

Advent Devotional ~ Jesse Tree

Through this season of Advent, you're encouraged to **read** each daily devotional with your child, **ask** the discussion questions, and **pray** together as a family. You can also print out the ornament symbols that go along with each daily reading, and have your child color the symbols while you discuss the story of Christmas. :)

Dec. 1

Read: In the beginning of the Bible story, we see that God is the Creator of all things. God created the world and everything in it, including the air, the water, the plants, the fish, the animals, and the people. When God finished creating the world, He looked at His work and saw that it was all good. God gave the first man, named Adam, and the first woman, named Eve, the job of taking care of His garden, called Eden. Adam and Eve lived in a perfect world created by a perfect God, and before sin came along, they were perfectly happy. This was the world God wanted us all to share. We still live in a beautiful world given to us by a good and loving Creator. And it is still up to us to take care of the good things God has made for us to enjoy. (Genesis 1-2)

Ask: How many examples of God's creativity can you think of? What are some ways you can help take care of the good gifts you've been given?

Pray: Dear God, thank You for being such a creative Creator. Thank You for taking care of us and giving us a home. Amen.

Dec. 2

Read: God gave Adam and Eve the whole Garden of Eden to enjoy, with just one rule: do not eat the fruit from one certain tree. But they did! Before they disobeyed God, Adam and Eve had no idea what evil was—they only knew about good things. After they disobeyed God and ate the fruit, the whole world changed. Now that they knew they had the choice to disobey God, people would always be tempted to disobey. God still loved Adam and Eve, and He still took good care of them, but now they had to learn the consequences of their actions. Because of their choice, God explained, people would have to work for their food, and life would be hard. But God let Adam and Eve know He already had a plan to overcome the evil that had come into the world. (Genesis 3)

Ask: Why is it important to do what God asks? What kinds of consequences can happen if we disobey? How did God plan to take care of His people even though they sinned?

Pray: Dear God, thank You for loving us even though we make bad choices sometimes. Please help us listen to You even when it's hard. Amen.

Dec. 3

Read: Several generations after Adam and Eve, there was a man named Noah. By this time, people had been disobeying God for many years. God created a good world for His people, and people chose sin instead of Him. This really hurt God's feelings! God was so upset, He decided to destroy everything He'd created. But Noah and his family still cared about God. So God told Noah to build an ark (a very large boat) to save his family, along with two of each kind

of animal. Noah obeyed God and built the ark, just as God instructed. Then he took his family and the animals, and they were safe on the ark while God flooded the rest of the world. After everyone else was gone, God made a promise to Noah. God will never again send another flood to destroy the world, no matter how much people sin. (Genesis 6-8)

Ask: What would have happened if Noah didn't believe God or listen to His instructions? How can we tell that God has kept His promise to Noah?

Pray: Thank You, God, for keeping Your promises. Thank you for letting us continue to enjoy the world You've created. Amen.

Dec. 4

Read: As the story of Adam and Eve shows us, God tells us to obey for our own good. God knows what is best for us, and God knows what will happen to us if we don't listen to Him. But sometimes, we don't want to listen. Sometimes, God asks us to do things we don't want to do, and it would be easier (or more fun) to pretend we don't know any better. Several generations after Noah, God asked a man named Abram to leave his home and take a long journey, not knowing where he was going. God promised Abram that if he just followed God and believed in God, he would be blessed and so would the whole world after him. Even though it was hard, Abram listened to God. And even though Abram didn't get everything right, God loved him and watched over him. (Genesis 12:1-8)

Ask: What does it mean to follow God? How can we tell when we're doing what God wants us to do?

Pray: Dear Lord, please help us listen to You and understand what You want for us. Thank You for loving us and watching out for us even though we aren't perfect! Amen.

Dec. 5

Read: More than anything, Abram and his wife, Sarai, wanted to have a family. They were very old, so they didn't think it was possible to have children. But God promised Abram if he was faithful, God would give Him a son, followed by a big family. In fact, God told Abram to try to count the stars in the sky—that's what it would be like to try to count Abram's family members! Even though Abram thought it was impossible, he believed in God and followed Him. God promised to watch over Abram's family, too. Abram became known by the name Abraham. He is called "our father in faith" because he believed in God's promises, and God blessed the whole world through Abraham. (Genesis 15; Hebrews 11:8-12)

Ask: How many stars can you count in the sky? How many people do you think have faith in God? What was the blessing God promised to Abraham?

Pray: Thank You, God, for giving us promises that will never be broken. Help us to believe what You say even when it seems impossible. Amen.

