

The Jesse Tree

An Introduction - What is a Jesse Tree?

The symbol of the Jesse Tree comes from Isaiah 11:1-2: A shoot shall come out from the stock of Jesse, and a branch shall grow out of his roots: and the spirit of the Lord shall rest on him. Each branch of the tree is a story, one of the stories that make up the whole sacred Story of God's relationship with His people, with us.

It's named for the father of King David because in a dark time—when the royal line seemed chopped down, cut off at the root—God promised His people that He would raise up a royal ruler for them. He would raise up His Messiah.

A Jesse Tree helps us remember our story, the story of God's people, who waited so long for the coming of Messiah, just as we are waiting through the dark days of December for Jesus.

How to Use this Jesse Tree Devotional

For each day, there is a Scripture reading, a prayer, a thought or question for reflection, and an activity.

At the top of each day's devotion, there is also a small picture. Match this picture to the corresponding picture on the accompanying calendar. Cross off the days as you explore them as a family.

Make sure to read and pray over these stories as you wait for Jesus. Enjoy!



CREATION

1st December

Isaiah 11:1-4a

Pray

Thank you, God, for this season of Advent, when we can prepare for the coming of Your Son. Just as Jesus was the branch that bore much fruit, help us to bear much fruit in this season. Amen.

Reflect

Today is the first day of our preparation for Christmas. Traditionally, Christians have fasted during Advent. Fasting is when we choose not to eat a certain food or participate in a certain activity, so that we can focus on Jesus instead. What might we fast from during Advent?

Act

Write what you (or your family) is fasting from and post it on your refrigerator (or some other prominent place).



ADAM AND EVE

2nd December

Genesis 1: 24-31

Pray

Creator God, thank you for making us in your image. Thank you, Jesus, for your generosity in coming to us and showing us what God's image looks like. Help us to become the people you created us to be. Amen.

Reflect

God was generous when He created people and gave them the whole earth and everything in it to take care of and enjoy. God was generous when He came to be with us as Jesus. During Advent, many Christians practice being like God in His generosity by giving to people who have less than they do. What and to whom could we give during Advent?

Act

Schedule a time to make (or buy) your gift—and to deliver it.



NOAH

3rd December

Genesis 6:11-14, 7:17-23, 9:12-15

Pray

Holy God, You made us to love You and love one another and love this good earth that You gave us. Sometimes we don't love You, or we're unkind to other people, or we hurt the world You made. And You get angry. But even then, You love us. Thank You for Your unending love. Amen.

Reflect

Advent marks the beginning of the Christian year. It is our "new year." One of the things many Christians do during Advent is repent. "Repent" means to turn around from doing wrong things and to go in a different direction— toward what is right.

Act

What is one thing that each of us can repent of during Advent?

Write it down. Keep it by your bed or some other semi-private place where you will see it often.



ABRAHAM

4th December

Genesis 12:1-7

Pray

God of Abraham, You called Abram to follow you, and you promised to bless Him and make Him a blessing. You call us to follow you, too. And you bless us. Thank You for the gifts you give us. We pray that you would make us a blessing to others. Amen.

Reflect

During Advent, we prepare to receive the greatest gift God ever gave us—Himself. To help us get ready to receive that gift, we can thank God for other gifts He gives us. Let's take turns sharing three gifts that we're grateful God has given us.

Act

Write down the three things that each person is grateful for. Post it where you can see it often. Each time you see the list, give thanks



ISAAC

5th December

Genesis 21:1-7

Pray

God of Abraham and Isaac, you give impossible gifts. You gave Sarah and Abraham a baby even though they were old and even though they didn't believe you would do what you said. Thank you that you keep your promises, even when we think they're impossible. Amen.

Reflect

During Advent we wait, like Sarah and Abraham, for the birth of a baby. When Isaac was born, Sarah laughed. What makes us laugh?

Act

Thank God by name for each of the things that makes you laugh.



JACOB

6th December

Genesis 28:10-17

Pray

Lord Jesus, You are the ladder to Heaven. Because of You, we can come to our Father in Heaven and pray with boldness and confidence. Thank You that You reached down to us so that we might reach up to You. Amen.

