

A Jesse Tree

family devotional



by Chris Moore

Help Getting Started

What is a Jesse Tree? A way for families to anticipate Christmas together by sharing a little piece of God's story all month -- from creation, to the fall, to Abraham and all his descents, to the prophets and their words of hope, straight through to Christ's birth. And a special ornament to hang on the Jesse Tree accompanies each piece of the story.

The Ornaments: Jacque Larsen at The Lilypad created the ornaments included. They create beautiful imagery that will help the story stick with your kids! Please honor the artist and do not copy or distribute her art in anyway. If you would like to purchase her art for your own project, please visit her at www.the-lilypad.com.

The Tree: Hang your ornaments from a small Christmas tree, sticks in a vase, twine and clothespins across a fireplace, a window, or a mirror. There is really no wrong way to create your tree.

This Devotional: This devotional was written to share with my young children. The short scriptures, thoughts, and simple language are meant to meet them where they are. The family connect questions are there to help your family talk and connect with each other each day!

Help with younger Kids:

- Let them hang the ornament each day.
- Have them color their extra ornaments to hang on the tree with the others. (Coloring sheet at the back of the packet.)
- Use a picture Bible when sharing the story.
- Help them with the Family Connect question by sharing your answer first and then guide them with theirs.
- Retell the stories at bedtime or read them from your picture bible, again.

Help with older Kids:

- Allow them to write a schedule for who will read and hang ornaments each day.
- Have them read the devotional aloud and lead the family connect question.
- Allow them to design their own ornaments to hang on the tree with the others.
- Read the extra passages with them.

Day 1: God Creates Peace and Harmony



Scripture: Genesis 1:26 (MSG)

*God spoke: "Let us make human beings in our image, make them reflecting our nature
So they can be responsible for the fish in the sea,
the birds in the air, the cattle,
And, yes, Earth itself,
and every animal that moves on the face of Earth."*

Thoughts: The dove reminds us of the peace and goodness God first created in the world. God looked at all of His creation, the earth, sun, moon, stars, oceans, animals, birds, fish, bugs, trees, plants, and people and thought they were very good. And he made men and women to be just like Himself, loving, caring, and full of life. For the whole story read Genesis 1-2:3.

Family Connect: What is your favorite thing God created? Why?

Day 2: Separated from God



Scripture: Genesis 2:15-17, 3:6 (MSG)

God took the Man and set him down in the Garden of Eden to work the ground and keep it in order. God commanded the Man, "You can eat from any tree in the garden, except from the Tree-of-Knowledge-of-Good-and-Evil. Don't eat from it. The moment you eat from that tree, you're dead." When the Woman saw that the tree looked like good eating and realized what she would get out of it—she'd know everything!—she took and ate the fruit and then gave some to her husband, and he ate.

Thoughts: The apple reminds us of that first time someone disobeyed God. Adam and Eve were sent away from the garden where they had walked and talked with God. Since then, we have all been separated from God, too. And we all disobey. When Jesus comes, he is called the New Adam because he begins a new creation where we can be forgiven for disobeying and be with God again. For the whole story read Genesis 2:4–3:24.

Family Connect: Adam and Eve were separated from God. How do you think it feels to be separated from your family for a long time? Would you be excited to see them again?

Day 3: The Flood

Scripture: Genesis 6:5-8 (MSG)

God saw that human evil was out of control. People thought evil, imagined evil—evil, evil, evil from morning to night. God was sorry that he had made the human race in the first place; it broke his heart. God said, “I’ll get rid of my ruined creation, make a clean sweep: people, animals, snakes and bugs, birds—the works. I’m sorry I made them.” But Noah was different. God liked what he saw in Noah.

Thoughts: The rainbow reminds us that although God once flooded the whole earth to wipe away all the wicked people, he also saw the goodness in Noah’s heart and saved him. God sent the rainbow to remind us he would never flood the earth again. And did you know, Jesus is like a flood in our heart? His love that wipes away all our wickedness so we can be clean again. We are very blessed! For the whole story of the flood, read Genesis 6:5-22, 7:17-8:12, 8:20-9:17.

