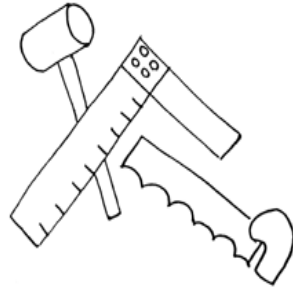


God sent an angel to talk to Joseph in a dream. The angel explained that God had chosen Mary, and that Mary's baby would be very special. When Joseph woke up, he knew that he and Mary were a part of God's plan. Joseph knew that he would be a good father to Jesus.



Talk about: Name some ways that God speaks to us.

Prayer: God who calls us, help us to hear your voice.

DECEMBER 24 SCRIPTURE: LUKE 2: 1-5

Reading: Sometimes taking a trip is fun, like when we go on vacation. Sometimes it's not so fun, like when we go to the doctor when we're sick. But usually when we're on a journey, whether a short trip or a long one, we experience something new. We learn things on a journey.

Mary and Joseph went on a journey. If we were to take the same journey by car it wouldn't take very long, but because Mary and Joseph were walking, it took a long time. They had to go to Bethlehem because the country's ruler said they had to. But it was all part of God's plan. That is one thing that Joseph and Mary learned on their journey.



Talk about: What new journeys did you take this past year?

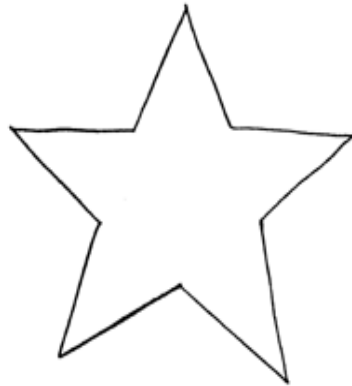
Prayer: Guide our journeys wherever they take us, holy God.

DECEMBER 25 Scripture: Luke 2: 6-21

Reading: Our waiting is over! Jesus is born! The star is shining, the angels are singing, the shepherds are worshiping. Our savior is here!

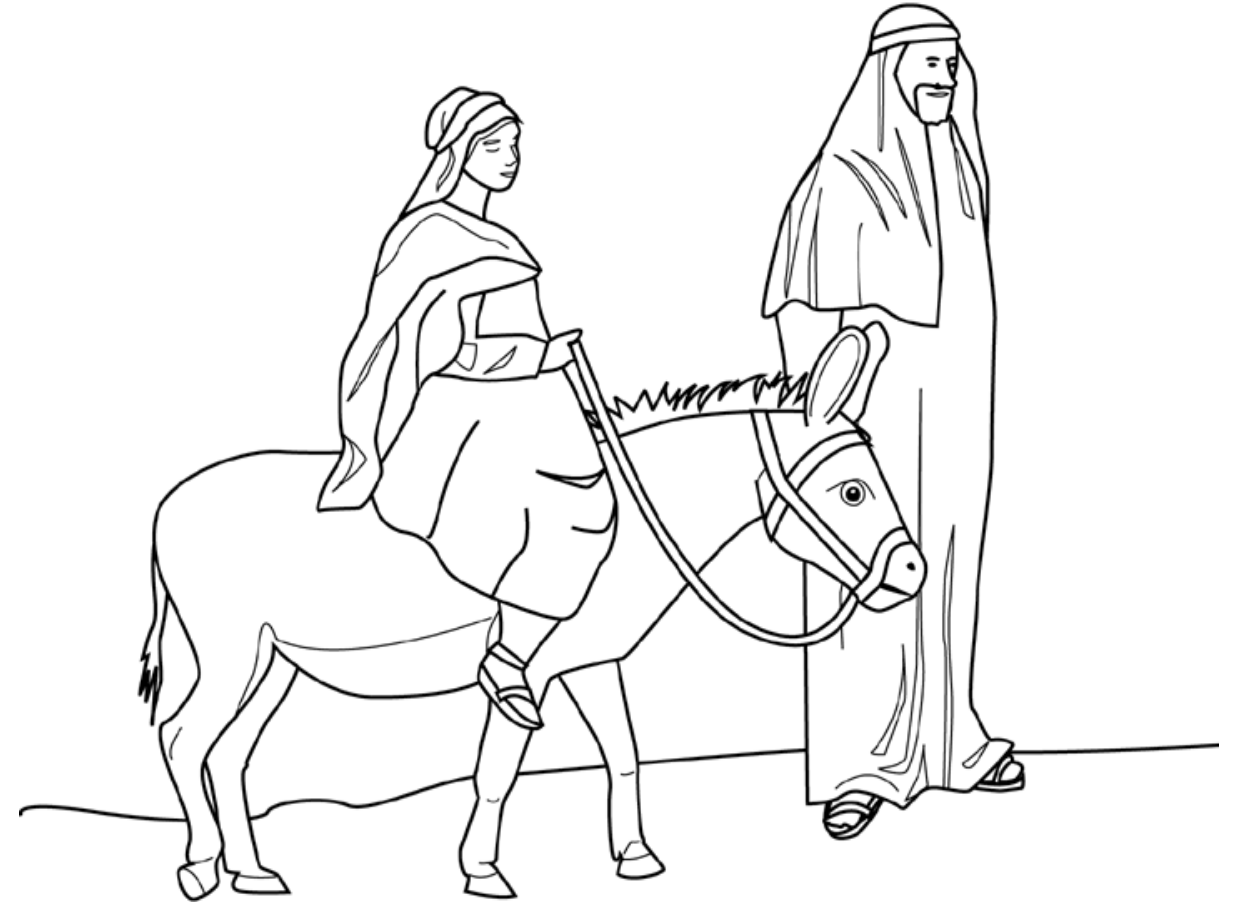
Mary was happy to have her beautiful baby, but she knew that not every day would be as special as his birth day. She knew that raising God's son was going to be a challenge. But for the moment she tried to enjoy all the amazing things that had happened.

