

GOD'S STORY OF

ADVENT



God's Story of Advent

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INTRODUCTION

For The Grownups:

How To Use This Book:

This book has been written at a 9-12 year old level and is meant to be read together as a family. It is a tool to guide you and your child(ren) through the Advent season. The intent is for parents and/or caretakers to read it with your child(ren) and grow in your love for the Lord and for each other as you learn about Advent together. Each day there is a reading from Scripture, a devotional, a few discussion questions, and an activity for you to do together. Our goal was to write as straightforward as possible while also providing a robust view of God's Advent story.

What's Involved:

Read Together: This is the Bible reading for the day. You will notice that there are two different readings each day - one is a longer portion of scripture and the other is short. Read whichever one best fits your family's schedule. We recommend that you read the Scripture section from a Bible that you have at home. If you don't have a Bible at home, please visit the Info Center at any of our venues and you can get one for free! For children up to age twelve, we recommend you use either the NIrV (New International Reader's Version) or the NLT (New Living Translation) translation of the Bible, as it is more reader-friendly for children in this age range. For children over twelve, we recommend using the NIV (New International Version) or the CSB (Christian Standard Bible).

Explain: This is an overall synopsis of what you just read that should be read aloud with family.

Family Summary: This section focuses on one core truth your family can take to heart and praise God for even in the beautiful chaos of life. The purpose of this is to come back each day reminding ourselves of who God is and what He has done for us.

Activity: These are completely optional! Our goal was to make them accessible and fun for the family to further tuck God's truths into our hearts.

Pray: Pray together either using what we have provided or whatever the Spirit has laid on your heart.

Glossary: Throughout the book we have several words and terms in **bold**. If you are unsure of a meaning for these, they are explained in the glossary in the back of the book.

Encouragement:

We are excited and hopeful for families to prepare their hearts and minds to celebrate the birth of our Savior. Deuteronomy 6:4-7 says,

“Hear, O Israel: The Lord our God, the Lord is one. Love the Lord your God with all your heart and with all your soul and with all your strength. These commandments that I give you today are to be on your hearts. Impress them on your children. Talk about them when you sit at home and when you walk along the road, when you lie down and when you get up.”

You are not required to be a Bible expert to share God’s love and truth with your child(ren). As caretakers of children, our goal should be to point them in the way of Jesus. By slowing down and anchoring ourselves on the rich truths of Scripture, we model for them that our deepest hope and identity is found in our Savior. The whole story of Scripture points to God’s special plan to rescue His people and bring them back into a perfect relationship with Himself. We hope this Advent guide shows glimpses of God’s plan to your family as we trace the lineage of Jesus and God’s provision throughout the Bible. Our prayer would be that your family would come into the Christmas season filled with delight and wonder at God’s power and control along with His attention to the smallest details.

For The Kids:

You are about to hear from God’s Word and learn so much about who He is and what He cares about. We want you to know that God created you and has had a plan from the beginning of time to be friends with you. The same Creator who created everything you see, made you. We hope you lean in and listen as the Bible is read and His story is told, hopefully preparing you for the true meaning of Christmas. Your grownup cares so much about you - that’s why they’re sharing these crazy stories about a God who loves you like crazy! Remember, no matter what happens, when you put your trust in Jesus Christ and follow His ways, there is nothing that can separate you from His love. Jesus died on the cross to fix what **sin** broke and make us friends with God. We get to talk, pray, and love the One True God who has always existed and will always exist. Our God is in control of everything. He cares for brokenhearted, lost, confused, anxious, messy people. You don’t need to do everything right for God to love you! He already does and He already sent His Son for you. Remember this as we read through the Bible and delight in the fact that He sent you a rescuer, and that He loves you with a never-stopping love!

What Is Advent?

Advent is a season leading up to Christmas. The word Advent comes from the Latin word, “adventus,” which means coming. When we celebrate Advent, we are celebrating Jesus coming to Earth as a baby, and we are reminding ourselves of Jesus’ promise to come back in the future. Advent lasts for four Sundays. It begins on the fourth Sunday before Christmas and continues until Christmas Eve.

Why Do We Celebrate Advent?

We celebrate Advent to remember when Jesus first came to earth as God’s promised rescuer. In the Old **Testament** of the Bible (the part written before Jesus lived on earth), God promised His special people, the Israelites, that He would send someone from their family to beat the **power and penalty of sin** for all time. Jesus is the rescuer who perfectly showed people who God is and what He is like. We celebrate to remember that God keeps His promises and that He rescues us from our **sin**. We celebrate to remind ourselves of who God is and how much He loves us. We also celebrate because we know that Jesus will come again to fix everything that **sin** broke, and He will reign as the King of all Kings.

DAILY
READINGS



Day 1

Read Together: Genesis 1 & 2

Abbreviated version: Genesis 1:27

Explain:

Through a man named Moses (the human author of Genesis,) God told the Israelites the story of why He created the world! The story didn't include every tiny detail, but it tells us that He was in charge of everything. The Israelites, God's special, chosen people, lived for 400 years as slaves in Egypt. During that time, they learned about and were exposed to the gods of Egypt and Mesopotamia, but not necessarily the One True God. The purpose of teaching the Israelites about why God created everything was to show them who God is and what He cares about. This is different from what the surrounding cultures believed. Moses taught the Israelites that God single-handedly created everything and that everything was created to bring Him glory. Let's think about that for a moment: God spoke and brought everything into existence. There was no struggle for power; God simply spoke and then declared what He had made to be good. Those good things, like the sky and water, plants and animals, planets, and people, then pointed back to God as Creator. This taught the Israelites that God alone is to be **worshiped**, not His creation.

The Israelites also learned why God created people. Genesis 1:27 tells us:

So God created human beings in his own likeness.

He created them to be like himself.

He created them as male and female.

All people are created in the image of God. Being created in the image of God does not mean that humans ARE God, it means that humans have God's fingerprints in every part of who they are. As God's image bearers, we get to represent Him to all of creation, including one another. That means we can show each other what God is like! We get to love one another, enjoy what God made, take care of what God made, and remind each other how much God loves us. This is why God made us!

Today let's celebrate that the God who made everything loves us so much! Let's celebrate that we can show God's amazing love to one another! Let's celebrate that we can **bring glory to God** and enjoy Him forever!

Family Summary: God made everything, and God made people to be like Him. We can show other people what God is like when we love one another.

Sticky Spots:

People have different opinions about whether the world was created in exactly 7 days or if God spent thousands or millions or billions of years creating it. What's important to remember is that God is the one who created it all so that we can bring Him glory! When we love Jesus and follow in His ways, our job is to love people - even if we disagree with them.

Discussion Questions:

- Why do you think it was important for the Israelites to know why God made them?
- How does it make you feel that God, who made everything, knows you and loves you?
- Who can you tell about God's amazing love?

Activity:

Create something together as a family. Here are some ideas:

- Draw, color, or paint pictures together. You can create pictures of the earth and of the different things that God made in Genesis.
- Play with blocks or Legos and build something together.
- Make a pillow or blanket fort.
- Bake a dessert or make a meal together.

As you work together to create something, talk about how we need tools to make things. We need pencils and crayons to draw; blocks, pillows, or blankets to build; and cooking utensils to make food. When God created everything, He didn't need any tools! He created everything from nothing just by speaking! What an amazing God we have!

Pray:

God, thank you for being all-powerful and so creative! You made everything, including us. Thank you for the people in our family and in our church. Thank you for creating us to know you and enjoy you. Amen.

Day 2

Read Together: Genesis 3

Abbreviated version: Genesis 3:6-7

Explain:

Before **sin** entered the world, everything was perfect and good. All of God's creation did what God made it to do. Adam and Eve glorified God and enjoyed Him! The Bible tells us that they walked with God in the Garden of Eden. Imagine what it would be like if everything was perfect and worked the way it was made to work. We would all love each other perfectly. We would take care of the earth. There would be no sickness or pollution. We would know God and have a perfect relationship with Him.

Adam and Eve only knew and experienced what was good. They had a perfect friendship with God, with one another and with everything God had made. But sin broke it all. When they ate the fruit from the tree of the knowledge of good and evil, Adam and Eve experienced evil for the first time. They felt shame - that uncomfortable feeling that you get when you know you have done something wrong or embarrassing. They made clothes for themselves because they suddenly felt embarrassed about being naked in front of each other. They even hid because they knew God would be upset with them. When we sin, it hurts our relationships with one another and with God.

God loved Adam and Eve, yet because they sinned, He sent them out of the garden and away from Him. But God still loved them and took care of them. He made them clothes to wear and He made it so that they wouldn't have to keep experiencing the evil of sin by living forever on Earth. God still wanted a relationship with them even though they had hurt Him.

As we read the Bible, we can see how God keeps pursuing, or going after, people to win their hearts back to Him. Everyone sins, but God still loves us and wants to have a relationship with us. Before He even created the world, God had a plan to rescue us. He would make the biggest sacrifice of all and it would cost Him everything to fix the world that people broke, but He was willing to do it because of His love for us.

Family Summary: Adam and Eve had a perfect friendship with God, but they sinned and hurt that relationship. Because of their sin, now everyone sins, and our sins hurt our friendship with God. God loves us and wants to have a relationship with us; He is the only one who can fix our relationship with Him.

Did You Know:

The Bible was written in 3 different languages: Hebrew, Aramaic, and Greek. The Hebrew word for sin (חַטָּא) and the Greek word for sin (ἁμαρτάνω) both mean “to miss” or “do wrong”. When we sin, we think, say, or do wrong and end up missing out on the good things God had planned for us.

Discussion Questions:

- What is sin?
- How does sin hurt our relationship with God?
- How does sin hurt our relationships with each other?

Activity:

Write or draw some of the things God has done for you and your family that you are thankful for.

Pray:

God, thank you that even though we all sin, you still love us. You still pursue us and want a friendship with us. Please help us to love you and trust you. Amen

Day 3

Read Together: Genesis 6-9

Abbreviated version: Genesis 6:5-8

Explain:

You may have heard this story before, and guess what? So had the Israelites! Actually, there were a lot of different flood stories that weren't true, and one of the most popular ones would have come from Abraham's hometown of Chaldea, also known as Mesopotamia. (We'll learn about Abraham and his part in God's rescue plan soon!) The author of Genesis wanted to tell the *real* flood story to show what the One True God was like and to show what makes Him different!

Genesis 6:5 tells us that,

"The Lord saw how bad the sins of everyone on earth had become. They only thought about evil things."