Reflect

When Jacob awoke, he said, "God is in this place, and I did not know it." He was surprised that God was there! Another name for Jesus is Emmanuel, which means "the with-us God." Because of Jesus, we know that God is always with us. Have you ever thought you were alone and been surprised to realize that God was with you?

Act

Draw a picture of a ladder and post it someplace where you will see it often. Every time you see it, give thanks that God is with you.



JOSEPH

7th December

Genesis 37:2-8, 12-28; 50:15-21

Pray

Powerful God, Thank You that you are strong enough to take bad things and use them in good ways. Thank You that you are always working to make all things well and whole and right. Amen.

Reflect

Joseph's brothers wanted to hurt him—and they did hurt him. But God was with Joseph, and God used what his brothers had done to him to save all their lives. Can we think of a time when something bad happened and then God used the bad thing to make something good?

Act

Draw a picture or write a few words to describe the situation you just talked about. Give thanks to God for his infinite mercy and power, that out of evil he is able to create good.



THE BURNING BUSH

8th December

Exodus 3:1-12

Pray

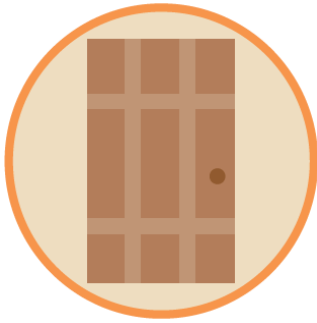
Holy God, you care about your people, and you hear us when we call to you for help. Thank You that you are near to us, that you hear our prayers, and that you are mighty to save us. Amen.

Reflect

God heard the cries of His people for rescue from the Egyptians. God then told Moses to go and rescue God's people. When we pray for help, God often asks others to be the answer to our prayers. Can we think of a time when we prayed for someone, and God answered our prayer by sending a person to help us.

Act

Sometimes God asks other people to be the answer to our prayers, and sometimes He asks us to be the answer to *their* prayers. If you haven't yet made or purchased the gift you decided to give earlier in the month, make plans to do so this week.



THE FIRST PASSOVER

9th December

Exodus 12:1-13

Pray

Loving God, Thank You that you desire for your people to be free. Thank You that Jesus came to give us freedom. Thank you that you free us from all the things that would keep us tied up or tied down, so that we can live the abundant life you long to give us. Amen.

Reflect

God delivered His people from slavery to the Egyptians. What does God deliver us from?

Act

Write down (or draw a picture of) the things from which God has delivered you. Post your list (picture) someplace prominent. Whenever you see it, give thanks for God's saving help.



THE TEN COMMANDMENTS

10th December

Deuteronomy 5:1-22

Pray

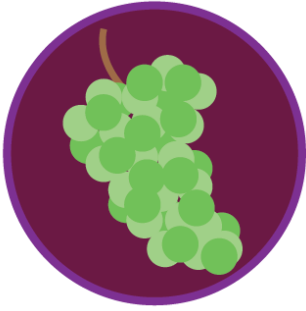
Holy God, you give us good rules to obey because you love us and you want us to live abundantly and well. Help us to practice obeying your rules. And thank you that when we don't obey, you forgive us, so we can try again. Amen.

Reflect

Jerome Berryman calls the Ten Commandments "the ten best ways to live." Why does God give us rules to follow? What happens when we don't follow these rules?

Act

Choose one commandment today, and try to keep it all day long. When you forget or fail, give thanks for God's amazing grace: though we forget Him, He does not forget us, and though we fail to love Him, His love for us is unending and unending.



RAHAB & THE PROMISED LAND

11th December

Joshua 2:1-9, 12-21

Pray

Loving God, you delight to work through the most unlikely people. Thank You for the ways you worked in and through Rahab. Thank you for the ways you work through us. Amen.

Reflect

Rahab was a foreigner, a Gentile, and yet God worked through her to bring two of his people safely home to the Promised Land. In Hebrews 11, Rahab is included with Abraham and Moses as one of the Old Testament's heroes of faith. And she is the ancestor of both King David and Jesus. God used this unlikely woman in mighty ways. What unlikely person has God used to bless you?

Act

Write a thank you note to that person, telling them how they have blessed you and thanking them for being a vessel of God's blessing.