When sin first came into the world, God made a promise. Even when the people forgot about God and the promise, God didn't forget about the people. God guided the people, protected the people, and loved the people, even when they were sinful. God was faithful, and today the promise is fulfilled.



Talk about: What is your favorite part of the Christmas story?

Prayer: Thank you, God of the universe, for the most wonderful gift of your son, Jesus.



Advent Devotions

Written by Christina Van Eyl. Illustrations by Helen Phillips except for the lion which was drawn by Jeff Brown.

NOVEMBER 29 Scripture: Isaiah 11:1-2

Reading: God has a plan for everything. Long before Jesus was born lived a man named Jesse. Jesse had seven sons; the youngest was named David. When David grew up, he became a great king of Israel. God had a plan for Jesse and for his son David, even before they were born.



Jesus was also part of Jesse and David's family tree, born many, many years after David. People waited a long time for the birth of the savior. The season of Advent is a season of waiting for us, too. We wait for Christmas, the day we celebrate the birth of Jesus.

It is hard to be patient, especially when we are waiting for something wonderful like Christmas! But it is important to learn to be patient, and to trust that God has a plan for us, too.

Talk about: Why is waiting so hard?

Prayer: Dear God, we thank you that you have a plan for each of us. Help us to be patient as we wait for Jesus' birthday.

NOVEMBER 30 Scripture: Genesis 1: 26-31

Reading: God is the creator of all things. God made the world and everything in it: the air and the water, the plants and the fish, the animals and the people. When God finished creating the world, it was perfect. When God first created people, even they were perfect. They did not sin or do anything to make God unhappy.



Even though there is now sin and sadness in the world, God still cares for us. We have been given a beautiful world in which to live, and God has asked us to take care of it. We can care for the world by showing kindness to all living things.

The world is God's gift to us. God wants us to enjoy this gift, but God also wants us to treat it with care.

Talk about: What are some ways that you can take good care of plants, animals, birds, rivers, people, and everything else in the world that God made?

Prayer: Thank you, Creator God, for making our wonderful world.

Talk about: How can you tell others about what God has done for you?

Prayer: Almighty God, give us the courage to tell everyone about your good works.

DECEMBER 21 Scripture: Matthew 3: 1-6

Reading: Elizabeth and Zechariah's son grew up to be John the Baptist. He was Jesus' cousin. God chose him to tell the people about Jesus.



John wanted people to know that Jesus is the Son of God, the savior that God had promised the people so many years ago. He wanted them to be ready to believe in Jesus. John wanted the people to remember God, and he baptized them in the river if they promised not to sin any more. The baptism reminded them that God forgave them for their sins.

