



# ALL SAINTS WELLINGTON

WITH ST CATHERINE'S EYTON



# Jesse Tree 2020

## Introduction

A Jesse tree is a way of exploring the long story of God that led up to Jesus' birth. We read part of the story each day in December, and decorate a tree or branch with pictures from those stories.

## Instructions

Decorate the picture for the day, cut it out (or make your own decoration) and hang it on your Jesse Tree

Read the Bible Story and Reflection together.

Say a prayer.

Take a picture of your decoration on the tree and post it to your social media.



## Credits

Text: The Rev'd David Sims and the Rev'd Tim Carter  
Images: <https://www.faithward.org/jesse-tree/>

## December 1st: The Jesse Tree



Bible Reading: Isaiah 11:1-2

Bible Story:

King David was one of Israel's most famous and powerful kings. His children and grandchildren were meant to be the Kings of Israel forever. But, some of them weren't very good Kings. Some of them were very bad Kings. So, God had brought their rule to an end, like a tree that is cut down.

Many years after David, a messenger from God, Isaiah, brought a message. Isaiah said that just like new branches sprout from the stump of a tree, so a new King will come from David's descendants. This new King will be given wisdom and knowledge by God's Spirit, so that he can rule the people well, doing what God wants him to do.

Reflection:

Have you ever been for a walk in the woods, and come across a tree stump? Maybe you've counted the lines, or even climbed up onto it! Compared to the other trees, they're quite small aren't they?

Years ago, a King called David had a son called Solomon, and although he started off to be quite wise, unfortunately he made some bad choices- and God's kingdom got smaller, and was broken up- a bit like a tree stump.

But there's good news! Here, a prophet called Isaiah is saying that one day a big tree will grow from it again- and that tree would be Jesus, growing God's people from a small stump into a big tree again!

So next time you're in the woods and playing on a stump- remember how God loved us so much that he came as Jesus turn it into a big tree!

Prayer:

Jesus, thank you that you can bring amazing things out of stuff that seems small or broken. Help us to bring hope to people who feel a bit like a small stump, and would you bring new life in the name of Jesus. Amen.

## December 2nd: Creation of Humans



Bible Reading: Genesis 1:25-31

Bible Story:

God loves making things. God made the sky with the sun and the moon, the clouds and stars. God made the earth with the trees and the flowers. God made the seas and rivers with their waterfalls. God made birds, fish and animals to go in them. And then God made people to look after the earth and all the living things that are on it. God looked at everything God had made, and was very pleased, delighted. God loves making things.

Reflection:

Do you like making things? Maybe you like baking cupcakes, building towers, or playing with playdough?

God likes to create, too. And today we read that, at the beginning of time, God made the universe- the moon, stars, planets, animals- and even us! Wow. And when he made us all, he looked and was really pleased. He even said it was very good. And for God to say something is very good, it must be **very** good!

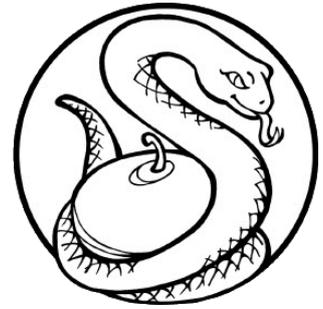
And when God made creation, he made us to be in a relationship with him. To be close with him, to talk with him, to walk with him, and to enjoy his creation.

Next time you're making something- maybe some work at school, or something crafty at home- remember that God made you. And he loves you.

Prayer:

God, thank you for your creation. Thank you for your wisdom and creativity - and that you made me. Amen.

## December 3rd: The Fall



Bible Reading: Genesis 3:8-13

Bible Story:

Adam and Eve were in the garden that God created. God had told them that they could eat anything, apart from the fruit of one tree in the middle of the garden. They had done what God had told them not to do, and eaten the fruit. They felt guilty and were hiding from God. God came to find them and they blamed each other and the snake for tricking them. Because they did what God had told them not to do, they had to leave the beautiful garden and their friendship with God was spoiled.

Reflection:

Have you ever been tricked by someone? Or maybe there was a time when you weren't entirely truthful, and it made someone else sad?

In this reading, we hear of Adam and Eve not doing what God wanted them to do. He asked them not to eat of a certain fruit that was bad for them, but they decided to do the opposite. They had a choice- but they chose to do the wrong thing. Have you ever made a choice that you knew, deep down, was wrong? I know I have!

