. As Christmas gets closer, give us a desire to share our blessings, even with people we don't know. Amen.

# DAY 19

**Scripture:** 2 Chronicles 34:1-3

**Person:** Josiah

**Ornament:** Broom

Josiah, Hezekiah's great grandson, was a remarkable little boy. His father and grandfather had both been terribly wicked kings. Josiah became the king of Judah at eight years of age. Instead of being cruel and sinful like his father and grandfather, he modeled his life after King David. The Bible says that no one could make him turn away from doing what was good. He publicly announced his intention to serve God when he was just sixteen. He showed he meant business by destroying the idol temples and images the former kings had allowed. Then, he sent servants to clean and repair the great temple of Solomon that his father and grandfather had allowed to fall into ruin. While cleaning the temple, one of the priests found the book of God's law that had been lost and ignored for years.

Josiah wept to think that the people had gotten so far from God that had even forgotten His law. He had the law read before the leaders of the people and made a promise to God that he would live and rule by God's laws all his life. Then, Josiah and the people celebrated God's love for them by keeping the Passover feast. Josiah loved and served God faithfully, and God blessed his obedience by keeping Judah safe during his reign.

## Discuss:

1. What does the broom represent in today's story?
2. Name a time when you were tempted to make a bad choice?
3. Why was it hard to avoid the temptation?

## Prayer:

Thank You, God, for helping Josiah choose to obey you rather than follow in his father's footsteps. Help us to choose the right way to live even when it is hard and it would be easier to do wrong.

## DAY 20

**Scripture:** Jeremiah 31:31-34; 33:14-16

**Person:** Jeremiah

**Ornament:** Heart

Although Josiah tried to lead Judah in God's way all his life and God blessed him for his faith, when Josiah died, the people immediately turned their backs on God. Led by the sinful kings that followed, they lived wicked lives and worshipped idols again. Jeremiah the prophet begged them to repent and ask God's forgiveness, but no one listened. So God told Jeremiah to tell the Israelites that the end of the nation was coming quickly. They would be conquered and captured by the Babylonians. The temple would be destroyed, Jerusalem would be ruined, and the precious land would be all but lost to them. Since the time of Solomon, they had been warned. And now they would be punished for forgetting God and His love for them.

But were the promises lost? Oh no! Israel might forget to love God, but that did not change His love for them. A time would come, God assured Jeremiah, when His people would listen to God again – they would know Him in their hearts. They would ask God's forgiveness, and He would wipe away their sin. Jeremiah also wrote of how God would one day fulfill all the promises made to Israel since the time of Abraham. A descendant of David's would rule with goodness and fairness. The Messiah would come – sin and disobedience would not destroy the promise.

### Discuss:

1. What does the heart represent in today's story?
2. Have you asked Jesus into your heart? Discuss what this means.

### Prayer:

Thank You, God, in all the excitement and business of Christmas time, help us to remember that nothing is so important as having you in our hearts. Amen.

# DAY 21

**Scripture:** Daniel 6:25-27

**Person:** Daniel

**Ornament:** Lion

Jeremiah had told the truth. The Babylonians did come and destroy the temple and Jerusalem. Thousands of Israelites were taken prisoners and made to march hundreds of miles back to Babylon where they lived in exile without a homeland. Daniel was one of the young Israelites who was taken prisoner. He was given the opportunity to study and serve in the palace of the king of Babylon. Even in that strange place, Daniel was not afraid to share what he believed about God and to obey God's rules. God never let Daniel down. The Babylonians respected Daniel for his faith and his honesty, and he rose quickly in power and authority.

Years later, Daniel remained an important ruler when the Persians conquered the Babylonians. However, some Persian officials were so jealous of Daniel that they made up a law that said that everyone had to worship the Persian king. They knew Daniel would be faithful to God and so would break the new law. Because Daniel did, he was sentenced to die in the lions' den. How amazed Daniel's enemies were when God spared Daniel from the lions. The king was so impressed that he made a speech honoring Daniel and his God's power. Here, in this foreign land, blessing was coming to God's people as they learned to trust God and to their captors as they discovered the power of faithfulness of the living God.

## Discuss:

1. What does the lion represent in today's story?
2. Share a difficult time in your life. How did God help you through it?

## Prayer:

Thank You, God, sometimes the hardest times in our lives become the times we learn the most about your love and faithfulness. Help us to always turn to you when the going is tough and let you make us strong. Amen.

# DAY 22

**Scripture:** Esther 4

**Person:** Esther

**Ornament:** Tiara

Esther is a beautiful Jewish woman. She lives with her cousin Mordecai, a high official in the king's government. After winning a beauty contest, she moves into the palace, becoming queen. She never tells the king that she is Jewish. Some time later, Mordecai refuses to bow down and pay homage to Haman, another high official. Infuriated, Haman plots to kill Mordecai, as well as all the Jews. Mordecai hears of the plot and reports it to Esther. Esther takes her petition to the king and pleads for the protection of the Jewish people from Haman's wicked schemes. In anger, the king has Haman hanged on the gallows. Esther's faith and courage saves her people from extinction, including David's royal lineage.