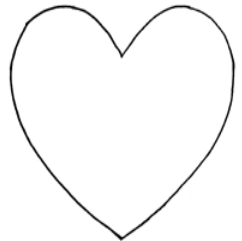
John did not look like other people, and some people probably thought he was a little strange. But many other people listened to John, and they were ready to believe in Jesus.

Talk about: What do you need forgiveness for today?

Prayer: Holy God, forgive us when we do things that displease you. Make our hearts ready for Jesus.

DECEMBER 22 Scripture: Luke 1: 26-38

Reading: God had a special job for someone. God was looking for an earthly home for baby Jesus. Jesus was going to need a mother who loved and trusted God. He would need a mother who was smart and strong and loving. God chose Mary to be Jesus' mother.



God sent an angel to talk to Mary. Mary wasn't sure that she could be a good mother to Jesus, but the angel reminded Mary that God would be with her. Mary knew that being a mother is a difficult and important job, but she knew that God would guide her. She also knew that she loved God and wanted to do whatever she could to serve him. Mary said yes with a joyful heart.

Talk about: Talk about some things that have happened to you or others that seem impossible.

Prayer: Thank you, God, that nothing is impossible with you.

DECEMBER 23 Scripture: Matthew 1: 18-25

Reading: Yesterday we talked about Jesus' mother, Mary. Jesus also had an earthly father named Joseph, who was a carpenter.

It was against the law for Daniel to worship God, but Daniel knew that God is the only true God, and he would not stop worshiping God. Daniel was punished for breaking the law, and he was put in a pit with lions. But God protected Daniel from becoming the lions' dinner. People learned of God's power because of Daniel, and many others worshiped God because Daniel had trusted and honored God.

Talk about: Who do you love the most?

Prayer: Savior God, it is not always easy to love you more than anything else. Help us to trust and honor you each day.

DECEMBER 19 Scripture: Habbakuk 2: 1-4

Reading: Christmas is less than a week away! Waiting is so hard! But we know that Christmas will eventually come, and our waiting will be over. We wait for so many things, some of them happy and some of them not so happy. Waiting means we are looking ahead to the future.

Before Jesus was born, the people were waiting for a savior. They had faith that God would keep his promise. They waited a long time; some of them forgot to keep looking for God's promised son. They no longer cared about God or God's promise, and when Jesus arrived they didn't recognize him. But those who remembered and trusted God recognized Jesus and their waiting was finally over.

Talk about: Tell about a time when you had to wait for something special.

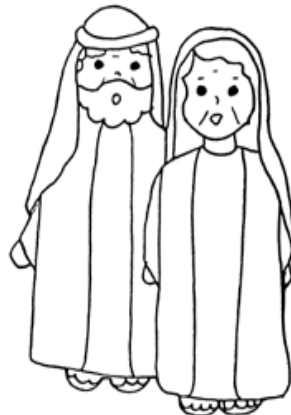
Prayer: God of all time, be with us as we wait for the birth of your son.



DECEMBER 20 Scripture: Luke 1: 5-25

Reading: Sometimes even good people have prayers that are not answered. Zechariah and Elizabeth honored God, and God loved them, but they did not have a child. One day while Zechariah was working in the temple, an angel brought him a message from God, saying that he and Elizabeth were going to have a very special son and his name was going to be John.

Zechariah wasn't sure he believed the angel, and so God took away Zechariah's voice as a sign of God's power. Imagine if you had seen an angel who had told you wonderful, happy news, and you weren't able to tell anyone what had happened! Zechariah was sad to have lost his voice, but he was happy to know that he would have a son chosen by God to do important work.



DECEMBER 1 Scripture: Genesis 3: 1-19

Reading: Yesterday we read about the perfect world that God created, including perfect people. Today we read in the Bible about Adam and Eve, and how they disobeyed God. God had given them everything, and had only asked that they not eat the fruit of one special tree. But Eve and Adam did eat the fruit. The fruit made them understand certain things, but eating it brought sin into the world.

God still loved Adam and Eve, but he had to punish them for disobeying him. God sent them out of the beautiful garden, and they had to work for their food. God also made a promise to Adam and Eve: that God would always love them.

