



THE JESSE TREE

An Advent prayer activity



These notes are intended to accompany the making of a "Jesse Tree", an ancient symbolic way of representing the Old Testament stories which lead up to the story of the birth of Jesus. There is one for every day of Advent. Symbols for each of the stories, which can be found on a separate sheet, can be coloured in, stuck on card, and hung on a branch through Advent. You can, of course, use these Bible readings and questions without actually making a Jesse Tree, for your own personal reflection, or for family discussion. You could talk about them at dinner or breakfast, or whenever you get together.

WEEK 1

First Sunday of Advent **1 Samuel 16:1-13**

The "Jesse Tree" takes its name from the fact that David, the shepherd boy who became Israel's greatest king was the son of Jesse. The Messiah was expected to be a descendent of King David. Jesus was, according to the Gospels, of David's family. The stories you will read as you make your Jesse Tree will help you trace some of the important stories in the Bible which lead up to the birth of Jesus.

- What do you know about your ancestors? Does it matter to you who they were and what they did? Why do you think people in Jesus' time though the Messiah should be "of David's line"?

Monday **Genesis 1:24-28**

The story about God making the world in Genesis tells us that he looked at what he had made and it was good.

- What do you think is good about our world? Think of something to give thanks for in the world today.

Tuesday **Genesis 3:1-24**

Yesterday's reading reminded us of the goodness in the world. Today's reminds us that things are wrong with it. People aren't perfect. They get things wrong and feel as if it is the end of the world.

- What do you think needs to change in our world? Think of something you've done that you wish you hadn't – can you find a way to put it right?

Wednesday **Genesis 6:11-22, 8:6-12**

Things had got so bad by the time of Noah that the story says God was tempted to destroy everything, but he decided not to. He couldn't give up on the people he had made. He tells Noah that he will never destroy the world.

- Think about people who face environmental disasters today. You might like to look at Christian Aid's website www.christianaid.org.uk. Pray for world leaders talking about climate change in Copenhagen at the moment.

Thursday **Genesis 12:1-7, 13:2-18**

Abraham is called by God to go out on a journey, far away from his own home. He is already an old man, but he obeys God's call.

- Think about how Abraham and Sarah might have felt as they set out. How do you feel about doing something different and new?

Friday **Genesis 22.1-14**

Many years after they set out Abraham and Sarah finally have the child God promised them. Then God asks Abraham to sacrifice him. At the last minute God sends a ram instead, and Isaac is spared. This is a difficult reading, because it seems so cruel, but it helps us to see just how determined Abraham was to do what he thought God wanted, and how much he trusted God.

- What do you think of this story? If we could hear Isaac's version of the story, or Sarah, his mother's, what do you think they would say about it?

Saturday

Genesis 27:41-28: 22

Jacob and Esau were twins. Jacob was younger by a few minutes, but he tricked Esau into giving him his “birthright” – the right to his father’s blessing and to be the head of the household after him. They fall out, and Jacob has to run away. Way out in the desert, he dreams of God – even here in the middle of nowhere, God is with him.

- Have you ever felt very hopeless, as if you were on your own? It might help to think of this story if you feel like that again, to remind you that God is with you.

WEEK 2

Second Sunday of Advent

Isaiah 9:2-7

The prophet Isaiah wrote at a time when the Israelites were in exile in Babylon. They felt hopeless. Through him God promises that he will come to rescue them.

- Isaiah promises that a child is coming who will change the world. In a way, every child changes the world. What impact do you think you have had on the world (whether you are a child or adult)? What difference do you hope you will make in your lifetime?

Monday

Genesis 37:1-36

Joseph and his brothers are like most families. They are jealous of each other and hurt each other. It looks as if everything has gone wrong when Joseph’s brothers sell him into slavery, but actually the story will have a happy ending.

- Think about your family – how do you feel about the other people in your family? Think of some good things about them!

Tuesday

Exodus 20:1-17

Joseph’s family followed him down into Egypt, but many centuries later his descendents were enslaved by the Pharaoh there. Eventually Moses led them to freedom. They were going to live as a new people in the Promised Land. God gave them some rules to live by when they got there which would shape them into the kind of people he wanted them to be.

- Which of the Ten Commandments do you think is hardest to keep? Why?

Wednesday

Numbers 6:22-27

No matter what they did, God loved his people. He wanted them to know that, so he told Moses and Aaron to declare his blessing on them.

- What do you think God wants to say to you today? Imagine hearing him saying these words to you.

Thursday

I Samuel 3:1-21

By the time Samuel was born no one seemed to be listening to God anymore. When he heard God’s voice, he didn’t know what it was, and neither did Eli. Fortunately Eli eventually realised what was happening.

- Have you ever tried to tell someone something important, but found it hard to get them to listen? What did you do? Did you make them hear in the end?

Friday

I Samuel 16:14-23

Here is David again, the son of Jesse. He was chosen to replace Saul as king, but Saul didn’t like that at all. David came to live in the palace, but Saul was often angry with him.