The good news though is that God still loves us when we make the wrong choices- and that's why he was to come as Jesus!

Prayer:

God, I'm sorry for when I've made the wrong choices, and not listened to you. Thank you that you forgive our mistakes- help me to listen to you more, and follow your words. Amen.

## December 4th: Noah's Ark



Bible Reading: Genesis 9:8-13

Bible Story:

Noah and his family listened to God and did the right thing, when no one else did. God told Noah to make a big boat, an Ark, and rescue all the animals from a great flood. God kept Noah and his family safe in the boat when the rain came. After the waters had gone, and the animals and Noah's family had come out of the Ark, God put a rainbow in the sky. God promised that there would never be another flood that would destroy the earth.

Reflection:

Months ago, rainbows were all over people's windows as a thank you to our wonderful NHS during lockdown. But thousands of years ago, God used a rainbow as a symbol of something a bit different- to remind us that there would never again be a great flood to destroy the world and its sin.

Instead of the world going under water again and many living things dying, God the Son himself would die- taken under the ground, buried- but then come back to life. And so, whenever you see a rainbow, we can say thanks to God for his faithfulness and love.

Prayer:

God, we know we live in a world where some people do bad things. But thank you that you are patient- and that you came as a man to die, and come back to life, getting rid of all the bad things we've done. Amen.

## December 5th: The Promised Land



Bible Reading: Genesis 12:1-7

Bible Story:

Abraham lived in a country far away. One day he heard God tell him to leave that country with his family and go to a new country. God promised to give him a huge family, with many children and grandchildren. God said happiness and blessing would come to the whole world from this family. Abraham did what God called him to do and went with his wife Sarah to a new country, called Canaan.

Reflection:

Have you ever been on a really long walk? Maybe you've taken some food with you in a rucksack, put some good shoes on, and gone out for a few hours. Or what about a long car journey? Or even a holiday?

There's something exciting about travelling isn't there, and staying in other places- but it's always nice to get home. But today we read of Abraham, who left everything he knew to follow God, to a new land of new promises. How do you think he might have felt? Sad to leave everything he knew- but excited to be on a journey to a new place with God. And for us, when God asks us to do new things, or go to new places, we can go knowing that he will be with us.

And again, we hear of Jesus- who is the one from whom all nations will be blessed!

Prayer:

God, thank you that you are always with us, even when we find ourselves in new places and doing new things. Help us to trust you- and thank you for Jesus, through whom all the nations can be blessed. Amen.

## December 6th: God's Promise to Abraham



Bible Reading: Genesis 15:1-6

Bible Story:

Abraham had done what God had said, and gone to Canaan with his wife Sarah. But there was a problem. Abraham and Sarah were both very old, and they did not have any children. Abraham did not understand how God's promise that he would have a big family could come true. God took him outside and showed him the night sky, and asked him to try and count the stars. God promised him again that there would be more people in his family than stars in the sky. Abraham believed and trusted God.

Reflection:

Have you ever gone stargazing? On a clear black sky, there's nothing quite like laying on blanket and gazing up at the stars- and once you tune your eyes in to find them, there seems to be more and more.

Today, we learn that God tells Abraham not to be afraid- and promises that his family will be as many as the stars in the sky. Wow, that's a big family!

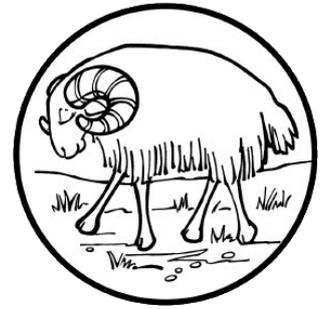
You see, those of us who follow Jesus are descendants of Abraham - who put his trust in the Lord.

Isn't it amazing that the God who made the stars, and knows each one, also knows and loves us. What is he calling you to trust in him about today?

Prayer:

God, thank you that you are always with us, even when we find ourselves in new places and doing new things. Help us to trust you- and thank you for Jesus, through whom all the nations can be blessed. Amen.

## December 7th: Abraham and Isaac



Bible Reading: Genesis 22:1-14

Bible Story:

God kept his promise to Abraham and he and Sarah had a son, Isaac. One day God tested Abraham by calling him and telling him to take Isaac and sacrifice him. Abraham took Isaac and was ready to do this when God called from heaven and told him to stop. In a bush nearby was a sheep, caught by its horns. Abraham sacrificed the sheep instead of his son. Abraham called the place that this happened, "The Lord Provides" to remind everyone who came afterwards that God gives us what we need.

