

Jesse Tree: Jesus' Family Tree provides a variety of ways to involve children in a Christmas service. Children of all ages can serve as readers, speakers, and nonspeaking characters for a variety of opportunities. Groups sing and present the Christmas story. Also consider using solos or ensembles for special music to involve more children and youth.

Because the service is in an editable form, you may delete or add parts. Reader parts can be combined or divided into even more parts if you like.

Other *Jesse Tree: Jesus' Family Tree* Resources in This Set

The children's Christmas service for all ages includes these editable files: a script with leader notes, a children's message, a bulletin file for your service bulletin, Jesse Tree Symbols for your service, and a lyrics file. An optional Christmas program for young children (early childhood) includes a corresponding set of editable files.

A selection of recorded songs and correlating song scores are provided with the *Jesse Tree: Jesus' Family Tree* set. Some songs are used for both options. Some are used only with the all-age children's service. Others are used only with the early childhood program.

Music Overview

Songs in the all-ages service with recordings:

- "Joy to the World" *LSB* 387
- "O Come, O Come, Emmanuel" *LSB* 357:1, 4–5, 7
- "What Hope! An Eden Prophesied" *LSB* 342
- "What Child Is This?" *LSB* 370:1
- "O Little Town of Bethlehem" *LSB* 361:1–2
- "Angels from the Realms of Glory" *LSB* 367:1, 4
- "Gentle Mary Laid Her Child" *LSB* 374:1, 3
- "O Come, All Ye Faithful" *LSB* 379
- "O Jesse Tree" (new hymn text by Lisa Clark to be sung to the tune of O Tannebaum)

Songs in the early childhood service with recordings:

- "Joy to the World" *LSB* 387
- "Little Baby Jesus" *Sing and Wonder*, page 34
- "O Jesse Tree" (new hymn text by Lisa Clark to be sung to the tune of O Tannebaum)
- "What Child Is This?" *LSB* 370:1
- "Gentle Mary Laid Her Child" *LSB* 374:1, 3
- "O Come, All Ye Faithful" *LSB* 379

Songs are provided as MP3 files that play on your computer.

Each song has two recorded versions: one with vocals and one with accompaniment only. Some leaders use the vocals version while the children are learning the songs, and then they switch to the accompaniment-only version for the service. Music scores are also provided for each song. Use the resources that best serve your purposes and the abilities of your participants.

Be mindful that the program suggests shortening or dividing some songs.

For this service, the hymns are meant primarily for congregational singing while children move to their places. The stanzas for the song “O Jesse Tree” are meant for the children to sing as performance pieces. You may want your group to do it differently, with different groups of children also singing the hymns without the congregation. Regardless of how you decide to do it, music is provided. If you do not have an organist available, the hymn recordings can also be used for congregational singing.

If you like, let the children use rhythm instruments to accompany some songs, perhaps even on the songs sung by the congregation.

Permission is given to print all congregational responses, readings, and lyrics in your worship bulletin. You may delete or substitute songs, but if any additional songs or hymns are not in the public domain, you must get permission from the copyright holders to use those songs and print the lyrics.

Mark up a copy of the worship bulletin to guide an accompanist. Ask him or her to provide soft background music as the children move into position for their parts. Note, however, that some hymns and songs are strategically placed to accommodate for such transitions.

Involve Your Pastor in the Service

If your service happens on a Sunday morning, your pastor will likely be involved already. If your service happens during a different time period, be sure to include your pastor in the planning as appropriate, asking what level of involvement works well for him. Don’t forget to let him know that there is an optional children’s message that he may want to use or adapt. During this busy time of year, it can be a real help to provide him with ready resources!

Individual Parts for All Ages

These parts are available for children’s participation:

14 Bible readings

2 responsive readings

13 rhyming verses, currently divided into 6 age-group recitations

Costumed nonspeaking characters: Mary, Joseph, angels, shepherds, etc.

Musicians/soloists

Group Parts for All Ages

The “Message Presented by the Children” follows a basic pattern: Bible reading, symbol presentation, group rhyme, song, and a congregational hymn. The Bible readings may be read by older children. The designated group of children can come up during the hymn. Have each group of children memorize their rhyme together to avoid stress and complications from absences or divide the rhyme among the children.

(See “Costumes and Props” below.)

Individual Parts for Early Childhood

These parts are available for children’s participation:

3 readers (adults or older children; parts may be divided further)

Costumed nonspeaking characters: Mary, Joseph, angels, shepherds, sheep, Wise Men

Responsive reading (this is an easy way to involve all students or to include your very small children and their parents, so all ages are represented.)