Evil and sin continued to spread through the world, but God chose Noah and his family to continue His rescue plan by washing away all the sin in the world through a flood and starting over. In a world where people were doing wrong, Noah had chosen to do right. It has always been God's plan to be with His people, but God allows people to make their own choices. In order to restore the world and make it new again, God sent a flood and washed away all the sin in the world. The only people who were rescued were Noah and his family because they obeyed and listened to God. God told Noah to build a large boat and bring male and female animals with him. Every living thing that was not inside the ark when the flood came would be washed away and die.

The Bible tells us that after about a year, the waters finally went down and they could see dry land again! God made a very special promise to Noah and every living creature to never again destroy the world by water. This kind of promise is called a **covenant** because the more powerful one cares for the less powerful. God says He will be the one to remember the special promise. How amazing that our God, the One True God, is the one in control?

In Genesis 8:21 God says,

I will never put a curse on the ground again because of human beings. I will not do it even though their hearts are always directed toward evil. Their thoughts are evil from the time they are young. I will never destroy all living things again, as I have just done.

Dig Deeper:

You can look back through the creation story and the flood stories to see how they mirror each other. In the original language the Bible was written in, the same word is used for God's Spirit hovering over the waters in the creation story and God pushing back the waters in the story of Noah. God used Noah as part of His plan to save creation as He made all things new.

Remember that God created the world, and He brought order out of chaos. God showed people that He was in control of everything. The story of the flood shows that God takes sin seriously and He always keeps His promises. Even though we sin and choose our way over God's way, He promised to send a rescuer who would one day take all sin onto Himself. God could save the world on His own, but He chose to **partner** with people to put the things back together.

Family Summary: In order to restore the world and make it new again, God sent a flood and washed away all the sin in the world. The only people who were rescued were Noah and his family because they obeyed and listened to God. God made a promise to never again destroy the world by water.

Discussion Questions:

- Noah's ark saved him from the world's destruction. How can we be rescued from sin?
- Why do you think God wanted the Israelites to know about who He is compared to the false gods?
- How does it feel knowing that even though we sin, God still rescues us and loves us?

Activity:

See if you can create a rainbow in your home. Take a small glass of water and place a small mirror inside at an angle. Let the sunlight hit the mirror and watch as a rainbow appears on the wall. Talk about the hope we have in Jesus as you gaze at the beauty of the rainbow.

Pray:


Lord, we thank you that you are the one in control. We praise you that even though we sin, you sent us Jesus to fix our relationship with you. Help us to think of you and walk in your ways all the days of our life. We love you, Amen.

Day 4

Read Together: Genesis 11:1-9

Abbreviated version: Genesis 11:1-4

Explain:

 After the flood, more people were born and the earth was filled with life again. At this point in history, everyone spoke the same language, which seems like it would have been great! People understood what everyone else was saying and they could easily work together. The trouble began in verse 4, where the people said to each other, *“Come on! Let’s build a city for ourselves. Let’s build a tower that reaches to the sky. We’ll make a name for ourselves.”*

You might be wondering, what was so bad about building a city and a tower? We have lots of cities and towers all over the world that are very good places to live. The problem was not the city or the tower; the problem was the people’s reason for building the city and the tower. They were doing it to make a name for themselves. This means they wanted **glory** - they wanted everyone to know how great and amazing they were. Let’s look back at Genesis 1:27. *“So God created human beings in his own likeness. He created them to be like himself. He created them as male and female.”*

God created people to be like Him so that they could show one another how amazing He is. When the people in Genesis 11 decided to make a name for themselves, they were trying to steal glory that belongs to God. Only God deserves to be worshiped, but the people were trying to be **worshiped**. Only God deserves all of our praise, honor, and thanks, but the people wanted those things for themselves. When we worship and give all of our thanks to something or someone who is not God, we are sinning. It’s good to cheer other people on and to thank them for helping us! However, people were not created to be worshiped. When we try to get everyone to see how amazing we are, we are hurting ourselves and others in the process, and we’re not giving God what belongs to Him.

Thankfully in the Tower of Babel story, God stepped in and mixed up everyone’s language and scattered them around the known world. He did this to show them mercy. God was kind and forgave them even though they didn’t deserve it. You see, if God had allowed them to continue to worship people, they would forget how amazing and good He is. The world would be filled with even more evil and sin, and the people would have experienced even more bad things. Only God is meant to be worshiped because only He is perfect and deserves all of our praise, honor, and thanks.

Did You Know:

The Hebrew word, Babel, means “Gate of God.” It is similar to the Hebrew word, balal, which means “to confuse.” The words Babel and balal are pronounced similarly, and it leads to a play on words in Genesis 11:9: “That is why it was called Babel—because there the Lord confused (balal) the language of the whole world.” (NIV)

Family Summary: God created people to be like Him so that they could show one another how amazing He is. When the people in Genesis 11 decided to make a name for themselves, they were trying to steal glory that belongs to God. They wanted everyone to see how great and amazing they were, and they wanted to be worshiped. Only God is meant to be worshiped because only He is perfect and deserves all of our praise, honor, and thanks.

Discussion Questions:

- Why is it bad to worship people and not God?
- How does the Tower of Babel story show us what God is like?
- What are some ways you can give God praise, honor, and thanks?

Activity:

Sing a worship song together. It can be a Christmas song like “O Holy Night,” “Joy to the World,” “O Come All Ye Faithful,” or any other song you like to sing to worship God. After you sing, discuss what it means to give God praise and glory with our lives.

Pray:

Lord, you deserve all of our worship and praise because you alone are perfect. Thank you that even though we forget you and give our worship to others, you sent us Jesus to fix our friendship with you. Help us to remember you and give you all of our praise. In Jesus’ name, Amen.

Day 5

Read Together: Genesis 11:27-12:1-9

Abbreviated version: Genesis 12:1-3

Explain:

In Genesis 11 God scattered the people because they were trying to build a name for themselves. Shortly after that, God chose an entire nation (the Israelites) to partner with Him to build a name for God by saving the world. Did you notice any descriptions of Abram when God chose to **ble**ss him? Does the Bible tell us that Abram was famous, or that He was a really great guy who always did the right thing? (If you read Genesis 12:10-20, you'll see that he definitely didn't always do the right thing!) The Bible doesn't tell us much about Abram's life up to the point when God called him, but it seems that he was a normal man who lived a regular life.

Then God chose Abram and told him in Genesis 12:2-3,

"I will make you into a great nation. And I will bless you. I will make your name great. You will be a blessing to others. I will bless those who bless you. I will put a curse on anyone who puts a curse on you. All nations on earth will be blessed because of you."

God told Abram and his wife, Sarai, that He would make their family into a great nation. That meant that Abram would have a gigantic family, and God said that they would bless everyone on earth. To bless, in this example, means that through Abraham's family the world would know about God's goodness and power. People would see that God loves them and cares about them. However, there seemed to be a mistake in God's plan: Abram was seventy-five years old when God called him. That's old enough to be a grandfather, but Abram didn't even have any children at that point!

Abram and Sarai questioned God and His promises, but they still trusted in Him. They obeyed God and left their hometown and everything they knew to follow God to a new land. They believed God when He promised them a family. They trusted God, even though God's promise might not have made sense to them. It took many years before God gave Abram and Sarai a son. Abram and Sarai didn't always obey God perfectly, just like we don't always obey perfectly. But God still used their mistake-filled faith to eventually bless everyone in the world!

Dig Deeper:

The name Abram means “exalted father,” yet when we first met Abram in the Bible, he had no children. Later, God changed his name to Abraham, which means “father of many” in Hebrew. How could a man who had no children be a father of many? Look ahead to Luke 3:23-38. As you read through the names, you’ll find that Abraham is part of the same family as Jesus! God blessed Abraham’s faith, and he became part of the family that God would use to rescue the world from sin.

Family Summary: God chooses who will partner with Him to bring about His plan to save the world. He promised Abram and Sarai a family so big, they wouldn’t be able to count everyone. God used their family to bless the whole world even though they made lots of mistakes.

Discussion Questions:

- God’s promise to Abram that he would have a family probably seemed impossible because he was so old. What does this tell us about how powerful and big God is?
- Why do you think it’s important that Abram listened to and obeyed God?
- How can you obey God?

Activity:

Play Red Light, Green Light together. Kid(s) should line up on one side of a room and the grownup(s) should stand on the other side. When grownups say, “green light,” kids quickly walk towards them. When grownups say, “red light,” kids stop where they are. If kids keep moving when grownups say, “red light,” they have to go back to the start. If grownups say “yellow light” or “blue light” or any other color light, kids have to stay put. After you play, discuss how it’s important to listen to and obey God as our Heavenly Father.

Pray:

Father, help us to trust you and obey you even when we don’t understand. You know everything, God, and you are way bigger than us. Thank you for loving us and blessing us through Abram’s family. Amen.

Day 6

Read Together: Genesis 21-22

Abbreviated version: Genesis 22:15-18

Explain:

(Note that not all children are ready for this story. Some may struggle with why God would ask Abraham to sacrifice Isaac. Instead of reading the entire story together, read Genesis 21:1-7 and focus on how God gave Abraham and Sarah a son despite being so old. Then talk about how God is faithful and He always keeps His promises.)



Abraham is very, very old at this point in the story. God changed his name to Abraham, which means “father of many,” and He changed Sarai’s name to Sarah, which means “princess.” God reminded Abraham of His promise to make his family so big, he wouldn’t be able to count them all, and He promised Sarah that He would **ble**ss her and that she would be the mother of kings.

Even though Abraham and Sarah were too old to have children, God gave them a son! They named him Isaac, which means, “one who laughs.” In Genesis 21:6, Sarah says, *“God has brought me laughter, and everyone who hears about this will laugh with me.”* Sarah laughed because she was way too old to be able to have children! She thought she’d never have kids, but God provided a son for her.

Then the story takes a turn. When Isaac was a young man, God asked Abraham to make a **sacrifice** to Him on Mount Moriah. A sacrifice is the act of giving something up that is very important and valuable. When a person offered a sacrifice to God, it showed that they were loyal to Him and that they **worshipped** Him. The very valuable thing that God asked Abraham to sacrifice was his beloved son, Isaac! Isaac was the son that God had promised to Abraham and that God was going to use to make Abraham’s family big!

In the land where Abraham was living, people worshiped many different gods that weren’t real. The priests for those gods said the gods demanded that people be sacrificed. Abraham might have wondered if God was like those other false gods when He asked him to sacrifice Isaac, but he trusted that God was different and that He would take care of them. He knew that God had promised He would be the father of many people, and that God had a plan Abraham could trust for his family, even if everything God asked of Abraham didn’t seem to make sense. He obeyed God right away and went to Mount Moriah. In all the years of waiting for God to fulfill His promises, Abraham’s friendship with God became very strong, and he knew that God was faithful and that he could trust Him.

