

Jesus Tree Daily Devotions

I am indebted to Sally Lloyd-Jones and The Jesus Storybook Bible.

1: Creation's Light

Genesis 1.1-4; Colossians 1.15, 16
(Cann p. 16 rectangle)

Before you were born and before mommy and dad were born and before any people lived at all, there was nothing. There wasn't even our home or your school or any animals or pets. There weren't any rivers or land or oceans or forests or fields. There was nothing. But God was there! No one made God. He has always been around, one God: Father, Jesus, and Spirit.

God had a plan. He wanted to make things. He wanted to create and draw and build. And so he spoke. He didn't use Legos or crayons to make His artwork. He used words. And when He spoke, God made life happen. God spoke and He made light.

The Bible later tells us that Jesus is our Light. The Bible teaches us that our hearts are dark and dirty because we want to live life without God. We want to do things by ourselves without His help. Jesus shines like a bright light into our dark hearts. During Jesus' birthday, we remember that only Jesus can shine light in our dark hearts. Nothing else and no one else can help us to see what is true and make life beautiful.

2: Adam and Eve (Marriage)

Genesis 2; Exodus 34.14; Hosea; Ephesians 5.28-33
(Cann p. 18 square)

After God made light and land and water and animals, He made the very best thing. He saved the best and most beautiful art work for last. He made people. The first two people were named Adam and Eve. God put them into a special relationship called marriage. Adam was Eve's husband. And Eve was Adam's wife. Adam did not share Eve with other men. Eve did not share Adam with other women. They loved each other and enjoyed a wonderful, special friendship.

Jesus is like our husband. And we are His wife. Jesus loves us and cares for you more than even mommy and dad. And like a good husband, He does not want share us. He wants all of us. Now this may sound like Jesus is selfish when I tell you that He doesn't want to share us with anything else. But get this: Jesus is not being selfish! He knows that we will only be safe and happy when we love Him more than anything else.

Jesus loves us even when we love things or people more than Him. Jesus chases after us to bring us back to Him when our hearts go the wrong direction.

3: Serpent

Genesis 3.1-10

(Thomas p. 20 square)

Remember Adam and Eve, the first husband and wife that God made? Well, God gave put them in a beautiful garden and gave them the important job of taking care of that garden. God enjoyed the people He made and Adam and Eve enjoyed spending time with God. Everything in God's world was right and perfect. Nobody got sick. Nobody ever got sad and cried. Adam and Eve never had a fight or got angry with each other.

God told the first people that they could not eat the fruit on one tree in the garden. God knew that if Adam and Eve did, they would think that they knew it all. God knew that they would believe the lie that they didn't need God. He knew that they would stop trusting Him and that the whole world would get all messed up.

A serpent or snake slithered into God's garden. The snake's name was Satan and he hated God. He lied to Adam and Eve and tried to convince them that God didn't really love them. Adam and Eve made the wrong choice. They listened to the snake instead of God. They believed that life would be better if they were on their own rather than with God. They listened to the serpent and ate the fruit on the tree.

Ever since then, the world that Jesus made is now broken and messed up. The Bible uses a special word to talk about sin breaking the world. It's called the curse. Our hearts are dirty and we don't love Jesus. We do not obey Jesus. We try to be happy without God.

God could have given up on Adam and Eve. He could have given up on you and me. But He didn't! He had an amazing plan. God didn't leave us after we messed everything up; He loved us. He came to earth as a baby to fix this broken world. Jesus didn't fix the world using hammers and nails and drills and screwdrivers. Jesus fixes the world by dying for us and living for us and sending His Spirit to help us. And He will come back to fix the world all the way. Jesus came as a baby to love us and make things right again.

Sing:

Joy to the World (especially verse 3)

*Joy to the world, the Lord is come!
Let earth receive her King;
Let every heart prepare Him room,
And Heaven and nature sing,
And Heaven and nature sing,
And Heaven, and Heaven, and nature sing.*

*Joy to the earth, the Savior reigns!
Let men their songs employ;
While fields and floods, rocks, hills and
plains
Repeat the sounding joy,
Repeat the sounding joy,
Repeat, repeat, the sounding joy.*

*No more let sins and sorrows grow,
Nor thorns infest the ground;
He comes to make His blessings flow
Far as the curse is found,
Far as the curse is found,
Far as, far as, the curse is found.*

*He rules the world with truth and grace,
And makes the nations prove
The glories of His righteousness,
And wonders of His love,
And wonders of His love,
And wonders, wonders, of His love.*

4: Ark

Genesis 6.5-8, 7.17-23, 9.16; Romans 6.23
(Cann p. 25 rectangle)

Remember how we talked about the world being broken after Adam and Eve obeyed the snake instead of God? About how people do not normally love God? About how we do not obey God? Well, after Adam and Eve's time, things kept going wrong. There were a lot of fights and sadness and sickness. People were destroying themselves, each other, and God's world.