Dec. 6

Read: Abraham and his wife had a son together when they were very old, just as God promised. The boy was named Isaac, and Abraham loved him dearly. One day, God tested Abraham to see who Abraham loved more—Isaac, or God. Abraham was told to take Isaac far away and sacrifice him. After all the time Abraham waited for a son, now he was supposed to

give him up? Even though God promised to bless Abraham with a family? This didn't make sense! But Abraham trusted God because he knew God keeps His promises. So he obeyed, even though it was very hard to do. Abraham took Isaac into the mountains and was just about to sacrifice his son when an angel came to stop him. Because Abraham loved and obeyed God, God gave him a sheep to sacrifice instead. (Genesis 22; John 1:29)

Ask: Can you think of a time when you had to do something even though it was very hard or scary? What is something you love very much that would be hard to give up?

Pray: Dear God, please help us to believe You will make everything right, even when things don't seem to be going right. Amen.

Dec. 7

Read: Many years later, Abraham's son, Isaac, had two sons of his own, Esau and Jacob. As the boys grew up, Jacob pulled some mean tricks on his family. When Isaac was old, Jacob ran away from his brother Esau, before Esau could get even with him. Eventually, though, Jacob had to face up to his brother and the things he'd done to his family. The night before he went to see Esau, Jacob had a dream from God. In the dream, Jacob saw a stairway to heaven with angels going up and down. God reminded Jacob of His promises to Isaac and Abraham. God told Jacob the promises were for him, too. Jacob tried to run away from his family, but God promised to stay with him, and Jacob put his trust in God. (Genesis 28)

Ask: What happens when people try to run away from God? Is it possible to build our own way to get to heaven?

Pray: Thank You, God, for keeping Your promises even when we're afraid to face the things we've done. Thank You for always being with us no matter where we try to hide. Amen.

Dec. 8

Read: Jacob went on to have twelve sons. His youngest son was named Joseph, and Jacob loved Joseph the most. Jacob made a special coat for his favorite son. Joseph's brothers could tell their dad loved him more than the rest of them, and they were jealous. Plus, Joseph had a big attitude problem. He had dreams about his brothers bowing down to him. His brothers really didn't like that idea! So they threw him in a pit, then sold him as a slave. They lied to their father, Jacob, and told him Joseph died! Joseph had some lessons to learn, but so did his jealous brothers. And God would show them all that He could even make this terrible situation work out for the best. God loved Jacob, Joseph, and all of Joseph's brothers, and He would still keep His promises through them. (Genesis 37, 50:15-20)

Ask: What happens when there's favoritism and jealousy in a family? How are siblings supposed to behave toward one another? If there was no sin, what would families be like?

Pray: Dear Lord, please forgive us for not always treating each other very well. Thank You for loving us anyway. Please help us love each other the way You love us. Amen.

Dec. 9

Read: As Jacob's children had more children, and God's promise about Abraham's big family continued to come true, more family problems kept coming up. God's people went through some long, hard times, and God told a man named Moses to lead them to a safe place. God

wanted what was best for the people, and that included teaching them how to treat each other well. God wants us to love one another, not be jealous or mean. So God gave Moses ten commandments written in stone to show the people what it meant to care for one another and treat each other with respect. Just like Adam and Eve in the beginning, we don't like to follow rules. We're afraid we might be missing out. But God gives us rules to guide us to the best lives people can live. (Exodus 20; Matthew 22:36-40)

Ask: What types of rules are in place at home? How about at school? How are these rules meant to help make sure everyone is treated well?

Pray: Dear God, we know You see what is best for us. You are our good and loving Father, and You want to guide us and protect us. Please help us follow Your good ways. Amen.

Dec. 10

Read: Many years later, a courageous woman named Rahab helped God's people get to a safe place. Rahab had a son, Boaz, who was related to a woman named Naomi. Sadly, Naomi's husband and two sons died. One of her sons had a wife named Orpah, and the other son had a wife named Ruth. Orpah went back to her family's hometown, but Ruth decided to go with Naomi to Naomi's town of Bethlehem. Naomi thought she'd lost everything and had no hope. But Ruth took care of Naomi by gathering leftover grain from a nearby field. There, she met Boaz, who found out Ruth had been so kind to his relative Naomi. Boaz married Ruth and took Naomi in, and Naomi was thankful to God for saving them. Because Ruth stayed with Naomi, she got to join the family of Abraham. (Ruth 1-4)

Ask: Has there been a time when things seemed really bad, but something good came out of it? How can trusting God help to change a situation for the better?