- Imagine you could talk to David. How do you think he feels during this story? How do you feel when someone is angry with you?

Saturday

Psalms 23

People often imagine this Psalm was written by David. It probably wasn’t, but it is the song of a shepherd like him, who imagines his life as if he was one of his sheep. God cares for him just as he cares for his own flock.

- This psalm has many “landscapes” – green pastures and still waters, narrow pathways and dark valleys, places of danger and places of welcome and plenty. Which of these feels like your life right now?

WEEK 3

Third Sunday of Advent 1 Kings 3:3-28

King Solomon, David's son, asks God for wisdom rather than power or wealth.

- If God offered you anything you wanted, what would you ask for?

Monday 1 Kings 17:1-16

The prophet Elijah stood up against a cruel king and queen, Ahab and Jezebel. This story tells of a time when there was a drought. Elijah had to try to find food and water far from his own home because the king and queen were angry with him. He asks a widow to help him, and she finds that no matter how much she gives him, there is always more there.

- Have you ever felt you have run out of energy or patience, and you just want to give up? Who or what helped you to get through that time?

Tuesday 2 Kings 5:1-27

Elisha was the prophet who came after Elijah. Here he heals a foreign military leader of leprosy. Naaman has been sent to Elisha by a little Israelite slave girl. At first he thinks it is beneath his dignity to do what Elisha says, but when he does he is healed.

- How easy or difficult do you find it to ask for help or to listen to what someone tells you to do? Do you sometimes feel like Naaman – you'd rather figure it out for yourself than accept help?

Wednesday Isaiah 6:1-8

The prophet Isaiah has a wonderful vision of God. It makes him feel very small and humble.

- When did you last have an experience or see or hear something that made you go "Wow!"

Thursday Jeremiah 31:31-34

The prophet Jeremiah looks forward to a time when people will know for themselves what is right to do. God's law will be written on their hearts.

- How did you learn what was right and wrong? Who or what are the main influences in your life? Can you think of things that you do instinctively now but which once you had to be taught to do?

Friday Nehemiah 13:10-22

Nehemiah was a Jewish leader who helped to rebuild Jerusalem after it had been destroyed by the Babylonian armies. It was a job that seemed almost impossible, but he kept going until it was done.

- Have you ever had a job to do that seemed to be impossible? What happened? If you managed to get it done, what helped you to do that?

Saturday Hebrews 1:1-14

This (rather complicated!) reading is from the New Testament letter to the Hebrews. In it the writer says that though God spoke to his people through prophets in the past, like Elijah, Elisha, Isaiah and Jeremiah, now he has spoken through his son, Jesus. People sometimes say "like father, like son" – they mean that when we look at someone's son or daughter we can see what their parents are like.

- Do you think you are like your parents? What might people be able to tell about them by looking at you?

WEEK 4 (Use readings for the weekdays until Christmas Eve, then special ones for Christmas Eve and Christmas Day, then use the rest)

Fourth Sunday of Advent

Luke 1:5-25

At the time of Jesus there were many priests in the land – they inherited the job from their fathers. They took it in turns to offer the incense, as Zechariah does here, and they might not have got a turn very often – it was a great privilege. Zechariah thought he knew what was going to happen as he did his job, but instead he got a huge surprise.

- How do you think Zechariah felt? What is the biggest surprise you have ever had? How did you feel?

Monday

Luke 1:26-38

The angel tells Mary that she is God's "favoured one". She has been chosen to be the mother of the Messiah.

- How would you have felt in her place? What might be good about being the mother of the Messiah? What might be bad about it?

Tuesday

Luke 1:39-56

Mary goes to stay with Elizabeth, Zechariah's wife. They are both happy because they know that God is going to work through their children to bring peace and justice to the world.

- If you had some really good news, who would you want to share it with first?

Wednesday

Luke 1:57-80

Zechariah's relatives think they know what his child should be called but he has other ideas. He will not just follow in his father's footsteps but will do something new.

- What were or are your parents hopes and dreams (and fears!) for you? How do you feel about their ideas about you?

Thursday

Matthew 1: 18-2.1

At the time of Jesus for someone to be pregnant without being married was a disgrace. Joseph acts with courage in refusing to abandon Mary – he trusts what the angel tells him.

- We often overlook Joseph in the Christmas story. Imagine you could ask him how he felt about what happened. What do you think he would say?

Friday

Matthew 2:1-12

The wise men come from a different country and culture to Jesus. Many of those in Jesus' culture would have said God's Messiah was nothing to do with them, but they are among the first to worship him.

- Who do we treat as outsiders?

Christmas Eve

Luke 2:1-20

Ordinary shepherds are the first people to hear of Jesus' birth in Luke's Gospel. Who would have thought it?

- How would you have felt if you were the shepherds? Would you have been excited or frightened? What might you have been afraid of?

Christmas Day

John 1:1-18

Happy Christmas! This reading says that God spoke to the world through Jesus to tell people that he loved them. He called us to spread that message by loving others as he loves us.

- How can you tell someone you love them today?