God noticed how messed up everything was and had a plan. He told a man named Noah that He was going to send a storm to wash away all the hate and sadness in the world. God promised Noah that He would keep him and his family and a bunch of animals safe inside a big boat called an ark.

After the big storm came and washed everything away, the rain stopped. God had kept His promise to Noah. He had kept everybody safe on the ark. God promised Noah that He wouldn't destroy the world again. God knew that people, even Noah, would mess everything up again. God knew that people would continue to try to live life without Him. But God had a better plan, a plan to save the world, not wash it away in a storm. Jesus is God's plan to save people like us, not destroy people. God the Father sent Jesus to die so that we will not die. Jesus saves us.

5: Tower of Babel

Genesis 11.1-10
(Cann p. 27 rectangle)

After Noah's death, some people got together and started to build a tall tower. Do you know what they were trying to do? They were trying to build a tower up to God. They wanted to be important, more important than God. They were trying to get rid of God and be famous and safe and happy without Him. They wanted to show how big and strong they were. They were showing off.

God did not let the people build the tower. He stepped in and confused their words so that they couldn't talk to each other or plan how to keep building the tower higher and higher. Eventually the people got so frustrated that they had to just stop building.

God hates it when we act like we can be big and strong without Him. He hates it when we act like we are more important than Him. He knows that we will not be happy or safe if we try to live without Him. So God stopped the people from building that tower.

We don't climb up to God. We can't. No matter how high we reach or try, we can't get to heaven by ourselves. We don't need a staircase to reach *up* to God. We need a Rescuer—a person who will reach *down* to us. God reaches down to us by sending Jesus as a baby. Did you know that another name for Jesus is Emmanuel? Emmanuel means "God with us." Jesus is God coming down to us.

6: Camel

Genesis 12.1-7, Matthew 11, Hebrews 11.8-16, Romans 4
(Thomas p. 45 oval)

A lot of years passed after God stopped the people from building the tall tower. But God didn't forget His promise to rescue us by sending Jesus to fix the broken world. You see, God never forgets things. He never forgets us. He always keeps His promise to love us. God wants us to trust Him to take care of us.

Years after the tall tower, God told a man named Abraham to leave his home and to travel far away to a place to which he had never been. God told Abraham to leave his relatives. Imagine how scary that would be! Imagine if God asked you to leave our home and San Antonio and go way far away and start life over! God promised that He would take care of Abraham. Abraham listened to God and trusted God even before he knew what God's big plan was. Abraham probably used some camels like this one to pack up all of his things and follow God to a new home.

Abraham shows us what it looks like to trust Jesus and take Him at His word. ("How do you trust Mommy and Dad? You believe that we will feed you and give you milk and water to drink. You trust us to bathe you and give you a cozy bed to sleep in. In a similar way, God wants you to trust Him like you trust Mommy and Dad.") Abraham trusted God. He left his family and his home to follow God and to obey.

At Christmas time, we remember to trust Jesus to take care of us. We remember that no one or nothing can take care of us or make us clean except Jesus.

7: Ram Caught in Branches

Genesis 22.1-13, John 1.29b
(Cann p. 39 oval)

Remember how Abraham trusted God and moved way far away even before Abraham knew God's big plan to rescue people and fix the broken world? One night after Abraham's big move, God started to tell Abraham a little bit about His big plan. God told Abraham that part of His plan involved a son that Abraham was going to have. God told Abraham that he was going to have a baby named Isaac and that Isaac was going to become a dad and have kids and those kids were going to have kids and those kids were going to have kids. God promised Abraham a big, big family—a family that started with a single son named Isaac.

Abraham liked giving presents to God. Those presents were called sacrifices that were a way of saying, "God, I love you." Usually sacrifices were animals like a sheep or goat. One day God asked Abraham for a sacrifice. This time, though, God didn't want an animal, He wanted something more. He wanted Abraham to give Him Isaac, Abraham's son. God told Abraham to take Isaac up a mountain and kill Isaac. Whoa! That is hard to imagine what it must have been like to be Abraham. Abraham didn't understand God, but he trusted God anyway. Abraham obeyed God. He took out a knife to kill Isaac and right before the knife cut Isaac, God stopped Abraham. God knew that Abraham had followed His directions and had trusted Him.

God showed Abraham a ram (or sheep) that was tangled up in a bush. God told Abraham to kill the sheep rather than kill his son, Isaac. The sheep died so that Isaac would not have to die. You see, God wants his people to live and not die. He wants to rescue his people, not punish them. But they must trust him.

God rescues His people by giving us Jesus. Jesus is like that ram. In the Bible, Jesus is called the Lamb of God who takes away the sin of the world. He took our sin and died on the cross so that we would not have to die.

