



Advent Calendar

Worship Booklet



25. In the Beginning

- Verse: John 1:1-3
- Bible Lesson: "Close your eyes for a moment and imagine nothing. No trees, no sky, not even stars in the night sky. Now imagine the Creator— God, and with Him, Jesus, who was with God before anything existed. Together, they decided to make something wonderful! With just words, they began speaking things into existence. 'Let there be light!' God said, and suddenly, light burst forth, making day and night. Then came the land, oceans, mountains, and rivers. Jesus watched as plants began to grow, reaching toward the sun, and animals filled the land, sea, and sky. Imagine their excitement!
But God saved His best creation for last— people. God made Adam and Eve in His own image, giving them the job of caring for the world. Jesus, who was there from the beginning, loved them deeply. Everything was perfect, just as God had designed. From the beginning, Jesus was part of this plan, creating with love and power and watching over His creation."

- Discussion: Why do you think Jesus created such a beautiful world for us to live in?

Story: It was Christmas Eve, 1968, and the world was gripped by tension from the Cold War and the challenges of modern life. But high above the earth, something incredible was happening— an event that would bring hope and inspiration to millions.

The crew of Apollo 8, the first humans to orbit the moon, had a historic mission: to explore uncharted space and pave the way for future lunar landings. On Christmas Eve, astronauts Frank Borman, Jim Lovell, and Bill Anders did something no one expected.

As their spacecraft circled the moon, they looked back at Earth and were awestruck by its beauty— a small, fragile blue planet suspended in the vastness of space. From 240,000 miles away, they wanted to share something meaningful with the world.

Broadcasting live to millions of people back on Earth, the astronauts read from the Bible: the opening verses of Genesis. Their voices carried across radio waves as they proclaimed, "*In the beginning, God created the heaven and the earth...*"

Their message of awe and wonder reminded people everywhere of the Creator who holds the universe in His hands. That Christmas Eve, people of all nations paused to reflect on the beauty and majesty of God's creation and the unity of humanity under His care.

Watch the video below to hear their message and see the photos they sent:

<https://youtu.be/Of1lau?VVP4?si=hJ8j60gc9ss1LyMy>

- Mission Activity: Create a "Thank You" card for your pastor or a church leader, thanking them for their work in leading others to Jesus.
- Prayer: Thank Jesus for His eternal love and for willingly leaving heaven to come to earth as our Savior.

24. The Need for a Savior

- Verse: Genesis 3:15
- Bible Lesson: Adam and Eve lived in the beautiful Garden of Eden. They could eat from every tree except one: the tree of the knowledge of good and evil. But one day, a crafty serpent whispered to Eve, tempting her. 'Did God really say you couldn't eat from this tree?' it asked. Eve decided to eat the fruit. She shared it with Adam, and suddenly, they felt different—they knew they had disobeyed God. They felt shame and tried to hide from Him. But God, who loved them, found them and knew what had happened. Though He was sad, He promised that one day, a Savior would come to fix the broken relationship between people and God. This was the very first promise of Jesus, who would come to defeat sin and bring us back to God. Even from the beginning, God had a plan to rescue us!
- Discussion: Why do you think God still loved Adam and Eve even though they disobeyed?

Story: It was Christmas Eve, and Ira D. Sankey, a well-known hymn writer and song leader, was traveling by steamboat across the river. Sankey had worked alongside D. L. Moody in many revivals, leading songs that touched the hearts of thousands. But this night, on this quiet boat ride, he wasn't leading a crowd of people in praise. Instead, he was simply traveling alone, enjoying a peaceful journey.

As the evening wore on, the passengers on the boat, who were gathered in the dining area, turned to him with a request: "Mr. Sankey, would you please sing for us?"

Sankey, ever willing to share his gift, agreed and stood to sing. He chose a beautiful song, "The Shepherd's Song," a hymn that speaks of the joy and peace brought by the birth of Jesus. As his voice filled the room, the passengers were touched by the gentle melody, and the peace of Christmas seemed to fill the boat. But little did Sankey know, this song would have an impact far beyond what he could imagine.

Afterward, a man approached Sankey with a look of deep curiosity. "Mr. Sankey, I have a question for you," he began. The man then asked if Sankey had ever served in the Union Army and if he had been on picket duty in 1862. As the questions became more specific, the man revealed something unexpected.

"I was a sharpshooter in the Confederate Army. And one night, in 1862, I was lying in wait, ready to shoot a Union soldier. It was a cold, silent night, and just as I was about to pull the trigger, I heard a voice coming through the air. It was a soldier singing a song... the very song you just sang, 'The Shepherd's Song.'"

The man's eyes filled with emotion as he spoke. "I don't know why, but when I heard that song, I couldn't pull the trigger. Something inside me stopped. I put down my gun, and I didn't shoot. That night, I realized something. I didn't know why that song had reached me so deeply, but it changed my heart. It was as if God Himself had reached into my soul."

The man looked at Sankey with awe and said, "And now, here we are, on this boat, and I recognize you as the man who sang that song. I believe that God stopped me from taking your life, and in doing so, He saved me. I came to faith in Christ that night on the battlefield, and now, I am a different man."

Sankey stood speechless, amazed by the man's story. God, in His perfect timing, had used a simple Christmas song to change the course of a life. That night, the power of God's calling was evident— how He can reach anyone, no matter where they are, no matter what they've done.

- Mission Activity: Bake cookies together and deliver them to a neighbor, teacher, or someone who could use a little extra love.
- Prayer: Ask God to help you turn away from sin and thank Him for sending Jesus to restore what was broken.

23. God's Mercy through Noah

- Verse: Genesis 6:5-8
- Bible Lesson: As people began to fill the earth, they also began to do things that displeased God. They were unkind to one another and turned away from God's ways. God was heartbroken at how far people had wandered from Him, but there was one man who was different: Noah. God revealed to Noah His plan to send a great flood to cleanse the world of sin and start anew. In His mercy, God provided a way of escape—a large ark that would save Noah, his family, and the animals.

For 120 years, Noah obeyed God, building the ark and sharing God's warning, even when people mocked him. When the time came, God brought the animals into the ark—two by two, and clean animals by sevens. Noah's family entered too, and God Himself closed the door. Soon, the rain began. It rained for forty days and nights, covering the earth with water. But through it all, God remembered Noah and kept him safe until the floodwaters receded.

Just as God called Noah to prepare the ark to save lives, He sent Jesus into the world as a baby to prepare the way for us to be saved from sin. Jesus, like the ark, is the refuge God provides—a place where we can be safe, not from a flood, but from the brokenness of sin.

- Discussion: What does Noah's story show us about God's love and mercy?

Story: Long ago, in 17th-century Ireland, the land was filled with fear and silence. At that time, following the Christian faith openly was not allowed, and pastors often had to go into hiding. Families who wanted to worship and celebrate the birth of Jesus had to do so in secret, meeting in hidden places or quietly in their homes.

One Christmas Eve, a small Christian family living in a stone cottage near the edge of a village decided they couldn't let the day pass without honoring the birth of their Savior. They had heard that pastors traveled through the countryside in secret, looking for safe homes where they could lead worship and share the message of Jesus' birth. But how could the family let a pastor know their home was safe?

The mother came up with an idea. She took a single candle, placed it in the window, and left the door slightly ajar. The candle was a quiet signal—a way to tell anyone passing by that this home was open to them and that they were welcome to join in celebrating the birth of Christ.

That night, their little home became a place of worship. A pastor arrived under the cover of darkness, and the family gathered with him to sing Christmas hymns, read the story of Jesus' birth from the Bible, and pray together. The flickering light of the candle shone out into the cold, dark night, a beacon of faith and hope for anyone who might see it.

Over time, this tradition of lighting a candle at Christmas spread throughout Ireland and beyond. Even when the times of danger ended, families continued to place a candle in their windows on Christmas Eve. The light became a symbol of welcome—not only for people but for Jesus Himself, reminding all who passed by that Christ's love was present in that home.

- Mission Activity: Give at least three genuine compliments to different family members or friends today.
- Prayer: Thank God for His mercy and faithfulness in keeping His promise to send Jesus, even when the world was full of sin.

22. The Dove and Olive Branch

- Verse: Genesis 8:11
- Bible Lesson: After the flood had covered the earth, Noah's ark drifted over the water for months. Finally, Noah sent out a dove to see if there was any dry land. The dove returned with nothing. Seven days later, Noah tried again, and this time the dove came back with a fresh olive leaf in its beak!

Everyone was thrilled— this was a sign that life was returning, and the flood was nearly over. They knew it wouldn't be long until they could step out onto dry land again. The olive leaf was a symbol of hope and new beginnings, and it reminded them that God had not forgotten them.

Just like the olive branch brought hope to Noah, Jesus would bring hope to all people, offering peace and a new start.

- Discussion: Why do you think God gave Noah and his family a sign of hope?

Story: In 1914, during the first Christmas of World War I, an extraordinary event took place on the battlefields of Europe. Soldiers on both sides of the conflict— British, French, and German— were enduring harsh conditions in muddy trenches, far from home, and filled with fear and sorrow. But on Christmas Eve, something miraculous happened that would forever be remembered as the Christmas Truce.

It began with an unexpected sound. Across the no man's land that separated the trenches, a German soldier began singing "Silent Night" in his native language: "*Stille Nacht, heilige Nacht.*" His voice carried over the frosty air. British soldiers listened in stunned silence. Then, one of them joined in, singing in English:

*"Silent night, holy night,
All is calm, all is bright..."*

As the song ended, voices from both sides cheered. Slowly, candles and lanterns appeared along the edges of the trenches. The flickering lights illuminated makeshift Christmas trees decorated with scraps of paper, bits of ribbon, and even tin cans. The soldiers called out holiday greetings to one another, hesitating at first but gaining courage.

"Fröhliche Weihnachten!"

"Merry Christmas!"

Then came the most astonishing moment. A German soldier, unarmed, climbed out of his trench and walked into no man's land. The British soldiers watched carefully, unsure if it was a trick. But when they saw he was carrying no weapon, one of their own climbed out to meet him. Soon, men from both sides were standing together in the middle of the battlefield, shaking hands, exchanging small gifts of chocolate, cigarettes, and buttons from their uniforms.

A British soldier produced a soccer ball, and soon the sound of laughter and a friendly game of soccer filled the crisp winter air. For a few hours, the war was forgotten. They were not enemies but human beings celebrating the birth of the Prince of Peace.

As night fell again, the soldiers reluctantly returned to their trenches. The truce would not last, but the memory of that moment— of shared humanity and kindness— remained. Some soldiers wrote home about the event, describing it as a glimpse of hope in the midst of darkness.

- Mission Activity: Visit a neighbor or friend and sing a Christmas carol to spread joy.
- Prayer: Praise God for His perfect plan to save us through Jesus, even from the very beginning of time.

21. The Covenant with Abraham

- Verse: Genesis 17:7
- Bible Lesson: Many years after Noah, God chose a man named Abraham to carry on His promise. God told Abraham to leave his home and go to a land He would show him. Abraham trusted God and obeyed. One night, God told Abraham to look up at the stars. 'Can you count the stars?' God asked. 'That's how many descendants you will have!' God promised to bless Abraham's family and make a great nation through him. Even more amazing, God promised that one of Abraham's descendants would bless the whole world—this would be Jesus! God's promise was for all generations, and Abraham believed it, even though he didn't see it fulfilled in his lifetime.
- Discussion: How does God's promise to Abraham show us His faithfulness?

Story: One Christmas Eve, an old shoemaker had a dream so vivid that it filled him with excitement. He dreamed that Jesus Himself would come to visit him the next day. The dream felt so real that he was certain it would happen.

The next morning, he jumped out of bed and set to work. He decorated his little cobbler shop with green boughs and carefully prepared, eager for Jesus' arrival. He sat down, waiting expectantly.

As the hours passed, the door opened, but it wasn't Jesus. It was an old man seeking warmth from the winter chill. The shoemaker noticed the man's shoes were in tatters. Without a second thought, he took a new pair of shoes from the shelf, made sure they fit, and sent the man on his way, feeling good about helping him.