RUTH

12th December

Ruth 1:1-2:3

Pray

Loving God, thank You for Ruth's faithfulness to Naomi. Thank You for her example of love. Help us to be faithful friends and to love the people You have placed in our lives. Amen.

Reflect

Like Rahab, Ruth was a foreigner. She chose to stake her life on the God of Israel and the people of Israel. She became an ancestor of King David and Jesus. At great cost to herself, she was faithful to Naomi—and God blessed her abundantly. Think of a time when you were faithful to someone (or something) and received a blessing you didn't expect.

Act

Today, choose one thing you'd rather not do but know you should and do it, as an act of obedience and love to God.



DAVID

13th December

1 Samuel 16: 1-13

Pray

Loving God, Thank You that you do not see as people see, that you look beyond the way we look or the way we act and see into our hearts. Thank You that even though you see both the good and the bad that is in our hearts, you love us anyway. Amen.

Reflect

David was the youngest and smallest of his brothers. But God saw beyond his age and his size and called him to be the next king of Israel. How do you think David felt when Samuel anointed him? How do you feel when God asks you to do a job that is hard?

Act

What is one hard thing that you must do this week? Know that God has anointed you for the task, and His Spirit enables You to do it. Give thanks for God's empowering presence through the Holy Spirit.



JONAH

14th December

Jonah 3:1-10

Pray

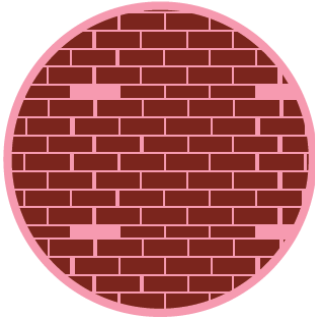
Loving God, you long for us to return to you each and every time we turn away. Thank You that you are slow to anger and abounding in steadfast love. Amen.

Reflect

When Jonah proclaimed the Word of the Lord, the people of Ninevah repented – turned back to God. They fasted from food and called out to God to forgive them and give them another chance. And God did. How are we doing with our Advent fast?

Act

If you've fallen away from your fast or have fallen back into the behaviour that you repented of, ask Jesus for forgiveness. Ask Him for strength to live out what He's called you to. Remember God's graciousness to Ninevah—and that His love for you is steadfast and abounding.



RETURN TO THE LAND

15th December

Nehemiah 1:1-4, 2:11-17

Pray

Loving God, thank you that when walls of protection fall, you are with us, and you help us to rebuild them. Thank You that in you we find a place of safety and rest. Amen.

Reflect

After Nehemiah and his men rebuilt the walls of Jerusalem, they were able to keep God's law about the Sabbath again. The walls kept the merchants and sellers out of the city, so that the people could rest on the Sabbath (Neh 13:15-22). The walls of Jerusalem protected God's gift of rest to His people. How does God give us rest?

Act

If you don't regularly observe a Sabbath, try to keep one on Sunday. Tomorrow, prepare for the Sabbath by doing the work that you would ordinarily do on Sunday, so that you can truly rest when Sunday comes.



DANIEL

16th December

Daniel 6:10-23 (context: King Darius has decreed that anyone who prays to a god other than him will be thrown into a den of lions.)

Pray

God, thank you that when all seems lost, when death seems certain, you find us and give us life. Amen.

Reflect

King Darius sealed Daniel into the lion's den and thought it meant Daniel's death, but God sealed the lion's mouths and brought Daniel life. In what other stories in Scripture do people think death is certain, but God surprises them with life?

Act

Look today for places where God surprises you with life and love and healing in a place of difficulty. Light the Advent candles and share these glimpses of God's goodness with one another.



PROPHECY, LIGHT IN THE DARKNESS

17th December

Isaiah 9:2-7

Pray

Loving God, thank you that you are light in the darkness that you shine on us even when we cannot see your light. Thank you that in these darkening days, we can trust that you are with us and are the Light that no darkness can overcome. Amen.

Reflect

Where do we see light on these dark nights? How could we let those lights remind us of God's light shining on us in Jesus?

Act

Light candles and listen to sections 11 and 12 of part one of Handel's Messiah, which come from today's reading. Pray for each person in the room, that Christ would warm their hearts with His light.



PROPHECY, THE LION AND THE LAMB

18th December

Isaiah 11:6-10

Pray

Loving God, thank you that you reconcile all things, all people to yourself through Jesus, the branch who blooms from the root of Jesse. Amen.