“Lamb of God”

8: Joseph

Genesis 37-50

(Cann p. 57 square)

God gave Abraham a son named Isaac. Isaac had a grandson named Joseph. Joseph had 11 brothers. Remember God's promise to Abraham, to give Abraham a big family? Well imagine being like Joseph and having 11 brothers. And that was just the start.

One day, Joseph's dad gave him a special coat. Joseph's brothers were jealous. They got so mad at Joseph. And even though Joseph didn't do anything wrong, His brothers were mean to Him. They hurt their brother, Joseph, and sold him to some people who took him away to a country called Egypt. He became a slave. That means that he had to work very hard but never got paid and had to do what other people told him all the time. Joseph had a very hard life even though he obeyed the LORD. Eventually, the most important man in all of Egypt, Pharaoh, noticed Joseph. Pharaoh grew to trust Joseph and put him in charge of all the food in Egypt. At this time, there wasn't a lot of food for people to eat. So people would come from all over to get food from Joseph. Joseph's own brothers, the ones who were mean to him, got very hungry. They went to Egypt and asked Joseph for some food. Joseph was kind to them; he forgave them; and shared his food with them so that they would live. God used all the bad things in Joseph's life to do a lot of good. God used all of Joseph's suffering and sadness to take care of God's people and bless them.

Jesus is like a brother to us. Like Joseph, Jesus would leave his home and his Father and his brothers would hate him and want him dead. Jesus would be punished even though he did nothing wrong. But God would use all the bad things that happened to Jesus to do something really good: to forgive our sins and save us. God is kind to us through Jesus. We are blessed and our hearts are full because we know Jesus, the Bread of Life.

9: Tablets of the Law

Exodus 20.1-17; 24.3-8; 24.3-8; Matthew 23.35-40; Galatians 3.10-14, II Corinthians 5.21
(Thomas p. 82 rectangle)

I totally plagiarized Sally Lloyd-Jones here because I couldn't say it any better myself!

Remember Joseph and the big family that God was making? The Bible calls Abraham's big family the Israelites. The people in Egypt began to hate the Israelites and be mean to them. But God took care of His people and rescued them. He helped them to escape. They left Egypt and followed God through the desert. A man named Moses led the Israelites.

God wanted to talk to his people and show them what he was like. He wanted them to get to know Him so He invited Moses up to the top of a mountain and told Moses to write down His words.

God told Moses: “The whole earth belongs to me! But I have chosen you to be my special family. I want you to live in a way that shows everyone else what I’m like—so they can know me, too. . . I want you to love me more than anything else in all the world—and know that I love you too. That’s the most important thing of all”. Moses listened to God and wrote down His words. They were called the 10 commandments.

Moses told the people what God had told him. Moses asked the Israelites to promise to love God more than anything else. They said, “Yes, we’ll do it! We will love God perfectly!” But they were wrong. They couldn’t do it.

At Christmas time, we think about the law, and we are thankful for Jesus. We need Jesus because we do not keep our promises. We do not obey His rules. We don’t keep the laws that God gave Moses. We do not love God and we do not love people all the way, from the heart, all the time.

Only one person can keep all the rules. And many years later God would send Jesus—to stand in our place and be perfect for us. Because keeping the rules won’t save us. Only Jesus can.

10: Tabernacle

Exodus 38, 40; John 1.14; John 14.6; Hebrews 9, 10
(Cann p. 95 rectangle)

God gave Moses and the Israelites instructions for setting up the tabernacle. The tabernacle was a special tent. This special tent represented that God was with them. The tabernacle represented God’s presence.

An Israelite couldn’t walk in the tabernacle whenever he wanted. People have dirty hearts, and God is perfectly clean. So a dirty person could not spend time with a clean or holy God. A person could only stand in the courtyard in front of the tabernacle and make an offering, asking God to clean His dirty heart. Certain people, called priests were allowed inside the tent. And only one person called the High Priest once a year could enter into a special room in the tent to meet with God. It was amazing that God who is so clean would want to spend time with and have a relationship with dirty people.

The tabernacle shows us that there are certain walls between a clean God and dirty people. We can’t climb over these walls to spend time with God. We can’t try to clean ourselves up so that we can meet with God. The tabernacle also shows us that there are certain gates or openings through which dirty people can approach a clean, holy God.

There is still a wall between dirty people and the holy God. That wall is sin. We can’t fix ourselves on our own. But Jesus is our gate. He is the *only* opening through which we can know God. Jesus is our tabernacle. Jesus is God with us. Because of Jesus, we can talk to God and get to know God and enjoy spending time with Him.

11: Slingshot

I Samuel 17; Joshua 5.14; John 12.31; Romans 8.31; II Corinthians 2.14;
II Corinthians 10.3-5
(Thomas p. 118 rectangle; discussed Clowney p. 131, 144)

Do you remember learning about God making a big family through the man named Abraham? Remember how Abraham's family was called the Israelites? Well there was another group of people who were not part of God's family. In fact, they were God's enemies and they were called the Philistines. And there was one Philistine who was huge. His name was Goliath. Goliath, the Philistine, was big and strong and hated God and God's people. All the Israelites were afraid of him when he tried to start a fight.