Reflection:

This is a difficult story for us to understand. But, like lots of stories in the Old Testament, it gives a hint of the future story of Jesus. Just like Isaac being Abraham's son, Jesus was God's son. In the same way Isaac went up the hill to make a sacrifice to God, so Jesus went up the hill to the cross.

Isaac's dad trusted in God, even when things looked really bad. And, right at the last minute, God provided the lamb for the sacrifice. Have you ever been worried about something? We can trust our God of hope, to always give us what we need.

Prayer:

God, thank you that you provided the sacrifice on the cross for our sin. Help us to honour you in our lives. Amen.

## December 8th: Jacob's Dream



Bible Reading: Genesis 28:10-22

Bible Story:

Isaac had two sons, Jacob and Esau. They didn't get on very well, and one day they had a big fight because Jacob had done something wrong. Jacob ran away. One night, he was sleeping by the side of the road, and he had a dream. He dreamt that he saw a ladder reaching up to heaven with angels going up and down it. God came and spoke with him and repeated the promises God had made to Abraham, that this would be their land, that they would have a big family, and that through their family, the whole world would be blessed. Isaac called that place Bethel, which means "House of God" to remind everyone who came afterwards that God had visited that place.

Reflection:

Have you ever had a strange dream? I wonder what the weirdest dream is that you can remember?

Today, we read that Jacob has a dream about a ladder, and angels going up and down on it- and God speaks to him too, reminding him that he will always be with him and keep him safe.

God knew that Jacob might be a bit worried, but wanted to remind him that he would always be there for him. Isn't it good to know that, even when we sleep, God watches over us- and, like Jacob, he will always be with us. He keeps his promises!

And remember- next time you have a dream, be open for God speaking to you through it...

Prayer:

God, thank you that you will always be with us, and that you are faithful. If we're ever worried, or weary, help us to trust in your promises. Amen.

## December 9th: Joseph



Bible Reading: Genesis 37:12-36

Bible Story:

Isaac had many sons. One of the youngest was called Joseph. Joseph was Isaac's favourite and he was spoiled. Isaac gave him a special many coloured coat, and his brothers were jealous of him. One day Isaac sent Joseph to find out where his brothers were, but when he found them, they kidnapped him and sold him as a slave. They went back to Isaac and told him that a wild animal had eaten Joseph. Joseph was taken to Egypt where he had many adventures, and ended up running the country for the king. One day his brothers appeared, looking for food because there was a famine in their country. Joseph was able to help them, and was reunited with his father.

Reflection:

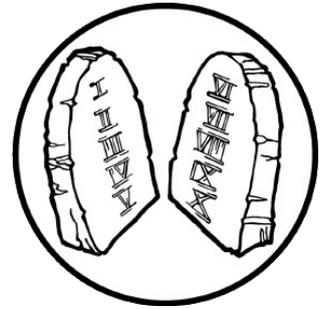
This classic story has been turned into a musical phenomenon, as well as many plays, books, and films. The story of some brothers getting rid of their annoying little brother by selling him into slavery in Egypt- where he eventually becomes Pharaoh's right hand man, used by God to predict a famine, and prepare enough food to keep the country fed and watered safely.

Eventually his brothers come looking for food, and they don't recognize Joseph. He gives them food, but more than that- he forgives them, saying that even though they had intended to harm him, God had used it for good.

Prayer:

God, thank you that you are not limited by our sin. When we make bad choices, you are still working for good. Help us to follow you more closely, to love people more deeply, and to see your kingdom come more powerfully. Amen.

## December 10th: The 10 Commandments



Bible Reading: Deuteronomy 5:6-22

Bible Story:

Some years after Joseph and his family had moved to Egypt, things had gone wrong for their family, and God's people had been made slaves. God sent Moses to rescue them and to take them back to the land that God had promised Abraham and Isaac. On the way God gave the people some rules so that they could live happily together. The ten most famous rules were called the Ten Commandments. They said, "Worship God only. Do not make things to worship. Do not misuse God's name. Keep one day a week to rest on. Respect your parents. Do not murder. Keep your promises to your husband or wife. Do not steal. Do not lie about people. Do not be jealous about what someone else has."

Reflection:

I wonder how good you are at sticking to rules? At school, home, and work- there are rules for grown ups and children alike! For example, if I get in my car- there's a certain speed I am allowed to drive, and I have to keep to the left hand side of the road. At school, there are rules about staying in your bubble, and washing your hands throughout the day.

