





1st December—Jesse Tree

## Gather

Talk about who is in your family. How far back can you go? Are you able to draw a family tree?

## Engage – *Isaiah 11:1-10; Matthew 1:1-17*

The Old Testament part of the Bible is just full of families, and as we will see they were not always happy families. King David came to notice when he defeated Goliath, but God had already chosen him to be king. David's dad was called Jesse and he was one of the ancestors of Jesus, that is why we call this advent calendar 'the Jesse Tree'.

Families are a bit like a tree, there's the trunk, then the branches and lots and lots of twigs. In a family there are great great grandparents, great grandparents, grandparents, parents and children; and along the way there are aunts and uncles, cousins and even sisters and brothers. The only trouble with that is if you draw the family picture then it looks more like a tree that is upside down.

When God created his first garden he put two trees right in the middle. In the Bible trees are often used as pictures, and our Jesse Tree is a picture made up of many parts. Each bit is a story from the Bible, a story that help us to understand more about God and all that has been done for us, right from the beginning of time.



24th December—Christ the Messiah

## Gather

Make a list of as many different types of light as you can.

Light is often used as a metaphor in the Bible. Why do you think this is? Jesus says he is the Light of the World what do you think that means?

[Youtube video of today's Bible passage.](https://www.bible.com/videos/25573-in-the-beginning-was-the-word)

<https://www.bible.com/videos/25573-in-the-beginning-was-the-word>

## Engage – *John 1:1-18*

John's gospel starts with these startling words, "*In the beginning was the word and the word was with God and the word was God.*" He is writing about Jesus, the baby who slept in an animal's feeding trough, whose mum was called Mary and was the long-promised descendant of Abraham.

John was able to look back on the life that Jesus lived and to tell his story, but we read nothing about babies and shepherds. John wanted people to know that Jesus was not just a kind person, was not just the greatest storyteller ever, was not just the person who made sick people well again, the blind to see and the deaf to hear.

His message, loud and clear, right from the very first words of his book is Jesus is God. This takes some understanding as Jesus had a human mother, and lived the same sort of life as other people of his time. He ate food, became tired and even got disappointed when his friends let him down. But the really great news is that Jesus coming to earth made it possible for anyone who chose to become part of God's family; girls, boys, grown-ups too were able to become children of God if that was what they wanted.

## Respond

*Jesus, King of Kings,  
we remember that powerful leaders visited you when you were born.*

*Give your wisdom, boldness and grace to our world leaders,  
to politicians, business people and those with influence.*

*King of Kings, establish your Kingdom here,  
on earth as it is in heaven.*

*Jesus, King of Peace,  
we remember Herod's jealousy, lies and violence when you were born.*

*Bring your peace in places of conflict, anger and hatred,  
across the world and right here in our communities.*

*King of peace, we pray for your Kingdom here,  
on earth as it is in heaven.*

Taken from [engageworship.com](http://engageworship.com).

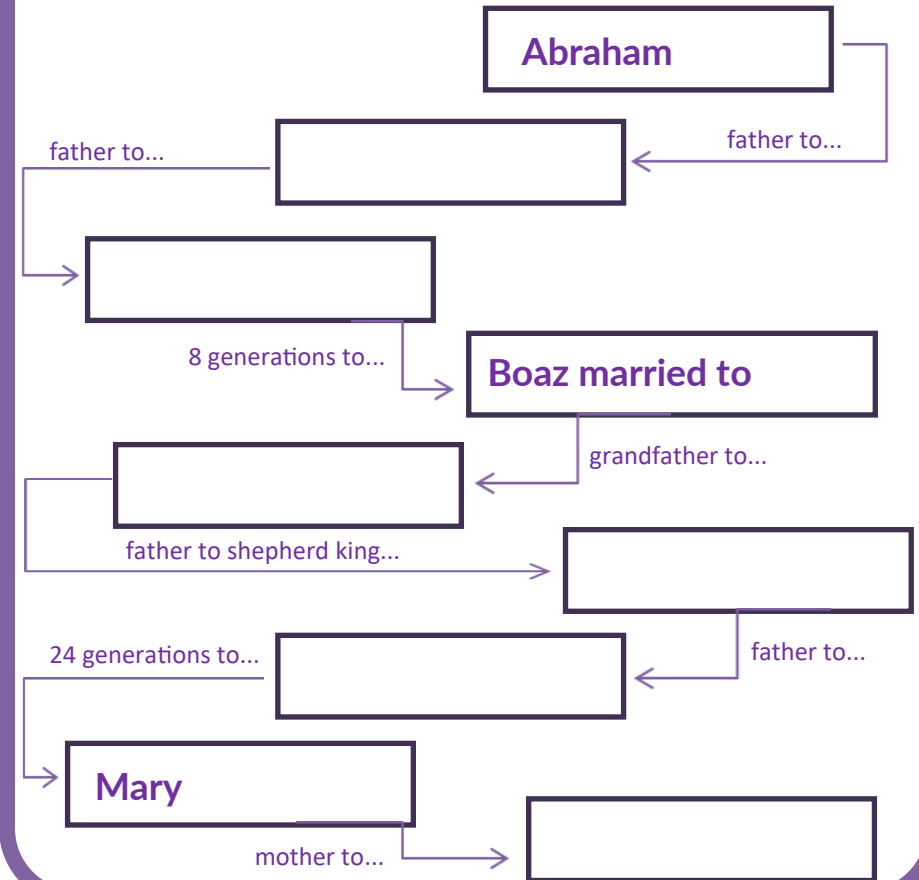
## Send

The magi gave the baby Jesus special treasures. What are the treasures in your life? Toys, money, gaming, phone? The Bible says where your treasure is, that is where your heart is. i.e. we are in danger of worshipping these things instead of God.

What treasures (like our time, singing, helping others) can we give to God in worship?

## Respond

Draw Jesus' family tree or fill in the gaps on this one (you can use Matthew Chapter One to help you!)



## Send

Give thanks for all the people in your family tree that are no longer living. Pray for God's blessing on all of those that are still alive and are yet to come.