Talk about: What kinds of things do we do that make God unhappy?

Prayer: Mighty God, keep us from doing things that make you unhappy.



DECEMBER 2 Scripture: Genesis 6: 11-14; 7: 17-8: 3; 9: 8-13

Reading: When people sin, or do wrong things, God is sad. There came a time when there was so much sin in the world that God had to find a way to remove sin from the world. So he asked Noah to build the ark and to save his own family, as well as the animals, because Noah and his family remembered God. Then God sent rain and the world flooded, and God destroyed all the people and animals that were not on the ark.

When the flood was over and Noah and his family were safely on dry ground, God made a covenant, or a promise, with Noah. God promised not to send another flood that would destroy the world. As a sign of this promise, God put a rainbow in the sky. Even in a sinful world, God still loves us and keeps his promises.

Talk about: Can you name a promise that God has kept?

Prayer: Thank you, Almighty God, for keeping your promises.



DECEMBER 3 Scripture: Genesis 12: 1-7

Reading: Sometimes God asks us to do things that are hard to do. God asks us to be good when it would be so much easier--and sometimes more fun--to be naughty. God asks us to go places and do things we'd rather not do.



God asked Abram to take a long trip, and to leave behind the place that Abram called home. But in return, God made promises to Abram. God promised that Abram would be blessed by God. Abram still had problems and struggles, especially when he forgot to listen to God's directions, but God kept all of the promises made to Abram. Most importantly, God was Abram's friend forever.

Talk about: Name some ways that God shows you what God wants you to do.

Prayer: Holy God, help us to obey you and do the things that you want us to do.

DECEMBER 4 Scripture: Genesis 21: 1-7

Reading: Have you ever wanted something so much that you thought you would die if you didn't get it? It's so hard to be happy when we focus on the things we don't have, instead of the things we do have.

Sarah wanted a baby more than anything, but even though she prayed a lot and tried everything she could think of, she didn't have a baby. As she got older she finally decided that God would not give her a child. But then God gave Sarah a son, and she named him Isaac. Sarah was very happy and grateful to God for giving her a wonderful son when she had given up on her dream.

Talk about: How has God answered your prayers?

Prayer: Gracious God, thank you for answering our prayers.



DECEMBER 5 Scripture: Genesis 22: 1-14

Reading: Isaac was a special boy, and his father, Abraham, loved him very much. But Abraham loved God even more than he loved Isaac. One day God asked Abraham to take Isaac on a journey. Abraham obeyed. God also asked Abraham to kill Isaac as a sacrifice, as a way of showing how much Abraham loved God.

Abraham was sad, but he knew that he had to obey God. He trusted that even though he was being asked to do something terrible, God would make everything right. As he was getting ready to sacrifice Isaac, God sent an angel to stop Abraham and save Isaac's life. Then Abraham sacrificed a sheep as a way of honoring God, and to thank him for saving Isaac's life.

Talk about: When did you feel protected by God?

Prayer: Protect us, dear God, when we have to do things that make us sad.



DECEMBER 16 Scripture: Isaiah 11: 6-9

Reading: Animals are one of God's great gifts to us. God made each animal unique. Many of them are gentle, but many others can hurt us or other animals. Most animals only hurt others when they are hungry or frightened.

Before Eve and Adam sinned, all of the animals got along with each other. There was no danger. God created a peaceful kingdom, but sin changed things. Someday God will restore peace to the world. There will be no hunger or fear, and all of the animals will get along again. They will not hurt each other, and we will not hurt them.

In a peaceful world, all of God's children will get along too. There will be no more war and no more pain. What a wonderful world that will be!

Talk about: How can you be a peacemaker?

Prayer: Loving God, help us find ways to have peace in our world.



DECEMBER 17 Scripture: Micah 5:1-5a

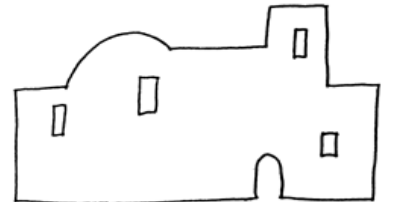
Reading: Often God does things that surprise us. God chose the small town of Bethlehem for the birthplace of Jesus. In Bible times, most rulers in important families were born in bigger cities, but Jesus was born into an ordinary family in a small village.