Just as Abraham was about to sacrifice Isaac, God called out and stopped him.

Did You Know:

God told Abraham to go to Mt. Moriah - the place to sacrifice Isaac. A thousand years later, David built an altar to God on Mt. Moriah, and Solomon built the first temple there, in what is now Old City Jerusalem. The Israelites rebuilt the temple when they returned from Babylon, and Herod later added on to it. This is the same temple Jesus went into in John 2:15. God used the same place in Abraham's story as a place of worship for His people throughout the Bible!

God showed Abraham that He was not like the false gods who wanted people to be sacrificed - He did NOT want people to be sacrificed. God saw that Abraham trusted and worshiped Him and *He* provided Abraham with a ram to sacrifice instead. Abraham named the place where God took care of him and Isaac "The LORD Will Provide."

When the Israelites heard this story, God had just rescued them from slavery in Egypt. They would have understood that God wanted *all* of their worship. He wanted to be the King in their hearts. The Israelites would have seen that God cared for them in every little detail, and they would have seen that God would provide for them.

The story of Abraham and Isaac reminds us that just like Abraham was willing to give God the most valuable gift of his own son, God also willingly gave up his only son to rescue us from sin.

Family Summary: God always keeps His promises, and He wants all of our worship. He wants to be the Lord of our hearts and our lives, and He cares for us in every little detail.

Discussion Questions:

- What does the story of Abraham and Isaac tell us about who God is?
- How is the story of Abraham's sacrifice like Jesus' sacrifice for us?
- How has God provided for us?

Activity:

Make a list together of some of the things you worry about. We all worry about many things in life. Next to your list, make a list of the ways that God has provided for you and your family. When we start to worry about things we need, we can remember the ways that God has taken care of us and that He will continue to do so.

Pray:

God, thank you for taking care of us. Thank you for sending Jesus to rescue us from sin and for giving us a sacrifice that we could never repay. We love you God! Amen.

Day 7

Read Together: Genesis 25:19-34

Abbreviated version: Genesis 25:21-23

Explain:



braham's son, Isaac, grew older and had a family of his own. He and his wife had two sons named Esau and **Jacob**. They were twins, but Esau was the firstborn, so he would have been the one to get the family **blessing**.

This meant that he would get most land and possessions from his parents. He would also be the one to lead the family and take care of everyone in the family when he grew up. This was called a **birthright**, and it was given to the first-born boys in each family during the time the Bible was written. Because God is in charge of everything and knows everything, He decided that the promise of Abraham would continue through Jacob (the second-born boy) instead of Esau. That meant that one day Jesus, our perfect rescuer, would come through the family of Jacob, not Esau.

However, Jacob didn't know this, and he wanted the best land and the most animals for himself, so he tricked his dad, Isaac, into **blessing** him. Jacob stole what belonged to Esau, which caused a lot of trouble between them. Jacob ran away to another town to live with his uncle where he met his two wives. (Yes, two wives. That's not God's design, but the Bible is filled with true stories of **God partnering with people**, even when they disobey Him.) Jacob's family grew and he eventually returned to the land of Canaan, which was the place that God promised Abraham, to live with his 12 sons and 1 daughter.

Remember how God changed Abram's name to Abraham? God also changed Jacob's name to **Israel**. Because God changed his name, Jacob (or Israel) became known as the father of the Israelites, God's special chosen people who would become **blessing bringers**. The family of God would continue through the man Israel until one day, God the Son would come to earth as Jesus Christ to fix what sin broke. But since we aren't there yet in our story, we get to keep reading to see how God continued to use broken people to bring them close to each other and close to God again.

Family Summary: Our perfect God is able to show the world what He is like through imperfect people. God's plans are always better than ours.

Learn Hebrew:

Bechor is the Hebrew word for firstborn. In the Ancient Near East, where the Bible was written, the firstborn is important because they become the one in charge of the family. They help the family communicate, take care of the family, and receive blessings. In the Bible, God the Son came as Jesus Christ, the first and only Son of God and we are the ones who receive the blessing when we put our faith in Him. He helps us, takes care of us, and gives us what we need to help others.

Discussion Questions:

- God uses sinful people to accomplish His plans. How does this make you feel when you think about bad things that happen in our world today?
- What does the story of Jacob teach us about God?
- What are things you can do to help take care of others?

Activity:

Spend some time writing holiday cards as a family to care for people who may be going through a hard time and need a reminder of God's love and care.

Pray:

Father, Son, and Holy Spirit, we thank you that you work through people who sin. Help us to trust your plan and to be a blessing to the world. We love you, v.

Day 8

Read Together: Genesis 50:15-26

Abbreviated version: Genesis 50:19-21

Explain:

In the previous reading, we learned that the man named **Jacob** (or **Israel**) and his big family moved to Canaan, the land that God had promised Abraham. Jacob's sons and their families would eventually become the big nation of Israel. One of Jacob's sons was named Joseph, and he was Jacob's favorite. Remember how God uses sinful people to carry out his plans? Having favorites in a family is not part of God's design, but God still used Jacob's sin to make everything work out for his good.

Joseph had dreams where his brothers bowed down to him, and when he shared those dreams with his family, his brothers became angry. On top of that, Joseph's brothers were jealous of him because their dad loved him the most. Because of their anger and jealousy, Joseph's brothers sold him as a slave. He was taken to Egypt, which was a faraway country. Joseph trusted in God, and after many years of being a slave and a prisoner, God raised him up to become a leader in Egypt. During Joseph's time as a leader, there was a famine all over Egypt and the surrounding lands. A famine is when there isn't enough food to eat. Joseph made a plan that took care of everyone in Egypt so that they would have enough to eat during the famine.

Jacob's family was also affected by the famine, so they went to Egypt to get food and bring it back home. When they were there, they met Joseph and he took care of them. All of Jacob's family - his 11 other sons, his daughter, and all of their families, moved from Canaan to Egypt so that they would have food to eat and a place to live.

Towards the end of the story, Jacob died, and Joseph's brothers worried that Joseph would be mean to them like they were mean to him. Instead, Joseph pointed them to God's goodness. In Genesis 50:20 Joseph says,

"You planned to harm me. But God planned it for good. He planned to do what is now being done. He wanted to save many lives."

Joseph reminded his brothers that God used the pain he experienced when they treated him unfairly to benefit them even though they were the ones who caused Joseph pain! Because Joseph's brothers sold him into slavery in Egypt, they now had a place to live and food to eat. Their family would survive the famine because God took something evil and made it into something good.

Dig Deeper:

To learn all about Joseph and his story of going from a slave to a ruler (and to see how his brothers also changed and took care of one another), read Genesis 37, 39-50.

Many years later, God would use evil human plans for something good again. He would use the death of Jesus on the cross to fix our broken friendship with Him.

Family Summary: God uses evil human plans and makes them into something good. He took what Joseph's brothers planned for evil and it led to his whole family being saved from a famine.

Discussion Questions:

- How did God take something bad in Joseph's life and turn it into good for Joseph and for his whole family?
- What does Joseph's story tell you about who God is?
- How has God taken care of you in hard times?

Activity:

As a family, choose some gently used clothing items and toys from your home and donate them to a shelter or charity to bless another family. Or, if you have resources available, find out what items a local shelter or charity needs and purchase them with your child(ren). Deliver them together so your child(ren) can see how they are helping others.

Pray:

God, you took care of Joseph and made something good out of a very bad situation. Thank you for caring for us and for giving us Jesus to fix our friendship with you. Amen.

Day 9

Read Together: Exodus 12

Abbreviated version: Exodus 12:25-28

Explain:

The Israelites continued to live in the land of Goshen in Egypt as their families grew larger. God's promise that they would outnumber the stars was unfolding as they grew into a great nation! Hundred of years passed and the king of Egypt who favored Joseph died, leaving a new Pharaoh in charge who was afraid of the Israelites. He forced them into slavery, which means they were treated poorly and worked very hard with no breaks and no pay.

The Bible tells us that God heard the cries of the Israelites and chose a man named Moses to help set the Israelites free. One day, God spoke to Moses through a burning bush that would not burn up. God told Moses He would bring the Israelites out of slavery and back into the land He had promised them. It was here that God first declared His special name of YAHWEH, meaning that everything depends on God because He has always existed and will always exist.

After some convincing, Moses went to Pharaoh and asked for the Israelites to be let go so they could go into the desert and **worship** YAHWEH (God). Pharaoh said no, because he believed in different (and fake) gods, and he didn't want to allow the Israelites to worship a God he hadn't heard of. In response to Pharaoh's denial, God sent nine **plagues** that showed He was the One True God and had power over the fake Egyptian gods. Each plague was terrible to live through, but the Israelites were protected each time because of their faith in YAHWEH. Pharaoh went back and forth changing his mind on whether he would let the Israelites leave. The tenth plague finally revealed God's plan to save the Israelites.

God told Moses to tell the Israelites to take a lamb and paint its blood over the sides and tops of the doorframes of their houses. This would show they trusted and obeyed God and their firstborn sons would be saved. At midnight, cries could be heard through Egypt as every firstborn son who was not protected by the blood of the lamb died. Pharaoh finally gave in. He told the Israelites they could leave Egypt, and they immediately packed up their things in the middle of the night and fled into the desert.

Sadly, Pharaoh again changed his mind and sent an army chasing after the Israelites to bring them back into slavery. Moses led the Israelites to the edge of the Red Sea where they were guided by God with a pillar of fire at

Did You Know:

In the Bible, God told the Israelites to celebrate the feast of Passover every year to remember the way He rescued His people from Egypt. He told them to teach it to their children so they would always remember that God is in control and always keeps His promises. Now, we celebrate Resurrection Sunday, or Easter, because we are rescued from the slavery of sin and death through the blood of Jesus Christ on the cross.

night and a cloud by day. Moses lifted his hands and God split the sea in half so all the Israelites could walk through on dry land. After all the Israelites were safely on the other side, God made the waters crash down on the Egyptian army and ultimately displayed His power to all the people. The Israelites had been rescued by YAWHEH, the One True powerful God.

In the same way, hundreds of years later, the Son of God came to earth and told everyone He was the passover lamb. God used the blood of a lamb to save His people in Egypt, and later God would use the blood of His Son, Jesus, to save all people who believe in Him.