2nd December—God's creation

## Gather

Look around you what can you see?

Close your eyes and listen, what can you hear?

What can you smell?

What can you feel with your hands?

We are surrounded by things that are made by God, but sometimes we take it all for granted

Why not read *In the beginning* – in The Lion Storyteller's Bible

## Engage – Genesis 1:1-2:3

The Bible starts with a very simple fact, in the beginning... God. That is where it all started; God chose to create a world, but in order to have a world it had to be part of a solar system and part of an even bigger universe. That world needed land and water, trees and plants in order to sustain life. The first book of the Bible, called Genesis tells us that God created his world in seven stages, and calls each stage a day. At the end of every stage God checks his work and sees that it is good.

The first four days are used to create the basic structure of planet earth. Then on day five we see the arrival of fish and birds, followed on day six by land animals of all sorts and sizes.

But the work of creation was not yet complete, there was one final piece of the story. People, Adam, the first man and Eve the first woman; God even planted a special garden for them to live in and look after.

God looked at everything that had been made and it was good. Day seven was God's rest day.



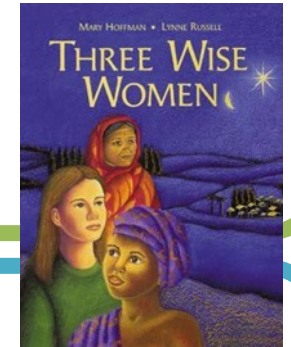
23rd December—Magi

## Gather

Imagine you are going on a long journey to visit someone who has had a new baby.

What things might you need for the journey and what gifts for the new family would you take?

Mary Hoffman's book is beautifully written and illustrated and helps us to think about the man Jesus grew up to be.



## Engage – Matthew 2:1-12

"Where is the new born king of the Jews?" was the question that really bothered King Herod. He knew there was no royal baby and was keen to know about this possible rival, and so he questioned his visitors. These visitors were foreigners who were experts in astronomy and their observations suggested that there was indeed a new king and they had been tracking a special star. After a detailed search through the scrolls and the records the king was told that Bethlehem was a likely place to look and so he sent them off to check.

It seemed that the star stopped right where the small family were living and the exotic travellers were delighted to meet them. They had brought three very special gifts, gold, a gift for a king, frankincense, a gift for a priest (remember Zechariah) and a third very odd present for a child. It was myrrh, a special substance used to prepare a body for burial, perhaps a symbol that this child, Jesus, when he grew up was to be killed. Tradition has suggested that there were three Magi, or wise men, and that they rode camels, but Matthew, who wrote about them, tells us very little, except that they worshipped Jesus.

## Respond

The angels sang a song of praise. See if you can make up a song that celebrates the gift of Jesus to all humanity

Why not make a host of angels as decorations? You can use a [template](#) cut out of folded paper to [make chains of them](#)



## Send

Who do you think God wants you to tell about the good news of Jesus? Write a list of three people and ask God to show you how to speak to them about your friendship with him and what things you might be able to invite them to.

## Respond

What is your favourite bit of God's creation?

Do you think God could have made things in a different order?

Why not try putting the elements of the story in the right order on [the RE:Start website](#)

## Send

Say thank you to God for something he has made starting with every letter of the alphabet.

For younger children use an alphabet book and encourage them to say 'thank you' as they point to each of the pictures.





3rd December—Adam and Eve

## Gather

Have you ever done anything that you regret?

What were the consequences?

## Engage – Genesis 2:8-3:24

Here comes the tree. There were two trees planted in God's garden, the tree of life and the tree of knowledge. There was only one rule for Adam and Eve, don't eat the fruit from that second tree.

All was going well, Adam had given all the living creatures their proper names and there was plenty of fresh fruit to eat, but they could not take their eyes off that tree. In the end it was Eve who just could not resist tasting the fruit for herself, and right away she shared it with Adam. They both knew that it was wrong, but were not really prepared for what happened next.

They were used to spending time with God, but felt so guilty that they hid among the bushes and did not even want to be seen. Only then did they find out just what they had done.

No longer could they live in the Garden called Eden; God's perfect world was spoilt. And what was worse their friendship with God was spoilt too. From then on life became hard, growing food became more difficult, there were family rows and people began to forget about God.



22nd December—Shepherds

## Gather

Imagine you are sitting out on a hillside looking after sheep right now. What might you be doing and how would you be feeling? Pretend to be settling down to sleep. What quiet noises can you hear as the hillside, and all those on it, settle down for the night?

## Engage – Luke 2:8-20

Being a shepherd two thousand years ago was not a particularly glamorous job. Most of the time you were simply sitting around watching goats and sheep, and making sure there was enough for them to eat. Bears and lions trying to attack your flock was about as exciting as it got; being on night duty was the worst of all; boring, nothing happening at all.

Then, all of a sudden, an angel appears. Don't ask me what this angel looked like, whether it sported wings or was all in white, but it certainly shook up those sheep minders. The neat thing was that the angel had brought them a message from God; a message about a baby; but not just any baby.

This was The Messiah – the one God had promised would come years ago: now was the time. The angel strongly recommended that they went to see for themselves, check out the truth of their message, especially about the baby sleeping in an animal's feeding trough. Then just to round off the evening a whole choir of angels appeared, just as suddenly and began to praise God, "*Glory to God in highest heaven, and peace on earth to those with whom God is pleased*" they chorused.

When the shepherds had been and seen Jesus lying in the manger, they were so excited that God had kept his promise, that they ran through the streets of Bethlehem telling everyone all the wonderful things they had seen and heard.

## Respond

Write a list of babies and children that you know.

Sing *Away in a Manger*, this time as a prayer for all the people on your list.

## Send

Have a go at making your own salt dough nativity

Recipe: 2 mugs of plain flour 1 mug of table salt.  
Approximately 1 mug of warm water (about 250 ml) Mix the flour and salt together in a bowl. Make a dip in the centre of the mix and pour in about half of the water. Now use a knife to mix it all together. Add a little more water by spoon until you the dough is soft enough to knead but not too wet. Knead the dough onto a smooth surface. Dust with cornflour if needed. Knead for ten minutes (to remove air bubbles). When you are not using it, keep it wrapped up. When you have made your creation, bake it in the oven at 130 °C until it is dried out. When cooled, you can then paint with any good paint and varnish it, if you wish.