The story of Esther takes place after the return of the first group of Jews returned to Judah from Babylon and the return of the second group led by Ezra. It takes place in Susa, a city close to the Persian Gulf, rather than the great city of Babylon where the majority of the original captives from Judah were taken. Historically this story shows how scattered God's people were in this new land. It also shows how some of the descendants of the original exiled had risen to positions of responsibility within the community they lived. For example, Mordecai became a high official within the providence he lived and was well respected within the king's court. Of course Esther was an orphan and became a queen. These two ordinary people played a key role in God's plan to protect His people. God used seemingly ordinary people to accomplish the impossible. God can use us to do the same. By obedience to His instructions, we can do great things.

## Discuss:

1. What does the tiara represent in today's story?
2. How is God using you to further His kingdom?

## Prayer:

Thank You, God, for using us, simple people, to accomplish great things. Help us to be obedient to what you have called us to do so that we can further your kingdom for your glory. Amen.



## DAY 23

**Scripture:** Ezra 1:1-4; 3:8-13

**Person:** Zerubbabel

**Ornament:** Nail

God had told Jeremiah that the Israelites would be in exile for 70 years. God kept His word. After 70 years, the Persian king Cyrus wrote an order permitting many thousand Israelites to return to Jerusalem to rebuild the city and the temple. They were allowed to take back with them many of the temple treasures that had been taken when the Babylonians had destroyed the temple. Cyrus also provided money to help pay for the rebuilding. At the head of the expedition and in charge of the rebuilding was Zerubbabel, a young prince from David's royal family.

What a job lay ahead for him and those who went along! The once glorious temple was almost unrecognizable. But as soon as they arrived at the temple site, they repaired the altar and thanked God for bringing them home. There was so much to do that it was years before the new temple was finally finished. Even as they praised God for allowing the temple to be rebuilt, the old men who remembered Solomon's magnificent temple wept to see how little the new building looked like the first one. But the temple itself was not as important as the fact that God had kept His promise to bring the Israelites back to the Promised Land. How soon would the other promises be fulfilled?

### Discuss:

1. What does the nail represent in today's story?
2. How are you keeping the real reason for the season of Christmas in your celebrations?

### Prayer:

Dear God, help us not to get so caught up in the parties and presents and decorations of Christmas that we forget that Christmas is really a celebration of how You have always kept Your promises. Thank you for sending Your Son Jesus to be born in the little town of Bethlehem. Amen.

# DAY 24

**Scripture:** Ezra 7:6, 10, 27-28

**Person:** Ezra

**Ornament:** Bible

Ezra was a member of the priestly family of Israel and a man who had studied God's law all his life. Several years after Zerubbabel and the people who had gone with him had returned to Jerusalem, Ezra went to Artaxerxes, the new king of Persia, and asked permission to return with another group of exiles. Not only was he given permission to go to Jerusalem, but the king also told him to take any priests, temple servants, gatekeepers, and singers who wanted to go with him. Then Artaxerxes gave Ezra a great offering of silver and gold for the newly rebuilt temple and ordered everyone Ezra met on the trip to give him all the supplies he needed. He also gave Ezra a royal commission to teach God's law to all the Israelites and even to those who were not Israelites. The king also made a law that everyone should obey God's laws as well as the laws of Persia. How exciting! God had given Ezra everything he needed to do the very job he had always hoped to do.

When Ezra reached Jerusalem, he wasted no time before he began his teaching. The people were eager to learn God's law and became sad when they discovered some things in their lives needed changing. They were serious about living God's way and asked God to forgive them and help them live good lives. They trusted God because they had seen Him keep His promise about allowing them to return to Jerusalem. God would surely keep the other wonderful promises too.

## Discuss:

1. What does the Bible represent in today's story?
2. Are you eager to learn and read God's Word? How can you be more faithful in your studies?

## Prayer:

Thank you, God, that you don't give us a job to do without giving us all we need to get it done. Help us be eager to learn and read Your Word and change those things in our lives that don't line up with Your Word. Amen.

# DAY 25

**Scripture:** Luke 1:67-80

**Person:** Zechariah

**Ornament:** Gift

For about 400 years, life went on without much change in Israel. To be sure, the great empires that ruled the Promised Land changed – first the Persians, then the Greeks, and finally the Romans. The Israelites were still waiting for the special promised king to come from David's family. Worshiping God was not always easy during that time because many of the foreign rulers made laws to try to keep them from doing what God had asked. But the people who loved God did not lose hope. They reread the promises and prophecies and remembered that God had always been faithful to His people.