Family Summary: God used the blood of a lamb to save His people in Egypt, and the Israelite people celebrated that night, naming it Passover. Later, God would use the blood of His Son, Jesus, to save all people who believe in Him.

Discussion Questions:

- How did God show that He is the Only True God?
- How were the Israelites saved from God's judgment?
- In what way can the Red Sea miracle encourage us?

Activity:

Think of some of your family traditions. Talk about how they started and why you continue them. Try to create a new tradition that points to God's power and goodness! One option: Begin a family journal of specific ways God has shown His power and goodness, and build a regular rhythm of reflecting on and adding to this list.

Pray:

Heavenly Father, thank you for rescuing us from the slavery of sin and death through Jesus Christ. Help us remember that you are powerful, in control, and always good. Amen.

Day 10

Read Together: Exodus 20:1-21

Abbreviated version: Exodus 20:2-3

Explain:

This type of writing in the Bible is called “The Law” because it is a set of commands God gave to His people to follow. These commands tell God’s people how to live. It might be easy to read this kind of writing as a list of things to do to make God happy, but it is much more than that. The Law, which includes the ten commandments from Exodus 20, are about the relationship between God and His people and relationships God’s people are to have with one another. God’s laws were different from the laws of the people around the Israelites. They were the only ones that showed how to care for the people in the community who needed extra help - people who were poor, people who didn’t have families, and people who were outsiders.

The first commandment reminds the Israelites of who God is. He is the one who brought them up out of Egypt. Therefore, they should not have any other gods that are not real. God is the only one who is to be their God. The next three commandments tell the Israelites how they can honor God as the only God by not **worshipping** false Gods and by resting on the **Sabbath**. The last six commandments tell how they are to treat one another.

As we read the commandments, we can see what God is like. When He says, “honor your father and mother,” we can remember Genesis 1, when God created all people in His image. All people should be treated with respect and honor because they have all been made to show each other what God is like. When God says, “do not want to have anything your neighbor owns,” God is reminding people how they should treat one another. God wants people to use what He gives them to take care of each other instead of hurting each other and fighting over what they own.

The commandments were given to all of Israel to remind them that they were not alone. God was with them and had claimed them as His people. The laws helped to make them different from all the other people living around them, and also helped them learn how to best take care of one another. The laws were the way the Israelites could **partner** with God in fixing the world. Most importantly, the laws and commandments helped the Israelites understand how to have a relationship with the One who created all things.

Did You Know:

There are 613 laws (Mitzvot in Hebrew) in the Old Testament. That's a lot of rules to remember! But these weren't just a list of things to do to make God happy - they told the Israelites about who God is and what He cares about. Jesus is the only person who could ever follow all of the 613 laws perfectly!

Family Summary: The law and commandments were written to remind the people of Israel that God was with them and had claimed them as His people. The laws helped the Israelites understand how to have a relationship with God and how to care for each other.

Discussion Questions:

- In what ways do the Ten Commandments tell us about what God is like and what He cares about?
- Why do you think God gave the Israelites the Ten Commandments at this point of the story? Why wouldn't He have given them these rules right away?
- What is one way you can show love to God?

Activity:

Talk about the rules you have as a family. Together, come up with a list and then talk about why you have each rule. Talk about how you have rules to protect and love everyone in the family.

Pray:

God, thank you that the whole Bible shows us who you are and what you care about. Help us to understand your words in scripture so that we can love you more. Amen.

Day 11

Read Together: Joshua 1:1-9

Explain:

The Israelites, God's chosen people, decided not to trust God. Because of this, they had to wander in the desert for 40 years before they entered the land that God had promised them. God used this time to help them learn to look to Him for guidance and to trust His plan to fix a world broken by sin. In the passage we read today, Moses died and passed his leadership onto Joshua. God wanted Joshua and the Israelites to be strong and courageous since He promised to be with them wherever they went.

In Joshua chapter 4, God displayed His power by parting the waters of the Jordan River to allow the Israelites to cross into the Promised Land. Forty years earlier the Israelites walked through the Red Sea on dry land to escape slavery. This time God was pointing them to a future of freedom as He worked out His plan to bring peace to the world. God told the Israelites to tell their children about how powerful God is so they would always remember His strength and how He cared for them. Once again, the people failed to obey God and love Him with all their hearts, and yet God was still faithful to them.

The book of Joshua is filled with conquests of cities as the Israelites took back the land that was given to Abraham, Isaac, and **Jacob**. The first story is about a woman named Rahab in the city of Jericho. Rahab was not an Israelite, but she helped the Israelites escape danger, and in return, the Israelites protected her and her family. This is important to our story because it shows God's rescue plan includes people who aren't Israelites, too! Rahab eventually became part of Jesus' family line as his great great great great great (times 100) grandmother! This is how God works. Time after time God's plan is to use people we would never expect to remind us that He is the one in control.

At the end of the book of Joshua, the Israelites were living in the land that God promised them. They agreed to serve the Lord with all their heart, soul, mind, and strength. They planned to love their neighbors as themselves and not **worship** anyone besides the One True God. But we know that everyone sins, and sin causes people to rebel against God. Sin ruins God's good creation, yet He doesn't give up on it. God's plan was to one day send a rescuer to beat sin once and for all. Let's keep reading and see how God continues to partner with people even though they are broken with sin.

Fun Fact:

After the Israelites walked through the Jordan River on dry ground, God told one man from each of the 12 tribes of Israel to pick up a stone from the middle of the river. They were to create two monuments, one in the middle of the river and one on the other side in a city called Gilgal. God wanted them to remember His goodness and how He kept His promise to deliver them into the Promised Land. He wanted them to come back and share the story for generations to come.

Family Summary: We all fail to obey God and love Him with all of our hearts, but God is still faithful to love us.

Discussion Questions:

- Remember how God parted the Red Sea for the Israelites? What do you think they would have thought about when God parted the Jordan River for them 40 years later?
- Why is it important that God chose Rahab and her family to be part of His family, even though they weren't Israelites?
- God told the Israelites that He will always be with them. This is true for us today too! How do you feel knowing that God is always with you wherever you go?

Activity:

Read Joshua 1:7-9 together and then pray it out loud as a family. Ask God to remind you that He is with you and to help you obey His word in Scripture.

Pray:

God, you are with us wherever we go. Help us to remind one another of your faithfulness and your love. In Jesus' name, Amen.

Day 12

Read Together: Judges 2:8-23

Abbreviated version: Judges 2:11-13

Explain:

The book of Judges is a set of stories that go from bad to worse. The people of Israel had been following God and worshiping only Him, but then Joshua died. Eventually, all of the people who knew Joshua died too, and the people who remained began to forget who God was. They forgot that God loved them and that He promised to be with them as long as they worshiped only Him. The Israelites forgot their promise to love God with all their hearts, souls, and minds. They forgot all the good things God had done for them and they started to follow the gods that the Canaanite people around them followed. (The Canaanites were the people who lived in the land that the Israelites took over. They didn't worship and follow God.)

It broke God's heart that His own chosen people had forgotten Him. When the Israelites started worshiping other gods that weren't real, God allowed their enemies to attack them. The Israelites cried out to God for help. Each time they cried out, God would raise up an Israelite to save His people. These leaders were called judges, and they led the Israelites against their enemies and helped them to remember God. When each judge was alive, the Israelites would have peace from their enemies. When the judge died, they would forget God again and worship false gods. The whole book is a pattern of the people crying out to God, God sending help and a time of peace, and then the people forgetting again.

Very few of these judges were actually good at leading the Israelites and reminding them of God's promises. Some of them were cowards, some were violent, and some were very selfish because they only cared about pleasing themselves. They were definitely *not* people you would look up to and want to be like.

The book of Judges shows us how far the Israelites had gone away from trusting God. The more they turned to false gods, the worse things got for them. At the end of the book, Judges 21:25 says, *"In those days Israel didn't have a king. The people did anything they thought was right."* What Israel needed was a king to rescue them, not just from their enemies, but from their own sinfulness. One day God would send that king to win His people's hearts back for good.

Sticky Spots:

The book of Judges is a very uncomfortable book to read, and it might cause you to question why these stories are part of the Bible. However, Judges shows us what happened to Israel when they chose to worship things that were not God. The stories in Judges can also give us hope as we look forward to God's Kingdom coming to Earth just like it is in heaven.

Family Summary: The book of Judges shows us how far the Israelites had gone from trusting in God alone and it shows us what happens when we forget our relationship with God. We turn to sin. However, God is faithful and He sent a king to win people's hearts back to Him.

Discussion Questions:

- How was God faithful to the Israelites even when they forgot Him?
- Who is the King that the Israelites needed and who we need?
- How can God be the King in our lives?

Activity:

Make a crown ornament together. You can make it out of paper, cardstock, pipe cleaners, or any other materials you have around the house. The crown can serve as a reminder that God did send a King to win our hearts back to Him and to rescue us from sin.

Pray:

God, sometimes we forget about you like the Israelites forgot about you. Help us to remember that you alone are our King, and you deserve all of our worship. Amen.

Day 13

Read Together: Ruth 1-4

Abbreviated version: Ruth 1:16-18, Ruth 4:9-10

Explain:

The book of Ruth is an amazing story that highlights God's faithfulness to His people when they trust in Him. The story is set in the time of Judges when everyone did what they thought was right and Israel didn't have a king. Yet right from the start, the writer of the book shows us that there were still people in Israel who were faithful to following God and His laws.

The book begins with an Israelite woman named Naomi and her family, who lived in a country called Moab. Naomi's husband died, and shortly after, her two adult sons died too. Naomi was left to care for herself, which was very dangerous for women during that time period. She had no way or place to get a job, she was in danger of losing her home and her land, and she didn't have a way to easily get food to eat. Naomi's daughter in law was a Moabite woman named Ruth. She had been married to one of Naomi's sons who had passed away. Ruth knew Naomi was in danger and decided she would stay with Naomi and care for her. Ruth could have gone back to live with her own family, but in Ruth 1:16 she tells Naomi,

"Don't try to make me leave you and go back. Where you go I'll go. Where you stay I'll stay. Your people will be my people. Your God will be my God."

Ruth was from a group of people who didn't follow God, yet right from the beginning of the story, she declared that God was her God. This reminds us that God called people who weren't just part of the Israelite family to be part of His family!

Naomi and Ruth traveled back to the town of Bethlehem in Israel to live near the rest of Naomi's family. There was a very important man in Bethlehem named Boaz, who also happened to be a relative of Naomi's husband. He followed God's laws and took care of the poor and the people who didn't have much help or importance. He allowed Ruth to gather grains in his farm fields so that she and Naomi would have enough to eat. Boaz saw how Ruth took care of Naomi and so he continued to take care of her. Eventually, Boaz married Ruth and they had a son.