Group Parts for Early Childhood

The “Message Presented by the Children” follows a basic pattern: symbol presentation, group rhyme, and a song. Have each group of children memorize their rhyme together to avoid stress and complications from absences. The action rhyme, “A Family for You and Me,” is presented by older nonreading children, perhaps four- and five-year-olds.

Staging

How you set up the presentation area and where children sit and stand depends on your facility, the number of children, and your local preferences. Keep in mind that smooth transitions help minimize behavior issues and that young children can stand for only so long!

Think about how you can avoid moving groups of children during the service. For example, it may be easier to seat everyone up front to avoid moving groups in and out of the presentation area. If you can do this, simply have children stand when it’s their turn to present something or to sing. Or, you may want to seat them in the front pews or seats, with the tallest children up front and the smaller ones closest to the rest of the congregation. Then, have children simply stand and turn around when it’s their turn to present or sing.

Costumes and Props

One option for this service is to have different groups wear different costumes: angels, shepherds, Magi, in that order. Another option would be for costumed volunteers to come up during the nativity portrayal. You may choose one or both options.

Dress the children who act the parts of Mary, Joseph, shepherds, angels, and Magi in costumes of bathrobes or other clothing that represent biblical attire. These children can come forward during the reading that corresponds to their character. If you choose to have children dress up as sheep, a headband with felt ears and a white robe or large white T-shirt can be an easy costume.

Wrap a baby doll in a blanket to represent Jesus. If you do not have a manger, use a cradle or even a box to represent one. Set two chairs (for Mary and Joseph) in the stable area with the manger. Younger children may play shepherds and sheep, as these characters could sit and kneel.

The all-age service uses symbols as visual cues about featured persons in the *Jesse Tree*:

Jesus' Family Tree. These signs could be banners, posters, or even projections. For banners, use felt, a dowel rod, and ribbon. Decorate with colored felt, puff paint, or glitter glue. For posters, use foam board for sturdy, lightweight signs. For projections, load the images in order. This download contains the images that could be projected as you choose.

Other *Jesse Tree* Gifts and Resources

This Christmas service is designed to align with several other resources! Consider giving each child a copy of the book *Jesse Tree: Jesus' Family Tree* (CPH item no. 562555) or a homemade keepsake as a Christmas gift. The book is used as the basis of this service, so it could make a great gift for families.

Let your pastor and church leaders know that there are several resources your church can use during Advent and Christmas with the *Jesse Tree* theme. See cph.org for more details.

The Message Presented by the Children

Leader Note: The reader roles are great for older children. They can stand behind a podium, reading from the script or straight from the Bible. Memorization is not necessary, but an option. To include more volunteers, break the reader parts into smaller sections.

Reader 1: There shall come forth a shoot from the stump of Jesse, and a branch from His roots shall bear fruit. And the Spirit of the LORD shall rest upon Him, the Spirit of wisdom and understanding, the Spirit of counsel and might, the Spirit of knowledge and the fear of the LORD.

And His delight shall be in the fear of the LORD. He shall not judge by what His eyes see, or decide disputes by what His ears hear, but with righteousness He shall judge the poor. . . . In that day the root of Jesse, who shall stand as a signal for the peoples—of Him shall the nations inquire, and His resting place shall be glorious.

Isaiah 11:1–4, 10

Reader 2: For to us a child is born,
to us a son is given;
and the government shall be upon His shoulder,
and His name shall be called
Wonderful Counselor, Mighty God,
Everlasting Father, Prince of Peace.
Of the increase of His government and of peace
there will be no end,
on the throne of David and over His kingdom,
to establish it and to uphold it
with justice and with righteousness
from this time forth and forevermore.
The zeal of the LORD of hosts will do this. *Isaiah 9:6–7*

Hymn: What Hope! An Eden Prophesied

LSB 342:1–2

What hope! An Eden prophesied
Where tame live with the wild;
The lamb and lion side by side,
Led by a little child!

A shoot will sprout from Jesse's stem,
A branch from David's line,
A Prince of Peace in Bethlehem:
The fruit of God's design.

(Children in preschool assemble during the hymn.)