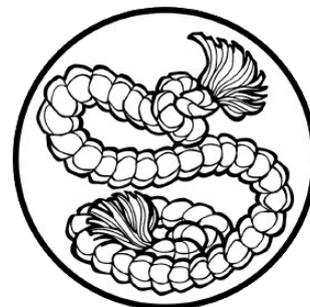
Rules might seem a bit of a drag- but they're there to keep us safe. And today, we read of God giving his people the 10 commandments- rules that were there to keep them safe, and to help them live their life as best as they could. Rules like- Only worship God. Take time to rest. Don't be jealous of what other people have.

Sometimes we might think that rules are there to stop us having any fun. But the strange thing with God's rules is that, actually, when we follow them- we find that our life is more amazing than it could ever be without them.

Prayer:

God, thank you for loving us enough that you want to keep us safe and help us live the best that we can. Help us to keep these commandments, that we might enjoy life, and life in all it's fullness. Amen.

## December 11th: Rahab



Bible Reading: Joshua 2:1-21

### Bible Story

When God's people arrived back at Canaan, they sent two men to spy out a city called Jericho. While they were there they met a woman called Rahab. Soldiers from the city were hunting for them, but she hid them and kept them safe. In return the men promised to keep her and her family safe when the city was taken over. As a sign of which house they were in, Rahab agreed to tie a piece of red rope to the window. She did this, and her and her family were kept safe. Rahab married a man called Salmon, and had a son called Boaz.

### Reflection:

What a story- of adventure, spies, exploration, and sneaky escapes. Sounds like something right out of a Hollywood blockbuster.

In this story, two spies from Israel are checking out a city- and it's full of danger. One lady who believes in God, and has heard of all he has done, keeps the spies safe and helps them escape- even though she knows the king of her city wants to find them. Her name was Rahab.

How do you think Rahab would have felt? Scared of the king, perhaps- but also scared of not doing the right thing for God and his two spies. Have you ever felt like that?

And of course, the good news of the story is that the spies manage to escape- and Rehab's family are kept safe too when the city is attacked.

### Prayer:

Lord, when we are torn between two things- help us to choose to do the right one. And thank you that, in the same way that both the spies and Rahab were rescued from danger, so you have brought us out of the darkness into your marvellous light. Amen.

## December 12th: Ruth and Boaz



Bible Reading: Ruth 2:1-18

Bible Story:

Naomi lived in a town called Bethlehem. There wasn't enough food there, so she and her husband went to live in a place called Moab. They had two sons, who married women in Moab called Orpah and Ruth. Sadly, Naomi's husband and sons died, so she decided to go back to Bethlehem. Ruth went with her. They didn't have enough to eat, so Ruth used to go and pick up grain in the fields. One day she went to the field of a man called Boaz (we met his mum yesterday). He saw her and was impressed by how well she looked after Naomi, how hard she worked, and how beautiful she was. He asked her to marry him, and she said yes. They were married, and had a son called Jesse.

Reflection:

Do you ever feel like an outsider? Like you don't fit in? Maybe at school when you're playing a game that everyone else is better at than you- or maybe when all your friends are talking about something which you don't really know much about. I sometimes feel like this when people talk about football.

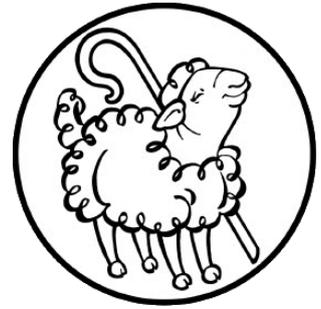
Ruth might have felt like that too, sometimes. She was not an Israelite- she came from a different tribe than all the other people of Israel. But after her first husband, an Israelite, died, she married a man called Boaz- who looked after her, and they were happy together. They had a son, and her son would one day be the Grandad of King David- this means that King David was Ruth's great grandson.

And one day, Jesus was to be born in Bethlehem- from the family line of David and his descendants. So Ruth, a woman from outside Israel, finds herself on Jesus family tree!

Prayer:

Thank you, Jesus, that all are welcome in your family. Help us to follow you like Ruth did, even when we might find it hard. Amen.