Ruth and Boaz's son was the grandfather of King David, Israel's second king. Remember how there wasn't a king in Israel during that time? God used faithful people to be part of his family to bring a king into the world.

Dig Deeper:

Read the genealogy of Jesus in Matthew 1:1-17. A genealogy is a person's family history. The one in Matthew is divided into three sections, and the first section is the same list of people we see in Ruth 4:18-22! God's plan to rescue us from sin came through the family of Ruth and Boaz!

Hundreds of years later, He would use more faithful people to bring His very own son as King into the world to save us from our sins.

Family Summary: Even when there is sin all around us, God uses faithful people to be part of His family and show the world what He is like. He is involved in all the details of our daily lives!

Discussion Questions:

- What is something you can do to show your family that you love them?
- How have you seen God working in your life?
- How can you show your friends and family what God is like?

Activity:

Write down your family tree together. See how many people you can list in your family. If you have time call a family member and talk to them about your family's history.

Pray:

Father, thank you that you are involved in all the details of our lives. Thank you that you are always near and that you put our families together so that we can know you and show the world what you are like. Amen.

Day 14

Read Together: 2 Samuel 7:8-29

Abbreviated version: 2 Samuel 7:8-9, 16

Explain:

Ruth and Boaz had a son named Obed, who had a son named Jesse, who had a son named David. David was the eighth boy in his family and his job was to be a shepherd. He cared for his family's sheep and made sure to keep track of all of them and protect them from predators. He was not the first in line to receive a family **blessing** from his father and people didn't see him like a king. However, God knew his heart and saw that David loved Him and followed His laws and commandments.

Because of David's love for God, (God even called David "a man after his own heart" in 1 Samuel 13:14) God chose David to be a king over all of his chosen people, Israel. When he grew older, David was a mighty warrior, and he fought many battles to help the Israelites conquer the Canaanites and Philistines who lived in the land. He was also a musician who played the harp and wrote many songs, called Psalms, as he prayed to and praised God. However, like all of us, David was not perfect. He understood that he was sinful; he thought, said, and did things that were not like God. He knew that it was only because of God's grace that God had chosen him to be Israel's king.

David saw that God had helped him build a kingdom and a house for himself, and he thought that he should build a house for God in return. He wanted God to have a place to live among His people, even though he knew that God is everywhere all at once. Instead, God made a promise to David and told him, *"I tell you that I, the Lord, will set up a royal house for you...Your royal house and your kingdom will last forever in my sight. Your throne will last forever."* (2 Samuel 7: 11, 16) God promised David that David's son would build a temple for Him, and God promised David that he would always have someone from his family on the throne in Israel.

In response, David praised God for his faithfulness and recognized that he didn't deserve such an amazing blessing. Almost a thousand years later, God fulfilled His promise to David by sending Jesus to live on earth. Jesus was part of the same family line as David. Yet He was not a king by human standards. Jesus didn't have a throne and He didn't wear fancy clothes or live in a castle. But He is the King of all kings and the LORD of all Lords. He would be the one to rescue people from sin and sit at the right hand of God's throne in Heaven. He is the one whose rule will last forever and whose kingdom will never end.

Dig Deeper:

Read Psalm 51. This was David's response after being caught sinning against God and against people. Notice that David didn't try to cover up or justify his sin. He saw the wrong he did and recognized that only God could take away his sin and his guilt. Only God could change his sinful heart and restore him.

Family Summary: David was the king of Israel for 40 years and was a mighty warrior and he wrote many songs, called Psalms, to pray to and praise God. God promised David that one of David's sons would build Him a temple and He promised David that he would always have someone from his family on the throne in Israel. Jesus is the forever King God promised and He is from David's family line.

Discussion Questions:

- David wasn't perfect and he sinned against God and people many times. However, God still called him a man after His own heart. How does that encourage you even though you still sin?
- What has God promised us when we put our trust in Jesus?
- What are some specific ways God has taken care of your family?

Activity:

Read Psalm 23 together. This psalm was written by David. Before David was king over Israel, he was a shepherd for his family's sheep. He understood what it meant to care for sheep very well, so when He called God his shepherd and said he was a sheep, he's giving us a word picture of how personally and lovingly God cares for each of us.

Pray:


God, you are the One True God who sees us and knows us. You see our sins and our failures, and you see our love for you. Help us to love you and love people more. Help us to be people after your own heart. In Jesus' name, Amen.

Day 15

Read Together: 2 Chronicles 6-7:3

Abbreviated version: 2 Chronicles 6:41-7:3

Explain:

od had promised King David that his name would be great forever and the promise to rescue the world would continue through his family line. Even though King David committed many sins, God remained faithful and blessed David with many good things, including a son named Solomon. Solomon was a wise king who would end up building the temple where people would come to **worship** God. The temple would also be the place where the Israelites would come to have their sins forgiven.

God gave Solomon such specific instructions about how to build the Temple that it took 20 years to complete! It was built to remind the Israelites of the garden back at the beginning of our story when humans first lived with God. This temple was the place where God would live with His people again. As you can imagine, this would be a very important place for God's people, where they would be reminded of God's power and holiness. God is so big that He is everywhere yet so close that He filled the temple with Himself!

In the passage that you read today, God's presence filled the temple and all the people stood in awe. They bowed down amazed that they serve the One True God who keeps His promises. We read this story to remember that God the Son, Jesus Christ, stepped into creation to live with His people. The God of the universe, who created mountains, flowers, beetles, stars, and you came to Earth as a baby in the dark of night to be a light to the world, just like the fire when God filled the Temple!

We read the Bible to find out who God is and what He cares about. And we slow down during this time of year to remember how amazing it is that God is the one who not only knows us and sees us, but reaches out and saves us even though we sin. We constantly choose our own way rather than God's way, *and* He still sent His Son into the world to fix what sin broke and to keep His promise that one day we would perfectly live with God again. In the meantime, we get to love God with all our heart, mind, and soul and love our neighbors as ourselves.

Family Summary: The Temple was where God met with His people. They were amazed at God's power and faithfulness. We can feel the same way when we think about how God the Son came as Jesus to be with us and rescue us!

Bible Connection:

Read Acts 2:1-4. We serve one God who exists as three persons: the Father, Son, and Holy Spirit. The Holy Spirit lives inside us when we place our trust in Jesus Christ and follow His ways. We walk with the presence of God living inside us! How amazing is that?! Now we get to forever carry God with us. This is how God **partners** with humans as they love Him and make Him known to other people!

Discussion Questions:

- What does this story teach us about God?
- What do you think it looked like when God filled the temple?
- How can you make God known to other people?

Activity:

Use a chemical reaction as an example of God's presence filling the temple. Gather together a clear glass, vinegar, food coloring, baking soda, and a baking tray or tub. Put the glass in the tray or tub and fill it halfway with vinegar. Add a few drops of food coloring to give it some color. Now add $\frac{1}{4}$ cup of baking soda and watch the reaction take place. As the vinegar and baking soda react with each other, they completely fill and overflow the glass. When God's presence came into the temple in 2 Chronicles 7, He completely filled the place and the people bowed down in awe of Him. Our God is so big that He can't be contained! He chooses to live with us and inside of us when we put our trust in Jesus.

Pray:

Dear Heavenly Father, thank you for always being with us. We thank you that even though we sin and hurt you and other people, you sent Jesus Christ to be our rescuer and friend. Help us to be amazed by your power and share your love with the world. Amen.

Day 16

Read Together: 1 Kings 18:17-39

Abbreviated version: 1 Kings 18:37-39

Explain:



After David and Solomon died their sons became kings in Israel. However, they often didn't follow God's laws, which meant they didn't love God with all their heart, mind, and soul and they didn't take care of God's people.

Instead, they **worshiped** other, false gods and encouraged the Israelites to forget God and do the same. God sent prophets, people who spoke His words to the king and to the Israelites, to remind them of who He is. The prophets told the people to leave their false gods and return to the One True God. They reminded the people of all that God had done for them and of their promise to follow God. They also told the people that they would be captured and lose their land and their homes if they kept following false gods. God's promise to the Israelites depended on their obedience to Him.

Elijah was one of God's prophets who spoke to the people during the times of the kings. He challenged King Ahab and his god, Baal, to a test. Elijah said to Ahab and to the Israelites, *"If the Lord is the one and only God, worship him. But if Baal is the one and only God, worship him."* (1 Kings 18:21) He then had the priests of Baal set up a sacrifice to Baal. He told them to get a bull and kill it and put it on an altar. The prophets of Baal then called out to Baal all day long, but he didn't answer. Elijah said maybe Baal was sleeping and that he couldn't hear them, so they cried out louder. Yet no matter what the priests did, Baal didn't send fire down and take their sacrifice. That's because Baal wasn't real, and Elijah wanted everyone to see and know it.

At the end of the day, Elijah set up a sacrifice to God. He dumped tons of water over it so that the Israelites could see God's power and that it wasn't Elijah who set fire to the sacrifice. Elijah prayed to God and asked God to answer him so that the Israelites would know that He is the One True God. Elijah wanted the Israelites to turn their hearts back to God. Then the fire of the Lord came down and burned up the sacrifice, the wood, the stones of the altar Elijah had built, and even the water over the sacrifice. When the people saw it, 1 Kings 18:39 tells us, *"Then they fell down flat with their faces toward the ground. They cried out, 'The Lord is the one and only God! The Lord is the one and only God!'"*

After that day, the Israelites followed God for a time, but then they forgot God and turned their trust to false gods again. Every time this happened, it broke God's heart. His chosen, beloved people were giving their love to gods that didn't love

Bible Connection:

Elijah shows up in the New Testament as well. Read Matthew 17:1-13 to read about Jesus and His transfiguration. In this story Jesus and the disciples are celebrating the Festival of Tabernacles. The Israelites pour water out three times and build temporary shelters to remind themselves how God provided for them in the wilderness for 40 years. This connects us to today's story when Elijah pours water on the altar three times and declares God as the One True God!

them and that weren't even real. But God had a plan to win His people's hearts back for good. One day He would send His own Son to live with His people and show them exactly what He was like. Then He would win their hearts back forever.

Family Summary: After David and Solomon died, their sons became kings over Israel. Not all of them followed God's laws and instead they worshiped false gods. They led God's people away from Him and encouraged them to worship false gods too. God sent prophets to speak to His people to remind them of who He is and what He had done for them. Sometimes the Israelites would turn their hearts back to following the One True God.