Family Connect: When Jesus floods our hearts, it feels just as good as a real bath. What do you love about taking a bath or being clean? Playing in the water? Smelling good?

Day 4: The Promise

Scripture: Genesis 15:5-6 (MSG)

Then he took [Abraham] outside and said, “Look at the sky. Count the stars. Can you do it? Count your descendants! You’re going to have a big family, Abram!” And he believed! Believed God! God declared him “Set-Right-with-God.”

Thoughts: The stars remind us of God’s promise to Abraham to give him a huge family that would be as big as the sky with all its stars. Abraham’s family would be God’s special family, and God would bless everyone on earth through them. And when Jesus came his job was to bring us all into that special family. God adopted us! We’re his sons and daughter, now too. For the whole story read Genesis 12:1-7, 15:1-6.

Family Connect: If you could adopt someone into your family, who would you adopt?

Day 5: Sacrificing Isaac



Scripture: Genesis 22:9-13 (MSG)

Abraham built an altar. He laid out the wood. Then he tied up Isaac and laid him on the wood. Abraham reached out and took the knife to kill his son. Just then an angel of God called to him out of Heaven, "Abraham! Abraham!" "Yes, I'm listening." "Don't lay a hand on that boy! Don't touch him! Now I know how fearlessly you fear God; you didn't hesitate to place your son, your dear son, on the altar for me." Abraham looked up. He saw a ram caught by its horns in the thicket. Abraham took the ram and sacrificed it as a burnt offering instead of his son.

Thoughts: God has promised Abraham a big family, and He gives him a wonderful son named Isaac to start that family. Abraham must have been excited to spend time with his son and watch him grow, but then God asks him to sacrifice Isaac on an altar. God was testing Abraham's faith. Would Abraham obey God and sacrifice his only son? Yes, he would because he trusted God so much. God rewarded Abraham's faith with a ram, our ornament today, to sacrifice in place of Isaac. And Isaac went on to be a grandfather of many children in God's special family. For the whole story read Genesis 22:1-19

Family Connect: Wow! Abraham sure was brave and Isaac too. What would you have done if you were Abraham or Isaac?

Day 6: Jacob Receives the Promise



Scripture: Genesis 28:10-15 (MSG)

Jacob came to a certain place and camped for the night since the sun had set. He took one of the stones there, set it under his head and lay down to sleep. And he dreamed: A ladder, our ornament for today, reached all the way to the sky; angels of God were going up and going down on it. Then God was right before him, saying, "I am God, the God of Abraham your father and the God of Isaac. I'm giving the ground on which you are sleeping to you and to your descendants. Your descendants will be as the dust of the Earth; they'll stretch from west to east and from north to south. All the families of the Earth will bless themselves in you and your descendants. Yes. I'll stay with you, I'll protect you wherever you go, and I'll bring you back to this very ground. I'll stick with you until I've done everything I promised you."

Thoughts: At the ladder to Heaven God let Jacob, Abraham's grandson, know that the promise he gave Abraham for a special family was for Jacob too. Jacob would go on to have twelve sons! Twelve! And these twelve sons would be the fathers of the twelve tribes of Israel.

And from one of those tribes, Jesus would be born! And He WOULD bless the whole world! God's promise to Jacob was very special indeed! For the whole story read Genesis 27:41-28:22.

Family Connect: Jacob was special like his grandfather Abraham. They both talked with God. Do you have anything in common with your grandparents? Maybe you both love to hike, or read, or laugh and be silly?

Day 7: God's Plan for Joseph



Scripture: Genesis 37: 3-8 (MSG)

Jacob loved Joseph more than any of his other eleven sons because he was the child of his old age. And he made him an beautiful coat. When his brothers realized that their father loved Joseph more than them, they grew to hate him—they wouldn't even speak to him. Joseph had a dream. When he told it to his brothers, they hated him even more. He said, "Listen to this dream I had. We were all out in the field gathering bundles of wheat. All of a sudden my bundle stood straight up and your bundles circled around it and bowed down to mine." His brothers said, "So! You're going to rule us? You're going to boss us around?" And they hated him more than ever because of his dreams and the way he talked.