He sat back down, waiting for Jesus, but hours passed, and still no Jesus. Instead, an elderly woman came in. She hadn't had a proper meal in days. The shoemaker invited her in, gave her a hot meal, and sent her on her way, feeling grateful that he could help.

Again, he waited. Then, a little boy appeared outside the shop, crying. The shoemaker spoke to him and learned the boy had gotten separated from his parents and didn't know how to get home. He put on his coat, took the boy by the hand, and led him back to his family.

By the time he returned to his shop, it was dark, and the streets were quiet. The shoemaker felt disappointed and sad that Jesus hadn't come, so he lifted his voice to heaven and cried, "Lord Jesus, why didn't You come?"

In that quiet moment, he seemed to hear a soft voice, saying, "Oh, shoemaker, lift up your heart. I kept My word. Three times I knocked at your friendly door. Three times My shadow fell across your floor. I was the man with the bruised feet. I was the woman you gave food to eat. I was the lost boy on the street."

Jesus had come, just as He promised. The shoemaker just didn't realize it.

- Mission Activity: Do something kind for a sibling today, like helping them clean their room or playing a game they love.
- Prayer: Thank God for His faithfulness in keeping His promises and for sending Jesus to bless all nations through Abraham.

20. The Sacrifice of Isaac

- Verse: Genesis 22:1-18
- Bible Lesson: God tested Abraham's faith in one of the most profound ways imaginable: by asking him to offer his beloved son, Isaac, as a sacrifice. Isaac was not just any son; he was the son of promise, the one through whom God had said Abraham's descendants would become as numerous as the stars. The request was heart-wrenching and seemingly contradictory to God's promises, but Abraham chose to trust God completely. He believed that somehow, even in this, God had a plan— perhaps even that God could raise Isaac from the dead if necessary.

With a heavy heart but unwavering faith, Abraham took Isaac on the long journey to Mount Moriah. He prepared the altar, bound his son, and raised the knife, fully prepared to do as God had asked. At the very moment he was about to act, an angel of the Lord intervened, calling out to stop him. In that instant, Abraham saw a ram caught in a nearby thicket— a ram God had provided to take Isaac's place as the sacrifice.

This powerful story not only demonstrates Abraham's faith and obedience but also reveals God's mercy and provision. It points us forward to the ultimate act of love: God's provision of His own Son, Jesus. While God spared Isaac, He did not spare His only Son, who willingly became the Lamb of God to take away the sin of the world.

- Discussion: How does God's provision of the ram show His love?

Story: In 1927, in the small, remote town of Hillspring, Alberta, Canada, Christmas was about to be very different for the Jeppson family. It was Christmas Eve, and Mary Jeppson, a young mother, was trying to prepare her six children for bed. Her heart was heavy with sorrow. The family had fallen on hard times, and this Christmas would be especially difficult. Their only milk cow had died just a week earlier, and with the cold winter settling in, food was scarce. Mary's thoughts weighed heavily on her as she helped her children hang their stockings. Her youngest children were still excited, but Ellen, the oldest at ten years old, was quiet and sad. She knew the truth — there would be no presents, just a small breakfast of mush. It was a hard thing for a young child to accept, but Ellen had grown up too fast and had learned too early that life doesn't always bring the joys you hope for.


Mary tried to comfort her, but Ellen just couldn't believe in the hope of Christmas. After they hung the stockings, Mary read the Christmas story from the Bible and recited a few Christmas poems from her own childhood. But in her heart, she was struggling with the uncertainty of how they would make it through the winter.

Her husband, Leland, had gone to bed early, discouraged by his inability to provide for his family. Mary thought of a letter she had sent to her sisters in Idaho. She had written asking for help — not for luxuries, but for the essentials: food, warm clothing, and coal for the fire. She had even asked for a used dress for Ellen, who had outgrown her only dress.

As Christmas Eve turned into Christmas morning, the storm outside grew fiercer. The snow was blowing so hard that Mary was about to give up and go to bed when there was a knock at the door. To her surprise, it was George Sidney Schow, the mailman from Cardston. He was covered in snow, his face frozen from the fierce winds. George had heard of the Jeppsons' struggles and knew about their hopes for the package from Idaho. He couldn't bear the thought of them having nothing for Christmas, so despite the blizzard, he had made the difficult journey to deliver the package himself.

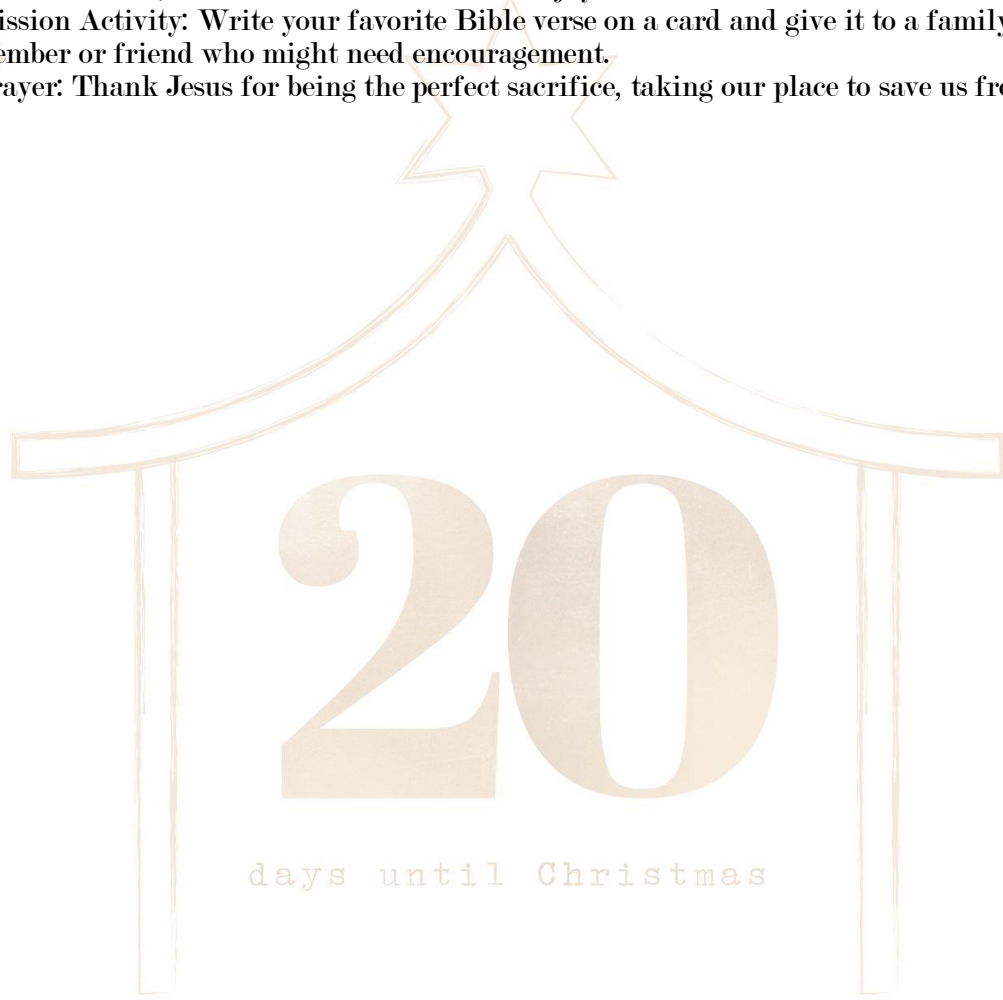
George, though nearly blind from a disease he had once suffered, had managed to find work as a postman to support his family. That night, despite being tired and cold, he knew he had to help. With a borrowed team of horses and a borrowed sleigh, he and his son Sidney had braved the storm, and after hours of difficult travel, they arrived at the Jeppson's home, their hearts filled with love and the Christmas spirit.

As Mary opened the crates, she found not just food and clothes, but love and care from so many people — quilts, shoes, socks, coats, and even meat for the winter. There were toys for the children and a beautiful red dress for Ellen. Mary could hardly believe her eyes. It was a



Christmas miracle. On that Christmas morning, Mary's family woke up to the most wonderful surprise. There were stockings filled with homemade taffy and fudge, and the warmth of the stove cooking breakfast. Ellen, who had doubted the joy of Christmas, opened her stocking to find the beautiful red dress, and her heart was filled with joy.

- Mission Activity: Write your favorite Bible verse on a card and give it to a family member or friend who might need encouragement.
- Prayer: Thank Jesus for being the perfect sacrifice, taking our place to save us from sin.



19. Jacob's Twelve Sons

- Verse: Numbers 24:17
- Bible Lesson: Jacob, the father of twelve sons, is a pivotal figure in God's grand story of redemption. From his sons came the twelve tribes of Israel, the foundation of God's chosen people. But Jacob's story is about more than just his family; it's about God's faithfulness in keeping His promises and weaving every thread of history into His perfect plan.

Even though Jacob and his sons lived many generations before Jesus' birth, they were a crucial part of the unfolding of God's plan to bring salvation. One of the most memorable moments in Jacob's life was his dream of a ladder stretching from earth to heaven, with angels ascending and descending on it. This vision wasn't just a dream; it was a glimpse into God's work of connecting heaven and earth.

Later, Jesus would refer to this very image, describing Himself as the fulfillment of that ladder: the bridge between God and humanity. In John 1:51, Jesus said, *"Very truly I tell you, you will see heaven open, and the angels of God ascending and descending on the Son of Man."* Just as Jacob's ladder symbolized a connection between heaven and earth, Jesus became the ultimate way for us to be reunited with God, overcoming the divide caused by sin.

- Discussion: How does it feel to know that God had a plan for Jesus long before He was born?

Story: As we approach Christmas, we might find ourselves feeling excited about all the gifts, food, and decorations. But it's important to ask ourselves, *What is the true meaning of Christmas?* Let's think about how much time and money people spend during this season. Did you know that, on average, Americans spend about \$1,000 on Christmas each year? This includes gifts, decorations, food, and travel. Some people spend even more, while others might spend less, but the total amount spent in the U.S. alone is in the billions of dollars!

That's a lot of money, right? But when you think about it, how much time do we actually spend preparing for Christmas? On average, people start their holiday shopping in early November and continue buying presents up until Christmas Eve. And it's not just shopping— people spend countless hours decorating, planning meals, attending parties, and sending cards. Some estimates suggest that people can spend about 40 hours or more getting ready for Christmas.

As we read in the Bible, the angels announced to the shepherds that a Savior had been born. The birth of Jesus wasn't about how much people spent or how fancy the decorations were. It was about God sending His Son into the world to bring peace, joy, and salvation. Jesus was born in a humble manger, not in a palace, and His arrival was a gift of love from God to all of humanity. Are we really getting ready for Christmas? Are we ready to give Jesus first place in our hearts? Are we preparing to join the angels in sharing the good news – a Savior was born, lived, died, and rose again for you and for me? And the good news gets even better! Jesus is coming again soon to take us to heaven to be with Him! Now that's worth celebrating! Let's share the gifts He brings into our lives— love, joy, peace, and salvation. This Christmas let's focus on the true meaning of the season. Shall we join together embracing and sharing the love and hope that Jesus brought to the world and the incredible gift that He is coming again soon?

- Mission Activity: As a family, choose someone to pray for today and let them know you're thinking of them.
- Prayer: Pray for hearts of gratitude that Jesus came through Jacob's family to bring salvation to the world.

18. Judah's Leadership

- Verse: Genesis 49:8-10
- Bible Lesson: As Jacob approached the end of his life, he gathered his sons to bless them and speak prophetic words over their futures. When he came to his son Judah, he spoke of a ruler who would come from his family line— a ruler who would lead with strength, power, and wisdom. This prophecy was a foreshadowing of Jesus, the Messiah, who would one day come from the tribe of Judah. Jacob's words pointed to more than just a human king; they spoke of a divine ruler whose reign would bring lasting peace and justice. Centuries later, Jesus would fulfill this prophecy, becoming known as the Lion of Judah. A lion, with its majestic strength and fearless leadership, is a fitting symbol for Jesus, who came to lead, protect, and save His people. Just as a lion fiercely defends its pride, Jesus stands as a protector for all who belong to Him. But unlike earthly rulers who gain power through conquest, Jesus demonstrated His strength through humility and sacrifice. The Lion of Judah triumphed not by wielding a sword but by laying down His life on the cross to rescue us from sin and death.
- Discussion: Why do you think Jesus is called the Lion of Judah?