David was an Israelite. He was part of God's growing family. Unlike Goliath, David loved God. And unlike Goliath, he was a little guy. He was not big and strong. He was probably the kind of kid who wouldn't have been a football player on a team. He did not know how to fight Goliath. David knew that he was too little to fight Goliath, but he believed that God was big enough to fight Goliath. You see, David knew that it wasn't how big and strong a person is that matters. He told Goliath, "It isn't how strong you are or how many swords and spears you have that will save you—it is God who saves you!" David took some small rocks and put it in a slingshot like this. A slingshot is like a little bag with some strings attached to it. David spun the slingshot around and around and then let it go, aiming it right at Goliath. The rocks flew out of the bag, hitting Goliath and killing him. God used little David and his slingshot to kill one of His enemies

At Christmas time, we remember that God sent another little person, a baby in fact, to take on a big fight. Jesus is our hero. He fought for us by dying on a cross to bring us back to God.

12: Lion with Lamb

Isaiah 11.6-10; Romans 5.6-11; II Corinthians 5.16-21
(Cann p. 5 rectangle)

Have you noticed how at the zoo animals are usually separated? The tiger is separate from the zebra so that the tiger does not hurt or eat the zebra. A tiger is not a zebra's friend. They are enemies. Lions and lambs are like that too. They are enemies. They do not normally get along because lions tend to attack and eat lambs. Way before Jesus' birthday, God promised that when Jesus was born the lion would lie down with the lamb. In other words, because of Jesus' birthday, the lion will become the lamb's friend—rather than its enemy. The lion won't eat the lamb. Instead, the lion will play with the lamb. It's amazing that because of Jesus two enemies would become friends and love one another.

The Bible teaches that before we have a relationship with Jesus, we are God's enemies. We hate God. Before we have a relationship with Jesus, we would die if we were to spend time with a holy God. But the Bible also teaches that Jesus has made us God's friend. Now we can have a relationship with God as God's children. And because we are God's friends now, we can be friends to other people.

When Jesus comes again, he will make everything completely right. There will be no enemies anywhere. The world will be fixed. People will get along all the time with other people. And people will enjoy God's friendship fully.

13: Shepherd

Psalm 23; Isaiah 53.6; John 10.27

(Cann p. 209 rectangle, discussed Clowney p. 175)

Remember David, the little guy who remembered that God is strong and always wins the battle? David wasn't just a fighter or warrior for God. He was also a shepherd. He took care of sheep. Did you know that sheep need a lot of help? They aren't the smartest animals! They are actually pretty stupid. Sheep need someone, a shepherd like David, to take care of them. They tend to walk off and get lost if they are left by themselves. They tend to go from places where they are safe and have food to eat and water to drink and go to dangerous places where they don't have any food or water. They tend to make foolish choices.

David was thinking about the foolish sheep that he was taking care of and decided to write a song about it. His song describes Jesus as a shepherd. David sang: Jesus is my shepherd. He takes care of me. Even when I am afraid, He is with me.

Jesus was David's shepherd. And Jesus is my shepherd and your shepherd. We are like sheep. We get off track. We go the wrong way. We get lost. We leave the safety and happiness of following God. We try to do our own thing and get hurt in the process.

The Bible tells us that "All of us like sheep have gone astray, each of us has turned to his own way; but the LORD has caused the iniquity of us all to fall on Him." That is such good news! That means that Jesus was punished for us because we make foolish choices and try to wander off away from God. Jesus is like a shepherd who chases us and pursues us and brings us back to God the Father.

14: Brick Wall

Nehemiah 1, 2, 4, 6, 8; Revelation 21.10-27

(Cann p. 126 rectangle)

Remember how we talked about how we are like sheep who go the wrong direction and try to leave God? And remember how we talked about how Jesus is like a good shepherd who follows us and brings us back to where it is safe? Sometimes God has to be tough with us to keep us close to Him where it is safe.

The Israelites were acting like sheep again! Even though they had promised to keep the rules that God had given to Moses, they were forgetting God and not loving Him completely. So God acted like a shepherd and worked to bring them back to Himself. God sent a mean king named Nebuchadnezzar to the Israelites. Nebuchadnezzar's army destroyed the Israelite's homes and made them go to a place called Babylon. Nebuchadnezzar even destroyed the most special city for God's people, Jerusalem. He tore down the walls that used to protect the Israelites inside the city.

Years later, there was a man named Nehemiah. He was so sad because the city of Jerusalem, God's city, was ruined. He wanted to rebuild the walls that Nebuchadnezzar destroyed. Nehemiah got permission to rebuild the walls. The Israelites helped Nehemiah. They worked really hard. It was dangerous working on the walls. Some of God's enemies wanted to fight them and ruin the walls again. But Nehemiah and the Israelites trusted God

to rebuild the city of Jerusalem. And they did it! Then the prophet Ezra read the Bible to all the people on the city wall. The people paid attention and then had a big party to celebrate what God had done. This all happened before Jesus was born as a baby.