Reflect

This passage paints a vivid portrait of *shalom*, God's perfect peace and wholeness. What images of that *shalom* appeal to you? Why?

Act

Think of one person in your life with whom you often don't get along. Offer that person a gift of God's *shalom* today.



PROPHECY, THE SUFFERING SERVANT

19th December

Isaiah 52:13-53

Pray

Loving God, thank you that you sent your Son to die in our place. Thank you that, through his resurrection, we may have live with you for ever. Amen.

Reflect

This passage is a song written by the prophet Isaiah describing the coming Messiah. Isaiah talks about the Messiah's death. Jesus, the Messiah, died on the cross in payment for our sin, conquering death so that all mankind to enter into communion with the Father.

Act

Write a letter to Jesus, thanking him for what he did for us on the cross.



PROPHECY, BETHLEHEM

20th December

Micah 5:1-5a

Pray

Loving God, thank you for coming in Jesus to bring us safely home. Amen.

Reflect

Micah prophesied, the Messiah would be born in Bethlehem and would be the ruler or King over Israel and who would be the Son of God. What images in this passage remind you of Jesus? Why?

Act

Start making your crib at home. Start with the stable. Find a place in the house where everybody can see the stable. Make sure there is no one in the stable, except the animals, until Christmas Eve. You could also find a little empty manger for the animals' food. Think about how Jesus, the King of Israel and the Son of God was born in a stable in a tiny town called Bethlehem. What a mystery!



JOHN THE BAPTIST

21st December

Luke 1:5-25

Pray

Loving God, thank you that you love your people and that you stop at nothing to help us be ready and able to recognize and receive You when You come. Amen.

Reflect

God sent John to Zechariah and Elizabeth, to surprise them in their old age. And God sent John to this world to prepare His people for His coming in Jesus. How have we prepared our hearts and our home for Jesus these past weeks?

Act

If there's something you've wanted to do to get ready for Christ's coming, carve out some time today or tomorrow to actually do it. Let yourself get ready for the greatest gift we've ever received: God-with-us.



THE VIRGIN MARY

22nd December

Luke 1:26-38

Pray

Loving God, thank You that nothing is impossible with you. Amen.

Reflect

Mary is troubled by the angel's greeting. How do you think she feels when the angel tells her that she will be the mother of God's own Son?

Act

For five minutes today be silent and still. Pray a breath prayer (praying in rhythm with your breathing) to focus your thoughts on God. One of the oldest Christian breath prayers is the Jesus Prayer: Lord Jesus Christ, Son of God, have mercy on me.



JOSEPH

23rd December

Matthew 1:18-25

Pray

God, thank You for the courage of Joseph. Thank you that he was a maker and a repairer. Thank You that you are the Maker and Repairer of all things, all people. Amen.

Reflect

Joseph was a carpenter. What are some things that carpenters make? What are some things that they repair? Jesus was the adopted son of the carpenter Joseph. Like his earthly father, Jesus also made and repaired things— only He made all the universe and repaired the brokenness that was born when Adam and Eve ate the forbidden fruit.

Act

Go for a walk. Look for two twigs that you could twine together to make a cross. Place the cross on your front door or in a window to remind you of the good work of Joseph's Son.



MARY AND ELIZABETH

24th December

Luke 1:39-45

Pray

God, thank You for the gift of friends and family, for people who will rejoice with us when we are happy and mourn with us when we are sad. Amen.

Reflect

Why did Mary go to visit Elizabeth? When you have good news, with whom do you share it? Why?

Act

Think of someone who has rejoiced with you recently over good news in your life. Write that person a note thanking them for their friendship and presence in that situation



THE BIRTH OF JESUS

25th December

Luke 2:1-7

Pray

Jesus, thank You for the gift of yourself to us. Thank you for coming to live among us as one of us. Amen.

Reflect

This passage doesn't give us any details about how Mary and Joseph feel, either about having to travel so far in the last months of Mary's pregnancy or about there being no room in the inn. Why do you think Luke overlooks these difficulties? What, then, is the focus of this story?

Act

Read an illustrated version of the Christmas story together. Spend time looking at the pictures and pondering the gift of Jesus.