Story: In Bethlehem, one silent night,
A baby lay in soft moonlight.
But don't be fooled by what you see—
He's the King of all, so strong and free.
He's the Lion of Judah, fierce and bold,
The promised King from days of old.
Not in a castle, tall and grand,
But in a manger, on the sand.
With eyes that shine like stars above,
He came to show us God's great love.
He roared with power, gentle and kind,
A mighty Savior, peace to find.
The Lion of Judah, with a heart so pure,
He came to heal, to help, to cure.
Not with a sword or army bright,
But with love, to make things right.
So, this Christmas, remember well,
The Lion came to break sin's spell.
His roar is love, His heart is light,
He came to lead us out of night.
The Lion of Judah, mighty and true,
He came for me, He came for you.
On Christmas Eve, we celebrate,
The King who came to change our fate.

- Mission Activity: Create a bookmark with a Bible verse on it and give it to someone who loves to read.
- Prayer: Praise Jesus as the Lion of Judah, who came to lead and save His people with power and love.

17. Joseph's Story of Forgiveness

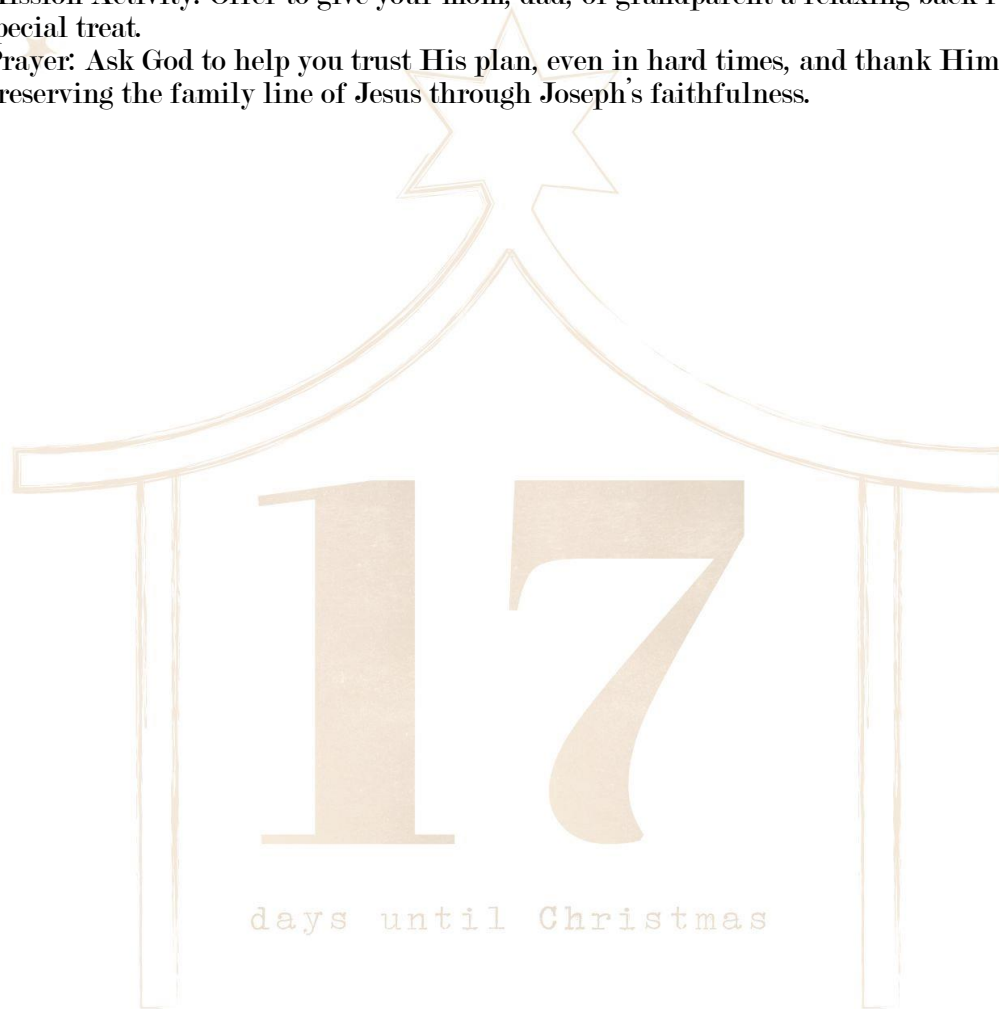
- Verse: Genesis 50:20
- Bible Lesson: Joseph's story is one of heartbreak, resilience, and redemption. Out of jealousy, his brothers sold him into slavery, sending him far from home and into a life of suffering. But through every trial— whether as a servant in Potiphar's house, a prisoner falsely accused, or a forgotten man in jail— God was with Joseph. Step by step, God's unseen hand guided Joseph, shaping him for a greater purpose. In time, Joseph rose to a position of power as a ruler in Egypt, second only to Pharaoh. When famine struck the land, Joseph's leadership and wisdom not only saved Egypt but also his family— the very brothers who had betrayed him. When they came to him, desperate for help, Joseph could have taken revenge. But instead, he chose forgiveness. He reassured his brothers with profound words: *"You meant it for harm, but God meant it for good, to accomplish what is now being done, the saving of many lives"* (Genesis 50:20). Joseph's story is more than an account of triumph over adversity; it's a glimpse into the heart of God's redemption plan. It points us to Jesus, who also endured betrayal, suffering, and rejection— but whose suffering ultimately brought salvation to the world.

- Discussion: How does Joseph's forgiveness remind us of Jesus' love for us?

Story: It was the Christmas season of 1994, and the air buzzed with excitement in Jaron and Parker's small hometown. The grocery store had announced a reading contest: the student who read the most books in each of two grade-level categories— first-to-third grade and fourth-to-sixth grade— would win a brand-new bicycle. Nine-year-old Jaron and six-year-old Parker, two brothers with big dreams, eagerly signed up. Parker's excitement knew no bounds. He had been longing for a bike of his own and saw this contest as his chance. He was tired of watching Jaron ride around on the purple ten-speed bike he had earned at a yard sale. Determined, Parker began reading as fast as he could. But despite his best efforts, every time Parker checked the chart at the grocery store, someone in his grade level had read more books. Meanwhile, Jaron had initially been less interested in the contest. But one day, as he saw Parker's name on the list and how hard his younger brother was trying, Jaron's heart stirred. Parker's dream of winning a bike was slipping away. Moved by the spirit of Christmas and the joy of giving, Jaron decided to step in and do something extraordinary. From that moment, Jaron made a choice: he would win the contest— not for himself, but for Parker. He set aside his own bike, picked up his library card, and got to work. For weeks, he read and read. He read when he wanted to play outside. He read late into the evenings. Some days, he spent as much as eight hours buried in books. As the contest deadline approached, Jaron turned in his final list of books— 280 in total. At the grocery store, he admired the shiny red twenty-inch bike on display. The store manager noticed him staring. "If you win, I suppose you'll want the bigger bike, won't you?" the manager asked. Jaron shook his head and replied earnestly, "Oh, no sir. I'd like one exactly this size." "Isn't this bike too small for you?" Jaron smiled. "No, sir— I want to win it for my little brother." The manager was stunned. "This is the best Christmas story I've heard all year!" he exclaimed. Jaron's mother overheard the exchange and was deeply moved. She hadn't realized just how much effort Jaron had poured into this for Parker. Her heart swelled with pride as they waited for the results. When the call finally came, it was official— Jaron had won! He and his parents secretly hid the bike in Grandma's basement, counting down the days until Christmas Eve. That evening, the family gathered at Grandma's house for a special family devotional. Jaron's mother shared the story of God's greatest gift: sending His Son, Jesus Christ, to the world. Then she shared another story— about an older brother who had shown love through sacrifice. As Parker listened, his eyes lit up. "My big brother would do something like that for me!" he said. At that moment, Jaron jumped up and wheeled the red bike into the room. Parker gasped in amazement. "It's yours," Jaron said softly. Tears filled Parker's eyes as he hugged his brother tightly over the handlebars. The love Jaron showed for Parker echoes the true meaning of Christmas. Jesus, our elder brother, made the greatest sacrifice out of love for us. His gift of salvation is one we could

never earn on our own, but He gave it freely, just as Jaron gave Parker his bike. This Christmas, let us remember that the greatest gifts come not from what we receive, but from the love we give to others.

- **Mission Activity:** Offer to give your mom, dad, or grandparent a relaxing back rub as a special treat.
- **Prayer:** Ask God to help you trust His plan, even in hard times, and thank Him for preserving the family line of Jesus through Joseph's faithfulness.



16. The Priceless Law

- Verse: Exodus 20:1-17
- Bible Lesson: God gave Moses the Ten Commandments as a gift to His people— a set of divine guidelines to help them live in harmony with Him and one another. These commandments were more than just rules; they reflected God’s holy character and a guide to living a life of love, respect, and obedience. They taught the Israelites how to honor God, care for others, and create a just and compassionate community. But the commandments weren’t just for the Israelites; they were part of God’s larger plan to prepare the world for Jesus. Many years later, Jesus came and brought these commandments to life, showing us how to live them out not just in actions but in the very depths of our hearts. He taught that the heart of the law is love— the love of God and the love of others. In Matthew 22:37-40, Jesus said, *“Love the Lord your God with all your heart and with all your soul and with all your mind... and love your neighbor as yourself. All the Law and the Prophets hang on these two commandments.”* Jesus fulfilled the law in a way no one else could. While the Ten Commandments showed people how to live, Jesus lived them perfectly. He demonstrated complete devotion to God, loving others with kindness, compassion, and grace. Through His life, Jesus gave us a model of what it truly means to honor God and serve others selflessly.

But Jesus didn’t stop at showing us how to live. He fulfilled the law’s ultimate purpose by taking the punishment for our sins, making a way for us to be forgiven and reconciled to God. Where the law revealed our need for a Savior, Jesus became that Savior, offering grace and mercy to all who trust in Him.

- Discussion: How does Jesus help us live out God’s commandments today?

Story: December was passing quickly for the little school on the hill and as the weeks passed, the children’s excitement about Christmas grew stronger. They couldn’t wait for the last school day before the holiday break, and neither could I. When that final bell rang, the children rushed out the door in a blur of excitement. I smiled as I watched them go, relieved to have a quiet moment. The children were elated to run outside, racing each other to get home. All except for one boy— David.

David was a small boy with messy brown hair and worn-out clothes. I couldn’t help but wonder what kind of home life he had, especially as I watched him arrive at school each day, shivering in the cold without a coat, boots, or gloves. But there was something different about David. It wasn’t his schoolwork or his manners— those were no better than his clothes— but it was his smile. No matter what, David always smiled. He was always ready to help, whether it was staying after school to straighten chairs or clean erasers. He didn’t say much; he would simply smile and ask, “What else can I do?” Then he would thank me and slowly head for home.

“Aren’t you excited to get home, David?” I asked, surprised to see him still there.

“No,” he answered quietly, looking up at me with bright eyes.


“Well, I think the chairs and erasers can wait today. Why don’t you hurry home and enjoy your Christmas break?” I suggested.

David hesitated for a moment, then spoke up. “I have something for you,” he said, pulling out a small box wrapped in old paper and tied with string.

Curious, I took the box from him and slowly unwrapped it. I opened the lid, expecting to find a small gift. But to my surprise, the box was empty.

I looked at David, puzzled. “David, the box is empty.”