Thoughts: God had special plans for one of Jacob's twelve sons, Joseph. There would be a famine and everyone would run out of food. But God had made Joseph wise, and Joseph would save everyone from starving. Not knowing this, his jealous brothers decided to get rid of Joseph and his special coat, our ornament for today. Even then, God was able to protect Joseph and use him. He made him a strong and wise leader in Egypt where he saved everyone from starving. For the whole story read Genesis 37:3-36, 50:15-2.

Family Connect: Have you ever gotten a gift you really loved like Joseph's special coat?

Day 8: Moses Meets God



Scripture: Exodus 3:2-10 (MSG)

The angel of God appeared to him in flames of fire blazing out of the middle of a bush. He looked. The bush was blazing away but it didn't burn up. Moses said, "What's going on here? I can't believe this! Amazing! Why doesn't the bush burn up?" God saw that he had stopped to look, and He called to him from out of the bush, "Moses! Moses!" He said, "Yes? I'm right here!"... God said, "I am the God of your father: The God of Abraham, the God of Isaac, the God of Jacob... I've taken a good, long look at the sad

lives of my people in Egypt. I've heard their cries to be let go from their slave masters; I know all about their pain. And now I have come down to help them, get them loose from the grip of Egypt, get them out of that country and bring them to a good land with wide-open spaces, a land lush with milk and honey,... It's time for you to go back: I'm sending you to Pharaoh to bring my people, the People of Israel, out of Egypt."

Thoughts: God used Joseph to save his special family from starving, but they would need saved again. Joseph brought them to Egypt where they had food and were safe, but as time went on, they become slaves in the land of Egypt and were very sad. The Egyptians wanted to kill Moses as a baby there, but God had a special plan for him and saved him. Later, God talked to Moses from a burning bush, our ornament for today, and shared his special plan to bring God's people back from Egypt. It wouldn't be easy for Moses, but God was with him, and Moses gets it done. For the whole story read Exodus 2-4:20.

Family Connect: Did you know God called Moses his friend? Do you have friends you ask for help? Who are they?

Day 9: The Passover Lamb and Exodus



Scripture: Exodus 12:21-27 (MSG)

Moses assembled all the elders of Israel. He said, "Select a lamb for your families to sacrifice as the Passover lamb. Take a bunch of hyssop and dip it in the bowl of blood and smear it on the doorway to your home. No one is to leave the house until morning. God will pass through to strike Egypt down. When he sees the blood on the doorway to your home, God will pass over the doorway; he won't let the destroyer enter your house to strike you down. "Keep this word. It's the law for you and your children, forever. When you enter the land, which God will give you as he promised, keep doing this. And when your children say to you, 'Why are we doing this?' tell them: 'It's the Passover-sacrifice to God who passed over the homes of the Israelites in Egypt when he hit Egypt with death but rescued us.'"

Thoughts: When Moses told the Pharaoh of Egypt to let God's special family go, the Pharaoh refused. God sent awful plagues to Egypt to change the Pharaoh's mind, but he won't budge. God sent one final plague, a horrible plague that killed all the first-born kids in each Egyptian family. But God's special family was protected by a special sacrifice. God asked them all to kill one baby lamb, our ornament for today, to eat it, and put its blood on their doors. They called it the Passover lamb, our ornament for today, because it caused God's plague to pass over them without hurting anyone in their house. And when all the Egyptians woke up and realized their first-born kids had died, they asked God's family to leave Egypt

quickly and even gave them gold and silver for their trip home. For the whole story read Exodus 12-14.

Family Connect: Who is the first born in your family? Who is the first born in your dad's family? Your moms? Your best friend's family?

Day 10: God's Way



Scripture: Exodus 19:3-6 (MSG)

As Moses went up to meet God, God called down to him from the mountain: "Speak to the House of Jacob, tell the People of Israel: 'You have seen what I did to Egypt and how I carried you on eagles' wings and brought you to me. If you will listen obediently to what I say and keep my covenant, out of all peoples you'll be my special treasure. The whole Earth is mine to choose from, but you're special: a kingdom of priests, a holy nation.' This is what I want you to tell the People of Israel."