Discussion Questions:

- Why is it important that God is the one and only God?
- How does God feel about His people when they give their love to something that is not Him?
- How does it feel to know that God loves you no matter what?

Activity:

Grab a piece of paper and a writing utensil. Start a timer for one minute and go on a scavenger together around the house, making a list of as many "one and only" items as you can find before the timer goes off (such as the one and only oven, the one and only hair dryer, the one and only you). After the game, discuss why being a "one and only" makes something very important and why you can't replace a "one and only" with anything else.

Pray:

God, you are the one and only God! Thank you for loving us and reminding us that you love us, even when we don't always love you like we should. Please let the way we live each day show the people around us that you are the one and only God and that there is no one who loves us like you. Amen.

Day 17

Read Together: 2 Kings 17:13-20, Isaiah 53 & 61

Abbreviated version: 2 Kings 17:13-14, Isaiah 53:2-7 & 61:1-2

Explain:

We know from our stories so far that people continued to sin, which is why God promised to send a rescuer and forever king through the family of David and the tribe of Judah. The Israelites were living in Jerusalem where the temple was, but eventually they split into two kingdoms, one in the North (Israel) and one in the South (Judah). Hundreds of years went by where the Bible tells us about different kings disobeying God and leading the Israelites, God's chosen people, further and further from the way that God told them to live. Does that remind you of the story we read yesterday about Elijah?

They were **worshipping** false gods, not taking care of their people, and not obeying the special laws God gave them to bring peace into the world. The Israelites were supposed to be **blessing** bringers, yet they chose to follow their own way rather than God's way. So, God sent messengers called prophets to warn the Israelites to turn from their sin and turn back to God.

God was patient with the Israelites and continued His plan to rescue the whole world through the family of Abraham. God was fixing what sin broke, even though it looked different than what the Israelites were expecting. The northern kingdom of Israel was conquered by a powerful army and was taken from their homes. Meanwhile, a prophet named Isaiah shared a message from God in the southern kingdom.

God's people and kings went back and forth between obeying Him and not obeying Him. But Isaiah's message was about a future King who would live out God's laws perfectly and bring peace to all people everywhere, not just the Israelites. This king would come and set people free, not just from being ruled by another group of people, but from their sins. This future king would be God as a human, showing up as a baby to step in and fix what sin broke. He would take the sins of the world unto Himself and die the death that we deserved. This is the beauty of God's story. God didn't wait for people to get it all right, He came and met us in the mess because we can't fix our sin ourselves. We need a rescuer.

Jesus Connection:

Read Luke 4:16-22. Jesus read from Isaiah 61 and told the people that it was about Him! This told the people that He was the Messiah they had been waiting for. Messiah means He was the expected rescuer from the family of David! Jesus Christ was and is the only one who can rescue us from our sin!

Family Summary: The kings in Israel and Judah continued to lead God's people further away from the way God told them to live. God remained faithful to His people and sent messengers, called prophets, to call His people back to Him. He spoke through one of these prophets, Isaiah, and promised His people He would send a king to set all people free from their sins.

Discussion Questions:

- What did today's verses teach you about God?
- Why can't we fix ourselves? Who is the only one who can fix us?
- How did Jesus prove that Isaiah's message was true?

Activity:

Watch an animal rescue video or documentary together. Talk about why the animal needed rescuing and what it took to rescue it. Share about a time that you rescued something or someone or a time that you needed rescuing.

Pray:

Dear Heavenly Father, thank you so much for promising to rescue your people even though they turned away from obeying you. Thank you for sending Jesus to make that promise come true! Help us to keep trusting in Jesus even when it's hard. Amen.

Day 18

Read Together: Daniel 1:1-3, Daniel 2:20-23, & 6:26-27

Explain:

The Israelites were God's special, chosen people whom God had made a **covenant** with. God promised to love them and that they would always be His people. He also promised that they would get to live in the land He gave them *if* they obeyed Him and followed all His laws and commandments. Now the first part of the promise, that the Israelites would be God's people, is called an unconditional promise. That means that God will love them forever no matter what and the Israelites will always be His people. The second part of that promise, the part where the Israelites would get to live in the land God gave them *if* they followed His laws, was a conditional promise. That means that Israelites had to do something in return for the promise. From what we've been learning, what do you think God wanted from the Israelites? God wanted them to love and **worship** only Him, and He wanted them to obey all His laws and commandments. All those laws and commandments were about loving God and loving people.

For hundreds of years, God warned His people that if they broke their part of the promise, they would lose their land. In the book of Daniel, that finally happened! In Daniel 1, it says that Nebuchadnezzar, the king of Babylon, came to Jerusalem and attacked it. God let His people get taken away from their homes and land because they were worshipping false gods. They forgot to love the One True God and they weren't loving each other the way God had told them to do.

Throughout the book of Daniel, there were many kings who were in charge over God's people. None of these kings realized that it was God who gave them their kingdoms, and eventually they lost everything they had. But even in **exile**, where God's people were not in their true home, God sent prophets to remind them of His plan. He told them to build houses, plant gardens, grow families, and remember who God is. God remained faithful to His promise to love them and help them. God still used His chosen people to love and care for others even when they had lost everything important to them! God knew His people would forget Him. He knew they would sin and hurt each other and Him, but He couldn't help but love them anyway. You see, long before God even made the world, He had a plan to rescue the world. God knew that we would all sin. We would hurt each other, and we would worship things that aren't God, just like the Israelites did.

Dig Deeper:

Read Daniel 3 and 6 together. These are some of the more recognizable stories from Daniel. What's interesting in both of these stories is that Daniel, Shadrach, Meshach, and Abednego didn't know if God would rescue them. However, they knew that they were in Babylon because they and their people had worshiped other gods that weren't real. In choosing to worship and serve only God, they recognized that God is the One True God.

God's people couldn't see the whole plan yet, so God kept reminding them that He was faithful and one day the world would be made right. But for now, God would work in the hearts of His enemies in order to bring His people back into the promised land. And one day a future kingdom would rule, one that would not fail because it would be God Himself stepping into the world, showing that God can be trusted because His promises always come true.

Family Summary: Even though God's people were taken captive by the Babylonians, God still loved them and helped them. He used His chosen people to love and care for others even when they had lost everything important to them. He reminded them that He was with them and that one day He would send a rescuer whose Kingdom would last forever.

Discussion Questions:

- Why did God allow His people to be taken from their home?
- Why can we trust God even if we can't see His whole plan?
- How does God remind you of His promises? How can you remind others?

Activity:

Get some sticky notes or notepad paper and a writing utensil. Talk as a family about the characteristics of God and the promises He made and write them on each paper. Decorate the papers and then put them on the fridge, on the bathroom mirror, on the ceiling above your bed, etc. so that you can see them every day and be reminded of who God is and what He has promised.


Pray:

God, thank you that you are faithful to love us forever and ever. Thank you for your Kingdom will last way longer than any of the struggles that we are facing right now. Please keep reminding us of your promises and help us to remind each other too. Amen.

Day 19

Read Together: Nehemiah 1:5-10 & 8:8-10

Explain:

 round 150 years had passed since Daniel, his friends, and the Israelites were taken from their homes and conquered by powerful armies. Since then, God's people returned to Jerusalem in groups and rebuilt God's temple that had been destroyed. But this time it didn't fill with the presence of God like it did before! An Israelite named Nehemiah, who loved God and followed His Laws, was living in a country called Persia, 900 miles away from Jerusalem. He found out that the walls around the city were still crumbling and broken, and that made him very sad. Nehemiah cried out to God in prayer and apologized for the sins of the Israelites. He prayed for God's help to rebuild the city of Jerusalem so all the Israelites could return and live their lives in **obedience** to God.

Nehemiah made the journey to Jerusalem and found that God's people had been treated poorly. Nehemiah knew God wanted people to treat each other with kindness and generosity, but instead he found the leaders only helping themselves instead of taking care of others. God's people saw that they had sinned and hurt others, and so they agreed to help fix what was broken. Eventually, God's people worked together to rebuild the wall around the city.

However, there were some people who didn't want God to be in charge or for Him to get the praise He deserved. These people came up with a plan to hurt Nehemiah and the Israelites. Nehemiah encouraged the people to remember they served an important purpose and a powerful God! He reminded them that sometimes things can be hard, but we can trust God in the middle of it because He always keeps His promises. The Israelites continued building and were able to complete the wall!

After the wall was completed, all the Israelites gathered together, confessed their sins, **worshipped** God, and listened as the Bible was read aloud to them. There were men, women, and children standing together to praise God and remind themselves of what God cares about. They were supposed to love God and love people!

Nehemiah returned home to Persia, but eventually went back to see if the Israelites were still obeying God. Sadly, they had forgotten what the Bible said and had to be reminded again. We see this all throughout the Bible and in our own lives. It's impossible to always make the right choice. God

Dig Deeper:

Read Nehemiah 9: 5-6 (or continue to verse 37). The Israelites stood and listened to the Bible for seven days and celebrated by sleeping in handmade shelters. They were celebrating the Feast of Booths. They did this to remind themselves that God provided for them in the wilderness after they left Egypt and to remember that God would always give just enough of what we need. We can trust God because He is good all the time!

knew this and planned to send a rescuer to forever fix our relationship with Him. Jesus would come to fix what we had broken. He would show us how to live a life that is pleasing to God. We aren't going to get it right every time like Jesus did, but God still loves us enough to send a forever rescuer.

Family Summary: God used a man named Nehemiah to help the Israelites remember who God is and what He cares about. They rebuilt the wall around the temple and praised God together. They would continue to mess up, but God would send a forever rescuer to one day fix the relationship between Him and His people.

Discussion Questions:

- How was the rebuilding of the wall around the Temple a picture of God's relationship with His people?
- Could the Israelites fix their relationship with God on their own?
- Why did God plan to send a forever rescuer?

Activity:

Reenact the story of Nehemiah together! Build a wall out of toy blocks, plastic containers, couch cushions, etc. then knock it over. Rebuild the wall then read Nehemiah 9:6-8, 16-17 aloud. Sing a worship song together. If you want, build a pillow fort or set up a tent and camp in it overnight like the Israelites did during the Feast of Booths.

Pray:

Dear God, thank you for being just as faithful to love us today as you were in Nehemiah's time! We confess that we mess up. Thank you for not turning us away when we cry out to you. We praise you because our relationship with you is fixed because of Jesus! Help us to become more and more like Him each day. Amen.