## December 13th: God chooses David



Bible Reading: 1 Samuel 16:1-15

Bible Story:

There was a messenger from God called Samuel. One day God told him to go to Bethlehem to choose a new King for God's people. He went there, to the family of Jesse (we met his mum yesterday). He asked Jesse to call his sons together, and they all came, all except the youngest who was away looking after the sheep. Samuel looked at them, one at a time. None of them was the person God had chosen to be king. He asked Jesse to send for his youngest son. When he arrived God told Samuel that he was the chosen king. That is how David found out that one day he would be king of God's people.

Reflection:

Imagine what you think a King should look like. You might say strong, courageous. Wise. Rich. Powerful. This is what Hollywood thinks doesn't it? If you've seen Thor, for example, we see the prince Thor thinking that, in order to be a strong King, he needs to wage war and conquer his enemies- to be stronger than anyone else, and bigger than anyone else.

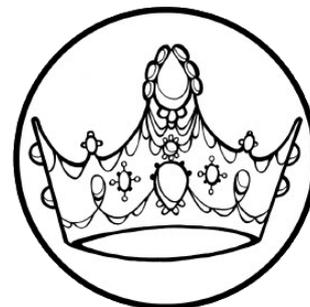
But in our reading today, we see that God chooses the smallest son of Jesse to be King of Israel. (Remember what we said on Day 1 about a shoot coming out of the tree? ) And David, although he was the youngest and looking after the sheep, was chosen to be king of Israel.

You see, people can look at what's on the outside- but God looks on the heart.

Prayer:

Thank you God that we don't have to be the biggest, or strongest, loudest or oldest to be chosen by you. In fact, we're all chosen! So help us to bring you glory every day. Amen.

## December 14th: Esther Saves her People



Bible Reading: Esther 4:6-17

Bible Story:

Many years later David's kingdom was overthrown because his children and grandchildren hadn't lived as God had asked them to. Some of God's people had been taken away to live in Persia. One of them was called Esther and she was married to the King. One of the important people who worked for the King, a man called Haman, didn't like the Jewish people. Haman made a plan to have all the Jewish people killed, and Esther heard about this from her uncle Mordecai. Even though she was his wife, Esther wasn't allowed to go and see the King unless he sent for her. She knew that it was important to see him, to tell him about Haman's wicked plan, so very bravely she went to see the King. He listened to her and stopped Haman and his plan. So God's people were rescued by Esther's bravery.

Reflection:

In today's story we see brave Queen Esther coming before the king without being asked first- something that you just didn't do at that time! It would be a bit like you just wandering in your headteacher's office at school without even knocking. But Esther is so sure of what she needs to do, that she goes for it. She asks the king to save all her people who are at risk of being killed and he does. He makes a law to keep them safe and so Esther saves all the Jews in the kingdom.

Have you ever had to be really brave about something that you felt God was asking you to do or say? Maybe you were a bit worried about it, but isn't it great that God is always with us!

Prayer:

God, thank you for Esther's bravery. Might we have that bravery, when you call us to speak out against injustice, on behalf of the vulnerable, or to say the words you call us to say. Amen.

## December 15th: Isaiah Foretells a Rescuer



Bible Reading: Isaiah 9:2-7

Bible Story:

One of God's messengers, Isaiah, wrote a beautiful poem looking forward to the time when God would send someone to rescue God's people from the mess that they were in. He wrote,

"The people walking in darkness have seen a great light.  
On those living in a land of shadows, a light has dawned.  
A child is born to us! A son is given to us!  
And he will be our ruler.  
He will be called "Wonderful Counsellor,"  
"Mighty God," "Eternal Father," "Prince of Peace."  
His royal power will increase;  
his kingdom will always be at peace.  
He will sit on David's throne,  
ruling with right and justice,  
from now until the end of time. "

Reflection:

Have you ever been in a power cut, when the electricity stops working? What's the first thing you do? If you're anything like me, it's hunting out a torch, or a candle with matches. I can't do anything until I can see what I'm doing.

In this reading, Isaiah is talking to a people who have walked in darkness for a long time- not physically, but in a spiritual way. They were lost, and couldn't see their way. It might even have been such a long time that they forget what it was like to know where they were going. But light is coming.

Jesus is the great light shining on them. He will be called wonderful, counsellor, mighty God. And he will bring bright light to dark places. Good news!

Prayer:

Thank you Jesus that you bring light to our darkness. We pray for those we know who still feel like they are in the dark- not knowing where to go in life, or what to do. May your light shine on them in Jesus' name. Amen.