God chose Bethlehem many years before Jesus was born. The prophet Micah wrote that Bethlehem would be the place where the Savior would be born. But even so, the town of Bethlehem wasn't ready for the birth of Jesus. There was no place prepared for God's Son to be born.

The day when we celebrate Jesus' birth will soon be here. We need to make our hearts ready.

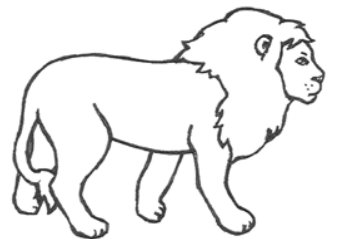
Talk about: How are you getting ready for Jesus' birth?

Prayer: Eternal God, help us to always be ready to serve you.



DECEMBER 18 Scripture: Daniel 6

Reading: God wants to be the most important thing in our lives: more important than our family, more important than our things, more important than even our own lives. Daniel understood that; he worshiped God even though it might cost him everything, even his own life.



The prophets also reminded people that God had promised a savior. The prophets also gave the people hope that no matter how bad things might be here on earth, God had not forgotten them. God was going to send a child who would grow to be the world's savior.

Talk about: Have you ever forgotten a promise?

Prayer: Thank you for making promises to us.



DECEMBER 14 Scripture: 1 Kings 18: 17-24, 36-39

Reading: The people of Israel had forgotten to worship God. Instead, they were worshipping a false god named Baal. God sent his prophet Elijah to remind the people about the true God. But the people didn't want to listen to Elijah. So Elijah offered to show the people God's power. He prepared a sacrifice, and the prophets of Baal prepared a sacrifice. The prophets of Baal prayed that their god would send fire to burn the sacrifice, but of course the false god did nothing. But when Elijah prayed, God sent fire.

The Israelites had forgotten God, until God showed them a miracle. God still does miracles today, but we need to remember God even if we don't see miracles. Our God is a great God; we need to praise God at all times.

Talk about: What are some things you can do to praise God?

Prayer: We praise you, powerful God, for all that you have done for us.



DECEMBER 15 Scripture: Jonah 3:1-5

Reading: Jonah was one of God's special preachers, called a prophet. God asked Jonah to do a special and important job. But Jonah didn't want to do the job God asked him to do, and so he ran away.

Of course, God always knew where Jonah went; no one can run away from God. God was with Jonah on the storm-tossed ship, and God was with Jonah in the belly of the fish. God was with Jonah when he finally went to Nineveh to do the job God had asked Jonah to do.

We can't run away from God. God wants us to obey him, but even when we don't, God is still with us. God loves us at all times and in all places.

Talk about: Have you ever tried to hide from God?

Prayer: Loving God, thank you for watching over us in all things.



DECEMBER 6 Scripture: Genesis 28: 10-22

Reading: Jacob had not always been a good person. He had done some unkind things, but instead of saying he was sorry, Jacob ran away. He lived away from his family for many years, but now it was time to meet with his brother. He had to face up to the things he had done wrong many years before.

When Jacob ran away from his family, he may have thought that he was running away from God, too. The night before he was going to see his brother, God spoke to Jacob in a dream. God reminded Jacob of promises God had made to Jacob's father and grandfather, and that those promises were meant for Jacob, too.

Jacob thought that he had run away from God, but God was always with him.

Talk about: How do you know that God is always with you?

Prayer: Remind us each day, God, that you are with us.



DECEMBER 7 Scripture: Genesis 37: 1-36; 50: 15-21

Reading: Sometimes even love cannot protect us from bad things. Joseph was loved very much by his father, Israel (Jacob), but Joseph's brothers hated him. And so they sold him to a man who made him a servant and even put him in prison.

But God had given Joseph a special gift of understanding dreams, and Joseph was able to use his special gift to help others. He was rewarded for his help by being given a very important job. While he was doing this job, he again met his brothers, who did not recognize him. Even though Joseph could have been mean to his brothers, he chose to help them. He knew that even though he had gone through some terrible times, God had been with him through everything, and God still expected him to do good things.