Day 20

Read Together: Malachi 1-4, Isaiah 7:14 & 9:6-7

Abbreviated version: Malachi 3:16-18 and Isaiah 7:14 & 9:6-7

Explain:

The final chapter of Malachi is the last part of the Old **Testament**. According to the Israelites, who eventually became known as the Jews, God did not send any messengers or prophets for 400 years after this. However, God was still working His plan to send a King who would fix the world that sin had broken. The Jews did not know exactly what that would look like, but they held onto the messages that God had shared with them.

In this time between the Old and New Testament, God was getting the world ready. Many things had happened: the Jews had been given a promise that a forever King would come through the family of David, they had been taken from their homes, they had returned and rebuilt the temple in the city of Jerusalem, and eventually other rulers and kings came into power in their special land.

The Jews were eventually under the rule of a new kingdom called Rome. The world changed as people were introduced to new ways of thinking. Roads were built, people spoke a common language, and they began to explore new ideas. The Jews remembered their time in **exile** when they were taken away from their homes, and some of them began making strict rules that they thought would bring honor to God. They spent so much time devoted to following their rules that they started to exclude people who were not like them. But God had promised to send a king that would **bless** the *whole world*, not just the Jewish people.

In Galatians 4:4-5 it says,

“But then the chosen time came. God sent his Son. A woman gave birth to him. He was born under the authority of the law. He came to set free those who were under the authority of the law. He wanted us to be adopted as children with all the rights children have.”

The Jewish people were desperate for peace and to hear from God so they could finally be set free from the people in charge of them. Soon enough this King would come, not as a strong warrior, but as a baby just as Isaiah had promised. And who would this baby be? Jesus Christ, who is Wonderful Counselor, Mighty God, Everlasting Father, Prince of Peace. He would be Emmanuel, which means *God with us*.

Did You Know:

The Israelites were eventually called “Jews” because they came from the land of Judah, where the city of Jerusalem was, and the temple stood. Judah was one of Jacob’s 12 sons through whom the promised land was divided. The land of Judah eventually was called Judea under Roman rule and would become the birthplace of Jesus Christ. God the Son would come through the family of Judah and be born in the town of Bethlehem in the land of Judea.

Family Summary: Even though God wasn’t speaking to His people through prophets at this time, He was still getting the world ready and would send a rescuer at the perfect moment who would fix what sin broke.

Discussion Questions:

- God’s people sinned by worshiping Him the way that they wanted to, not the way God had told them to. Why does God get to decide what is good and evil and how people should worship Him?
- What does God’s choice to save the *whole world*, not just the Jews, tell you about Him?
- How can you show others what God is like by how you treat them, particularly people who are different from you?

Activity:

Together, brainstorm some ways that you can show God’s care to people who are different from you. Then, encourage each other to actually do it! It can be as simple as smiling and saying hello to someone you might rather walk right past. Remember, God loves the *whole world* so much that he chose to give His very life for us!

Pray:

Father, you are the God who rules over all. Thank you for using your awesome power to do what is best for us because you love us no matter what! Blow us away with how huge and awesome your love and power are so that we can joyfully show others around us what you are like. Amen.

Day 21

Read Together: Luke 1:1-25, 57-80

Explain:

It had been hundreds of years since the Jews had heard from God directly. They were growing tired of being ruled by another kingdom, and some had lost hope that a messiah would come. The world was in desperate need of a rescuer, as it had been since Adam and Eve first sinned in the garden of Eden. The Bible tells us that God would send someone before the savior to get people ready. This messenger would tell them how they could be saved and have their sins forgiven.

Zachariah was an old priest who worked in the temple helping people **worship** God. One day while he was working, an angel appeared and told him that his wife would have a baby and they would name him John. John would have a special mission that we read about yesterday in Malachi. His job was to point people to the ultimate rescuer! He would be filled with the Spirit of God even before he was born!

Zachariah had a hard time believing this, so the angel told him that he would be silent until the baby was born. (Imagine not talking for 9 months!) Do you remember the first thing Zachariah did once he was able to speak? He praised God! Zachariah gave all his respect and love to God because He remembered God's promises from long ago. Remember, Zachariah was a priest, so he studied the Bible and helped people understand God's plan. He knew that this special baby, John, would teach people about the One True God who was coming to save the world. John would become known as John the Baptist, because he would baptize people as they confessed their sins and realized their need for God. John would help point people back to God!

God's plan was becoming known to His people. He knew they needed a rescuer, and He would be the one to step in and fix what sin broke. Through Jesus Christ, God was coming to live with broken people and make all things new.

Family Summary: John the Baptist was born to point people back to God, and eventually to Jesus, the Savior. John helped people confess their sins and be baptized as they realized that they needed God.

Fun Fact:

John the Baptist lived in the desert, wore camel's hair for clothing, and ate locusts with honey. Even though that sounds pretty strange, people were still drawn to him and wanted to be his disciples! John was bold in sharing the good news that forgiveness was being offered to anyone who asked and was unfortunately killed for it.

Discussion Questions:

- What does this story tell you about God?
- John wasn't the Messiah, the ultimate rescuer that God had promised, but he did have an important job. What was John's special mission?
- What are some ways that you can point people back to God?

Activity:

Look up the meanings of the names of the characters in this story, particularly Zachariah. Talk about how the meanings of their names connect to their place in the story.

Pray:

Praise to you, the Lord, the God of Israel! Thank you for using your great power to come and live with broken people in order to fix our relationship with you. Help us to use our lives here on earth to point people to you. Amen.

Day 22

Read Together: Luke 1:26-56 & Matthew 1:1-25

Explain:

Today we got to read something called a genealogy. A genealogy is a list of people in a family. This may seem strange to us and somewhat boring at first, but to the people who Matthew was writing to, this list was very important! This list of family names tells us a few things. It tells us that God's promise to make the Israelites into a great nation had come true! It also tells us that God not only saw the group of Israelites as a whole family, but He also saw each individual person that had a special part in His plan. Some of the people included in the genealogy were not even Israelites, which shows us that God's promise to have a relationship with the whole world was unfolding as well.

This family line traced all the way down to Mary and Joseph, who both came from the royal line of David! (David was the one who God said would have a kingdom that would never end!) Mary was probably a teenager and was promised to be married to Joseph. One day an angel showed up and told her that God was pleased with her, and she would be the one to give birth to the Son of God. This troubled Mary as she wondered how this would happen since she was not married. The angel told her that God the Holy Spirit would make it happen! She understood that she was a servant of the Lord and she praised God with a song acknowledging Him as her Savior.

The angel then appeared to Joseph to let him know that Mary was pregnant by the power of the Holy Spirit. This was to reassure him that this was part of God's plan. Joseph was given special instructions about who this child would be and what He would be known for. Mary and Joseph both agreed to God's plan! Imagine how much trust they had in God and His promises. They were agreeing to something that could possibly make their families and friends never speak to them again. They trusted that God was sending His promised rescuer through their family as a baby, and that would have been difficult for people to believe. However, Mary and Joseph knew that God is **sovereign**, which means that God is a powerful ruler in charge of everything!

Matthew's lineage wasn't Jesus's entire family - it was just the people Matthew decided to tell us about. Rahab and Ruth weren't even Israelites. Mary was likely a young teenage girl when she became pregnant with Jesus. Judah and David sinned in terrible ways against their own families. None of these people were perfect or were people you would think would be members of God's family. However,

Did You Know:

The common age for young women to be married at this time was 14 years old. It may sound strange to us today when we read that a teenage girl was going to be married so young, but this was part of daily practice when the Bible was written.

that's just what God does! He invites us in and rescues us, even when we don't deserve it. When we trust Jesus as the one and only Savior and turn from our sins, we are brought into God's family forever no matter what our past looks like.

Family Summary: We can look at Israel's story and know that it is our story too because God has invited us into His family forever. No matter what our past looks like, when we trust Jesus and turn from sin, we are part of God's family forever. God the Son came to rescue us, even when we don't deserve it!

Discussion Questions:

- What does Matthew's genealogy tell us about God and His plan to save the world?
- Why do you think Mary and Joseph thought it was worth it to trust God?
- All of God's children have a special purpose as part of His plan to fix what sin broke. How does this make you feel?

Activity:

Find a recipe for a baked good. Look at the recipe together and discuss what each ingredient's purpose is. Talk about how each individual ingredient has an individual job to do, but together they have the common purpose of creating a delicious baked good.

Pray:

Father, thank you so much for making a way for us to be a part of your family! Thank you for choosing us because of who YOU are, not who we are. Through your Holy Spirit, you give us everything we need to be and do what you have called us to. Help us to live lives that show others that we are part of your family. Amen.

Day 23

Read Together: Luke 2:1-40

Abbreviated version: Luke 2:1-21

Explain:

This is the part of the story where God the Son came into the world! Caesar Augustus, the ruler of Rome, wanted to count all the people in his land, so he ordered everyone to return to the area where their families were from. Mary and Joseph traveled with other family members for 90 miles up and over hills for about a week until they reached Bethlehem (which was where King David was from).

When they got there, Mary gave birth to a baby who would change the world! They wrapped him in long pieces of cloth and placed him in a manger, which is a container made to feed animals. In a nearby field, there were shepherds taking care of sheep. An angel showed up to tell them that the Savior of the world had just been born! The Bible tells us that a whole group of angels showed up praising God! The shepherds quickly headed to Bethlehem to see the baby and eventually told everyone what the angels had said. The shepherds were the first people to spread the news that something amazing had happened! God's rescue plan to fix what sin ruined was a baby born in a dusty barn with animals.

Mary and Joseph named the baby Yeshua, or Jesus. Yeshua means "God saves". That was exactly what He came to do! Jesus came to set us free from sin. He came to be with us and to bring peace between us and God and with one another. Jesus came to save us from separation from God because of sin. He came to invite us into a better life with God. You might think that God would have shown up to the most important people, like kings and rulers, to announce His Son's birth. But His messengers showed up to shepherds taking care of stinky sheep in a field. Here we see something about the special mission of God. Throughout Jesus' life he would walk and talk with people that the world would've said were unimportant. But everyone is important to God!

God loved the world so much that He sent His One and Only Son, Jesus Christ, to rescue us and bring us into a forever friendship with Him. We can worship God, or giving Him all our love and praise just like the angels did that night in the field, because He deserves it! And that is what Christmas is all about!

Did You Know:

Many people would have been traveling to Bethlehem to also be counted in the census. People would have been staying with different family members all over the city and houses would likely have been crowded! Mary and Joseph ended up in a basement where the animals lived because that was the only place available for them. How incredible that God the Son left heaven to be with us and was laid in a cradle made for animals!