Thoughts: God made a promise to the people of Israel, his special family, if they obeyed his ways, they would be his treasure. He gave rules for Godly living to Moses on the top of a mountain. The people saw lightening and smoke, and heard thunder and trumpets coming from that mountain. That was all God talking to Moses! Moses came back with God's rules on stone tablets, our ornaments for today. For the whole story read Exodus 19-20.

Family Connect: God gave the people rules to help them be holy and good. What rules help you be holy and good? Speaking nicely to people? No hitting? No lying?

Day 11: Joshua and Jericho



Scripture: Joshua 1:1-6 (MSG)

God spoke to Joshua, Moses' helper: "Moses my servant is dead. Get going. Cross this Jordan River, you and all the people. Cross to the country I'm giving to the People of Israel. It's all yours. All your life, no one will be able to hold out against you. In the same way I was with Moses, I'll be with you. I won't give up on you; I won't leave you. Strength! Courage! You are going to lead this people to inherit the land that I promised to give their ancestors. Give it everything you have, heart and soul."

Thoughts: After Moses died, God asks Moses' helper, Joshua, to lead the people into the land he had promised them. But the promise land was filled with lots of other wicked people. And Joshua would have to lead God's people in battle against them. When they came to the city of Jericho, God gave Joshua a special battle plan, but it didn't include swords or fighting. God wanted seven priests and the soldiers to walk around the city blowing ram's trumpets, our ornament for today. After seven days of marching and blowing their trumpets, they would stop and shout! God promised to bring the walls of Jericho down if they did. And God did just that! Joshua and God's people defeated Jericho that day. For the whole story read Joshua 1:1-11, 6:1-20.

Family Connect: God brought his special family to their new home, the Promise Land, where they would be very happy. If you could live anywhere and be happy, where would you live?

Day 12: Gideon's Little Army



Scripture: Judges 7:19-22 (MSG)

All three companies blew the trumpets and broke the jars. They held the torches in their left hands and the trumpets in their right hands, ready to blow, and shouted, "A sword for God and for Gideon!" They were stationed all around the camp, each man at his post. The whole Midianite army in the camp jumped to their feet. They yelled and fled.

Thoughts: God's people were at home in the Promise Land, but they forgot about God and His holy ways. They even started believing in other gods and became very wicked. God was angry with them and handed them over to the Midianites who were very cruel and wicked too. After a while, God heard His people crying out in pain and decided to save them from the Midianites. He called Gideon to help, and just like Joshua, he gave Gideon a battle plan that didn't include swords or fighting. In the dark, Gideon and his small army of 300 men quietly surrounded the huge Midianite army, and all at once they blew their ram's horns and smashed the clay pots, our ornament for today, so their torches could be seen. The Midianite army was so surprised and scared by all of this, they jumped up and ran away. Once again, God had saved his people! For the whole story read Judges 2:6-23, 6:-8:28.

Family Connect: Gideon helped the people remember who God was and how mighty He was. What things help you remember God? Church? Your story bible? Your mom and dad?

Day 13: Ruth, the Outsider



Scripture: Ruth 1:15-18 (MSG)

Ruth said to her mother-in-law Naomi, "Don't force me to leave you; don't make me go home. Where you go, I go; and where you live, I'll live. Your people are my people, your God is my god; where you die, I'll die, and that's where I'll be buried, so help me God—not even death itself is going to come between us!" When Naomi saw that Ruth had her heart set on going with her, she gave in. And so the two of them traveled on together to Bethlehem.

Thoughts: Ruth's story reminds us that God's special family was never meant to be just Abraham's children. God wanted to include outsiders like Ruth and us in his story, too. One day, while Ruth was gathering barley in her sack, our ornament for today, a man named Boaz noticed her. Now Boaz was part of God's special family, and like God, he was kind to Ruth, even though she was an outsider. Boaz and Ruth would go on to be married and become the great grandparents of King David! And from King David's family would come Jesus! Ruth was given a very special place in our story indeed! For the whole story read Ruth 1-2, 4:13-22.

Family Connect: If you could choose an outsider to be a part of your family, who would you choose?