## Respond

Mix corn flour with water to the consistency of thick double cream and pour into a tray.

The choice that Adam and Eve made got in the way of their friendship with God. When we put ourselves first and hurt other people or do what we want instead of what God wants, these choices also get in the way of our friendship with God. But the Bible tells us that because of what Jesus did on the cross, when we say sorry to God, he forgives us and our bad choices no longer get in the way of our friendship with him.

As you think about choices that you have made that have harmed other people or made things difficult for them, or that you know make God sad, write or draw them in the corn flour with your finger. As they disappear say sorry to God and thank him that he has forgiven you.

## Send

When you make choices this week, take some time to think about whether your action will make life better for others or worse.



4th December—Noah

## Gather

What promises have you made?  
Have you kept those promises?

Can you remember a time when someone kept their promise to you? How did that make you feel?

Have a look at how long a metre is. How big is the room that you are in? See if you can work out how many times bigger the ark was.

## Engage - Gen 6:9-22, 7:17-8:12

As more and more people were born they continued to take very little notice of God and were busy spoiling the world that he had created for them to enjoy. God was very fed up and decided to destroy it in a great flood, but Noah was someone who still trusted God and so he was told to build a floating animal shelter and collect as many pairs of animals as he could. The Ark was big, it was nearly one hundred and forty metres long, over twenty-two metres long and more than thirteen metres tall. Plenty of room for Noah, his three sons and their wives, as well as all those animals.

When all were safe inside it began to rain, and it rained for weeks and weeks until everything was under water. Even after it had stopped raining it took a long time for the water to go down. Finally Noah was able to set the animals free and move out of his floating home. God was pleased with Noah and promised that he would not flood the earth like that again, as a sign of that promise he made a big rainbow in the sky.



21st December—Jesus Birth

## Gather

Sing 'Away in a Manger'.

Do you think the baby Jesus really didn't cry? Talk about what it must have been like for Mary and Joseph and Jesus on that incredible night.

*Away in a manger  
No crib for His bed  
The little Lord Jesus  
Lay down His sweet head*

*The stars in the sky  
Look down where He lay  
The little Lord Jesus  
Asleep on the hay*

*The cattle are lowing  
The poor Baby wakes  
But little Lord Jesus  
No crying He makes*

*I love Thee, Lord Jesus  
Look down from the sky  
And stay by my side  
'Til morning is nigh*

*Be near me, Lord Jesus  
I ask Thee to stay  
Close by me forever  
And love me, I pray*

*Bless all the dear children  
In Thy tender care  
And take us to Heaven  
To live with Thee there*

## Engage: Luke 2:1-7

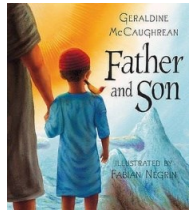
We expect babies to be born in a hospital or a nice quiet room at home, not in a local hotel come campsite. The Roman Emperor wanted a list of all the people who lived in the different countries so that he could work out how much tax he would get from them. Everyone had to go back to their town where their family came from and so Joseph left the village of Nazareth and travelled to Bethlehem, ancestral home of David the king. It was there that the baby was born. Not surprisingly the town was full of visitors and most of the accommodation was fully booked but the travellers were able to stay in one of the animal shelters. There the baby was born, and because they were travelling there was no cot prepared for the tiny mite, he slept in an empty animal's feeding trough. It all seems pretty rough and ready to us some two thousand years later, but the historians Luke, and Matthew are pretty matter of fact about it, with no grumpy innkeepers and not a donkey in sight. I imagine local people helped where they could, but they had no idea just who this new baby was.



## Respond

Many of the characters in our stories so far have been asked by God to do things that were frightening and beyond what they thought they could do. The man entrusted to look after God's son, Joseph had a job full of responsibility. No more so, than when they had to run to Egypt to protect Jesus from Herod's army. It must have taken a great deal of trust and faith.

Geraldine McCaughrean's book *Father and Son*, really helps us to think about how Joseph might have felt.



List all the feelings that Joseph might have had from the moment he became engaged to Mary to when they returned to Nazareth. Now tick/circle those that you *have* felt in one colour, and all those you *are* feeling in a different colour. Finally talk about some that you *might* feel with life events that are coming up in the next few weeks and months and tick/ circle those in a third colour. Remind each other that God is with you and offers you peace and strength for all of those feelings.

## Send

Many thousands of families are refugees just like Joseph, Mary and Jesus. Why not see what people are doing in your area to offer refuge and support to refugee families, and join in.

[York](#)

[Middlesbrough](#)

[Hull](#)

## Respond

Even though we might see pictures of terrible flooding around the world, or even experienced it in our own homes, God has kept his promise that he will not flood the whole earth again. When we see a rainbow in the sky we can remember that promise and remember that God always keeps his promises.

The story of Noah might give us all sorts of feelings: happiness that the animals were saved; sadness that people were not taking notice of God and ruining his world; and hope in God's promises. God loves to hear about all our feelings. Use the colours in the rainbow to talk to God about your feelings.

Red – what is making or has made you angry?

Orange – what makes you feel warm and safe and comfy?

Yellow – what are you happy about?

Green – what or who are you jealous of?

Blue – what is or has made you sad?

Indigo – Is there anything you are worrying about?

Violet – What are you hopeful about?

## Send

Although he has promised not to flood the world again, people are still ignoring God and ruining his world. What can you change this week that shows that you are looking after God's world?



5th December—Abraham

## Gather

Play a game to see who can guess how long a minute is without looking at a clock, watch or phone.

Have you ever had to wait for something for a long time? What did it feel like?

## Engage - Gen 12:1-7, 15:1-6

Abraham and his family worshipped God, who had a very special plan for him. Abraham was seventy five years old when he and his family were told by God to move their tents to a new land and make it their home. They moved all of their belongings, their goats and sheep to this new place and settled down, waiting to see what would happen next. God had a plan to make this small family into a great nation and to be a blessing to all of humanity.