## December 16th: Isaiah Foretells Jesus' Return



Bible Reading: Isaiah 11:6-9

Bible Story:

Isaiah wrote another poem looking forward to the time when God's chosen King would return to rule for ever. He described God's kingdom as a place that was so peaceful that wolves and sheep would live together safely. He said that lions and calves would eat together, being looked after by young children. Snakes will not hurt babies. Wherever God is King, there will be peace.

Reflection:

A year or so ago a clip went viral from a wildlife documentary of a lizard escaping from lots of snakes trying to gobble him up. I wonder if you saw it - as the lizard scuttled across the ground, different snakes tried to snatch him- but he managed to escape.

In this reading, we get an amazing idea of a wolf and sheep lying down together, alongside a cow and a bear. To help us think about how strange that is, you might want to imagine what it would be like if those snakes actually just snuggled up next to the lizard and fell asleep! It would be a reversal of everything we know to be 'normal' in nature.

One day Jesus will come back- and the whole world will have peace. There'll be no attacking each other, or conflict, or fear- but, just like animals at peace with each other, so we will have amazing, wonderful peace. Wow!

Prayer:

Thank you Jesus that one day you will come back again, and bring peace. Help us to look forward to that day- and to be people who speak of your peace, and walk in your peace, today. Amen.

## December 17th: Jonah



Bible Reading: Jonah 3:1-5

### Bible Story

Jonah was another of God's messengers. He didn't want to go where God sent him, to a city called Nineveh, so he ran away. A storm overtook the ship he was on, and he ended up in the sea, about to drown. God sent a large fish to rescue him by swallowing him up. Jonah was in the fish's belly for three days, before he was spat out onto the beach. He went to Nineveh with God's message, the people said sorry for the things they were doing wrong and were rescued from the danger they were in.

### Reflection:

God asked Jonah to go to Ninevah to tell the people there about Him. Jonah was too scared, and run away! He ran so far than he ended up on a boat, in a storm and then inside the belly of a fish!

The fish spat him out (yuck), on a beach which was near where God had asked him to go right back at the beginning. So Jonah went and told the people of Ninevah to turn to God. And they did!

Sometimes we might be scared of what God is asking us to do. We might feel that we're not good enough to do it, or clever enough. Or we might feel that whatever God is asking us to do is a silly thing, and that actually it's not a good idea. But in this story we learn that God's ways are always good, and we should listen when he asks us to do things.

### Prayer:

God, help us to hear your voice and to be brave, and do what it is you're asking us to do. Maybe inviting our friends to church, or praying for someone. Help us not to run away from you, but to stay close. Amen.

## December 18th: Daniel and the Lions



Bible Reading: Daniel 6:10-23

Bible Story:

Just like Esther, Daniel was one of God's people who lived far away from home. He had been taken away by invaders, but he was still loyal to God, and had become an important person in the government. Some of the other important people were jealous and tried to get him in trouble with the king. They said that people shouldn't pray to God, only to the king. Daniel kept praying to God, so they threw him into a lion's den. God sent an angel to stop the lions eating Daniel, and rescued him, because he trusted God.

Reflection:

Did you know that in some countries, you can get into lots of trouble for being a Christian. If you carry a Bible, or go to church, or talk about Jesus, you can end up in prison, and sometimes get really hurt too.

In our reading today, Daniel is in similar position. It's against the law to pray in his country, but he still does it, and he gets into lots of trouble- he's thrown into a den of lions!

But they don't eat him for dinner, instead, angels come and keep him safe. And the next morning, Daniel is found safe and sound.

Years later, Jesus was to come and he was to rescue everyone! He came that we might all be able to have a relationship with God at any time, whether or not the rules said we shouldn't pray.

Prayer:

Jesus, we pray for those Christians who are in prison and persecuted for their faith. Would you give them peace and courage. And would we never be too scared to pray, tell people about you, and wear our faith boldly. Amen.

## December 19th: Bethlehem



Bible Reading: Micah 5:1-5

Bible Story:

Micah was another of God's messengers. About seven hundred years before Jesus was born, he was looking forward to the time when God would send a new King to rescue God's people and rule over them in peace and justice. He foretold that the new King would be born in a little town, one of the smallest towns in the kingdom. The same town that had been home to Naomi, Ruth, Boaz, Jesse, and David. The town called Bethlehem.

Reflection:

Micah wrote of a ruler coming out of Bethlehem 700 years before Jesus was to be born. Isn't that amazing! Christians believe that the people who wrote the words of the Bible were inspired to do so by God, who is the author of Scripture- and he gave lots of prophecies like this about Jesus, God's chosen King.