Day 14: King David, the Shepherd



Scripture: 1 Samuel 16:10-13 (MSG)

Jesse presented his seven sons to Samuel. Samuel was blunt with Jesse, "God hasn't chosen any of these." Then he asked Jesse, "Is this it? Are there no more sons?" "Well, yes, there's the littlest one. But he's out tending the sheep." Samuel ordered Jesse, "Go get him. We're not moving from this spot until he's here." Jesse sent for him. He was brought in, the very picture of health—bright-eyed, good-looking. God said, "Up on your feet! Anoint him! This is the one." Samuel took his flask of oil and anointed him, with his brothers standing around watching. The Spirit of God entered David like a rush of wind, God was with him for the rest of his life.

Thoughts: David was the smallest of his family, and just a shepherd boy in charge of the family sheep. But God didn't see him as small and unimportant. He saw David's heart, and knew what a great king he could be. David would be like a shepherd to God's people,

guiding their hearts towards God with his shepherd's crook, our ornament for today. While David was King, things would be very good for God's special family. And from David's family would come the greatest shepherd of our hearts, Jesus. For the whole story read 1 Samuel 16-17, 2 Samuel 5:1-5, 7:1-17.

Family Connect: King David is called the runt of his family, or the smallest, but he was really special. Talk about who is the smallest in your family. Your dad's family? Your mom's? And what makes these people special, too!

Day 15: Elijah and Fire from Heaven



Scripture: 1 Kings 18:36-39 (MSG)

When it was time for the sacrifice to be offered, Elijah the prophet came up and prayed, "... O answer me and reveal to this people that you are God, the true God, and that you are giving these people another chance at being sorry for doing wrong." Immediately the fire of God fell and burned up the offering, the wood, the stones, the dirt, and even the water in the trench. All the people saw it happen and fell on their faces in awed worship, exclaiming, "God is the true God! God is the true God!"

Thoughts: Not all the kings that led God's people were great like David. Some of them were very wicked like King Ahab who worshipped the god Baal. Many of God's people followed King Ahab and worshipped Baal too. So God called the prophet Elijah to bring them back. He challenged the priests of Baal to a contest! We'll put an offering on this alter, our ornament for today, and see whose god can set it on fire. The priests of Baal called and called on their god, but nothing happened. When it was Elijah's turn, he dumped water over everything, to make it harder! He really wanted to make sure he got the people's attention and they believed! He prayed and immediately God sent down flames from heaven that burned everything up! And boy did that get the people's attention. They turned away from being wicked and followed God again! For the whole story read 1 Kings 17:1-16, 18:17-46.

Family Connect: Elijah got the people's attention in a big way, but God uses small ways to get our attention too. What small things does God use to get your attention? The beautiful flowers or birds he made? A bible story your mom shares? Hugs from your grandma?

Day 16: Isaiah, Doom and Hope



Scripture: Isaiah 9:2-7 (MSG)

*The people who walked in darkness
have seen a great light.
For those who lived in a land of deep shadows—
light! sunbursts of light!
You repopulated the nation,
you expanded its joy.
Oh, they're so glad in your presence!
Festival joy!
The joy of a great celebration,
sharing rich gifts and warm greetings...
For a child has been born—for us!
the gift of a son—for us!
He'll take over
the running of the world.
....and there'll be no limits to the wholeness he brings.*

Thoughts: After Elijah, some of God's people become very religious, but none of the things they did actually honored God. They gathered together and prayed, but were cruel to the poor. They made sacrifices to God, but continued to be wicked. They made things very hard for the others with their cruelty and selfishness. So God called Isaiah to share messages of doom and hope with the people. Isaiah felt guilty and unworthy of God's message, though. So an angel flew to him and placed a hot coal on his lips, our ornament for today, forgiving his wickedness. Isaiah then guided the people away from wickedness, warning them of the doom God would bring if they didn't stop. And he gave them hope for the future, sharing God's plan to save them all from darkness. God would send a light! A baby! A king! Who would rule the world with fairness and peace. Isaiah was talking about Jesus! For the whole story read Isaiah 1:10-20, 6:1-13, 8:11-9:7.