But even though he was very old, Abraham did not have any children, which meant that his family did not really have a future. God knew differently and he made Abraham a promise that it would be easier to count the stars in the sky than to count the number of people who would be his descendants. Abraham had already learnt to trust God and so, even though it did not seem possible, he was happy to leave it all to God. It was a long wait, but eventually when Abraham and his wife Sarah were very old their son Isaac was born. Things were beginning to happen.



20th December—Joseph

## Gather

What might Joseph and Mary have written to each other if they had had social media in those days? Watch this [video on Youtube \(https://youtu.be/6w-Dv1N8si4\)](https://youtu.be/6w-Dv1N8si4) for an idea!

## Engage – Matthew 2:13-23

Herod the king was never pleased to hear about a rival and so it was important for Jesus and his family to get away. Joseph had been warned by an angel to escape to the country of Egypt, and so the three of them became refugees and lived in Egypt for a time. There they were safe and it must have been very tempting to stay there and make a new life, but again Joseph was told by an angel it was now safe to move back to Israel, the third angelic message he had received. Unlike Zechariah he did not seem to question angelic instructions.

And so the small family packed up everything and made the long journey from Egypt to the hill country around the Sea of Galilee. There they settled in the village of Nazareth, the village where Mary and Joseph came from. Very little is recorded of Jesus childhood but, so far as we know he grew up in that same village surrounded by the same families. We do know that at least once he travelled to the city of Jerusalem to celebrate the Passover festival that reminded people of their escape from slavery in Egypt, led by Moses.

## Respond

The Bible tells us that Mary sang as her heart overflowed from the good news she had received. Read it below or listen to [this song](#), [this song](#), or [this song](#) and think about what this tells us about the nature of God:

*I'm bursting with God-news: I'm dancing the song of my saviour God. God took one good look at me, and look what happened – I'm the most fortunate woman on earth! What God has done for me will never be forgotten, the God whose very name is holy, set apart from all others. His mercy flows in wave after wave on those who are in awe before him. He bared his arm and showed his strength, scattered the bluffing braggarts. He throws tyrants off their high horses, pulled victims out of the mud. The starving poor sat down to a banquet: the callous rich were left out in the cold. He embraced his chosen child, Israel: he remembered and piled on the mercies, piled them high. It's exactly what he promised, beginning with Abraham and right up to now*  
(from The Message)

## Send

Can you make up your own song like Mary that praises God for what he has done and will do?

## Respond

God always answers our prayers, just not always in the way that we like or when we want. Sometimes he says yes, but not yet.

Talk about the things that you are waiting for that are happening soon (like Christmas!); and the things you are waiting for that are a long way off (maybe a holiday or going to secondary school). Ask God to give you patience as you wait.

## Send

Some couples wait for a long time to have children, just like Abraham and Sarah, but it doesn't happen and this can be very sad and painful. Some children's parents are not able to look after them and they have to live with other families. Pray for all the organisations that help families especially Home for Good which supports families of children that are fostered and adopted.



6th December—Isaac Testing

## Gather

Have you ever been asked to do something that is really hard and you don't want to do? How did you feel? Did you do it or did you try to get out of it?

Play 'would you rather?' asking people to choose between two options and explain why.

*Would you rather be covered in fur or covered in scales? Would you rather know the history of every object you touched or be able to talk to animals? Would you rather be forced to dance every time you heard music or be forced to sing along to any song you heard?*

In our story Abraham is faced with a tough choice.

## Engage – Genesis 22:1-19

Telling this story is very hard, but it was even harder for Abraham and his wife Sarah. After a very long time their son Isaac had been born and they were a proper family. God had made a promise to Abraham that his small family was to be the start of a great nation. Then, quite out of the blue, God asked Abraham to make an offering of his son, to sacrifice him.

I can only imagine the distress this caused the entire household, but Abraham absolutely trusted God and so set off on the journey with all the things that he needed and prepared to make the sacrifice. Abraham and his son toiled up the mountain until they got to the place that God had chosen. Everything was set and Abraham was just about to do as he had been told when he heard an angel's voice telling him to stop. God was testing his friend Abraham to see if he really trusted him. It was a very hard test, but God was pleased and reminded him of the promise to make his descendants as many as the stars in the sky. Sarah must have been very pleased to see both her men back safely.



19th December—Mary

## Gather

The white lily symbolizes Mary, mother of Jesus. Why do you think that is? What other flowers are used to

symbolise people or events or places?

Today's story is about hope for the future. What hopes and dreams for the future do you have?

## Engage – Luke 1:39-56

Mary needed a break after her meeting with Gabriel the angel and so headed off to see cousin Elizabeth who was really pleased to see her and excited to hear news of the coming baby. Mary herself was so pleased and excited that she made up a song, a song of worship to God. She was surprised that she of all the women in Israel had been chosen to be the mother of Jesus and realised just how special she was.

She reminded herself that although God was holy he readily forgave people who were truly sorry, showing them his mercy. Her song went on to say how God had always cared about the weak and the humble and was not really keen on kings and other powerful people who often thought they were greater than God. Right at the end of her hymn to God she looks back on way that God had been with Abraham's descendants all through their history, both in good times and bad times too.

God had promised his Messiah – saviour to Abraham and now it was all coming true, just as had been foretold.

## Respond

This is the Collect (a special prayer said in the Church of England) said when the birth of John the Baptist is celebrated in

John told everyone how God had kept his promise by sending Jesus

Repent means say sorry and mean it!

Sometimes it can be tough doing the right thing, but we can trust God to help us

*Almighty God,  
by whose providence your servant John the Baptist was wonderfully born, and sent to prepare the way of your Son our Saviour by the preaching of repentance: lead us to repent according to his preaching and, after his example, constantly to speak the truth, boldly to rebuke vice, and patiently to suffer for the truth's sake; through Jesus Christ your Son our Lord, who is alive and reigns with you, in the unity of the Holy Spirit, one God, now and for ever.*

This means that God provided – John was an answer to Zechariah and Elizabeth's prayer and a special messenger for God

Rebuking vice is trying really hard not to do the things we know we shouldn't

## Respond

Spend some time in silence thinking about the story and giving God the opportunity to speak to you.