Did you know that even though Jerusalem's walls were fixed and it was beautiful and the people were happy, that we are looking forward to a better city? We will live in this city in heaven. It has high, beautiful, shiny walls made of jewels. There is no church or tabernacle in it because Jesus is there. He is the center of this big, beautiful city that we will live in one day. There is no sun or moon in God's city in heaven because God's glory shines all the time and all sorts of people—people like us and people different from us will walk through the open gates in the wall and live there with Jesus. And just like the Israelites had a party when they rebuilt the walls around Jerusalem, we are going to have a big celebration in heaven as we worship God.

15: Refiner's Fire

Malachi 3, 4; Matthew 3.11, 12; II Corinthians 3.17, 18; Hebrews 10.22; I John 1.1-3
(Cann p. 166 square)

Before the very first Christmas when God the Son became the baby Jesus, a prophet said that Jesus was going to be born and that He was going to be like a fire. Let's think about what fire is like to see if we can guess what Jesus is like.

First of all, fire is hot. You cannot touch it or goof around next to it because you might get burned.

So fire can burn you, but fire can also clean certain things. It's kind of like soap. If you put dirty metal into fire, the fire will clean the metal by taking out all of the dirty parts.

The very first Christmas, God surprised everyone! Jesus did not come like a burning fire that no one could touch. Instead of coming as a warrior to fight people, He came to fight against our sin and Satan and death. Jesus came as a little person who could be touched and looked at and listened to. He came as a little baby. At Christmas time, God doesn't tell us, "Stand back! Stay away! Don't touch!" Instead, God invites us to come close to Him and touch Him. Because of what Jesus has done, God calls us clean and the Holy Spirit works in our lives to wash away the dirty parts of our hearts. As we look at Jesus and get to know Him, the Holy Spirit changes us so that we love Jesus more and more and we sin less and less.

After Jesus died on the cross and went up to heaven, He promised to come back another time. Jesus will come again—this time as a raging fire. He will gather up and protect Christians, but He will burn up those who do not love Him. Thank you Jesus that you have loved us and made us clean so that we won't experience your fire!

16: Jesus' Family Tree

(Cann p. 259* rectangle)
Matthew 1.1-17; Genesis 12.1-3; Hebrews 2.14b

Did you ever wonder what Jesus' mom was like and what his grandparents were like? Did you ever wonder who were Jesus' great-grandparents and great-great grandparents? Well, the Bible tells us some very interesting things about Jesus' family.

1) Jesus' family included all types of people. No people were left out or excluded. It included the leaders and kings of Israel like Jacob and Isaac. Even these leaders messed up and did not obey God. Jesus' family included women like Tamar, Rahab, and Ruth who did not seem very important. It also included forgotten people who had to leave their homes and live in Babylon. Finally, Jesus' family included people that we don't know a lot about from the Bible, people like Eliud and Eleazar. No one is nameless to Jesus. Jesus welcomes everyone—all types of people. Jesus wants you to know him and be part of His story. Jesus comes to people who are left out and don't seem very important.

2) And you want to know something else about Jesus' family? Not only did it include all types of people, these people messed up a lot. They weren't perfect. You know how you sometimes fight with your brother/sister and sometimes mommy and dad make mistakes? Well Jesus' family wasn't any different. Even though they messed up all the time and their hearts were dirty, God is so big that He was able to use this messed up family to fix the broken world. Did you know that God can still do what He wants to in *your* life even though you aren't perfect? Nothing can separate you from God's love. Jesus is not embarrassed of you. Jesus came at Christmas time to make you part of God's big family.

17: John the Baptist

Malachi 4. 5, 6; Luke 1.12-17; Luke 1.59-80; Luke 3.3-6; John 1.29
(Cann p. 226 square)

Do you remember how we talked about Jesus' family yesterday? Remember how Jesus' family included all kinds of people and that it wasn't perfect? Well there was a man named John the Baptist. He was part of Jesus' family. In fact, he was Jesus' cousin. And he had an important job. His job was to get people ready for Jesus. He would tell them, "Stop running away from God and run to him instead. You need to be rescued. I have good news—the Redeemer is coming! Make your hearts ready for him. Yes! Get ready because your King is coming back for you!" A lot of people listened to John and ask God to wash their dirty hearts and said that they needed God to rescue them. John would baptize them by dunking them in water. This baptism was a sign that showed that they wanted to follow God and begin a new life.