Family Summary: Mary gave birth to Jesus and a group of angels appeared to some shepherds who were taking care of their sheep in a nearby field. They were the first people to worship Him as their rescuer.

Discussion Questions:

- Were there any parts of the story that surprised you or that you didn't expect? What does that tell you about the Messiah and His special mission?
- How can you share this story with everyone around you like the shepherds?
- What does it look like for you to give God all your love and praise?

Activity:

How many Old Testament prophecies about the Messiah did God fulfill in yesterday and today's Scripture reading? Together, see how many you can find! For hints, read Genesis 3:15, Numbers 24:17, 2 Samuel 7:12-13, Isaiah 7:14, and Micah 5:2. God planned to send His Messiah ever since Adam and Eve first sinned. He was faithful to make His plan come true!

Pray:


Faithful God, thank you so much for keeping your promise to send a forever rescuer! Even though we sin again and again, throughout history you have never stopped loving us and you made a way for our relationship with you to be made right again. Help us to never ever forget how faithful and good you are! In your name we pray, Amen.

Day 24

Read Together: Matthew 2

Abbreviated version: Matthew 2:1-11

Explain:

fter Jesus was born and wise men “also called magi” came from the East to **worship** Him. The wise men were non-Jewish people who likely believed in different gods, along with the One True God. From what the Bible tells us, they were following a star that was leading them to Jesus. This means they were highly trained and educated men who studied astrology. They used the movements of planets and stars to figure out what their gods were telling them. They most likely came from the area that is the country of Iran, which is 800-900 miles away from where Jesus was born. It would have taken them a very long time to reach Jesus because they were traveling through deserts on camels. They traveled for so long that Jesus was likely not a newborn baby when they found him, but a toddler! We also don't know how many wise men came to worship Jesus. We tend to think there were three because the Bible says they brought three gifts, but there may have been more.

The wise men went to Jerusalem first where King Herod lived in his palace, because a palace is the place where a king would live. Herod was upset because he wasn't the king the wise men were looking for. He wanted the power and importance of being the person in charge of all of the Jewish people. But from what we have learned about who God is, we know that God doesn't always choose the richest and most important people. He chooses the people who know that they need Him. The wise men found Jesus in his home with Mary and Joseph. Their home was nothing like a palace for a king, yet it was where the King of all kings lived. The wise men gave Jesus gifts of gold, frankincense, and myrrh. These are gifts you would give a king to show him honor and respect. The wise men recognized something that King Herod didn't - Jesus was the king that God had promised to send to rescue His people from sin. King Herod wanted to be the king of Israel so that he could have all the power and authority. However, the true King of Israel, Jesus Christ, gave up all His power and authority as God to become a human. Later He would also give up His own life to rescue His people.

Family Summary: Jesus was born, and wise men came from far away to worship Him. They were the first non-Jewish people to worship Jesus and they brought Him gifts that were made for a king, showing that Jesus is the king God had promised to send long ago.

Fun Fact:

In Deuteronomy 18:9-20, God very specifically tells the Israelite people that they were not to use magic to try to figure out what He wanted. Astrology was a type of magic, and the wise men used it to find Jesus! The wise men were the first non-Jewish people to worship Jesus. This shows us that Jesus was the promised King sent to rescue *all people*, just like God promised Abraham thousands of years before.

Discussion Questions:

- What do the wise men's gifts tell us about who Jesus is?
- Why do you think God chose to send His Messiah to a young couple living in a barn instead of to a powerful king living in a palace?
- Why is it important to agree with God that you need His forever rescuer?

Activity:

Make a list of some things that you are looking forward to. Talk about how it feels to look forward to something and how it feels when it finally happens. One of the things we often look forward to most this time of year is Christmas day! God made a promise to send a Messiah in the Garden of Eden, and the Israelites had to wait not just one year for Christmas, but hundreds of years! Doesn't that make the first Christmas that much more exciting?

Pray:

God, we need you. Because of our sin, we can never be what you made us to be. But you made a way for us to come back to you by sending a forever rescuer! Thank you! Convince our hearts of our need for you and help us live like Jesus is King of our hearts. In Jesus' name, Amen.

Day 25

Read Together: John 1:1-5, Colossians 1:15-19, Hebrews 1:1-4

Explain:



ll through this Advent season we have been reading about God's plan to send a rescuer into the world to fix what sin broke. The most beautiful part of this story is that we are celebrating God Himself stepping into the creation that *He* made and making a way for us to spend forever with Him! Think about that for a moment.

The readings today remind us that God has always existed and will always exist. He holds the world in His hands, yet He came as a baby. He was in control of everything *and* was completely human, requiring food, water, and rest. It's a stunning mystery! How amazing that we serve a God who is so big that our brains can't always understand, and so close that He knows how many hairs are on our heads!

Today we celebrate the incarnation. This means we celebrate that God the Son came to be with His people as a person. In the beginning, back in the garden, God was *with* Adam and Eve. After they left the garden, God showed up in different ways - through the Holy Spirit, living in the temple, or by speaking through prophets. But today we celebrate that God the Son came as a human and lived how we live in every way, except without sin. He lived the perfect life that we could never live and showed us exactly what God is like. He talked with people, listened to them, healed them, and gave them hope. Jesus Christ came to bring peace with God to everyone who accepts Him.

Jesus died on the cross for our sins, by taking them all onto Himself. He is the only one who could do this as fully man and fully God. He was buried in a tomb, and three days later He rose again conquering sin and death. Then He rose back to Heaven and now is seated at the right hand of God the Father. He will come back one day bringing Heaven with Him. Anyone who trusts Him and follows His ways will get to live forever in perfection with the God of the universe!

We are still in an Advent season, even when Christmas is over. We are in a period of waiting for things to be made right. We know this because we still see pain, tears, and sadness around us. But guess what? We serve a huge God who always does what He says He will do. He promised us He will return and fix everything. He promises that once you are part of His family, nothing can separate you from His love.

Did You Know:

We don't know the exact date when God the Son came into this world as Jesus Christ. But over time, people began to celebrate His birth during one of the darkest times of the year because Jesus is the light of the world. In this season, when the day is dark for long periods of time, remember that we serve the God of light who came into this world to rescue His people. He is King and is always pursuing us. We just have to accept the invitation to make Him King of our lives.

The first time God the Son came, it was in a tiny town called Bethlehem, where only a few people knew what was happening. But the second time He comes, we're told the whole world will know! In the meantime, as followers of Jesus Christ, we should invite people into His family and live in a way that gives God praise. We get to be **blessing bringers** as we wait for God to return. We get to show love, bring peace, and be God's hands and feet. So let's celebrate today that God partners with people, that He keeps His promises, and that one day He will return and make all things new.

Family Summary: Advent is a season where we celebrate God Himself stepping into the creation that *He* made and making a way for us to spend forever with Him! We can celebrate that God partners with us, He keeps His promises, and one day He will return and make everything that way it was meant to be.

Discussion Question:

- What have you learned about God this Advent season?

Activity:

Enjoy celebrating together that God sent Jesus to Earth as our Savior!

Pray:

God, thank you for coming to Earth as Jesus to show us exactly who you are and what you care about! Thank you for everything you have taught us about yourself this Advent. Help us always remember what we have learned and let it change the way we live. In Jesus' name, Amen!

GLOSSARY

Birthright: Jewish fathers passed down special privileges and advantages for the first-born son in their families. Birthrights included leadership and responsibility for the family's well-being (the oldest son was responsible for taking care of his family when his father died). The firstborn son was also given a larger portion of his father's land and possessions when the father died.

Bless/Blessing: God does good things for His people and His people are to do good things for others. This is important to our relationship with God and with others. Blessings, whether given or received, should always cause us to acknowledge the goodness and power of God. Every good gift comes from Him.

Blessing Bringers: With the power of the Holy Spirit, as followers of Jesus, we show God's love to the world and our dedication to Him by loving our neighbors as ourselves. That means we take care of one another, show kindness to each other, help those in need, and give generously. Everything we have is a gift from God and we show our love for God by sharing all we have with others.

Bring glory to God: People bring glory to God and show others His glory by loving Him and obeying His commands.

Covenant/Testament: A covenant is a promise that two partners make to each other to reach a common goal. Both partners have commitments and responsibilities that are explained in the covenant. In the Bible, God began a covenant with Abraham, which He continued to Abraham's children and their descendants, all the way to the Israelites. God would take care of and protect the Israelites and the Israelites were expected to keep the rules that God gave them. If the Israelites broke their covenant, or promise, then God would remove His protection and care.

Exile: Being sent away from your home and country.

Glory: Honor, praise, fame, magnificence, great beauty.

God Partnering with People: God can rescue the world without our help, but He chooses to invite people to be part of His plan to rescue the world from sin.

Jacob/Israel: Abraham's grandson who stole his brother, Esau's, birthright and ran away. He wrestled with God and God changed his name to Israel, which means "wrestles with God" and "clinging firmly to God." Israel's name was part of a covenant with God: God promised to care for and protect Israel (the man) as long as Israel followed God's rules and trusted in God as the One True God. Later, Israel's children and children's children (also known as his descendants) became known as the nation of Israel. They also had a covenant with God. (See the definition of covenant above.)

Sin: Anything we think, say, or do that is not like God. It's choosing our way over God's way, and it hurts our relationships with others and with God.

Power and Penalty of Sin: When Jesus Christ died on the cross, He took all of the punishment that we deserved for our sin onto Himself. He then sent the Holy Spirit to give us power to say "no" to sin. When we put our trust and hope in Him, He frees us from sin's punishment and control in our lives.

Plagues: The disasters God sent on Egypt to make Pharaoh let the Israelites go free.

Sabbath: A Day God set aside for all people to stop working and rest. The purpose of the sabbath is to remember that God is King of everything and that He deserves all of our praise and honor.

Sacrifice: The act of giving something up that is very important and valuable.

Sovereign: God is a powerful King in charge of everything!

Worship: Giving something or someone all of our honor, celebration, and praise. As Christians, we can worship God in everything we do.



A child will be born to us.

A son will be given to us.

He will rule over us.

And he will be called

Wonderful Adviser and Mighty God.

He will also be called Father Who Lives Forever

and Prince Who Brings Peace.

Isaiah 9:6





**We celebrate Advent to remember
when Jesus first came to earth
as God's promised rescuer.**

Advent is a season leading up to Christmas. The word Advent comes from the Latin word, "adventus," which means coming. When we celebrate Advent, we are celebrating Jesus coming to Earth as a baby, and we are reminding ourselves of Jesus' promise to come back in the future.