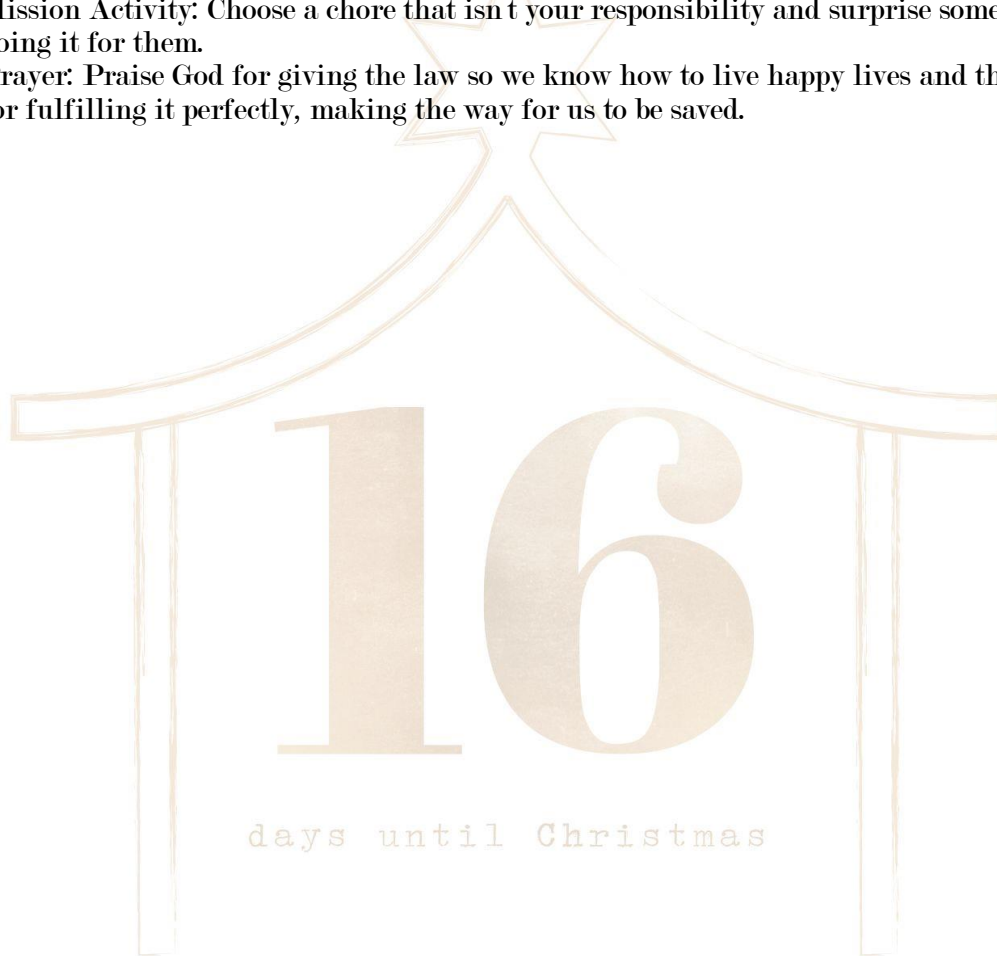
David looked up at me, his face lighting up with pride. “Oh no, it’s not empty,” he said. “It’s full of love. My mom told me before she died that love is something you can’t see or touch, but you know it’s there.”



Tears filled my eyes as I looked at David. Here was a boy who had so little, yet he wanted to give everything he had— his love. And in that moment, I realized that David had given me the most precious gift of all: a gift of love, a gift that can't be wrapped in paper but can be felt in the heart. "David," I whispered, "I can see it. I can see your love. Thank you."

David's smile grew even brighter, and he turned to leave, walking slowly out the door, leaving behind the warmth of his love that would stay with me.

- Mission Activity: Choose a chore that isn't your responsibility and surprise someone by doing it for them.
- Prayer: Praise God for giving the law so we know how to live happy lives and thank Jesus for fulfilling it perfectly, making the way for us to be saved.



15. The Passover Lamb

- Verse: Exodus 12:13
- Bible Lesson: When the Israelites were enslaved in Egypt, God performed mighty miracles to set His people free. On the night of the final plague, God gave specific instructions: each family was to sacrifice a spotless lamb and place its blood on the doorposts of their home. That night, the angel of death passed through Egypt, but wherever the blood of the lamb was found, the angel passed over, sparing the firstborn inside. The lamb's sacrifice became their protection, and through it, God delivered His people from bondage.

This powerful moment, known as the Passover, wasn't just about Israel's escape from Egypt—it was a picture of a greater deliverance to come. Many years later, Jesus would fulfill the Passover in the most extraordinary way. He became the ultimate Passover Lamb, offering Himself as a sacrifice to save us from sin and death. Just as the lamb's blood protected the Israelites, Jesus' blood covers us, ensuring that we are spared from the judgment we deserve and granted eternal life instead.

The parallels are breathtaking. The lamb in Egypt had to be perfect, without blemish, and chosen for sacrifice; so too was Jesus, sinless and spotless, the perfect Lamb of God. The Israelites were freed from slavery after the Passover, just as we are freed from the bondage of sin through Jesus' sacrifice. The blood on the doorposts marked the homes as safe, and Jesus' blood marks our hearts, assuring us of God's protection and salvation. His blood is our covering, His sacrifice our deliverance, and His resurrection our hope.


- Discussion: How does the Passover Lamb remind us of Jesus' sacrifice?

Story: It was December 23, 1910, in the small village of Velky Slavkov, nestled beneath the shadow of the High Tatra Mountains. The streets were eerily silent, as a deadly plague of diphtheria swept through the area. In the midst of the frozen winter, there was no escaping the sorrow that had gripped the village. Suzanna Boratkova's heart felt as though it had frozen along with the landscape outside. Her family was devastated— with the loss of so many from her home and in the village. The black "X" on their door marked their home as one to be avoided. There were no Christmas greetings, no gifts, no joy. Only the cold emptiness of a house that had once been filled with life.

"I don't think I'll see another Christmas," Suzanna's husband Jano whispered weakly hardly able to swallow the soup Suzanna had prepared for him. There was no cure, for the doctor had given up hope. As the wind howled outside, she dipped a cloth in cold water to cool his fever. Staring out the window at the distant Tatra Mountains, Suzanna found a strange comfort in the words of Psalm 121:1-2, "I will lift up mine eyes to the hills, from whence cometh my help." The night seemed endless, but just as morning began to break, Suzanna saw something unexpected. A woman appeared in the snow, trudging slowly toward the house. The woman was wrapped in a colorful shawl, her face weathered from many harsh winters, but there was a warmth in her eyes that instantly touched Suzanna's heart. The woman approached cautiously, understanding the gravity of the situation. "I hear you are suffering," she said gently. "May I offer help?" Suzanna, too weak to turn her away, explained that her husband was gravely ill with the plague. The old woman nodded, holding out a jar of liquid.

"Take a clean cloth," the woman instructed, "wrap it around your finger, dip it into this oil, and rub it on your husband's throat. Have him swallow a spoonful. It will help him clear the mucus choking him, and he will be able to breathe again."

The woman's kindness was overwhelming. Suzanna, desperate, agreed, thanking her with tears in her eyes. "God bless you," she whispered as the woman left, disappearing into the cold morning. That Christmas morning, a miracle happened. Jano, after swallowing the oil, was able to clear his throat, and his fever began to break. Suzanna praised God in her heart, tears of relief streaming down her face. There were no presents, no decorations, but the gift of life had been



given, and it was enough. Though they had lost so much, this small, unexpected miracle sparked hope in Suzanna's heart. She knew the road ahead would still be difficult, but God had given her a glimpse of His mercy amid her sorrow. Suzanna shared the folk remedy with her neighbors. Slowly the plague began to retreat and the village, though scarred, began to heal. Several years later, Jano and Suzanna emigrated to America, where they started a new life. They had eight children, including twins and triplets, and their family grew stronger. Each Christmas, Suzanna and Jano remembered that dark time, but they also remembered the kindness of a stranger who, in the face of death, brought the gift of life. The jar of oil that had saved Jano's life sat on their shelf, a symbol of God's unexpected provision and the enduring hope that can be found even in the deepest sorrow.

- **Mission Activity:** Buy a bouquet of flowers and hand them out one by one to people at a nursing home or in your neighborhood.
- **Prayer:** Thank Jesus for being the perfect Passover Lamb who gave His life to protect and save us.



15

days until Christmas



14. Manna from Heaven

- Verse: Exodus 16:4-5
- Bible Lesson: After the Israelites escaped from Egypt, they found themselves in the vast and barren wilderness, a place with no crops, markets, or resources to sustain them. As the days stretched into weeks, their joy over freedom began to fade, replaced by hunger and doubt. The people grumbled against Moses and wondered aloud if God had brought them into the desert to die. Yet even in their complaints, God responded with grace and compassion. He had a plan to provide for them in a miraculous way. One morning, as the sun rose over the desert, the Israelites woke to find the ground covered with something unusual. It looked like frost but was thin, flaky, and tasted sweet—like honey. They called it *manna*, which means "What is it?" in Hebrew. God instructed them to gather just enough manna for each day's needs, teaching them to trust Him daily for their provision. On the sixth day, He gave them a double portion so they could rest on the Sabbath without worrying about food. Day by day, God faithfully provided, and the Israelites learned an important lesson: God is always faithful to meet our needs.

But the manna was more than a miracle for that moment. It pointed forward to something much greater. Hundreds of years later, Jesus would declare, "*I am the bread of life*" (John 6:35). Just as manna sustained the Israelites physically, Jesus came to sustain us spiritually. He is the true bread from heaven, offering not just daily sustenance but eternal life to those who believe in Him.

- Discussion: How does God provide for us today, and how can we trust Him like the Israelites were asked to?

Story: After World War II, the city of Berlin lay in ruins. Its people were cold, hungry, and weary from the devastation of war. The city had been divided, and supplies were scarce in the western sector, controlled by the Allies. In 1948, the Soviet Union blocked all supply routes into West Berlin, leaving millions of people without food and essential items.

To help, the Allies began the Berlin Airlift, an operation to deliver food and supplies by air. Every day, planes flew over the city, dropping essentials like flour, milk, and coal. Among the pilots was a kind-hearted U.S. Air Force lieutenant named Gail Halvorsen.

One day, as Halvorsen was walking near Tempelhof Airfield, he noticed a group of children standing by the fence, watching the planes. Their clothes were thin and tattered, and their faces showed signs of hardship. Halvorsen stopped to talk with them. Though they were hungry, the children didn't beg for food. Instead, they thanked him for bringing supplies and expressed their hope for a better future.

Deeply moved by their gratitude, Halvorsen reached into his pocket and found two sticks of gum. He broke them in half and handed them to the children. Those who didn't get a piece simply smelled the wrappers, grateful to be part of the small gift.

As Halvorsen left, he promised to drop candy for the children from his plane the next day. He told them to watch for a plane that would "wiggle its wings" as a signal. True to his word, he tied candy bars to little parachutes made of handkerchiefs and dropped them from his plane.

Word quickly spread, and soon, children all over the city were looking up to the sky for "Uncle Wiggly Wings," as they called him. Halvorsen and his fellow pilots continued the candy drops, bringing a little joy to the children of Berlin. Over time, they dropped over 23 tons of candy, a small but powerful gesture of kindness during a dark time.

The candy drops became a symbol of hope, showing the children that they were not forgotten and that love and compassion could still shine, even in the aftermath of war.

- **Mission Activity:** Create a banner or sign about Jesus' birth and hang it in your home or yard to share the good news.
- **Prayer:** Thank Jesus for being the Bread of Life who satisfies our souls and provides for all our needs. Mention specific needs you are grateful He provides for.



13. The Bronze Serpent


- Verse: Numbers 21:8-9
- Bible Lesson: As the Israelites continued their journey through the wilderness, they again began to complain, doubting God's care and provision. They grumbled about the food, the water, and the hardships of the journey, turning their hearts away from the God who had delivered them from slavery. In response, poisonous snakes appeared among them, biting the people and causing many to suffer and die. Fear and sorrow swept through the camp, and the people realized their sin. They cried out to Moses, asking him to intercede for them, and Moses turned to God for help. God gave Moses a peculiar instruction: He was to make a serpent out of bronze and lift it high on a pole where everyone could see it. God promised that anyone who had been bitten could look at the bronze serpent and be healed. It wasn't the bronze serpent itself that healed them, but their act of looking— a demonstration of faith in God's promise. The people learned that their healing came not from their own efforts but from trusting in God to save them.