Pray: Thank You, Lord, for staying with us and providing for us. Help us to believe You always have a plan for us, even when we're not sure what's going to happen. Amen.

Dec. 11

Read: The whole Bible story shows us God's plan for His people. When it was time to choose a good king for the nation of Israel, God already knew He'd selected a young boy named David, the great-grandson of Ruth, and the son of Jesse. When a faithful man named Samuel showed up at Jesse's house, looking for a king among the strong young men who lived there, the family didn't even think of David. He was the baby of the family... just the boy who took care of the sheep. But God knew David's heart, and He knew what kind of a man David would grow up to be. God told Samuel that David was the one—and this little boy was anointed as the future king of Israel! We might not all grow up to rule a nation, but God already knows the plans He has for us. (1 Samuel 16)

Ask: What does it mean to be chosen by God? How can we learn to listen to God to find out what important job He has for us?

Pray: Dear Lord, help us understand that You have a plan for every person in Your family. Help us remember that what we do will matter to many family members after us. Amen.

Dec. 12

Read: David started out as a shepherd, taking care of sheep. God chose David to be a king, taking care of people. David was not the kind of king most people would expect, and God did this on purpose. God chose David to show what kind of a leader He really had in mind. Jesus would be born into David's family many generations later, and Jesus wasn't the kind of leader the people were expecting, either. Jesus would be known as the Good Shepherd. David wasn't a perfect man, but he had a humble attitude and loved God. He was careful to ask God what He should do. God said David would be a shepherd over God's people, and David protected the people for a long time. (2 Samuel 5)

Ask: How many different ways does a shepherd take care of the sheep? How does the ruler of a nation take care of the people? How can we care for those in our family?

Pray: Thank You, God, for watching over us and giving us a Good Shepherd who cares for us. Please help us to care about people as much as You do. Amen.

Dec. 13

Read: Sometimes, we get distracted and forget what we're supposed to be doing. Long after King David's time, the people of Israel forgot about following God. Even after everything God had done for them, the Israelites got distracted by other people's shiny statues and fake idols. So God sent a man named Elijah, who was a prophet, to remind the Israelites that God was the only God. The Israelites didn't want to listen to Elijah, so he challenged the false prophets to a contest. Elijah prepared a sacrifice to God, and the other prophets prepared a sacrifice for their fake god, Baal. When those prophets prayed, nothing happened—since Baal wasn't real, he couldn't do anything! But when Elijah prayed, God sent fire to show His people He was real and powerful. (1 Kings 18)

Ask: What do God's miracles tell us about Him? How can we remember to follow God all the time, even if we don't always see His miracles?

Pray: Mighty God, we praise You for everything You have done for us, even before and after our time. Help us to remember that You are real and You are powerful. Amen.

Dec. 14

Read: Even when things don't seem to make any sense, we can trust that God has a plan. Later, when we look back, we can often see there's a reason for everything. Sometimes, we see that God put us in a certain place for a certain reason. That's what happened with a woman named Esther. She was one of God's people, and she was so beautiful that a king of another nation made her the queen. But one of the king's best friends planned to get rid of all of God's people. Esther found out about the plan from her uncle Mordecai, and he asked her to help. Even though it was extremely dangerous for her, Esther saw that God had planned for her to become the queen for this exact reason. Because she trusted God's plan, she was brave enough to face the king and risk her life for the lives of all her family. (Esther 4)

Ask: Where might God be asking us to be brave? What should we do if we find ourselves in a situation where we're not sure about God's plan?

Pray: Dear God, thank You for always knowing exactly where You want us. Help us to pay attention and notice when You put us in a certain place for a certain reason. Amen.

Dec. 15

Read: Hundreds of years before Jesus was born on the earth, God sent special messengers, called prophets, to talk to the Israelites. We already read about Elijah, who was one of the prophets. A man named Isaiah was another prophet. God spoke to the prophets and told them what to say to the people of Israel. The prophets reminded the Israelites that God was the only true God. They reminded people about God's faithfulness and the way He wanted them to love one another. Isaiah had a special message for the people: God promised a Savior! No matter how hard and confusing things might be on earth, we can have hope because God in heaven has a plan to make everything right. Isaiah announced the good news: God was sending a child to be the Savior of the world! (Isaiah 7:14, 9:6-7, 53:1-12)

Ask: Have you ever wondered if someone has forgotten a promise to you? What stories have we read so far that remind us of God's promises?

Pray: Dear Heavenly Father, thank You for letting us know about the plans You have for us. Thank You for sending messengers to remind us there is always hope. Amen.