Micah writes that Jesus will reunite people, rule with strength and majesty, and bring safety and peace. And we know that, when Jesus came as a baby, he did all that- and what's more, he still does it today! Through his Holy Spirit, poured out on all, we continue to see Jesus' majesty, greatness and peace.

Prayer:

Lord, thank you for your word- inspired by you, and speaking of events hundreds of years before they were to come to pass. We pray that we might have more of the gift of your Holy Spirit so that others might see the majesty and greatness of Jesus through us. Amen.

## December 20th: Elizabeth and Zechariah



Bible Reading: Luke 1:5-25

Bible Story:

Zechariah and his wife Elisabeth didn't have any children, and they were very old, just like Abraham and Sarah. One day Zechariah was at work, serving in the Temple, when an angel appeared to him and told him that he was going to have a son. Their son was going to be called John, and he was to be the one who got the people of God ready for God's chosen King to return. Zechariah was surprised by this news, and asked how he could be sure it would happen. The angel, Gabriel, said that Zechariah wouldn't be able to speak until his son was born, and that is exactly what happened.

Reflection:

I wonder how often you have been to church? For lots of us, it's something we often do on a Sunday- if not in person, online!

Now, imagine that you're halfway through singing the first song. Everything is going as per normal, you're singing away, then all of a sudden - BOOM! An angel appears right in front of the communion table! Stretching up to the ceiling, arms wide open. Wow! How would you feel? What would you think?

In this story, this happens to Zechariah. He's by himself, doing something that happens every day and all of a sudden, an angel appears! And it tells him that God has heard his prayer, he will have a son called John the Baptist! And John will grow up to be someone who will tell everyone about Jesus, and prepare the way for him. What an amazing answer to Zechariah's prayer!

Prayer:

God, help us to keep praying for your breakthrough. We long for your Holy Spirit to burst in to our lives and our communities, bringing new life. Amen.

## December 21st: John the Baptist



Bible Reading: Matthew 3:1-6

Bible Story:

When John had grown up, he lived in the desert outside Jerusalem. He wore rough clothing and ate what he could find in the desert – honey and locusts. He spoke to the people, telling them to say sorry for the things they were doing wrong. He told them that God's chosen King was on the way. Many people came to listen to him and did what he said. To show that they were sorry for what they had done wrong, and wanted to live in God's way, they were baptised in the River Jordan.

Reflection:

I wonder if you've ever been to a baptism? Last year, some of the people from our church went to Ellesmere lake in September to baptize a couple of people. Unlike John, I wasn't wearing clothes made of camel's hair or a leather belt, and we went to the café afterwards for tea and cake, not locusts and honey.

But what we did see were two people confessing their sin, and turning to Jesus. They made a public declaration of their faith. The symbolism of going under the water and rising again reminds us that we leave our old life behind, and rise again to a new life in Jesus.

If you haven't been baptized why not spend a moment today thinking about it? Saying goodbye to your old life, confessing your sin and mistakes, and embracing the new life that Jesus gives.

Prayer:

Lord, thank you for the gift of baptism, and the new life that you offer us. Thank you that we can die to sin and rise to live for you. Thank you that baptism reminds us that you died for all our sin, and rose in glory. Amen.

## December 22nd: God Chooses Mary



Bible Reading: Luke 1:26-38

Bible Story:

About six months after his visit to Zechariah, the angel Gabriel went to a town called Nazareth. He went to see a young woman called Mary, to tell her that she was going to have a son, whose name would be Jesus. He would be God's Son, God's chosen King, sent to rescue people from all the mess that they got into. His Kingdom of peace would never end. Mary was surprised, and asked the angel how this was possible. Gabriel told her that there is nothing that God cannot do. Mary agreed, and said that she was happy to do as God said.

Reflection:

Half an hour ago, we had a knock on the door from some lovely friends with a box of chocolates for us. We were surprised to see them, excited by the present, and felt pleased that they had thought of us! Have you ever had a surprise visit? Who was it? Did they bring anything? How did you feel?

These kind of visits happen a few times in Advent, and here we have another one from an angel. This time to Mary, who seems a bit nervous as to why, of all people, the angel has come to her.

The angel has some news for her. She, a teenager, is to become pregnant. And her baby will be Jesus- the King of a never ending kingdom! Mary is surprised by the news but she trusts God, and says that she is his servant. And then the angel leaves. Just like that. I wonder how Mary would have felt?