Family Connect: Share a special candlelit dinner or play with lights in a dark room and talk about ways we can bring a little light into someone else's life. Helping someone else with a task? Sharing a kind word? Visiting someone who is lonely? Sharing a treat?

Day 17: Jeremiah Cries Out



Scripture: Jeremiah 7:13-16 (MSG)

“So now, because of the way you have lived and failed to listen, even though time and again I took you aside and talked seriously with you, and because you refused to change when I called you to repent,... I’m going to get rid of you, the same as I got rid of those old relatives of yours in that kingdom to the north.’ “And you, Jeremiah, don’t waste your time praying for this people. Don’t offer to make petitions or intercessions. Don’t bother me with them. I’m not listening.”

Thoughts: Isaiah warned God’s people that bad things were coming if they didn’t change their ways and return to God, but they just wouldn’t listen. So God sent Jeremiah, his last try, to call out for change one more time before he brought bad things upon His people. Jeremiah loved the people, and so he cried out to them, begging them to clean themselves up and return to God’s ways. But they still wouldn’t. They broke Jeremiah’s heart. Jeremiah said he wished his head was a well full of water, and his eyes fountains of tears, our ornament for today, so he could cry night and day for God’s people. And God finally destroyed them. Babylonian soldiers came and destroyed their city. The soldiers made God’s people leave the city and come as slaves to Babylon to serve their King. But God was still with them, and it’s there in Babylon that men like Daniel, would find God and return to His ways. For the whole story read Jeremiah 1:4-10, 2:4-13, 7:1-15, 8:22-9:11.

Family Connect: God’s people were sent to a place far away from home. What places do you know that are far away? And what would it be like to live there? Would the food be different? Would your house look different? Your clothes?

Day 18: Habakkuk Waits



Scripture: Habakkuk 1:12-13, 2:1 (MSG)

*God, you’re forever, aren’t you?
Holy God, we aren’t going to die, are we?
God, you chose Babylonians for your judgment work?
Rock-Solid God, you gave them the job of changing us?
But you can’t be serious!
You can’t approve of their evil!
So why don’t you do something about this?*

*Why are you silent now?
This outrage! Evil men swallow up the good
and you stand around and watch!...
What's God going to say to my questions? I'm braced for the worst.
I'll climb to the lookout tower and scan the horizon.
I'll wait to see what God says,
how he'll answer my complaint.*

Thoughts: Habakkuk was one of the men who listen and turned back to God's ways when Jeremiah cried out warnings. But now poor Habakkuk was angry and confused because God allowed the Babylonians to hurt the faithful in God's family along with the wicked. He voiced his complaints to God and then waited for God's answer in his watchtower, our ornament for today. God shared a message with Habakkuk that gave him hope and joy. God would not leave the wickedness of the Babylonians unpunished. He would see to it that their greed and cruelty destroyed them. For the whole story read Habakkuk 1:12-1; 3:16-19.

Family Connect: Habakkuk was brave and shared his honest thoughts with God about how wrong things were. Then he waited for an answer. What do you see at home, school, work, or in the world that seems wrong? Kids without jackets at school? A friend's dad who died? Someone stealing? Share them with God as a family, and wait for his answer.

Day 19: Queen Esther



Scripture: Esther 7:1-6 (MSG)

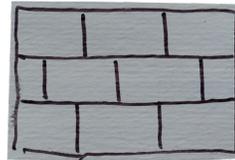
So the king and Haman went to dinner with Queen Esther. The king again asked, "Queen Esther, what would you like? Half of my kingdom! Just ask and it's yours." Queen Esther answered, "If I have found favor in your eyes, O King, and if it please the king, give me my life, and give my people their lives. "We've been sold, I and my people, to be destroyed—sold to be massacred, eliminated. If we had just been sold off into slavery, I wouldn't even have brought it up; our troubles wouldn't have been worth bothering the king over." King Xerxes exploded, "Who? Where is he? This is monstrous!" "An enemy. An adversary. This evil Haman," said Esther. Haman was terror-stricken before the king and queen.