Dec. 16

Read: Remember in the beginning of the Bible story, when God created the world and saw that it was all good? In the Garden of Eden, before sin, all of creation lived in peace. Adam and Eve were perfectly happy, and all of the animals got along. No living creature had to fear any other creature. The prophet Isaiah told the people about God's plan for a peaceful kingdom. He said a member of Jesse's family (remember, Jesse was King David's dad) will one day save the world, and everything will be perfect again. Isaiah used the example of dangerous animals resting with gentle animals to help explain what a peaceful world is like. One day, God promises, there will be no more fighting. All of God's creation, including all of His people—including us—will live in peace again. (Isaiah 11:1-10)

Ask: What are some living creatures that don't get along? What would it be like to see these creatures living together peacefully?

Pray: Father God, we look forward to the day when Your Son brings peace to all of Your creation. Help us to make peace with other people now, especially in our own family. Amen.

Dec. 17

Read: Sometimes, we know what we're supposed to do, but we don't want to do it. Even people with very important jobs can feel like this. One of God's prophets, named Jonah, was given a special job to go and talk to a certain group of people. But Jonah didn't like those people, and he didn't want to talk to them, so he tried to run away instead. Nobody can run away from God, though, and God's plan always happens, whether we like it or not! God went with Jonah everywhere Jonah went, even when a big fish swallowed him up for three days so he could think about what he'd done. Jonah finally decided to listen to God and do the job God asked him to do, even though he didn't want to. And God still loved Jonah even though Jonah complained about his job! (Jonah 1-3)

Ask: Have you ever tried to hide instead of doing something you were supposed to do? How did that go for you? What were the consequences?

Pray: Dear Lord, sometimes You ask us to do hard things. Thank You for being with us all the time, even when we're misbehaving. Help us to do the right thing the first time. Amen.

Dec. 18

Read: God gives us lots of chances to practice trusting Him when it's very scary. Because God is the only true God, He is the only One worthy of our worship. Sometimes, other people expect us to love them more than God, but God is always the most important. When we love God more than anyone and anything on earth, God shows Himself in big ways. Once, long before Jesus was born, a prophet named Daniel had a choice to prove God was most important in his life. The ruler of the nation made it illegal to worship God, but Daniel worshipped God anyway. As his punishment, Daniel was thrown into a pit of lions to be eaten! But God stopped the lions from eating Daniel. Many people saw God's power because Daniel put God before everyone else—even himself and his own life. (Daniel 6)

Ask: Who or what on earth do you love the most? How does it feel to say that God is more important than anything else?

Pray: Dear God, sometimes, it's scary to put You first when there are others who want to be first. Help us to love You even if there's a chance of making someone else mad. Amen.

Dec. 19

Read: As the Bible story has shown us so far, God has a plan for His people, and He puts people in certain places for certain reasons. One of those people was a man named Micah, one of God's prophets. Micah wrote about a Savior who would be born in the town of Bethlehem. He knew this because he was told about God's plan—a long time before Jesus was actually born! God picked Bethlehem for a reason. Most rulers came from big, important families, and they were usually born in big, important cities. But the Savior of the world would be born in a small town and grow up with an ordinary family. And even though Micah wrote about this before Jesus was born, the little town of Bethlehem still didn't expect Him to come the way He did! God shows us that He works in surprising ways. (Micah 5:2)

Ask: How can we prepare to celebrate Jesus' birth? What does it mean to have our hearts ready for Him?

Pray: Dear Lord, You do many surprising things. Please help us be prepared to see You in unexpected places. Amen.

Dec. 20

Read: God told His people about His plan in many different ways. Hundreds of years before Jesus was born, God's prophets told about the Savior to come. As the time drew near, God spoke again. A man named Zechariah and a woman named Elizabeth waited a long time to have a child, and just like Abraham and Sarah, they grew so old that they thought it would never happen. But God sent an angel to tell Zechariah they were going to have a special son, who would be named John. Zechariah doubted the news, so God took his voice! Now he'd been told of God's plan, but he couldn't tell anyone else! Only after Elizabeth had the baby was Zechariah able to speak again. And their child, named John, would become a prophet, telling the people all about God's plan to save the world through Jesus. (Luke 1:1-25, 57-80)

Ask: Have you ever heard some news that seemed too good to be true? How does it feel to find out something wonderful will happen?

Pray: Father God, thank You for the wonderful news about Your Son, Jesus. Help us remember that You always do what You say You will do. Amen.