This strange yet powerful story foreshadowed something far greater. Centuries later, Jesus would speak of this event, saying, *"Just as Moses lifted up the serpent in the wilderness, so must the Son of Man be lifted up, that whoever believes in Him may have eternal life"* (John 3:14-15). Jesus was referring to His death on the cross, where He would be lifted up for all to see. Just as the Israelites looked to the bronze serpent for physical healing, we are called to look to Jesus for spiritual healing and salvation.

- Discussion: How is looking at the bronze serpent like looking to Jesus for help?

Story: The Parable of the Three Trees - A long time ago, on a mountaintop, there stood three trees. Each tree had its own dream for what it hoped to become when it grew strong and tall. The trees would often talk to one another about their futures, imagining what they might become. The first tree was the tallest and proudest. It dreamed of holding precious treasures. It imagined being carved into a beautiful chest, filled with gold and jewels, something that would be admired by kings and queens. "I want to be a treasure chest!" the first tree said, its branches reaching toward the sky. The second tree was smaller but dreamed of adventure. "I want to sail the mighty seas," it thought. "I'll be a great ship, carrying kings and queens on exciting journeys." It imagined itself gliding over the waves, strong and swift, with sails catching the wind. "I'll be the strongest ship ever!" the second tree said, swaying in the breeze. The third tree was the smallest, but it had the biggest dream of all. "I want to stay right here on this mountaintop and grow tall and straight. I want everyone who sees me to look up at me and think of God. I want to point people to Him," the third tree said, its leaves rustling with excitement. "I will be the tallest tree in the world, and everyone will look at me and think about God." But the years passed, and one by one, the trees were chopped down.

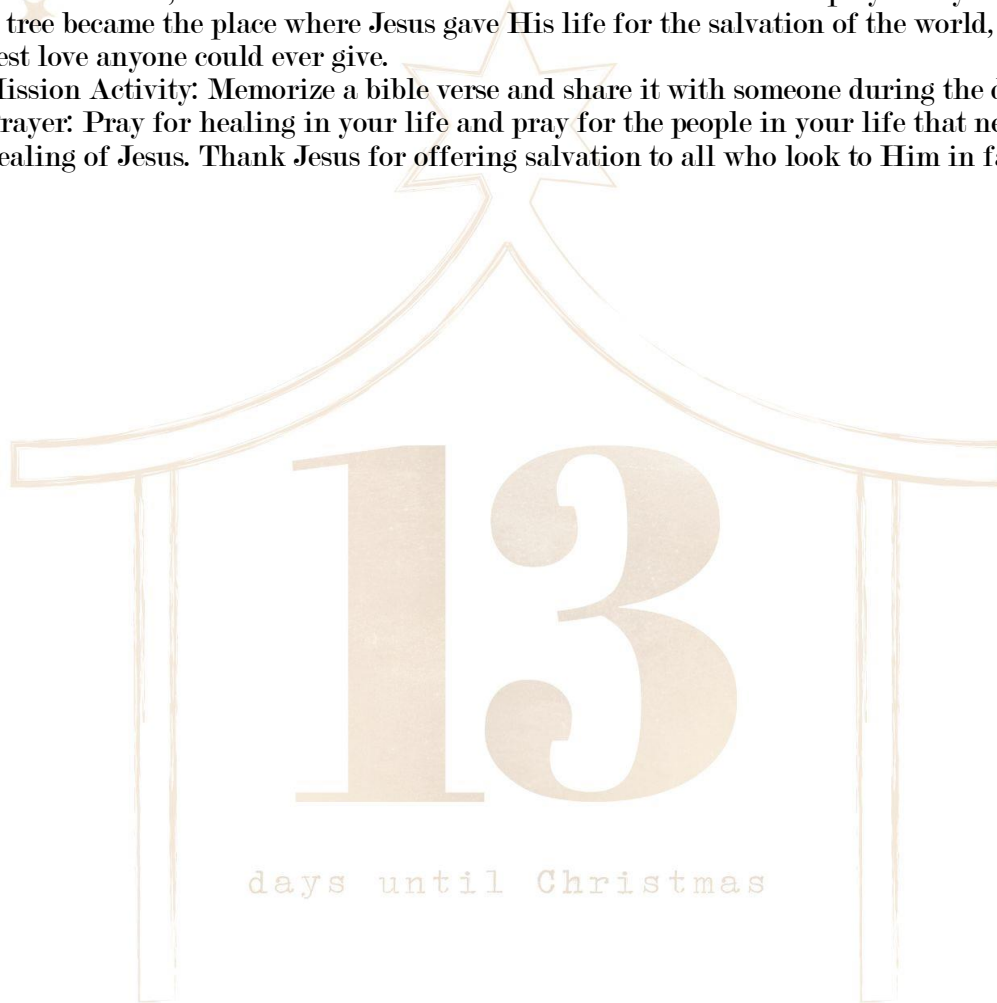
The first tree was cut into large pieces and made into a simple feedbox, used to hold food for the animals in a stable. The second tree was turned into a small, plain fishing boat, used by fishermen to catch fish on a quiet lake. The third tree was made into a cross, a heavy, rough piece of wood, used for something very sad and painful. The trees had each dreamed of something great, something special, but their lives had turned out very differently than they had expected. The first tree, which had dreamed of holding treasure, was now just a feedbox, used by animals. It felt sad at first, thinking it would never hold anything precious. But one night, a baby was placed in it—a baby who was more precious than anything the tree could have imagined. The tree became the cradle for Jesus, the greatest treasure the world has ever known. The second tree, which had dreamed of sailing the seas, was now just a simple fishing boat. It thought it would never go on grand adventures. But one day, a man named Jesus climbed into the boat. As He sat there, the wind and the waves became still, and the tree realized that it had carried the greatest



traveler the world had ever known. Through Jesus, the boat became part of a mighty journey, one that would change the world forever.

The third tree had longed to point people to God, yet felt like it had been forgotten. It was made into a cross, something that seemed so wrong for such a tall, proud tree. But then one day, Jesus was nailed to the cross, and the tree understood that it had been chosen to play a very important role. The tree became the place where Jesus gave His life for the salvation of the world, showing the greatest love anyone could ever give.

- **Mission Activity:** Memorize a bible verse and share it with someone during the day.
- **Prayer:** Pray for healing in your life and pray for the people in your life that need the healing of Jesus. Thank Jesus for offering salvation to all who look to Him in faith.



12. Rahab and the Scarlet Cord

- Verse: Joshua 2:18-21
- Bible Lesson: As the Israelites prepared to take the mighty city of Jericho, Joshua, their leader, sent two spies to secretly scout the land. These spies entered the city and found an unlikely ally in a woman named Rahab. Rahab was not part of God's chosen people, yet she had heard of the God of Israel— of His power, His miracles, and His faithfulness to His people. Unlike her fellow citizens, she chose to believe in this God and acted on her faith.

When the king of Jericho heard about the spies, he sent soldiers to capture them. But Rahab courageously hid the spies on her roof, risking her own life to protect them. She confessed her faith, saying, *"The Lord your God is God in heaven above and on the earth below"* (Joshua 2:11). Rahab then helped the spies escape, lowering them down the city wall with a rope. In return, the spies made her a promise: when Jericho was conquered, she and her family would be spared, provided she hung a scarlet cord in her window as a sign.

When the Israelites marched around Jericho and the city walls fell, Rahab's home was untouched. The scarlet cord hanging in her window marked her and her family for salvation. Her faith in God not only saved her but changed her future. Rahab later joined God's people, marrying into the family line that would eventually lead to Jesus Himself. Her story reminds us that God's mercy and salvation extend to all who trust in Him, no matter their past. Rahab's story is a testament to God's grace. She was an outsider, living in a city destined for destruction, yet her faith in God brought her into His family and gave her a pivotal role in His plan of salvation. Her life shows us that no one is beyond the reach of God's love and that faith in Him transforms everything.

- Discussion: Why do you think Rahab helped the spies, and what does her story teach us about faith?

Story: It was Pastor James's first Christmas leading the small church. Among his congregation was a single mother struggling to raise three young boys. She worked hard, cleaning houses and sewing, but it was barely enough to get by. Her faith was unshakable, and her love for God was evident in all she did. Still, life wasn't easy, and her three energetic boys often found themselves in trouble, sometimes needing Pastor James's gentle intervention.


One day, just a few weeks before Christmas, a member of the church, Brother David, asked to meet privately with the pastor. He brought his six-year-old son, who sat quietly as the two men spoke. David expressed concern for the single mother and her children. "Pastor," he said, "I feel led to help this family. I know you'll know how best to use this."

David handed Pastor James an envelope containing a sum of money— not large, but significant given David's modest income. Pastor James hesitated, knowing the sacrifice this gift represented. But David's faith and resolve were clear. "I only ask," he added, "that this be done anonymously." Pastor James accepted the envelope with gratitude and promised to use the gift wisely.

The following week, just days before Christmas, there was a quiet knock on the pastor's office door. Opening it, Pastor James was surprised to see David's young son standing alone. The boy clutched something in his pocket and, with some effort, pulled out two dimes and a nickel.

"Pastor," the boy said shyly, "I don't have much, but I want to help the mother's boys, like my dad is helping their mom. Maybe you can split this between them." He looked down at the coins and added apologetically, "I wish I had three dimes, so each of them could have one."

Pastor James's heart swelled. Only weeks ago, this same boy had been in a scuffle with the very children he now wanted to help. The love and generosity he was showing were clearly a reflection of his father's unselfish example.

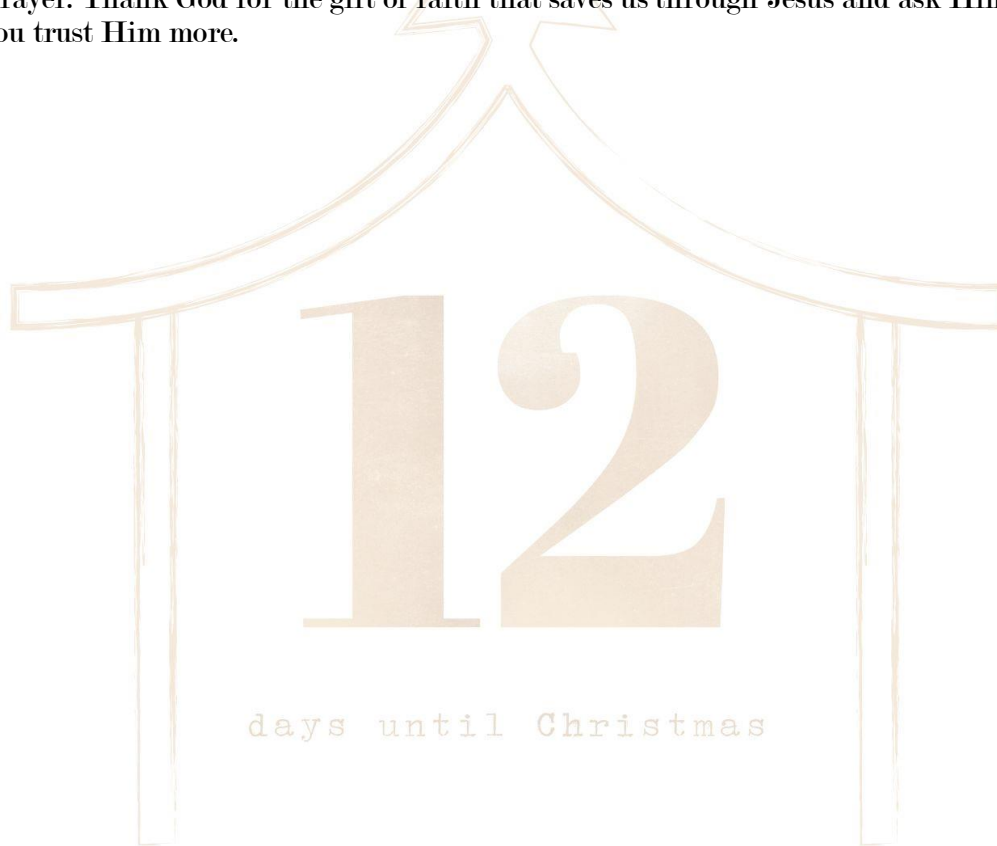


Overwhelmed, Pastor James knelt to hug the boy, his eyes brimming with tears. “Your gift is beautiful,” he said. “And I know your Heavenly Father is so proud of you.”