Reader 3: Now the serpent was more crafty than any other beast of the field that the LORD God had made. He said to the woman, “Did God actually say, ‘You shall not eat of any tree in the garden?’” And the woman said to the serpent, “We may eat of the fruit of the trees in the garden, but God said, ‘You shall not eat of the fruit of the tree that is in the midst of the garden, neither shall you touch it, lest you die.’” But the serpent said to the woman, “You will not surely die. For God knows that when you eat of it your eyes will be opened, and you will be like God, knowing good and evil.” So when the woman saw that the tree was good for food, and that it was a delight to the eyes, and that the tree was to be desired to make one wise, she took of its fruit and ate, and she also gave some to her husband who was with her, and he ate. . . .

Reader 4: The LORD God said to the serpent, “Because you have done this, cursed are you above all livestock and above all beasts of the field; on your belly you shall go, and dust you shall eat all the days of your life. I will put enmity between you and the woman, and between your offspring and her offspring; He shall bruise your head, and you shall bruise His heel.” *Genesis 3:1–6, 14–15*

(At this point, someone will place SYMBOL A: APPLE on display.)

Leader Note: The Jesse Tree symbols can be projected, made into large ornaments and placed on a tree, or displayed in some other way. Note that this service uses only some of the Jesse Tree symbols. These symbols correspond to the children’s book, but not all 26 that are featured in the family devotional.

Preschool Children

Leader Note: These rhymes weave throughout the service and assist with memory, but the language matures with the age group. To ease stress for children, have them say the rhyme together. You may choose to divide the rhyming pairs and assign to individuals to memorize if you’d prefer.

Recitation:

Now Eve and Adam were the first,
And through their sin, the world was cursed.
But by God’s love, these two were blessed,
And through their fruit, we, too, find rest.

Song: O Jesse Tree

O Jesse Tree—Christ’s fam’ly tree—point us the way to Jesus.
God’s promise shows His love for all, and with His Son, He frees us!
*When Eve and Adam took that bite,
God promised to make all things right.*
O Jesse Tree—Christ’s fam’ly tree—point us the way to Jesus.

Reader 5: Then God said to Noah and to his sons with him, “Behold, I establish My covenant with you and your offspring after you, and with every living creature that is with you, the birds, the livestock, and every beast of the earth with you, as many as came out of the ark; it is for every beast of the earth. I establish My covenant with you, that never again shall all flesh be cut off by the waters of the flood, and never again shall there be a flood to destroy the earth.” And God said, “This is the sign of the covenant that I make between Me and you and every living creature that is with you, for all future generations: I have set My bow in the cloud, and it shall be a sign of the covenant between Me and the earth. *Genesis 9:8–13*

(At this point, someone will place SYMBOL B: RAINBOW on display.)

Recitation:

The world was sinful, mean, and bad.
The people made God very sad.
The waters made the world anew—
Like Noah’s fam’ly, me, and you!

Song: O Jesse Tree

O Jesse Tree—Christ’s fam’ly tree—point us the way to Jesus.
God’s promise shows His love for all, and with His Son, He frees us!
*God cleansed the world from evil sin;
Another promise would begin.*
O Jesse Tree—Christ’s fam’ly tree—point us the way to Jesus.

Hymn: What Hope! An Eden Prophesied

LSB 342:3–4

As banner of God’s love unfurled,
Christ came to suffer loss,
That by His death a dying world
Would rally to the cross.

Come, Jesus, come, Messiah Lord,
Lost Paradise restore;
Lead past the angel’s flaming sword—
Come, open heaven’s door.

(Preschooler children return to their places while the congregation sings. Kindergarten children get into place.)

Leader Note: Overall, this sets the pattern: (1) The congregation sings while a group gets into place. (2) A reader gives the Bible context. (3) A symbol is placed. (4) The group recites a rhyme. (5) The group sings a stanza of “O Jesse Tree.” This **repeats** once more with the same group before the congregation sings and starts the pattern again. This service is a little longer

than some others. You can decide to trim time by omitting some of the readings, by omitting some of the symbols, or by stacking the poems and songs together. Also, you might want to replace some of the congregational singing with some special music by older students (solos, ensembles, etc.).

Reader 6: Now the LORD said to Abram, “Go from your country and your kindred and your father’s house to the land that I will show you. And I will make of you a great nation, and I will bless you and make your name great, so that you will be a blessing. I will bless those who bless you, and him who dishonors you I will curse, and in you all the families of the earth shall be blessed.” *Genesis 12:1–3*

(At this point, someone will place SYMBOL C: TENT on display.)