Thoughts: After God's people were sent away to Babylon and after Babylon was destroyed by Persia, many of God's people were still scattered around living among strangers. But the story of Esther reminds us that God was still faithful to them even though they were far away. Esther and God's people were not liked among the strangers they lived with, and one man

wanted to kill all of them. But the King of Persia loved Esther, and put the royal crown on her head, our ornament for today, making her a powerful queen. God was able to use Esther's power to save all of His people from dying. They would start a new holiday, that year, remembering the day God saved them all through Queen Esther! For the whole story read Esther 2, 3:8-11, 5:1-8, 7.

Family Connect: The first time Esther saw the King she could have worn as much jewelry from the palace as she liked, but she was beautiful inside and out, and didn't need the jewelry to impress the King. Share something that makes each person in your family beautiful from the inside.

Day 20: Nehemiah Returns



Scripture: Nehemiah 1:8-9 (MSG)

"We've treated you like dirt: We haven't done what you told us, haven't followed your ways, and haven't respected the decisions you gave to Moses your servant. All the same, remember the warning you posted to your servant Moses: 'If you betray me, I'll scatter you to the four winds, but if you come back to me and do what I tell you, I'll gather up all these scattered peoples from wherever they ended up and put them back in the place I chose to mark with my Name.'

Thoughts: Just like Esther, Nehemiah lived among strangers in a far away place. He became very sad when he heard how awful things had become back in God's City. The people who were left there had very little to eat and very little protection. So, he began praying that God would provide a way home for the faithful. He asked the King he served if he could return home and rebuild the temple, the gates, and the wall, our ornament for today. The King agreed, and Nehemiah returned to God's City. It wasn't easy rebuilding the wall, and God's people still struggled with following His ways. But as Nehemiah built the wall he was able to strengthen God's people and their dedication to God. For the whole story read Nehemiah 1-2:8, 6:15-16, 13:10-22.

Family Connect: Nehemiah wanted to build a good home for God's people to return to. What makes your home a good home?

Day 21: Mary's Hope



Scripture: Luke 1:30-33 (MSG)

The angel assured her, "Mary, you have nothing to fear. God has a surprise for you: You will become pregnant and give birth to a son and call his name Jesus.

*He will be great,
be called 'Son of the Highest.'
The Lord God will give him
the throne of his father David;
He will rule Jacob's house forever—
no end, ever, to his kingdom."*

Thoughts: After Nehemiah rebuilt the wall around God's City, God's people waited for the promised king from David's family to come. They waited for God to make them a great nation under this king. They were looking for a strong warrior, or an impressive king. But no one came, and 400 years past. The people began to forget what God had promised as they waited, feeling forgotten by God. But God meant to do all that he promised. He was just waiting for the right time. And one day, when everything was ready, God sent the angel Gabriel to Mary, the pure and beautiful lily, our ornament for today. God had chosen Mary because she was beautiful inside and out, and loved God. She would carry and care for God's own Son. Things were beginning to change! God was beginning to set all things right in the world through his very own son on earth with us! Emmanuel! For the whole story read Luke 1:26-38.

Family Connect: Mary must have enjoyed her time with Jesus. I wonder what they talked about and did together. What is something you would love to talk to God about in person, or something you would love to do with him in person?

Day 22: Zachariah's Son



Scripture: Luke 1:76-79 (MSG)

Then Zachariah was filled with the Holy Spirit and prophesied...

*And you, my child, "Prophet of the Highest,"
will go ahead of the Master to prepare his ways,
Present the offer of salvation to his people,*

*the forgiveness of their sins.
Through the heartfelt favor of our God,
God's Sunrise will break in upon us,
Shining on those in the darkness,
those sitting in the shadow of death,
Then showing us the way, one foot at a time,
down the path of peace.*

Thoughts: Mary wasn't the only person the angel Gabriel visited. He also visited Zachariah, and shared how he and his wife Elizabeth would give birth to a baby boy in their old age and name him John. Not only that, but he shared how great John would be among God's people. Zachariah told Gabriel he couldn't believe any of this. So Gabriel took away his voice, and Zachariah was forced to use a tablet and pen, our ornament for today, to talk. But sure enough, Zachariah and Elizabeth had a son and named him John! Zachariah regained his voice and praised God for keeping his promises. His son John spread the word that a King was finally coming! He woke the people up after their long wait! Got them excited and guided their hearts back to God so they'd be ready! For the whole story read Luke 1:8-26, 26-38.