As Pastor James walked the boy to the door, the child paused and whispered, “And remember, Pastor, don’t tell anyone it was me.”

That Christmas, the single mother and her boys experienced the love of Christ through the quiet generosity of a man and the pure-hearted kindness of a little boy. It was a reminder to all that true giving doesn’t come from abundance but from a heart full of love.

- **Mission Activity:** Visit an elderly neighbor or someone who lives alone and spend time chatting with them.
- **Prayer:** Thank God for the gift of faith that saves us through Jesus and ask Him to help you trust Him more.



11. Ruth's Loyalty and God's Plan

- Verse: Ruth 4:13-17
- Bible Lesson: Ruth was a young woman from Moab who had lost everything— her husband, her home, and her future. Yet she chose to stay by her mother-in-law Naomi's side, leaving her homeland to journey to Bethlehem. There, Ruth worked in the fields to provide for herself and Naomi, humbly gathering leftover grain. But Ruth's faith and loyalty did not go unnoticed. Boaz, a kind and respected man, owned the fields Ruth worked in. Boaz noticed Ruth's dedication and showed kindness to her, allowing her to gather as much grain as she needed. Little did Ruth know, Boaz was a close relative, able to redeem her and give her a future. Following the laws of Israel, Boaz became Ruth's redeemer by marrying her, taking care of her, and securing a place for her family's name. Through Boaz, Ruth's life was completely transformed. Their union also led to something greater than they could have imagined— Ruth became the great-grandmother of King David, from whose family Jesus, our ultimate Redeemer, would come. Just as Boaz redeemed Ruth and gave her a new life, Jesus redeems us, bringing us into His family and offering us eternal hope.
- Discussion: How did Ruth's faith lead to her redemption? How is Jesus like Boaz, our Redeemer?

Story: It was Christmas Eve in 1910, and the snow was falling heavily in London. William Booth, the founder of the Salvation Army, was bedridden and too weak to attend the annual Christmas meeting. For years, Booth had led the Salvation Army's efforts to bring hope and practical help to the poor, especially during the holiday season. Even as his health declined, his heart remained full of compassion for those in need.

That year, the Salvation Army planned a grand gathering to inspire volunteers and celebrate the work of the ministry. The large hall was filled with Salvation Army officers, soldiers, and supporters. Booth's absence was keenly felt. He had always been the center of these gatherings, delivering powerful messages that stirred hearts and strengthened resolve.

As the evening began, the chairman stepped to the podium with an announcement: though William Booth could not attend in person, he had sent a telegram to be read aloud. Excitement buzzed through the crowd as the chairman opened the envelope, wondering what profound words of wisdom or encouragement Booth had chosen for this special occasion.

The room fell silent as the chairman read aloud the single word in the telegram: "Others." For a moment, there was confusion. Then, understanding dawned, and the message swept over the crowd like a wave. In that one word, Booth had encapsulated the heart of the gospel and the mission of the Salvation Army. Christmas wasn't about self-indulgence or even about their organization— it was about serving others, just as Christ had come to serve and save humanity. That Christmas, Booth's message spurred a movement of generosity. Volunteers distributed blankets to the homeless, meals to the hungry, and companionship to the lonely. Booth's simple yet profound reminder— "Others"— became the rallying cry of the Salvation Army, inspiring countless acts of kindness around the world.

- Mission Activity: Decorate a family member's door with kind notes or drawings about what you love about them.
- Prayer: Praise Jesus for His power and love to redeem us and thank Him for the new life He gives to all who believe in Him.

10. Jonah in the Belly of the Fish

- Verse: Jonah 1:17
- Bible Lesson: Jonah was a prophet who received a special mission from God to go to Nineveh and call the people to repent of their wicked ways. But Jonah didn't want to go; he thought Nineveh deserved punishment, not mercy. So, he ran in the opposite direction, boarding a ship bound for a faraway land. However, God had other plans. As Jonah sailed, a violent storm arose, threatening to destroy the ship. The sailors, fearing for their lives, cast lots to see who was responsible for the trouble. The lot fell on Jonah, and he confessed his disobedience. Knowing he was at fault, Jonah told them to throw him overboard to calm the sea. When they did, the storm ceased, but Jonah found himself sinking into the ocean's depths. Yet God didn't leave Jonah to drown. He sent a great fish to swallow Jonah, keeping him alive for three days and three nights in the belly of the fish. During those dark days, Jonah prayed, realizing he couldn't run from God. On the third day, the fish spat him out on dry land, giving him a second chance to obey. This story points us to Jesus, who, like Jonah, spent three days in a dark place— the grave— before rising to bring us new life. Just as Jonah emerged to fulfill his mission, Jesus rose to offer us forgiveness and hope.
- Discussion: Why do you think God sent the fish to save Jonah? How does this story show God's mercy?

Story: It was a cold winter's evening, and the auction house buzzed with chatter as people gathered to bid on an array of items. Among the prized antiques and valuable heirlooms sat an old, dusty violin. Its strings were loose, its varnish faded, and its case worn with time. When the auctioneer held it up, a few chuckles rippled through the crowd. "Who will start the bidding at \$1? Do I hear \$2? Who will give me \$3?" the auctioneer asked, his voice echoing in the room. The crowd remained unimpressed. A man near the back muttered, "Why bother? It's not worth anything." Another whispered to his companion, "It's just firewood with strings!" Just as the auctioneer was about to call the sale, an elderly man rose from his seat. With quiet confidence, he walked to the front, gently took the violin, and tightened its strings. He tuned it carefully, his hands moving with the skill of someone who had long loved music. Then, he lifted the bow and began to play. A melody filled the room— rich, haunting, and full of life. The notes soared, capturing the hearts of everyone listening. The once-dismissive audience now sat in stunned silence, eyes glistening with emotion as the masterful music carried them to another world.

When the man finished, he quietly handed the violin back to the auctioneer and returned to his seat. The auctioneer, now smiling, lifted the violin again. "Ladies and gentlemen, what am I bid for this violin? Who will give me \$1,000? Do I hear \$2,000? Who will make it \$3,000?" The bids came quickly, one after another, until the violin sold for an astounding sum.

As the room quieted again, someone from the audience called out, "What made the difference?" The auctioneer replied simply, "It was the touch of the master's hand."

Like the violin, our lives may sometimes feel worn or unworthy, and the world may underestimate our value. But in the hands of the Master— Jesus Christ— we are transformed, and our true worth shines through.

At Christmas, we celebrate the moment the Master came into the world, not with grandeur, but humbly as a baby in a manger. He came to redeem and restore each of us, showing that even the humblest among us are cherished in His eyes. This Christmas remember that the Master's touch can bring out the beauty and purpose in every life, just as He did for Jonah and for Nineveh.

- Mission Activity: Give each family member a big hug and tell them you love them.
- Prayer: Thank Jesus for being our Redeemer who brings us hope and restores us with His love. Ask God if there is anything you are running away from like Jonah.

9. David's Kingdom

- Verse: 2 Samuel 7:16
- Bible Lesson: David was a shepherd boy whom God chose to become king of Israel. Though he started from humble beginnings, God's favor was with him, and he grew to be a mighty leader and a man after God's own heart. David led Israel with courage, wisdom, and faithfulness, establishing a united and strong kingdom. As David's reign continued, God gave him an incredible promise through the prophet Nathan. God told David that his kingdom would be established forever and that one of his descendants would reign on the throne eternally. This descendant would be a King unlike any other—one who would bring peace, justice, and salvation. David must have wondered who this eternal King would be. His son Solomon became king after him, and though Solomon's kingdom was grand, he was not the eternal King God had promised. Centuries later, that promise was fulfilled in Jesus, born in Bethlehem, the city of David. Jesus, the 'Son of David,' came as the forever King, whose kingdom would never end. Today, Jesus reigns in the hearts of all who follow Him, and one day, He will return to rule over a kingdom of peace forever.
- Discussion: What does it mean that Jesus is our King? How can we live as part of His kingdom now?

Story: A Christmas Parable - In a faraway kingdom, there lived a generous king who loved his people dearly. One year, as Christmas approached, the king decided to hold a great feast in his castle. He sent his messengers out into the villages with a royal invitation. The invitation read: *"Come to the king's feast! Bring nothing but your heart. All is prepared for you, and you will receive the most wonderful gift the kingdom has ever known."*

The villagers were excited but puzzled. What kind of gift could the king be offering? Some were curious and immediately began preparing to go. Others shrugged, thinking the invitation wasn't for them or that they didn't deserve to be in the king's presence.

One family, a mother, father, and their young daughter named Clara, were among those who received the invitation. They were poor and didn't own fine clothes or treasures to offer the king. The father hesitated. "What could we bring to a feast at the castle? Surely, we'd be turned away." The mother smiled and said, "The king said to bring nothing but our hearts. That means we are welcome as we are."

Clara's eyes sparkled with excitement. "I want to see the king!" she said.

So, they put on their cleanest clothes and began the journey to the castle. Along the way, they passed others who had received the invitation but chose not to go. One man said, "I'm too busy with my work to go to a feast." Another said, "The king won't notice if I don't come."

When Clara's family arrived at the castle, they were greeted warmly by the king himself. The feast was magnificent, with every kind of delicious food they could imagine. But the greatest moment came when the king stood and presented his gift.

"This gift is not gold or jewels," the king announced. "It is a promise: my love and care for each of you, forever. This is the gift I give to all who come."

Clara and her parents left the castle filled with joy. They realized the king's invitation had been about more than just a feast—it was about being part of his family. And they carried the memory of that gift with them for the rest of their lives.

- Mission Activity: Create a bag with small items like snacks, gloves, and a water bottle to give to someone in need.
- Prayer: Praise Jesus as the forever King of heaven and earth, and ask Him to reign in your heart today.

8. Solomon's Temple

- Verse: 1 Kings 8:27-30
- Bible Lesson: Solomon, the son of David, was chosen by God to build a temple in Jerusalem—a holy place where God's presence would dwell among His people. Solomon used the finest materials to construct this temple, with walls of cedar and floors of gold. It was a beautiful, awe-inspiring structure that took seven years to complete. When it was finally finished, Solomon gathered the people of Israel, and they celebrated the temple's dedication with worship and sacrifice. Solomon prayed that God would hear the prayers of anyone who turned to the temple in faith.
But as grand as the temple was, Solomon knew that God's greatness couldn't be contained in a building. The temple was just a symbol, reminding the people of God's presence with them. Many years later, God would come even closer. Jesus came to live among us, and He was called 'Emmanuel,' which means 'God with us.' Jesus became the true temple—a living connection between God and His people. And today, He lives in the hearts of all who believe, making us a temple where His Spirit dwells.
- Discussion: How is Jesus like the temple that Solomon built? How can we show God's presence in our lives?

Story: In a small, aging church in a struggling part of town, a young pastor and his wife were working tirelessly to restore what once was a vibrant place of worship. Though the church had seen better days, the couple believed with faith, hard work, and a little paint, they could bring it back to life.

Late one December, just days before Christmas, a fierce storm rolled through the valley. It left devastation in its wake, including a large, rain-soaked chunk of plaster that fell from the wall behind the church altar. The gaping hole was an eyesore, and though the pastor reminded himself, "Thy will be done," his wife was heartbroken. "Christmas is only two days away!" she lamented as they swept away the debris.

Later that afternoon, seeking a distraction, the couple attended a charity auction benefiting the local youth group. Among the items was a magnificent gold and ivory lace tablecloth, nearly 15 feet long. Though a stunning piece, it was from another era and drew only a few hesitant bids. Inspiration struck the pastor, and he purchased the cloth for \$6.50.


Back at the church, the pastor carefully tacked the tablecloth over the damaged wall. Its intricate handwork shimmered in the dim light, transforming the altar into a vision of beauty. The once dreary sanctuary now radiated warmth and festivity, and the pastor felt a renewed joy as he prepared his Christmas sermon.