If you find this difficult then try listening to some [Taize music](#) to help and dialing down by focusing on your breathing

## Send

Abraham trusted God even though it seemed like a really bad situation. God kept his promise that Abraham would be the ancestor to a whole nation and Isaac was the start of that. Remember that when you have to do something right that is hard to do.

## Send

Very soon it is going to be New Year when people think about making new year resolutions – a fresh start. What fresh starts could you make that show that you love God and care for other people? Why not draw or colour a picture of John baptising people in the river while you think about it.





7th December—Jacob

## Gather

Have a go at the 'dream questions' on the next page. Use a ladder (making sure someone is holding on to it) or mark one out on the floor, and every time you get a question right, take a step closer to the top.

## Engage - *Gen 27:41-28:22*

Isaac was an old man and his sight was failing and so it was easy for Jacob the younger of his twin sons to trick him into giving him the blessing due to his older twin Esau. Esau had carelessly swapped his inheritance for a bowl of spicy stew. He had come home from hunting feeling hungry and was quite happy to agree to Jacob's deal in exchange for something to eat.

Isaac duly blessed the wrong son, thinking that it was Esau who brought him a fine meal; Jacob even went so far as to dress in his brother's best clothes and make his arms feel hairy. Esau was very angry at being cheated like this and Jacob was so scared that he ran away. At night he slept in the open and had a very strange dream. He saw a stairway going up to heaven with angels going up and down it.

In his dream he heard the voice of God speaking to him. Despite his bad behaviour God did not tell him off but reminded him that his promise to Abraham still stood and that his descendants would be a nation that would spread out and fill the land. When he woke up Jacob promised to offer back to God a share of everything he got in the future.



18th December—John the Baptist

## Gather

The seashell, especially the scallop, is the symbol of baptism in Christianity. It is also used to symbolise pilgrimage because St. James used a scallop shell during his pilgrimage to beg for food and water. Even the poorest people could fill the small shell, so he always found help along his way.

## Engage - *Luke 3:1-19, Matthew 3:1-12*

Zechariah and Elizabeth's son John grew up just as God had promised and chose to live in the wilderness where he dressed in rough and coarse clothing and lived off the land. Matthew tells us his coat was woven from camel hair and he ate honey and locusts. That was not as remarkable as his message. Crowds came to see him and to listen to his talks. He was not very polite, he told people exactly what God thought of the way that they behaved and told them in no uncertain terms that they should stop doing wrong things and do what they knew to be right, following the basic rule of loving God and caring for other people.

Tax collectors, John proclaimed should not cheat people, collecting only as much as they should; soldiers should not bully and frighten people, but act honestly. But his worst criticism was reserved for the people who thought they were being very religious but did not care about other people.

He offered individuals the chance to be baptised in the Jordan river as a sign showing that they were sorry and wanted to make a new start. A symbol of belonging that is still used by Christians today.

## Respond

As soon as he could speak Zechariah praised God saying...  
*Blessed be the Lord, the God of Israel; he came and set his people free. He set the power of salvation in the centre of our lives, and in the very house of David his servant, just as he promised long ago through the preaching of his holy prophets: deliverance from our enemies and every hateful hand; mercy to our fathers, as he remembers to do what he said he'd do, what he swore to our father Abraham—a clean rescue from the enemy camp, so we can worship him without a care in the world, made holy before him as long as we live.*

*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 mercies 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.*

Talk about how many links you can find with stories you have heard throughout the Jesse Tree.

## Send

God answered the prayers of Zechariah and Elizabeth, but Zechariah couldn't quite believe it when it happened. Why not commit to pray for something every day in January and make a note of when God answer's your prayers.

You could make a [prayer jar](#) to help you

## Dream Questions

1. We have lots of different dreams while we are asleep but we don't remember them all
2. Some people dream in black and white: others dream in colour
3. Christians believe that sometimes God speaks to people through dreams
4. If you dream about something it will definitely come true
5. In the Bible there are several examples of God speaking to people through dreams
6. In the Bible story of Joseph, when he was in prison in Egypt, Joseph could not tell his fellow prisoners what their strange dreams meant
7. In the Bible, Daniel told King Nechuchadnezzar what he had dreamed as well as what it meant
8. In the Christmas story Joseph had a dream telling him that it was ok to marry Mary and look after her baby who was God's son
9. You can decide what you are going to dream about
10. In the Christmas story the wise men were warned in a dream not to tell Herod where they had found Jesus

## Answers

- |     |       |
|-----|-------|
| 1.  | True  |
| 2.  | True  |
| 3.  | True  |
| 4.  | False |
| 5.  | True  |
| 6.  | False |
| 7.  | True  |
| 8.  | True  |
| 9.  | False |
| 10. | True  |

## Respond

Even though he had done wrong, God's grace and mercy meant that Jacob's dream was full of reassurance that God keeps his promises. Jacob's response was to promise to give back to God a tenth of all that God provided for him. Below is a prayer that people who worship God in Methodist churches say every year as a love response to God's grace and mercy. It is a hard prayer to say but it helps us to think about what it means to be a committed friend of Jesus.

*I am no longer my own but yours. Put me to what you will, rank me with whom you will; put me to doing, put me to suffering; let me be employed for you, or laid aside for you, exalted for you, or brought low for you; let me be full, let me be empty, let me have all things, let me have nothing: I freely and wholeheartedly yield all things to your pleasure and disposal. And now, glorious and blessed God, Father, Son and Holy Spirit, you are mine and I am yours. So be it. And the covenant now made on earth, let it be ratified in heaven.*

## Send

What promises can you make to be generous in response to God's provision for you?



17th December—Zechariah

## Gather

Play a game where one person has to try to mime something and the others have to

guess what it is without them speaking

One of the characters in today's story had to do that for nine whole months! Just imagine how frustrating that must have been for everybody.