Family Connect: It must have been hard for Zachariah when Gabriel took away his voice. Everyone needs to pick out one bible character from the Jesse Tree, but shhhh, don't tell. Without talking like Zachariah, get the rest of the family to guess your character!

Day 23: Joseph the Carpenter



Scripture: Matthew 1:20-24 (MSG)

God's angel spoke in the dream: "Joseph, son of David, don't hesitate to get married. Mary is pregnant with God's child. She will bring a son to birth, and when she does, you, Joseph, will name him Jesus—'God saves'—because he will save his people from their sins." ... Then Joseph woke up. He did exactly what God's angel commanded in the dream.

Thoughts: King David's family no longer had palaces or power, but God still had a very special plan for them. Joseph, part of King David's family, was chosen by God to be Jesus' earthly father. He was a carpenter who worked wood with his tools, our ornaments for today. But there was so much more to him. When the angel asked Joseph to take Mary as his wife and to help her raise and care for her son, God's son, he agrees straight away. Trusting that God knows best and ready to serve Him. Joseph, one of David's sons, would help care for and guide God's Son. For the whole story read Matthew 1:19-25.

Family Connect: Joseph probably had Jesus working with wood along side him as a young boy. What do you love to help your dad or mom with?

Day 24: He's Almost Here!



Scripture: Luke 2:8-12 (MSG)

There were shepherders camping in the neighborhood. They had set night watches over their sheep. Suddenly, God's angel stood among them and God's glory blazed around them. They were terrified. The angel said, "Don't be afraid. I'm here to announce a great and joyful event that is meant for everybody, worldwide: A Savior has just been born in David's town, Bethlehem. This is what you're to look for: a baby wrapped in a blanket and lying in a manger."

Thoughts: The shepherds ran off to see if what the angel said was true. And there was Jesus wrapped in swaddling clothes, lying in a manger, our ornament for today, just like the angel had said. The long awaited King had been born! Just as God promised, He would grow up to be a great King. He would teach us the way to live well, and would guide our hearts back to God. And in the end, He would give up his life as a sacrifice for us. The last sacrifice to set us right with God forever. He would be the one to make us all sons and daughters of God. Our Saviour is born! For the whole story, read Luke 2:1-20.

Family Connect: What is one of your favorite Christmas memories? or What do you really love doing at Christmas?

Day 25: Worshipping the Baby King!



Scripture: Matthew 2:1-2, 9-11 (MSG)

A band of scholars arrived in Jerusalem from the East. They asked around, "Where can we find and pay homage to the newborn King of the Jews? We observed a star in the eastern sky that signaled his birth. We're on pilgrimage to worship him."... Then the star appeared again, the same star they had seen in the eastern skies. It led them on until it hovered over the place of the child. They could hardly contain themselves: They were in the right place! They had arrived at the right time! They entered the house and saw the child in the arms of Mary, his mother. Overcome, they kneeled and worshiped him. Then they opened their luggage and presented gifts: gold, frankincense, myrrh.

Thoughts: God had set a star in the sky, our ornament for today, celebrating the birth of his Son, Jesus. God's salvation plan was for the whole world, so it's no surprise he used a star high up in the sky for all to see. When the wise men showed up from far away looking for Jesus, they were ready to worship Him! Ready to shower Him with gifts perfect for a King and a Saviour. This new baby, this long awaited King was a gift to the whole world. And these wise men weren't gonna miss out on welcoming him! For the whole story read Matthew 2:1-12.

Family Connect: Merry Christmas! Wishing you all a day filled with peace and joy as you celebrate the great hope that is ours today.

While our Jessi Tree Adventure ends here, I hope you will continue joyfully into Christmastide, the twelve days of Christmas after Christ's birth and the Epiphany of the Wise Men. See our Jacob's Well Advent Family Resource for great ways to make the most of this often passed over celebration!