Later, Jesus would ask John the Baptist to baptize Him. Jesus didn't need to be baptized because His heart was dirty. No, His heart was perfectly clean. He came to be baptized because it was what God wanted Him to do. John said, "Look! This is Jesus. He is the Lamb of God who takes away our sin." Then John took Jesus down to the water and baptized Him. God the Spirit came down on Jesus' head like a dove. And God the Father spoke from heaven, "This is My Son. And I love Him. I am pleased with Him. Listen to what He says."

So I want you to remember two things about John the Baptist, Jesus' cousin:

- 1) Number one: he reminds us that we need to be rescued. We can't wash our own dirty hearts. We can't fix the broken world. We need Jesus to save us.

- 2) And number two: when John baptized Jesus we learn that God the Father is pleased or happy with Jesus. Our Father in heaven loves us not because we try to be good. Our Father loves us because he loves Jesus and we are joined to Jesus.

18: Nazareth

Luke 1.26-38

(Thomas p. 186 square)

Do you see this picture right here? It is a picture of a town called Nazareth. One day, right before Jesus was born, an angel appeared to a young girl named Mary. The angel said to Mary, "Don't be afraid of me. God is very happy with you. You're going to have a little boy. You will call him Jesus. He is God's own Son. He's the One the world has been waiting for! He's the Rescuer!" Wow! God was going to come to earth as a baby? God was going to use a little bitty baby to rescue people and make everything right? Mary said, "How can something this good be true?" And the angel said to her in the town of Nazareth, "Is anything too wonderful for God?" Mary trusted God (just like Abraham did many, many years ago) and said, "I am God's servant. He is in charge of my life. Whatever God says, I will do."

19: Angel

Luke 2.8-15

(Cann p. 220 rectangle)

Remember how we learned a little bit about sheep and shepherds when we were talking about David's life? Well get this: God was so very excited about the birth of Jesus that He couldn't keep the good news to Himself. Like a new dad who just had a baby, He wanted to shout it to everyone. Guess whom He told first? He didn't tell the good news of Jesus' birth to the fanciest people He could find. He didn't tell the news of Jesus' birth to the strongest people He could find. No, He first told the great news of Jesus' birth to ordinary, plain, dirty, smelly shepherds who were camping out at night taking care of their sheep. So God sent an angel to the shepherds with this message: "Don't be afraid of me. I am going to tell you some really good news! Jesus has been born. He is your Savior. He is Christ the Lord." Then an army of angels appeared and sang out: "Glory to God in the highest, and on earth peace to the people He loves." They sang, "God gets all the credit! To God be Fame and Honor and all our Hoorays! Wow, God!"

Jesus is good news for us! Because God loves us, we are His friends. Jesus makes us God's friends. Because of Jesus, we are no longer God's enemies. We are His children. He loves us. And when we remember that Jesus made us God's friends, we are kind to other people and are a good friend to them.

20: Bread and Wine

Mark 14.22-27; John 6.26-40
(Thomas p. 264 rectangle)

This year for Christmas you will probably get a lot of toys. But you know what? In a few days or weeks or months, you will want more toys. . . different toys. The toys that you got for Christmas won't be enough for you. You will want more. Your heart will want more. Toys won't fill up your heart. Your little heart will still be hungry for more.

Jesus is the Bread of Life. He fills our hearts. He satisfies us. Nothing else can or ever will. We have life and grow as we believe in Jesus.

One way Jesus grows us is through the Lord's Supper. Before he died on the cross, he had a special meal with his friends. He broke bread and gave it to them and said, "My body is like this bread. It will break. This cup of wine is like my blood. It will pour out. This is how God will rescue the whole world. My life will break so that God's world will be fixed. My heart will tear apart—and your hearts will heal. My blood will wash away all of your sins. And you'll be clean on the inside—in your hearts. So whenever you eat and drink, remember, I've rescued you!"

Each Sunday when we eat the bread and wine, we remember that Jesus has rescued us. We spend time with Him and our church family when we eat the bread and drink the wine. When you are older and tell the church that Jesus has rescued you, you will get to share in this special meal. Jesus will use this special meal in your life to teach you about Him and change you.

21: Rooster

Mark 14.26-31; Mark 14.66-72; John 21.14-17
(Thomas p. 269 square)

Jesus had a friend named Peter. Peter liked to talk a lot. He was one of Jesus' disciples. Jesus told his disciples that He was going to be killed on the cross. His friends were sad. Jesus also told them that his friends would leave him all alone when Jesus needed them the most. Peter did not like hearing this. He said, "Even if all of your other friends leave you, I will stay with you!" Jesus told Peter that Peter *would* leave him and that Peter would tell other people that he didn't even know Jesus. Jesus told Peter that he would say three times that he didn't know Jesus. Then a rooster like this one would crow.

When other people were hurting Jesus and about to nail him to the cross to die, some people asked Peter if he was Jesus' friend. Peter lied three times and said, "No. I don't know Jesus!" Then a rooster crowed just like Jesus said. Peter cried because he realized that he had left Jesus all alone. Peter had done exactly what Jesus said he was going to do; when Jesus needed a friend the most, Peter left Jesus all alone.