## Engage – Luke 1:5-25, 57-80

Every few months Zechariah would set off from his home and help to lead worship in the Temple. His special task was to burn incense, a sweet-smelling mixture of herbs and spices, a symbol of God's holiness and the prayers that people were offering at the same time. He was all on his own in the most sacred part of the Temple when he became aware that he had company. It was one of God's messengers, an angel who told him that he and his wife were going to have a baby.

Zechariah was a bit suspicious as both he and Elizabeth, his wife, were very old, but then the angel went on to tell him that this child was to be called John, and he was to herald the coming of the Messiah. Before the angel left Zechariah was told that because he had not believed what Angel Gabriel had come to tell him he would not be able to speak.

When the time came to name the baby it was agreed that his name was to be John, even though it was not a family name. Then Zechariah was able to tell everyone just what had happened when he met Gabriel.

## Respond

Read Luke 1:26-38 together and see how many bits of good news you can find and check against the list below. Thank God for each bit of good news in turn.

v28: God is with you  
v30: No need to be afraid when God is with you  
v31: God had kept his promise of sending a saviour, Jesus  
v32: Jesus is great and the Son of God  
v33: Jesus' kingdom of love and justice will never end  
v36: God answers prayers sometimes miraculously  
v37: No word from God will ever fail  
v38: We too can chose to be God's loved and loving servants just like Mary

## Send

Mary was only young when she received the good news, many biblical scholars think she was only a teenager. God has always used children and young people to share his good news.

In what ways are you going to be good news today?



8th December—Joseph

## Gather

Have you had any strange dreams that you remember? Did you wonder if they had any particular meaning?

Can you remember a time when something didn't go to plan? How did it feel?

You might be familiar with bits of today's story because of the musical *Joseph and his technicolour dreamcoat*? but the truth behind the story is that God provided for Joseph and stayed faithful to him, and Joseph trusted him even though lots of things didn't go to plan and initially didn't seem to match the dreams that he had as a young man.

## Engage – Genesis 39-47

Imagine having ten older brothers and being dad's favourite too. Then add to that a series of dreams that made your brothers and even mum and dad look silly. No wonder Joseph was unpopular, but dad took little notice and even gave him an amazing coat that he could show off in. His older brothers were so fed up that they decided to get rid of him; selling him as a slave and pretending that he had been killed by a wild animal.

Sold as slave in Egypt Joseph quickly settled down and was doing well, when he was thrown into prison even though he had done nothing wrong. In prison he worked hard and helped a couple of the king's servants. One of them remembered him and when the king was bothered by nightmares suggested that Joseph might help.

Joseph was not only able to explain the dreams but he had an idea about what to do. Pharaoh put him in charge. After seven years of good harvests there were seven years of famine across many lands in the region, but God's provision through Joseph meant that the people of Egypt had enough. It was not long before Joseph's brothers came from their land near Egypt to buy food, Joseph recognised them and realised that his dream of his brother's bowing down to him had come true. God had indeed taken care of him.

## Respond

Although the Bible doesn't say so explicitly, we can assume that Joseph was able to trust God because he kept in touch with him through prayer.

Use a pot of bubbles to represent your prayers. As the bubbles rise imagine they are prayers that represent:

- things that you are praising God for
- things that have not gone to plan and have been disappointing or difficult
- dreams and hopes that you want to share with God.

## Send

Joseph's brothers were reunited with him because the country they lived in had a famine, and they needed food.

There are many people in this country who won't be having big feasts at Christmas because they cannot afford it for all sorts of reasons.

What can your family do to share some of your good fortune with others in the coming weeks?



16th December—Angel

## Gather

Play a good news/bad news game, where one person makes up some good news and the next person has to counter that with the related bad news. What good news have you had recently? Was it surprising or something that you had been hoping for, for a while?

The people of Israel had been hoping for a Messiah for hundreds of years, but Mary had no idea that it would be her that would be the one to give birth to him!

## Engage – *Luke 1:26-38*

We know very little about Mary. Dr Luke in his book about the life of Jesus, tells us that although she was engaged she was not married and she lived in a village called Nazareth. Very little other information is available about her, though people have often used their imagination to fill in the details. Luke writes that she did receive a very unexpected visit from an angel. This heavenly messenger announced himself as Gabriel, the angel who stood in the presence of God.

This was not simply a social call, Gabriel had a message from God. Mary was told that even though she was unmarried she was to become a mother, and her child was to be called Jesus, the son of God. He was the fulfilment of that long ago promise to Abraham that all the families of earth would be blessed through him. I imagine that Mary was quite overwhelmed by all of this and took the opportunity to go and visit her cousin Elizabeth.

Joseph, who Mary had promised to marry, was not left out of the picture. Matthew, in his life of Jesus, wrote that an angel went to see Joseph to tell him about the baby too.



## Respond

The symbol of today is a sword and a hammer, because Isaiah's message was about peace. Literally turning weapons into farm tools. Isaiah also had a message about the Prince of Peace, Jesus.

Isaiah 9:6

For to us a child is born,  
to us a son is given,  
and the government will be on his shoulders.  
And he will be called  
Wonderful Counselor, Mighty God,  
Everlasting Father, Prince of Peace.

[Listen to these words being sung as part of Handel's Messiah](#)

## Send

God asked 'Whom shall I send?' Isaiah answered, 'Here I am, send me'. Where do you think God wants to send you to do what? And are you willing to go?



9th December—Moses

## Gather

What rules do you have at home or at school?

Why do you think those rules are in place?

[YouTube video - Ten Commandment Boogie](#)

## Engage

God had promised Abraham that he would be the father of a great nation, years later Moses led around six hundred thousand men and their families out of Egypt on their long journey to the Promised Land. It was not an easy journey and by the time they reached Mount Sinai they were ready for a rest.

While the people waited at the foot of the mountain Moses went up to the top to meet with God. It was scary for the people waiting, but it must have been even more frightening for Moses, meeting God face to face.