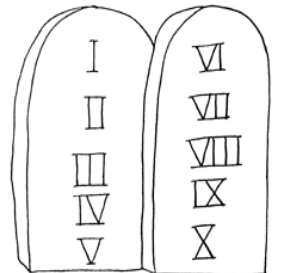
Talk about: Who can you be kind to today?

Prayer: God of forgiveness, help us to be kind even to people who make us angry.



DECEMBER 8 Scripture: Deuteronomy 5: 1-22

Reading: God wants us to be good to each other. God wants us to treat others the way that we want to be treated. To help us to understand how to care for each other, many years ago God gave Moses the ten best rules for living. These rules are called the Ten Commandments, and they are still good rules for us today.



Not everybody likes to follow the rules. They think rules keep them from having fun. But God gave us the rules not as a punishment, but as a way of helping us to show God that we are thankful for what God has done for us. God wants us to do good, and will help us to do the right thing by guiding us to the right path.

Talk about: What rules help your family to live together and be happy?

Prayer: Righteous God, thank you for giving us rules to guide us.

DECEMBER 9 Scripture: Joshua 2: 1-21

Reading: The Israelites were ready to enter the land that God had promised them. They sent two men into the land to find out more about the land. It was very dangerous to go into the land; if the people who ruled the land had found the two Israelites they would have been killed.



Rahab saved the lives of two of God's people. She hid the two men in her house and then helped them to escape. She knew that God had promised the city of Jericho to Joshua and the Israelites, and she believed that God is a powerful God.

Brave Rahab honored God because she believed in God's power. In return, the Israelites protected Rahab and her family. Rahab hung a red rope from the window in her house so that the Israelites would remember to protect her. And God remembered Rahab and took care of her for the rest of her life.

Talk about: Tell about a time when God gave you courage to help someone.

Prayer: Dear God, give us courage to help others.

DECEMBER 10 Scripture: Ruth 1: 15-2: 3

Reading: Ruth and Naomi had lost all the people they loved. Naomi's two sons—one of them was Ruth's husband—had died, and Naomi's husband had died too. Naomi had been living in Ruth's country, far from her family, and so Naomi decided to return to Bethlehem. Ruth could have stayed in her own country with her own family, but she chose to go to Bethlehem with Naomi.



Naomi was so sad that she thought that God had forgotten her. In the days of the Bible, most women couldn't get jobs, so women would go the fields and take the grain that the farmers left behind. Ruth went to the field to gather grain, and there she met Boaz, a relative of Naomi's, who took care of them. Boaz and Ruth married and had a son, and Naomi was happy. She knew that God had not forgotten them, even when she had been sad.

Talk about: When did you feel really sad? What can make you happy?

Prayer: Holy God, thank you for being with us always.

DECEMBER 11 Scripture: 1 Samuel 16:1-13

Reading: God has a plan for you. Even when we are young, God sees into our hearts and knows what kind of people we are and what kind of people we will be.

Most of the grown-ups who saw David thought he was just a kid who tended the sheep, but while David was still a child God chose him to be a king. God's servant Samuel poured oil on David's head and anointed him as the future king of Israel.

God has a plan for each of us. Not many of us will be rulers, but each of us can serve God in important ways. It's important to listen for God's call and to find ways to honor God in our lives.

Talk about: How can you honor God in your life?

Prayer: God of wisdom, guide us to serve you.



DECEMBER 12 Scripture: 2 Samuel 5: 1-5

Reading: Although David was chosen by God to be king when he was a boy, he didn't become king until he was thirty years old. David was a good king because God guided him and because David listened to God. David served as king for forty years.

Being a king is an important job. Kings must be wise and strong; they must do what is good for the people of their land. Sometimes they must fight wars, but whenever possible they need to try to keep peace. Kings protect their people like shepherds protect their sheep.

David had been a shepherd, and then he became a king. God trusted him to take care of the people of Israel.

Talk about: Whom is God trusting you to take care of?

Prayer: Watch over us and protect us, Holy God.



DECEMBER 13 Scripture: Isaiah 9: 2-7

Reading: Many, many years before Jesus was born, people called prophets would bring God's message to the people of Israel. The prophets reminded the people of what God wanted them to do. God wanted them to be good and kind to others. The prophets told the people to worship only the one true God.