Kindergarten Children

Recitation:

To Abraham and Sarah now,
The Lord would give a special vow.
Their home would be the Promised Land
With children numbered as the sand.

Song: O Jesse Tree

O Jesse Tree—Christ’s fam’ly tree—point us the way to Jesus.
God’s promise shows His love for all, and with His Son, He frees us!
*God promised Abraham a son;
His line would bring the Chosen One.*
O Jesse Tree—Christ’s fam’ly tree—point us the way to Jesus.

Reader 7: And Abraham took the wood of the burnt offering and laid it on Isaac his son. And he took in his hand the fire and the knife. So they went both of them together. And Isaac said to his father Abraham, “My father!” And he said, “Here I am, my son.” He said, “Behold, the fire and the wood, but where is the lamb for a burnt offering?” Abraham said, “God will provide for Himself the lamb for a burnt offering, my son.” So they went both of them together. *Genesis 22:6–8*

(At this point, someone will place SYMBOL D: RAM on display.)

Recitation:

God’s promise of a son came true!
This joy—through Isaac—Sarah knew.
This boy—this gift—for Abraham
Was saved by God, who sent a ram.

Song: O Jesse Tree

O Jesse Tree—Christ’s fam’ly tree—point us the way to Jesus.
God’s promise shows His love for all, and with His Son, He frees us!
*Through Abr’am’s line came sacrifice;
But it was God who paid the price!*
O Jesse Tree—Christ’s fam’ly tree—point us the way to Jesus.

Hymn: What Child Is This

LSB 370:1

What child is this, who, laid to rest,
On Mary’s lap is sleeping?
Whom angels greet with anthems sweet
While shepherds watch are keeping?
This, this is Christ the king,
Whom shepherds guard and angels sing;
Haste, haste to bring Him laud,
The babe, the son of Mary!

(During the hymn, kindergarten children take their seats and children in grades 1–2 assemble.)

Reader 8: Jacob left Beersheba and went toward Haran. And he came to a certain place and stayed there that night, because the sun had set. Taking one of the stones of the place, he put it under his head and lay down in that place to sleep. And he dreamed, and behold, there was a ladder set up on the earth, and the top of it reached to heaven. And behold, the angels of God were ascending and descending on it! And behold, the LORD stood above it and said, “I am the LORD, the God of Abraham your father and the God of Isaac. The land on which you lie I will give to you and to your offspring. Your offspring shall be like the dust of the earth, and you shall spread abroad to the west and to the east and to the north and to the south, and in you and your offspring shall all the families of the earth be blessed. *Genesis 28:10–14*

(At this point, someone will place SYMBOL E: LADDER on display.)

Children Grades 1–2

Recitation:

Now Jacob always liked to scheme!
But far from home, he had a dream.
Though Jacob had to hide and flee,
He’d have a mighty fam’ly tree!

Song: O Jesse Tree

O Jesse Tree—Christ’s fam’ly tree—point us the way to Jesus.

God's promise shows His love for all, and with His Son, He frees us!
*When Jacob's planning fell apart,
God granted him a brand-new start.*

O Jesse Tree—Christ's fam'ly tree—point us the way to Jesus.

Reader 9: And she said, "See, your sister-in-law has gone back to her people and to her gods; return after your sister-in-law." But Ruth said, "Do not urge me to leave you or to return from following you. For where you go I will go, and where you lodge I will lodge. Your people shall be my people, and your God my God. *Ruth 1:15–16*

(At this point, someone will place SYMBOL F: YOU HAVE A REDEEMER on display.)

Recitation:

At first, Ruth didn't know the Word.
But through her marriage, she had heard
About the Lord, the one true God,
And in His ways, through life, she trod.

Song: O Jesse Tree

O Jesse Tree—Christ's fam'ly tree—point us the way to Jesus.
God's promise shows His love for all, and with His Son, He frees us!
*God helped Ruth follow faithfully;
She's now part of Christ's family!*
O Jesse Tree—Christ's fam'ly tree—point us the way to Jesus.

Hymn: O Little Town of Bethlehem

LSB 361:1–2

O little town of Bethlehem,
How still we see thee lie!
Above thy deep and dreamless sleep
The silent stars go by;
Yet in thy dark streets shineth
The everlasting light.
The hopes and fears of all the years
Are met in thee tonight.

For Christ is born of Mary,
And, gathered all above
While mortals sleep, the angels keep
Their watch of wond'ring love.
O morning stars, together
Proclaim the holy birth,
And praises sing to God the king
And peace to all the earth!