What a sad story! But you know what? The story doesn't end there. After Jesus died on the cross, he rose again. He then visited Peter to tell Peter that he still loved him even though Peter had not loved Jesus. Jesus was Peter's friend even though Peter was not always Jesus' friend.

Jesus is your friend even when you are not His friend. He loves you even when you don't love Him. One of the ways he loved you was by coming to earth as a baby on Christmas day to live and die for you. Jesus' love for us is an undying, unfailing, never giving up, never stopping love.

Sing:

*Jesus! What a Friend for sinners!
Jesus! Lover of my soul;
Friends may fail me, foes assail me,
He, my Savior, makes me whole.*

Refrain

*Hallelujah! what a Savior!
Hallelujah! what a Friend!
Saving, helping, keeping, loving,
He is with me to the end.*

22: Crown

Isaiah 9.6, 7; Matthew 27.27-31; Mark 16.12-20; John 19.1-7; James 1.12; Revelation 4.8-11; Revelation 19.11-16
(Thomas p. 273 oval)

Before Jesus was born, people were looking for a Messiah. They thought that the Messiah would be a king who would get power by fighting other people and winning battles. They thought that this Messiah would be a king like the other kings of the earth. Some people thought that the Messiah would wear a shiny crown with expensive jewels.

Jesus Christ is the Messiah. He is the one that people were expecting to fix the world and bring peace. But Jesus surprised everyone. He did not come to earth as a king to fight other people and win battles. He did not wear a shiny crown with jewels. He did not live in a fancy palace or in an expensive house. Instead, he came to earth as a tiny, helpless baby. He chose to be born with dirty animals in a barn rather than be born in a big, clean, fancy house. He did not wear a beautiful crown. Instead, he wore a crown of thorns. People began to hate Jesus because He claimed to be God. They wanted to kill him. Some soldiers put a crown of thorns on his head—a crown that hurt him—and they made fun of him. They were not kind to him. They hurt him. Even though as God he could have stopped all of it, he chose to suffer and he chose to hurt. He chose to wear a crown of thorns. And do you know why he did it all? He chose to wear a crown of thorns to love you and to love me. He knew that by suffering and dying, and rising to life again, he would do an amazing thing. He would make us God's sons and daughters. Jesus knew that we would have a relationship with God the Father because of his suffering.

One day, we will meet Jesus in heaven, in Zion. Remember the city in heaven that we are waiting for? There Jesus will give us the crown of life for loving Him even when it is hard. Creatures in heaven throw crowns at Jesus' feet and worship him. Jesus is King of kings and Lord of Lords.

23: Cross

Matthew 27, 28; Mark 15, 16; Luke 23, 24; John 19, 20; Romans 3.21-26
(Cann p. 292 oval)

After the soldiers made Jesus the crown of thorns, they made Him carry a cross on His back up a hill. There they nailed Him to the cross in order to kill Him. Hanging on the cross bloodied and bruised, Jesus who was supposed to rescue us from our sin looked as though He couldn't even rescue Himself. Even though Jesus looked hopeless and weak, He was not. He could have rescued Himself in a flash, but He chose not to. He could have made it all stop. He could have climbed down and walked away, but He wanted to die on the cross. He wanted to die on the cross because He loved us. You see, He knew that the God the Father hated sin. And the only way for God to destroy sin and not destroy us whose hearts are full of sin was to pour out his anger toward sin all over Jesus. Jesus was punished for our sins so that we would not be punished for them. Then Jesus shouted, "It's finished! Father, I give you my life", and He let Himself die. Jesus had done everything that needed to be done to rescue us from our sin.

Some friends buried His body in a deep hole or tomb in the ground. They rolled a big, heavy stone in front of it. They were confused and sad. They missed their friend and didn't know how God could use a dead Jesus to save them. But God's story of His love for us doesn't have a sad ending. It has a happy ending. Three days after Jesus' death on the cross, He rose again! He was made alive! Jesus found His friends and told them, "I am the Savior and the Rescuer of the world." And his friends knew that because Jesus couldn't stay dead, because Jesus had come alive again, that somehow everything would be all right.

At Christmas time we remember that Jesus came as a baby with a very important job to do. He came to live and die for us on the cross. He came to rise again after three days and give our stories a happy ending.

Sing:

What Child is This?