On Christmas Eve, while opening the church, the pastor noticed a woman standing at the nearby bus stop. She was shivering in the cold, waiting for a bus that wouldn't arrive for another 40 minutes. He invited her inside to warm up. The woman explained that she was a war refugee, recently interviewed for a governess position, but had been turned down. Her English was hesitant, and her spirit seemed worn from years of hardship.

As she sat in the pew, warming her hands, the pastor adjusted the gold and ivory cloth behind the altar. The woman's attention was immediately drawn to it. Rising from her seat, she approached the chancel, her hands trembling as she touched the fabric. "It is mine," she whispered, her voice filled with emotion.

The pastor looked at her in surprise as she pointed to a corner of the cloth, where monogrammed initials confirmed her claim. She explained how the tablecloth had been made especially for her in Brussels, a gift from her husband before the war. She and her husband had opposed the Nazis and fled separately, planning to reunite in Switzerland. But he never arrived. She later learned he had perished in a concentration camp. Tears welled in her eyes as she spoke of her guilt for leaving without him and the years of wandering that followed.

The pastor, moved by her story, urged her to take the cloth as a keepsake, but she declined. She left the church, her memories stirred but her heart heavy.



That evening, as the Christmas Eve service began, the tablecloth drew admiration from the congregation. Its intricate beauty seemed to glow in the candlelight. After the service, the pastor stood by the door greeting attendees. Among them was a gentle-faced man, a local clockmaker. He paused, staring at the cloth with a puzzled expression. "Many years ago, my wife and I had such a tablecloth in Vienna," he said softly. "She would only use it when the bishop came for dinner." The pastor's heart leapt as he told the man about the woman he had met earlier. The clockmaker's eyes widened, and he clutched the pastor's arm. "Could it be? Does she live?" Without delay, the pastor helped the man track down the family who had interviewed the woman and, in his car, they drove to the city. Early on Christmas morning, the pastor witnessed a reunion decades in the making. The man and his wife, separated through years of hardship and heartache, were reunited at last.

This story reminds us of the intricate ways God works in our lives, weaving threads of hope and restoration through even the most unlikely circumstances. Just as the tablecloth found its way back to its rightful owners, Christmas is a time to remember that the Savior came to mend the broken, heal the lost, and reunite us with the love and grace of our Heavenly Father. Let this season inspire us to trust in His plan and to look for ways to be instruments of His love in the lives of others.

- **Mission Activity:** Go through your toys or clothes and choose something to donate to someone who needs it.
- **Prayer:** Thank Jesus for being Emmanuel, God with us, and for making His presence known in your life. Ask Him to make your home His temple that He dwells in.



8

days until Christmas



7. Esther's Courage to Save Her People

- Verse: Esther 4:14
- Bible Lesson: Esther was a young Jewish woman living in the vast Persian Empire who, through a series of events, became queen. Though her heritage was a secret, Esther's life would soon take a dramatic turn that would require all of her courage and faith. A powerful man named Haman, who held a high position in the king's court, became filled with hatred toward the Jewish people. He hatched a plan to have every Jewish person in the kingdom destroyed. When Mordecai, Esther's cousin and guardian, learned of the plot, he urgently urged Esther to take action. But there was a great risk. Approaching the king without being summoned was a dangerous move—even for the queen, as it could mean death. Esther hesitated, feeling the weight of the peril, but Mordecai reminded her of something crucial: *"Who knows but that you have come to your royal position for such a time as this?"* (Esther 4:14). Esther realized that her position wasn't just a matter of chance; God had placed her in the palace for a purpose. With that realization, she gathered her courage, determined to act on behalf of her people.

Esther went before the king, risking her life, and revealed Haman's wicked plot. Because of her bravery and faith in God, the king listened and took action to save the Jewish people. Haman's evil plans were thwarted, and the Jewish people were delivered from destruction. Esther's courage changed the course of history and demonstrated how God can use anyone, regardless of their background or position, to fulfill His purposes—if they are willing to trust Him and take bold steps of faith.

- Discussion: How did Esther show bravery? How can we be brave in our faith like Esther?

Story: There once was a pastor named A.J. Gordon who was the pastor of the Clarendon Church in Boston, Massachusetts. One day, as he was walking near the church, he saw a young boy standing in front of the sanctuary. The boy had a rusty cage in his hands, and inside the cage were several birds, fluttering nervously, trapped and helpless.

Pastor Gordon, noticing the boy and the birds, approached him and asked, "Son, where did you get those birds?" The boy looked at him and replied, "I trapped them out in the field."

Pastor Gordon then asked, "What are you going to do with them?"

The boy, with a shrug, answered, "I'm going to play with them for a while, and then I guess I'll just feed them to the old cat we have at home."

The boy seemed to think that the birds didn't matter much, just wild, ordinary birds with no song or beauty to them. But Pastor Gordon had an idea. He asked, "How much for the birds and the cage?"

The boy, looking surprised, replied, "Mister, you don't want them. They're just little old wild birds and can't sing very well."

Pastor Gordon smiled and said, "I'll give you \$2 for the birds and the cage."

The boy hesitated for just a moment before agreeing. "Okay, it's a deal, but you're making a bad bargain," the boy said, and with a happy grin, he took the \$2 and walked away whistling.

Pastor Gordon now had the birds, and he walked around to the back of the church property. He opened the small wire coop and let the birds fly free. The creatures fluttered at first, struggling a bit, but then they spread their wings and soared into the clear, blue sky.

The next weekend, Pastor Gordon took the empty cage into the pulpit with him and used it as an illustration in his sermon. He told the congregation, "That boy told me the birds weren't songsters, that they couldn't sing very well. But when I released them and they flew into the sky, I couldn't help but think they were singing, 'Redeemed, redeemed, redeemed!'"

- Mission Activity: Draw a picture of the Nativity scene and share it with someone as a reminder of Jesus' birth.

- **Prayer:** Ask God to give you courage to follow Him in whatever He calls you to do, and thank Jesus for His ultimate act of bravery in giving His life to save us.



6. Isaiah's Prophecy of a Child

- Verse: Isaiah 9:6
- Bible Lesson: Around 700 years before Jesus' birth, the prophet Isaiah delivered a powerful message from God to the people of Israel. They were living in a dark time, facing threats from their enemies, and many had turned away from God. But in the middle of this darkness, Isaiah spoke of a light, a promise of hope. He told of a child who would be born—a child who would bring peace, joy, and justice. This child would have a remarkable name, full of wonder and wisdom: 'Wonderful Counselor, Mighty God, Everlasting Father, Prince of Peace.'
Imagine hearing those words, especially in a time when hope seemed impossible. Isaiah's prophecy painted a picture of a King who would not rule with power and force but with gentleness, love, and everlasting peace. For centuries, God's people clung to this promise, waiting for the day when this miraculous child would come. And on the first Christmas night, the prophecy was fulfilled when Jesus was born in Bethlehem. Isaiah's words came true in a way no one could have fully understood— God Himself came as a humble baby, born in a manger. This child brought light to a world in darkness, offering a peace beyond understanding, a peace we celebrate every Christmas.
- Discussion: How does the name "Prince of Peace" describe what Jesus came to do? What does it mean for us today to have Jesus as our "Wonderful Counselor"?

Story: In 1932, during the height of the Great Depression, a young boy eagerly awaited Christmas, dreaming of one special gift: an electric train. These were difficult times, marked by economic hardship, yet his parents, despite their struggles, managed to surprise him with a beautiful electric train set. On Christmas morning, his heart raced with excitement when he saw the gift. The hours that followed were spent eagerly watching the train zoom around the track, forward and backward, as he marveled at the power of the transformer.

Later, his mother told him that she had also bought a wind-up train for Mark, a boy who lived down the lane on Gale Street. Mark was a year or two older, and his train was nothing like the boy's electric set. It was simple, but the boy noticed one thing that caught his attention—the tanker car. It was just like the one in his own set, but it seemed even more special. With pleading eyes, he begged his mother for it, and she finally relented, allowing him to take the tanker car from his own train and add it to Mark's set.

After giving Mark the train, the boy returned home, but something had changed. His joy in his own train had vanished. The tanker car, once the object of his fascination, now felt empty and insignificant. Overcome with a wave of guilt, he decided to make things right. Without thinking twice, he grabbed the tanker car and an extra car from his own set and rushed down the lane to Mark's house.

When he arrived, he proudly called out to Mark, "We forgot to bring two cars that belong to your train!" With a sense of peace flooding his heart, he watched Mark's eyes light up as he added the extra cars to his set.

As the Christmas season wrapped up, he would always remember that moment as a lesson in the power of giving from the heart—one that would stay with him forever. It was a Christmas not only of gifts but of realizing that sometimes the best presents aren't the ones we keep for ourselves, but the ones we share with others.

- Mission Activity: Write down the names of people you know who need prayer, put them in a jar and pick one each day to pray for.
- Prayer: Praise Jesus for being the Wonderful Counselor and Mighty God who came to bring peace to the world. Spend time in prayer praising Him for all His characteristics.

5. The Suffering Servant

- Verse: Isaiah 53:5
- Bible Lesson: In another of Isaiah's prophecies, he shared a vision of a 'Suffering Servant'— someone who would be rejected, despised, and afflicted by others. This Servant would endure terrible pain, not because He deserved it, but because He would bear the sins of the people, bringing them peace and healing. Isaiah's words must have been puzzling to those who heard them. How could someone so righteous suffer so much? Why would God's chosen one experience rejection and sorrow?
Centuries later, on Christmas night, this prophecy began to come true in a humble stable in Bethlehem. Jesus, the Suffering Servant, was born into a world that would eventually turn against Him. From the very beginning, Jesus was a King who did not come to be served, but to serve and to give His life for others. His journey of suffering, from His humble birth to His sacrificial death on the cross, fulfilled God's promise to take our burdens and bring us peace. The Christmas season reminds us of the incredible love that led Jesus to take on our pain, giving us the greatest gift of all— His love and salvation.
- Discussion: Why did Jesus come as a servant instead of a mighty ruler? How does His sacrifice give us peace?

Story: It was Christmas Eve during the Second World War, and a young soldier stationed in London felt an ache in his heart. Far from his family and home, he was surrounded by the uncertainty and danger of war. The city, scarred by bombings, was quiet that night, its churches closed and its streets somber. Still, he decided not to let loneliness take over. With a few of his fellow soldiers, he set out to bring Christmas to whomever they could find.

As they walked through the dark streets, they came upon an old building with a sign that read, "Queen Anne's Orphanage." The soldiers paused, and the young man suggested they stop there to visit the children. They knocked on the door, their hearts racing with anticipation. A kind, elderly woman answered, her face lighting up with a smile. She wished them a Merry Christmas and asked how she could help. The soldier explained their request: they wanted to spend a few moments with the children, sharing some Christmas cheer. The woman hesitated only briefly, then warmly invited them in. As the soldiers stepped inside, the sound of children's laughter and excitement greeted them. A group of little ones came running down the stairs, eager to see the visitors. But as the soldiers looked around, their joy was tempered by the stark reality of the children's circumstances. The orphanage was bare and cold, with no decorations, no Christmas tree, and no festive lights. The children's clothes were worn and thin, and the absence of comfort in their surroundings was undeniable. Determined to bring warmth to the children's hearts, the soldiers greeted each child with smiles and kind words. They searched their pockets for anything to share— sticks of gum, coins, small trinkets, or ribbons. The children's faces lit up with delight at these simple gestures, their joy filling the room. As the time came for the soldiers to leave, the young soldier noticed a small boy standing quietly in the corner, his tiny frame trembling as he wiped tears from his face. The soldier's heart ached, reminded of his own son back home, likely the same age.

He walked over to the little boy, knelt down to meet him at eye level, and softly asked, "What's wrong, little one?"

The boy hesitated, looking into the soldier's kind eyes. Then, through trembling lips, he whispered, "All I want for Christmas is for someone to hold me."

The soldier's heart broke. Without hesitation, he gently wrapped the boy in his arms, holding him close.

- Mission Activity: Cook a simple meal as a family and deliver it to someone who could use encouragement or invite them to dinner.
- Prayer: Thank Jesus for taking your sins upon Himself and bringing you peace through His sacrificial love.