Prayer:

Thank you Lord for nice surprises that help us feel loved and special. And thank you that you visited Mary and that she trusted you. Help us to trust you with our lives, like she trusted you with hers. Amen.

## December 23rd: Joseph and the Angel



Bible Reading: Matthew 1:18-25

Bible Story:

Mary was engaged to be married to a man called Joseph. He was surprised to find out that she was going to have a baby, and was thinking about breaking off the engagement. One night he had a dream and an angel told him to marry Mary, and to help her bring up Jesus, who was the rescuer that God was sending to God's people. Joseph woke up from his dream, and did what the angel said. He married Mary and looked after her.

Reflection:

Today there's another angelic surprise visit, to Joseph this time. And the angel tells him the news: your fiancée is pregnant! How do you think he would have felt, hearing the news that his fiancée was going to have a baby?

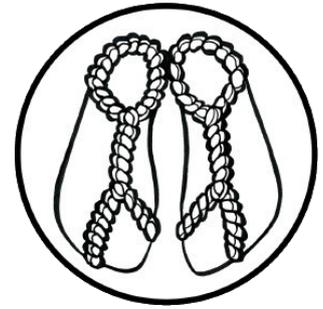
Back then people would not have been kind to Mary and Joseph. They would have had to put up with people picking on them and saying unkind things about them. They might even have been ignored or bullied by their friends and family. But they stayed true to each other, and trusted God.

Have you ever had a time when you've felt picked on, or bullied? It can make us feel quite sad, can't it- but remember, God is always with us, and loves us.

Prayer:

Lord, when we might feel sad, or people might be picking on us or making us feel unhappy, we pray that we would be able to still trust you. Holy Spirit, come beside us we pray. Amen.

## December 24th: Travelling to Bethlehem



Bible Reading: Luke 2:1-5

Bible Story:

While Mary was pregnant, the Roman Emperor decided to count everybody who lived in his empire. Everybody had to go back to their home town to be counted. Joseph came from a little town called Bethlehem because he was part of David's family. So, he and Mary left Nazareth and set off for Bethlehem.

Reflection:

Do you remember at the beginning of Advent, we talked about a long journey that Abram went on- leaving everything he knew to go to a new place?

We have another long journey here too. They would have walked for around 90 miles- that's more than the walk would be from Wellington to the centre of Birmingham and back again! What do you think your feet would be like after that long hike? Ouch....

So they walked, and walked and they eventually got to Bethlehem, the village which Micah the prophet talked about years before.

I wonder how they would have felt walking all that way. They would have had a lot of time to talk together, to share their hopes, their fears, and their dreams. And I'm sure, being pregnant, Mary would have needed a few stops to rest! Isn't it good that, on the journey of life, with all its ups and downs, hopes and fears, that God is always, always with us.

Prayer:

Lord we thank you for Mary and Joseph's trust in you. Help us to trust in you, especially when the going gets tough. Amen.

## December 25th: Jesus is Born



Bible Reading: Luke 2:6-21

### Bible Story

While they were in Bethlehem, Mary had her baby and they named him Jesus. Some shepherds were looking after their sheep in the fields. Angels came to see them and told them that God's chosen King had been born that night, and that they would find him sleeping in an animal's feeding trough. They went into town and found Jesus, just as the angel had said. They went back to the fields, telling everyone they saw about their exciting news.

### Reflection:

If you've ever been to the cinema, or the theatre, you'll know what I mean when I talk about the finale. Everything comes together with all the characters, music, and scenery in a great, spectacular ending... Dadaaaaaa!

A bit like this, you might think. We have the angels appearing again, giving praises. We have the shepherds too, giving their praises. And we have the baby names Jesus, a name which reminds us that he will save us from our sins.

So that's it right? Curtain closed. Story over. Finale finished. Well, not quite... You see, this is just the next chapter of God's story. This is when it gets, if possible, even more exciting- the potential start of a life with Jesus. Today, the offer is open to all: to walk with Jesus, to embrace the new life he gives, to join the shepherds in worship around the manger. Jesus Christ- once a baby in Bethlehem, and now the King of glory.

### Prayer:

Lord Jesus, we do worship at your manger, laying our lives before you. We join with the angels, shepherds, and millions through history as we declare you the wonderful counsellor, prince of peace, and almighty God. This Christmas, may we know you more, love you more, and live for you more. Amen.