One day Zechariah, a priest who loved and believed God, was taking his turn burning incense in the temple, when he was amazed to see an angel standing before him. The angel assured Zechariah that he should not be afraid because he had wonderful news for him. Zechariah and his wife Elizabeth would soon have a son who would be the man chosen to prepare the way for the Messiah. Zechariah could hardly believe it. His own son would be a part of the wonderful promise and its fulfillment. After all the years of waiting, the advent of God's gift was almost there.

## Discuss:

1. What does the gift represent in today's story?
2. Tell about a time when you had to wait for something special.

## Prayer:

Dear God, thank you for the gift of Jesus. In all the excitement of these last few days before Christmas, help us to feel the wonder in our hearts of the miracle of Jesus' birth. Amen.

# DAY 26

**Scripture:** Matthew 3:1-12

**Person:** John the Baptist

**Ornament:** Coat

Zechariah and Elizabeth's son grew up to be John the Baptist. He was Jesus' cousin because Elizabeth was Mary's cousin. God chose him to tell the people about Jesus. John wanted people to know that Jesus is the Son of God, the Savior that God had promised the people so many years ago. He wanted them to believe in Jesus. His message was also simple, "Repent for the forgiveness of sins." He boldly called for those who heard him preach to change their ways. He called the Pharisees and Sadducees a brood of snakes. His message to them was clear – do not trust in their ancestry as descendants of Abraham for their salvation. They must change their hearts and live as God wanted them to. The people who came to hear him preach wondered if he was the promised Messiah. He answered, "I baptize you with water. But the one more powerful than I will come...He will baptize you with the Holy Spirit."

John did not look like other people. He wore a coat of camel's hair and ate locusts and honey. Some people probably thought he was a little strange. But many people did listen to John, and they were ready to believe in Jesus.

## Discuss:

1. What does the coat represent in today's story?
2. What do you need forgiveness for today?

## Prayer:

Dear God, thank you for forgiving us when we do things that displease You. Make our hearts ready for Jesus. Amen.

## DAY 27

**Scripture:** Matthew 1:20-23 & Luke 1:30-33, 46-55

**Person:** Joseph & Mary

**Ornament:** Angel

Mary's heart could not stop pounding! How could she not be afraid and amazed and overwhelmed with joy all at once? The angel's presence still seemed to fill the room. Was what he said true? Was she really chosen to be the mother of God's Son- the promised Messiah? She knew Israel had waited for hundreds of years for the promise from God and now she had become part of the blessing God was giving all mankind. Because the angel told her, "God is with you", she knew she could fulfill her part in God's plan. But – how would Joseph respond to the news?!

Joseph was aware that years earlier, even before the time of David, God had predicted that his family line would be rulers in Israel. He had read Isaiah's promise that a shoot would grow from Jesse's family tree that would be a wonderful Messiah, or Savior, to Israel. Joseph knew, and believed these promises. But never in his wildest imagination was he prepared for the appearance of an angel to him, or the news that the angel had appeared to Mary the girl to who he was engaged. The angel assured him he should not be afraid. Joseph was part of God's plan for fulfilling His promises to the world. All Joseph had to do was be willing to follow God's leading.

The Promise was upon them – the Blessing had begun!

### Discuss:

1. What does the angel represent in today's story?
2. Talk about something that happened to you, or someone you know, that seemed impossible to believe.

### Prayer:

Dear God, thank you that Joseph and Mary were both willing to trust and believe you. Help us to learn to listen to you and make our lives and futures available to you and to your plan, too. Amen.

# DAY 28

**Scripture:** John 3:16-17

**Person:** Jesus

**Ornament:** Star & Butterfly

Today is Christmas! The waiting time of Advent is over. Jesus is born. The Promise has been kept. A king has come from David's royal line. A shoot has sprung from the root of Jesse's family tree. A star has risen from Israel and shines over the entire world. God has given His own Son as a man to live like us – but not to sin or disobey – so that he could pay the price for our sins and disobedience. When Jesus gave His life on the cross, death could not destroy the Promises or the Blessing. The butterfly represents Jesus' resurrection from the dead and the reality of the new life that we have because God's promises have been kept. God has given us the gift of salvation and eternal life.

## Discuss:

1. What does the butterfly represent in today's story?
2. What is your favorite part of the Christmas story?

## Prayer:

Thank you, God of the Universe, for the gift of Your son Jesus. As we celebrate His birthday today, help us to be truly thankful for all the blessings we have. Amen.

Hang the star at the top of the tree after today's devotions as a reminder that Jesus is the bright and shining One who has been with us since the world began, and He has prepared a place for us in heaven, with Him for all eternity – all we have to do is ask Him into our hearts, and live for Him.