4. The Shepherds Hear the Good News

- Verse: Luke 2:8-11
 - Bible Lesson: On the night of Jesus' birth, shepherds were out in the fields, watching over their flocks. Shepherds were simple, humble people, often overlooked by society. But God chose them to be the first to hear the good news of Jesus' birth. Suddenly, an angel appeared before them, shining with the glory of God. The shepherds were terrified, but the angel calmed them, saying, 'Do not be afraid. I bring you good news of great joy that will be for all people. Today, in the town of David, a Savior has been born to you; He is Christ the Lord.'
- The angel's message was clear: Jesus came for everyone, including those who felt lowly or forgotten. When the shepherds heard the good news, they rushed to Bethlehem, leaving everything behind to find the baby lying in a manger. Imagine their awe and joy when they saw the newborn King, the Savior sent to bring hope and salvation. Their lives were forever changed that night, and they went back to their fields, glorifying God and spreading the news. Christmas is a time when we, like the shepherds, are invited to come close to Jesus, to experience the joy of His presence, and to share His love with others.
- Discussion: Why do you think God chose shepherds to hear the good news first? How can we share the joy of Jesus' birth with others?

Story: In 1748, during World War II, a man named John Newton found himself shipwrecked off the coast of Africa. He had been a sailor for most of his life, but his story was far from conventional. Newton was born in England in 1725, and by the time he was a young man, he had joined the British navy. Over the years, he became involved in the slave trade, a practice he later regretted deeply. His life was marked by wild living, selfish pursuits, and a lack of direction. On that fateful voyage in 1748, his ship was caught in a violent storm while crossing the Atlantic. The storm was so fierce that the crew feared they would perish. Amidst the violent winds and waves, John Newton was struck by an overwhelming sense of fear and helplessness. He began to cry out to God, remembering the faith of his mother, who had prayed for him even when he was far from God. In the midst of the storm, he pleaded for mercy and made a vow to change his life if God spared him.

The ship miraculously survived the storm, and this near-death experience marked a turning point for Newton. In the years that followed, he left the slave trade and became a Christian minister. He eventually became known for his work as an abolitionist, advocating for the end of slavery. He also wrote the famous hymn "Amazing Grace," expressing his own journey from darkness to light and the grace he had received from God.

Just as the shepherds left their livelihood behind to search for Jesus that first Christmas night, John Newton left behind his past life to search for God. This Christmas season, just like the shepherds and John Newton, we are invited to leave behind anything that may be hindering our relationship with Jesus and search for Him. Whether it's a busy schedule, a life filled with distractions, or past regrets, we can find Jesus by turning toward Him with an open heart. No matter how far we have gone or how stormy life may seem, Jesus is always there, ready to welcome us with open arms. As we celebrate His birth this season, we can remember that finding Him is the greatest gift we can receive.

- Mission Activity: Do three kind acts for people without them knowing it was you.
- Prayer: Thank God for sharing the good news of Jesus with everyone, and ask Him for opportunities for you to share it too.

3. The Gifts of the Wise Men

- Verse: Matthew 2:11
- Bible Lesson: Far away from Bethlehem, wise men, or Magi, saw a special star shining in the sky. They believed this star signified the birth of a great King, so they set out on a long journey, following the star across deserts and mountains. When they finally arrived in Bethlehem, they found the child Jesus with His mother, Mary. Though He was in a humble home, they knew this child was a King like no other. They knelt down and worshiped Him, offering precious gifts of gold, frankincense, and myrrh— treasures fit for royalty.
Each gift had a special meaning. Gold symbolized Jesus' kingship, frankincense represented His divinity, and myrrh, often used in burial, foreshadowed the sacrifice He would make. By giving these gifts, the wise men honored Jesus as the King, God, and Savior of the world. Their journey reminds us that Jesus is worth seeking, and no gift is too precious to offer Him. At Christmas, we remember these gifts and consider what we can give to Jesus— our love, our devotion, and our lives.
- Discussion: What can we give to Jesus this Christmas that shows our love and devotion to Him?

Story: One cold winter day, a little boy stood on a busy street corner in the city, trying to sell newspapers. His feet were bare, and he had no coat to keep out the chill. As he shivered from the cold, a kind woman walking by noticed him. She approached the boy with a warm smile and said, "Come with me, dear. I want to buy you a coat and some shoes."

The boy's face brightened, and he eagerly took her hand. The woman led him to a nearby department store, where she bought him a warm coat, sturdy shoes, and all the winter clothes he needed.

After the boy had finished putting on his new clothes, the woman quietly paid the bill and slipped out of the store. The boy, now warm and dressed in his new clothes, looked around to thank her, but she was gone.

He ran out of the store, searching up and down the street for the woman. Finally, he spotted her in the distance. He hurried to catch up and grabbed her hand. "Lady, why did you go? I wanted to thank you!"

The woman smiled and said, "You're most welcome, dear."

The boy looked up at her with wide eyes and asked, "Lady, who are you? Are you God's wife?"

She smiled gently and answered, "No, dear, I'm just one of His children."

The boy's face lit up as he wiped away a tear. "Oh, I knew it!" he said, with a smile. "I just knew you were some relation."

- Mission Activity: Act out the Nativity story as a family and invite someone to watch or join in.
- Prayer: Pray that your life would be a gift of worship to Jesus, and thank Him for giving Himself for you.

2. The Birth of Jesus

- Verse: Luke 2:11
- Bible Lesson: The night had finally come— the night that had been foretold by prophets for generations. Mary and Joseph were far from home in Bethlehem, where they had traveled for a census. As they arrived, Mary went into labor, and there was no room for them in any inn. They took shelter in a stable, surrounded by animals, where Jesus, the Savior of the world, was born. Mary wrapped Him in swaddling cloths and laid Him in a manger, a humble bed for the King of Kings. The simplicity of Jesus' birth shows us that God's love is not limited by wealth or power. Jesus came to earth as a tiny, vulnerable baby, bringing with Him joy, hope, and peace for all people. His birth marked the beginning of a new covenant between God and humanity— a promise of love and redemption that we celebrate every Christmas. The angels rejoiced, the shepherds marveled, and the wise men journeyed far to honor Him. Today, we join in that celebration, remembering that Jesus came to be with us, to save us, and to fill our lives with His love.
- Discussion: Why do you think Jesus was born in such a humble place? How can we celebrate His birth with gratitude?

Story: It was nearing Christmas in 1994 when the children at the orphanage heard the story of Jesus' birth for the first time. The staff told them about Mary and Joseph traveling to Bethlehem and finding no room in the inn. They went to a stable, where Mary laid baby Jesus in a manger. The children listened with wide eyes, captivated by the story. Some sat at the edges of their stools, eager to take in every word.

After the story, we gave the children materials to build their own manger scenes. As I walked around, offering help where needed, I came to a table where little Misha, about six years old, had finished his project. To my surprise, there were not one, but two babies in his manger.

Curious, I asked him through a translator why there were two babies. Misha looked at his scene, crossed his arms, and began to tell the story, adding his own unique twist:

"When Mary laid the baby in the manger, Jesus looked at me and asked if I had a place to stay. I told him I had no mama and no papa, so I had nowhere to go. Then Jesus told me I could stay with him. But I told him I didn't have a gift to give him like everyone else. But I really wanted to stay with him. So I thought about what I could give him. I decided that maybe if I kept him warm, that would be a good gift. So I asked Jesus, 'If I keep you warm, will that be enough?' And Jesus said, 'If you keep me warm, that will be the best gift anyone could give me.' So I climbed into the manger, and Jesus told me I could stay with him— always."

Misha's eyes filled with tears as he finished his story, his small body trembling with emotion. He buried his face in his hands and sobbed quietly. In that moment, this little orphan had discovered something precious: a love so deep that it would never leave him, someone who would never abandon him. Jesus had promised him, "You can stay with me— always."

- Mission Activity: Make Christmas cards and take them to a nursing home or hospital.
- Prayer: Thank God for the joy and peace that came with Jesus' birth, and ask Him to help you share that joy with others.

1. The Promise of Jesus' Return

- Verse: Revelation 22:12
- Bible Lesson: After Jesus grew up, taught, healed, and laid down His life for us, He rose again and promised that He would return. In the book of Revelation, we read His words: "Look, I am coming soon!" The same Jesus who came as a baby in a manger will one day come again in power and glory, bringing with Him a new heaven and a new earth where there is no more pain, sadness, or fear. This is the hope that we hold onto as Christians—the hope of His return and the promise of eternal life with Him. Christmas is a time to remember that Jesus came once and will come again. Just as people waited with longing for His first arrival, we wait with anticipation for His return. This promise gives us hope and helps us live with joy, knowing that Jesus will one day make all things new. As we celebrate His birth, we also look forward to the day when He will return to bring us home. What a wonderful day that will be!
- Discussion: How does the promise of Jesus' return give us hope? What can we do to prepare for His coming?

Story: Once upon a time, there was a wealthy man who loved collecting rare works of art. From Picasso to Raphael, his collection was vast and impressive. His greatest joy, however, was sharing these beautiful pieces with his son. Together, they would spend hours admiring their treasures, always talking about how special each painting was.

One day, the son had to leave for war. He was brave and courageous, and he fought to protect others. During one battle, while saving a fellow soldier, the son was fatally wounded and died on the battlefield. The father was heartbroken, for his son had been his pride and joy.

About a month later, just before Christmas, there was a knock at the door. Standing there was a young man holding a large package. He said, "Sir, you don't know me, but I am the soldier your son saved. He carried me to safety that day, and it was in that moment that he was struck by a bullet. He often spoke of you and your love for art. I've brought you something I think your son would want you to have."

The young man handed over the package. The father opened it carefully, and inside was a portrait of his son, painted by the soldier. The father was amazed at how the young man had captured his son's spirit, especially in his eyes. It felt as though his son was right there with him. The father's eyes filled with tears as he looked at the portrait.

"I wish I could pay you for this," the father said, "but I don't know how to repay such a gift."

"No, sir," the soldier replied. "This is a gift to you. I can never repay what your son did for me."

The father hung the portrait over the mantle in his home. Every time visitors came, he took them to see the painting of his son before showing them any of the other masterpieces in his collection. Time passed, and eventually, the father passed away. He had planned a great auction of his entire art collection, and many important people came, eager to bid on the famous paintings. But when the auction began, the auctioneer started with the painting of the man's son.

"We will begin with this picture of the son," the auctioneer announced. "Who will start the bidding?"

There was silence in the room. Finally, someone shouted, "We want to see the famous paintings! Skip that one!"

But the auctioneer continued. "Who will bid on the picture of the son? \$100? \$200?"


Another voice called out, "This isn't what we came for! We want the big names— Van Gogh, Rembrandt! Let's move on."

But still, the auctioneer persisted, asking, "Who will take the son?"

Finally, from the back of the room, a quiet voice spoke up. It was the family gardener, a poor man who had worked for the family for many years. "I'll offer \$10 for the painting," he said, his voice shaky but sincere. It was all he could afford.

The crowd grumbled, but the auctioneer continued, "We have \$10, who will bid \$20?"

"No, give it to him for \$10!" someone shouted. But the auctioneer continued, "\$10 is the bid. Will anyone bid \$20?"



The room grew tense, with people becoming frustrated. They didn't want the portrait of the son. They wanted the famous works, the masterpieces. But in the end, the gavel came down. "Sold, for \$10," the auctioneer announced.

The crowd was eager to move on, but the auctioneer stood still. "I'm sorry," he said, "the auction is now over."

"What about the other paintings?" someone asked.

The auctioneer paused and then spoke in a quiet voice, "When I was called to conduct this auction, there was a secret stipulation in the will. I was not allowed to reveal it until now. Only the painting of the son was to be auctioned. Whoever bought that painting would inherit the entire estate— everything."

A hush fell over the room as the full weight of the words sank in. The man who took the son's portrait had received not just the painting, but the entire collection— the treasures that others had so eagerly desired.

- Mission Activity: Spend time as a family talking about Jesus' birth and sing "Happy Birthday" to Him. Call a relative you haven't seen for a while and wish them a Merry Christmas.
- Prayer: Pray with hope for Jesus' return, thanking Him for the promise of eternal life with Him.



1

day until Christmas