(especially verse two)

*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.*

*Why lies He in such mean estate,
Where ox and ass are feeding?
Good Christians, fear, for sinners here
The silent Word is pleading.*

*Nails, spear shall pierce Him through,
The cross be borne for me, for you.
Hail, hail the Word made flesh,
The Babe, the Son of Mary.*

*So bring Him incense, gold and myrrh,
Come peasant, king to own Him;
The King of kings salvation brings,
Let loving hearts enthrone Him.
Raise, raise a song on high,
The virgin sings her lullaby.
Joy, joy for Christ is born,
The Babe, the Son of Mary.*

24: Pearl

Matthew 13.45, 46; II Corinthians 8.9
(Cann p. 232 rectangle)

Remember how we've been getting ready for Christmas time and talking about Jesus coming as our king to wash our dirty hearts? When Jesus was on the earth, He taught His friends about God's kingdom. He told them, "God's kingdom is wherever God is in charge. It's where he fills your heart up with his Forever Happiness and you stop running away from him and you love him." To help his friends understand the kingdom of God better, he would tell them stories called parables.

One story is about a pearl. A pearl is a very valuable jewel that an animal in the ocean named an oyster makes. Sometimes women string together pearls like beads and make fancy necklaces out of them. In this story, a merchant was looking for pearls to buy. And when he found one perfect pearl that was very expensive, he sold everything else that he owned to buy that one, perfect, beautiful, valuable pearl.

Jesus used this story about the pearl to teach His friends that coming home to God is as wonderful as finding a priceless pearl. You might have to work hard to find this pearl. You might even have to give up everything you have to get it. But being where God is—being in His kingdom—that's more important than anything else in all the world. It's worth anything you have to give up because God is the real treasure.

God the Son was perfectly rich in heaven, but He gave it all up to come down to earth. Jesus became a baby to love us and make us rich by knowing God.

25: Baby Jesus

Luke 1, 2
(Cann p. 219)

We've finally made it! We've been thinking about Jesus for 24 days now, getting ready to celebrate His big birthday. Baby Jesus is God's wonderful gift to us. Baby Jesus is God's plan to fix the broken world and wash our dirty hearts. Remember, Jesus is no ordinary baby; He is God who has put skin on and become a person. His name is Emmanuel which means that God has come to live with us.

We're going to sing a song that talks about Jesus being both God and a person. Listen for the words that talk about Jesus being God. And listen for the words that describe Jesus as a baby person. He appears in the flesh, with skin on.

Sing:

"O Come All Ye Faithful"

*O come, all ye faithful, joyful and
triumphant,
O come ye, O come ye, to Bethlehem.
Come and behold Him, born the King of
angels;*

Refrain

*O come, let us adore Him,
O come, let us adore Him,
O come, let us adore Him,
Christ the Lord.*

*True God of true God, Light from Light
Eternal,
Lo, He shuns not the Virgin's womb;
Son of the Father, begotten, not created;*

*Sing, choirs of angels, sing in exultation;
O sing, all ye citizens of heaven above!
Glory to God, all glory in the highest;*

*Yea, Lord, we greet Thee, born this happy
morning;
Jesus, to Thee be glory given;
Word of the Father, now in flesh appearing.*

For older kids: Council of Chalcedon summarizes the Bible's teaching about the personhood of Jesus Christ:

Therefore, following the holy fathers, we all with one accord teach men to acknowledge one and the same Son, our Lord Jesus Christ, at once complete in Godhead and complete in manhood, truly God and truly man, consisting also of a reasonable soul and body; of one substance with the Father as regards his Godhead, and at the same time of one substance with us as regards his manhood; like us in all respects, apart from sin; as regards his Godhead, begotten of the Father before the ages, but yet as regards his manhood begotten, for us men and for our salvation, of Mary the Virgin, the God-bearer; one and the same Christ, Son, Lord, Only-begotten, recognized in two natures, without confusion, without change, without division, without separation; the distinction of natures being in no way annulled by the union, but rather the characteristics of each nature being preserved and coming together to form one person and subsistence, not as parted or separated into two persons, but one and the same Son and Only-begotten God the Word, Lord Jesus Christ; even as the prophets from earliest times spoke of him, and our Lord Jesus Christ himself taught us, and the creed of the fathers has handed down to us.

- Jesus is 100% God. Because He is God, He is able to meet God's holy standard.
- Jesus is 100% Man. Because He is man, He is able to stand in our place, dying the death that we deserve and living a perfect life for which we get credit.

Jesus tree devotions

Our family set up a Christmas tree and hung an ornament each day for each devotion. I made ornaments from 2 children's Bibles by cutting out pictures and framing them in ornament frames from Crate and Barrel. I selected these Bibles solely on the basis of their artwork or photography and not on the content.

They are:

1) by Watts and Cann (http://www.amazon.com/Bible-Children-Murray-Watts/dp/1561483621/ref=sr_1_1/104-1841274-7625528?ie=UTF8&s=books&qid=1180186927&sr=1-1) and

2) by D.K. publishing illustrated by Thomas (http://www.amazon.com/Childrens-Illustrated-Bible-DK-Publishing/dp/0756609356/ref=pd_sim_b_5/104-1841274-7625528?ie=UTF8&qid=1180187094&sr=1-5).

You will see the name of the Bible, the page of the picture, and the shape of the ornament under each day.