At this meeting God gave Moses a set of basic rules for life, we call these the Torah, or the Ten Commandments. When, many centuries later Jesus was asked which was the most important He reminded people what was written in the Old Testament. His reply was 'Love the Lord your God with all your heart and with all your soul and with all your mind,' adding 'the second is like it, love your neighbour as yourself.' It seemed simple, all that anyone had to do was to keep all of those rules, but as you probably know it is not that easy.

## Respond

Wonder together about what commandments you could leave out or add.

Jesus summarised God's guidelines by saying that we should:

- Love God,
- love others
- and love ourselves.

See if you can work out which of the ten commandments

## Send

Have a go at making something to help you remember God's ten guidelines for living.

[Folded paper teller game](#)

[Ten Commandments Wheel](#)



15th December—Isaiah

## Gather

Make the room as dark as possible and then light a candle. Spend some time looking at it and thinking about the difference that light makes in

the darkness. Isaiah 9:2 says 'the people walking in darkness have seen a great light; on those living in the land of deep darkness a light has dawned'

Isaiah's message was to help people see their way out of the darkness of their lives. Apart from night time what dark things are there in our world today?

## Engage – *Isaiah 6:1-10, 9:1-7*

Yet again God's people had forgotten all the great things that God had done for them. They were still having services in the Temple, but they were more concerned about looking good than following God's rules. God needed someone who would remind the people of all that he had done, who could warn them of what would happen to them and tell them of the great future that God had planned.

Isaiah had a dream, and in it he saw God in all his majesty and power surrounded by fierce looking angels. It was all very scary and Isaiah realised that he was simply not good enough to be even there. Then, in his dream, one of the angels touched his lips as a sign that he was forgiven for all the wrong things that he had done.

Isaiah heard the voice of God asking who would act as a messenger, and volunteered for the job. He was to be the person to remind, warn and encourage the Hebrew nation.

Bad things would happen to them, but God had a great future in store. He was going to send his Messiah who would change everything and allow everyone to become friends with God again.

## Respond

Almighty God, Father of all mercies, we your unworthy servants give you humble thanks for all your goodness and loving-kindness to us and to all whom you have made. We bless you for our creation, preservation, and all the blessings of this life; but above all for your immeasurable love in the redemption of the world by our Lord Jesus Christ; for the means of grace, and for the hope of glory. And, we pray, give us such an awareness of your mercies, that with truly thankful hearts we may show forth your praise, not only with our lips, but in our lives, by giving up ourselves to your service, and by walking before you in holiness and righteousness all our days; through Jesus Christ our Lord, to whom, with you and the Holy Spirit, be honour and glory throughout all ages.

Amen.

[www.anewliturgy.com/no-5](http://www.anewliturgy.com/no-5)

## Send

Use a paper plates or cake cases to make lions' heads. Cover them with orange and yellow strips of wool or paper to make the mane.



10th December—Ruth

## Gather

Spread a pile of grain/seeds on a tray and take it in turns to see how many you can pick up using only one hand in twenty seconds.

How far is the furthest you have walked? Did you enjoy it? In today's story the long walk was done to find help and somewhere safe to live.

Visit this website below to help you make sense of today's story.

<https://www.thebiblejourney.org/biblejourney2/29-the-journeys-of-ruth-and-samuel/ruths-journey-to-bethlehem/>

## Engage

We do not meet many women in the Bible and only two have a book with their name, Esther is the other one. Ruth was not one of Abraham's descendants, but she married one of them.

Elimelek, and Naomi, his wife had moved from their home in Bethlehem with their two sons as there was a local shortage of food. After their father's death it was not long before the two boys met and married a couple of local girls, Orpah and Ruth. Sadly both sons died leaving three widows, Naomi decided that she ought to move back to her home village and Ruth chose to go with her.

It was not easy to make a new start and with no land to grow food on they depended on kind neighbours letting them share in the harvest. Ruth's kindness was seen by many and they willingly helped her, but in secret so that she was not embarrassed.

Boaz, a local farmer noticed her and showed her special kindness and nobody was surprised when he asked her to marry him. Ruth was now settled in the village of Bethlehem where she became the great grandmother of David, the giant killing shepherd who was to become king.

## Respond

God provided for Ruth and Naomi in ways they did not even hope for. God provides for us in many ways too, some of which we take for granted.

For each seed/grain you have gathered say thank you to God for something that he has given you.

*Leader: Lord Jesus, who had nowhere to lay your head.*

*All: Be with those who have no land to call their own.*

*Leader: For the all the refugees around the world*

*All: Lord, hear our prayer.*

*All: Help us, Lord, to find room at the inn for those who are far from home. Amen.*

adapted from [www.christianaid.org.uk](http://www.christianaid.org.uk)

## Send

Many people in our world leave countries where there is no food, or in dangerous situations like wars to find help and a safe place to live. Visit the [Christian Aid website](http://www.christianaid.org.uk) to learn more and for ideas on how you can make a difference



14th December—Daniel

## Gather

Joke: Why are lions religious? ... because they prey frequently, and prey as a family!

Do you know any other jokes about lions?

How would you feel if you had to face a whole pride of lions with nothing to protect you?

Read Daniel and the Lions in the Lion Storyteller Bible.

## Engage

Things had gone badly wrong for God's people. They had chosen to ignore God's rules of life and even worshipped other gods. As a result God had allowed them to be defeated in battle and many people were taken off into another country where they lived as refugees. However there were some who still chose to worship God, despite living in a foreign land.

Daniel and his companions chose to follow God's rules and he blessed them for their obedience. Their talents were recognised by the king and they became an important part of the government.

Kings came and went, but Daniel was given even more government responsibility. Others were jealous and persuaded King Darius to make a law that for a month people could only ask the king for anything that they wanted.

Undaunted Daniel continued to pray each day, and even stood at the window so there was no hiding. The king had no choice but to uphold the law and Daniel spent the night in a cage of lions, hungry ones at that. God looked after him and he was kept safe. King Darius was so impressed that he warned everyone in his empire to respect God.