Dec. 21

Read: Family is important to God. From Adam and Eve all the way to Jesus, the story of God's plan is told through a family tree. Jesus, the Son of God, was born into the family of David, Jesse, Ruth, Rahab, Jacob, Isaac, and Abraham. Elizabeth, John's mom, was related to Mary, who became the mother of Jesus. John and Jesus were cousins! John's job was to tell everyone that Jesus was the Savior—the promise God had been telling people about all along. John reminded the people about God and told them to be ready. He baptized many people who believed in God's forgiveness for sins. Others thought John was strange, because he wore camel hair and ate locusts (a kind of bug). When Jesus asked John to baptize Him, God Himself said, "This is my Son." (Matthew 1:1-17, 3:1-17)

Ask: Does it ever feel strange to talk about the Lord with certain people? How can we be prepared to tell others about Jesus this Christmas?

Pray: Father God, please help us remember Your promises instead of worrying about what other people might think. Thank You for all the brave things Your family has done. Amen.

Dec. 22

Read: As we learn the Bible story, we read about a lot of people who did really amazing things. These people might seem incredibly brave, strong, and heroic, and we might feel like we could never be like them. But God chooses completely ordinary people to carry out His plan—completely ordinary people just like us! And then He does completely unexpected things in their lives, leaving no doubt that only God could do that. Before Mary became the mother of Jesus, she was just a small-town girl planning her wedding to Joseph. When an angel told Mary she would be the mother of the Son of God, she was scared and confused. She wasn't even married yet, so how would she explain this to her husband-to-be? But she trusted God, and her heart was filled with joy. (Luke 1:26-56)

Ask: What are some good things that are very hard to do? How can we celebrate good things even when we're doing hard things?

Pray: Father God, thank You for showing us that nothing is impossible for You. Help us trust Your plan and be filled with joy when You give us something challenging to do. Amen.

Dec. 23

Read: Jesus is the Son of the Heavenly Father—our Lord, the one true God. Jesus also had an earthly father: Mary's husband, a carpenter named Joseph. When Mary found out she was going to have a baby, she and Joseph weren't married yet, and Joseph didn't know what to think about this. But God had a plan for Joseph, too. God sent an angel to talk with Joseph in a dream. The angel told Joseph that Mary had been chosen by God, and Mary was going to have a very special baby with a very important purpose. Joseph was told to make Mary his wife and give her baby the name Jesus. Then the angel shared God's plan for Jesus to save

God's people from sin. Joseph woke up knowing he, too, was a part of God's plan, and he had an important part in God's family. (Matthew 1:18-25)

Ask: Why do you think family is such an important part of the Bible story? What special purpose might God have for us in the lives of our family members?

Pray: Dear Lord, thank You for giving us special responsibilities to care for each other. Please help us trust You and listen to You when unexpected things happen in our family. Amen.

Dec. 24

Read: Joseph and Mary lived in the town of Nazareth, which was in Galilee. But according to the prophet Micah, the Savior would be born in the town of Bethlehem, which was known as the City of David because King David grew up there. It so happened that around the time Mary was due to have her baby, the emperor of Rome decided he wanted to count all of the people in his empire. Joseph was a relative of David's, so according to the emperor, Joseph had to travel to his hometown of Bethlehem to be counted. This was a long, hard journey for Joseph and Mary to take, especially when she was so close to having a baby. They didn't know it at the time, but Joseph and Mary were going to a certain place for a certain reason: so God's plan would come true, just the way He said. (Luke 2:1-5)

Ask: Has a member of your family ever taken you somewhere when you didn't know why? How did it feel after you understood the reason for what was happening?

Pray: Almighty God, thank You for showing us that Your plan will always work out exactly the way You intend it to. Keep us ready to listen when You want us to go somewhere new. Amen.

Dec. 25

Read: It's Christmas Day! It's the day we've been waiting for! Jesus is born! The angels are singing—glory to God and peace on earth! The Savior of the world has come in the most unexpected way: born to an unmarried mother, far from home, without even a bed in a motel room available to welcome Him. Yet this is the Son of God, born exactly according to God's plan, and all of heaven is rejoicing! Way back in the beginning, from the moment sin entered the world, God promised a Savior. Even after all the times God's people have forgotten about Him and done terrible things all over the earth, God still loves us so much that He gave us His only Son to keep His promise to us. The child is born. Here is our Lord... Messiah... Emmanuel... God with us, here on earth. Christ the Savior is born! (Luke 2:6-21)

Ask: Why is it so important to understand the Bible story that leads up to the birth of Jesus? What is your favorite part of the story? Who would you like to learn more about?

Pray: Dear Jesus, we praise You and celebrate You today. Thank You for showing us all that has happened, so we can see Your birth as the beginning of a new story. Amen!