## Respond

Pray using lego. If you need some ideas visit  
['Prayer like a gourmet'](#)

[praylikeagourmet.com/creative-practices/6-ways-to-lego-pray/](http://praylikeagourmet.com/creative-practices/6-ways-to-lego-pray/)



## Send

People in your family may have already started writing lists for Christmas, especially the things they want to receive as gifts, but Christmas is about much more than that.

Talk about the rituals and the traditions that you have as a family. What things are important and need to be cherished and what things are getting the way of your enjoying and celebrating what God has given us in Jesus.



11th December—David

## Gather

What things are people judged by?

How do you decide whether someone is a good person or not?

In one of the Bible stories about David we hear about how God doesn't judge people by how tall they are, or how old they are or even how strong and healthy they look. He looks at their heart – the things that they care about and think and feel are important. How might people know that you are trying to have a good heart that pleases God?

Read David the Giant-Killer in the Lion Storyteller Bible.

## Engage – 1 Samuel 16:1-23-17:58, 2 Samuel 5:1-5

David was a musician and wrote many songs, the first King of Israel, Saul, liked to listen to him singing. But David grew up looking after sheep, it was hard and sometimes dangerous as wild animals would attack the flock. Fighting with Goliath first brought him to the king's attention, but God has already chosen him to be the next king.

After many adventures David became king and ruled well, though that did not stop him from getting things very wrong at times. Despite his faults and weaknesses God forgave him and in turn David wrote some memorable poems that were set to music to be sung during worship services. One of the most memorable of these poems describes God as a good shepherd,

David wrote, *"Even when I walk through the darkest valley, I will not be afraid, for you are close beside me. Your rod and your staff protect and comfort me"* Going on to say: *"My cup overflows with blessings. Surely your goodness and unfailing love will pursue me all the days of my life, and I will live in the house of the LORD forever."*

David was writing about his own experience of God.



## Respond

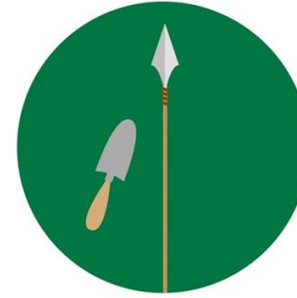
In one of the famous David stories, about Goliath, he took five small stones from the riverbed as weapons when he faced the giant. He decided to fight the giant because he couldn't believe what he was saying about God. He trusted that God was with him and would help him do what he needed to do.

Pick up and hold in turn five small stones as you think about the five truths below and talk to God about them:

- God is God
- God is good
- God loves us
- God asks us to share his good news
- God helps us to do the right thing for him

## Send

Write a poem about your experience of God, like David. If you need help look at the Psalms for inspiration as he wrote many of them



13th December—Nehemiah

## Gather

Write a list of all the things that you might need to build a city wall including the resources and the skills required.

Today's story is about a man who God used to rebuild the city of Jerusalem as promised, with hope and hard work, and a lot of good organization.

## Engage – *Nehemiah 1-13*

The Hebrew refugees had been exiled for about seventy years when there was a new king who began to allow them to return to their homeland, and the city of Jerusalem. The walls of the city of Jerusalem were broken and people felt threatened by their enemies. Nehemiah was working as the king's wine waiter and was sad when he heard how bad things were. The king noticed and gave Nehemiah a chance to explain, after a very short prayer to God for help Nehemiah told the king, who immediately sent him off to manage the rebuilding of the city walls.

The enemies of the Hebrews were determined to stop the work and tried to do so in all sorts of ways. In the end the builders had their tools in their hands and a weapon by their side, ready to spring into action if they were attacked. When the money began to run out Nehemiah paid for food for all of the workers out of his own pocket.

Finally, the walls of the city of Jerusalem were rebuilt and the people gathered to worship God and services were held in the Temple building and the Book of the Law read to all of the people.

## Respond

Water is an important symbol in the Bible often representing being made right with God again. Read this prayer from the Baptism service together:

*We thank you, almighty God, for the gift of water to sustain, refresh and cleanse all life. Over water the Holy Spirit moved in the beginning of creation. Through water you led the children of Israel from slavery in Egypt to freedom in the Promised Land. In water your Son Jesus received the baptism of John and was anointed by the Holy Spirit as the Messiah, the Christ, to lead us from the death of sin to newness of life. We thank you, Father, for the water of baptism. In it we are buried with Christ in his death. By it we share in his resurrection. Through it we are reborn by the Holy Spirit. Therefore, in joyful obedience to your Son, we baptize into his fellowship those who come to him in faith. Now sanctify this water that, by the power of your Holy Spirit, they may be cleansed from sin and born again. Renewed in your image, may they walk by the light of faith and continue for ever in the risen life of Jesus Christ our Lord; to whom with you and the Holy Spirit be all honour and glory, now and for ever. Amen.*

## Send

We might not worship other Gods like the people in today's story, but sometimes we do let other things become more important than our friendship with him. Have a think about whether you have any habits or priorities that need to change.



12th December—Elijah

## Gather

Fire and water are fascinating things. They are essential to human life but can also be devastating when they get out of control. Why not have a go at an experiment with fire and water?

[Youtube video of fire and water experiment](https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=2MLTfjh4glc)—<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=2MLTfjh4glc>

[Youtube video of water experiments](https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=CCxbl1qRsWY)—<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=CCxbl1qRsWY>

## Engage – 1 Kings 18

God had promised Abraham that his family would grow into a nation. Moses had led them out of Egypt where they were slaves to the Promised Land. David was a great king who trusted God, but people had short memories and forgot what God had done so he sent prophets to remind them and warn them.

Under King Ahab people had begun to worship other gods and so Elijah, one of God's prophets, wanted to show everyone that there was only one God. The competition was simple, two stone platforms were built as a base for a sacrifice. The wood was in place, the meat was laid out, but nobody was to light the fire, that was the test of the god's power.

One set of priests danced about and prayed for most of the day but no fire. Elijah even teased them, telling them to make even more noise. But nothing happened.

Before Elijah started to pray he had buckets and buckets of water poured over the sacrifice so that it was well and truly soaked.

Then he asked God to set light to it all. Within seconds everything had gone up in smoke. There was only one God, the one who made the world.