COKESBURY CHURCH

Daily BIBLE READING PLAN

JESSE TREE

ADVENT 2026

In loving memory of Diane Baylor

cokesbury.tv

INTRODUCTION

For this season of Advent, we will share scripture that follows a tradition called the Jesse Tree. We share this through our Daily Bible Reading in memory and honor of Diane Baylor. She created a series for our Cokesbury Kids using the Jesse Tree as a guideline. Each day has a scripture focus, the entire scripture reference (if you want to read more) and an application.
We will have DIY ornament kits available for you or your family to create a unique ornament for each day of the devotional. You can pick up a kit at the Information Desk at either campus. You can also download label templates and print your own ornaments at home. Everything you need is on our website at cokesbury.tv/news.

We hope you enjoy this tradition as we work through the Old Testament examining the history of God and his people. It's easy to forget that the birth we celebrate at Christmas was put into motion in the Garden of Eden. God's desire was to be with his people—and he would never give up on us, going to extreme measures to bring us back to a right relationship with him. Each day reminds us of the moments God put in place to lead us to Jesus.

DAILY READINGS

NOVEMBER 30

TODAY'S SCRIPTURE: JOHN 3:16-17

"For this is how God loved the world: He gave his one and only Son, so that everyone who believes in him will not perish but have eternal life. God sent his Son into the world not to judge the world, but to save the world through him.

APPLICATION

These verses in John are why we celebrate Christmas - God sent his son for us! Every moment is evidence of God's love for us. As we begin this Advent season, thank God for sending his son so that we can have eternal life.



TODAY'S SCRIPTURE - GENESIS 1:1-5

In the beginning God created the heavens and the earth. The earth was formless and empty, and darkness covered the deep waters. And the Spirit of God was hovering over the surface of the waters.

Then God said, "Let there be light," and there was light. And God saw that the light was good. Then he separated the light from the darkness. God called the light "day" and the darkness "night."

And evening passed and morning came, marking the first day.

APPLICATION

God created the world. He had a plan for us the moment he spoke the world into existence. Has it ever occurred to you that God had the plan for salvation through Jesus even before the world began? Take some time today to step outside, enjoy creation, and thank God for the gift of life.

READ MORE: GENESIS 1:1-31



TODAY'S SCRIPTURE - GENESIS 3:1-7

The serpent was the shrewdest of all the wild animals the Lord God had made. One day he asked the woman, "Did God really say you must not eat the fruit from any of the trees in the garden?"

"Of course we may eat fruit from the trees in the garden," the woman replied. "It's only the fruit from the tree in the middle of the garden that we are not allowed to eat. God said, 'You must not eat it or even touch it; if you do, you will die.'"

"You won't die!" the serpent replied to the woman. "God knows that your eyes will be opened as soon as you eat it, and you will be like God, knowing both good and evil."

The woman was convinced. She saw that the tree was beautiful and its fruit looked delicious, and she wanted the wisdom it would give her. So she took some of the fruit and ate it. Then she gave some to her husband, who was with her, and he ate it, too. At that moment their eyes were opened, and they suddenly felt shame at their nakedness. So they sewed fig leaves together to cover themselves.

APPLICATION

The Garden of Eden was a perfect place. God had declared his creation very good. Adam and Eve had been given a special place in this garden, and God chose to spend time with them each day. Imagine, the powerful, almighty Creator choosing to spend time with his creation!

And then, human desire got in the way of God's perfect plan. Obedience to God's purpose was pushed aside as the serpent went to work on Adam and Eve. Satan's desire was to cause a break in the relationship between God and his people. Sin—anything that separates us from God—had entered the garden and our relationship with God was changed forever.

But, God did not abandon his plan to be in relationship with his people, and the bible is a record of his reaching out and our turning away. The plan for a savior began in the garden. Thank you, God, for your faithfulness.

READ MORE: GENESIS 3:1-24



TODAY'S SCRIPTURE - GENESIS 6:17-22

"Look! I am about to cover the earth with a flood that will destroy every living thing that breathes. Everything on earth will die. But I will confirm my covenant with you. So enter the boat—you and your wife and your sons and their wives. Bring a pair of every kind of animal—a male and a female—into the boat with you to keep them alive during the flood. Pairs of every kind of bird, and every kind of animal, and every kind of small animal that scurries along the ground, will come to you to be kept alive. And be sure to take on board enough food for your family and for all the animals."

So Noah did everything exactly as God had commanded him.

APPLICATION

The Garden of Eden was a perfect place. God had declared his creation very good. Adam and Eve had been given a special place in this garden, and God chose to spend time with them each day. Imagine, the powerful, almighty Creator choosing to spend time with his creation!

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READ MORE: GENESIS 3:1-24



TODAY'S SCRIPTURE - GENESIS 12:1-4A

The Lord had said to Abram, "Leave your native country, your relatives, and your father's family, and go to the land that I will show you. I will make you into a great nation. I will bless you and make you famous, and you will be a blessing to others. I will bless those who bless you and curse those who treat you with contempt. All the families on earth will be blessed through you."
So Abram departed as the Lord had instructed.

APPLICATION

When we first meet Abraham in the Bible, God's plan is still unfolding. God needs a nation from which the savior of the world will come, so he calls Abram to leave his home and go to a land God will give him. The assignment was hard, and the destination was unclear. But when God spoke, Abram believed, and when he believed, he obeyed. He trusted God completely and traveled through the desert, living in tents.

God promised to bless Abram and his family, and to bless the world through them so everyone would see God's love. He changed Abram's name to Abraham, meaning "father of many nations," and it is into this family that Jesus would be born.

READ MORE: GENESIS 12-15



TODAY'S SCRIPTURE - GENESIS 22:9-13

When they arrived at the place where God had told him to go, Abraham built an altar and arranged the wood on it. Then he tied his son, Isaac, and laid him on the altar on top of the wood. And Abraham picked up the knife to kill his son as a sacrifice. At that moment the angel of the Lord called to him from heaven, "Abraham! Abraham!"

"Yes," Abraham replied. "Here I am!"

"Don't lay a hand on the boy!" the angel said. "Do not hurt him in any way, for now I know that you truly fear God. You have not withheld from me even your son, your only son."

Then Abraham looked up and saw a ram caught by its horns in a thicket. So he took the ram and sacrificed it as a burnt offering in place of his son.

APPLICATION

God promised Abraham that through Isaac a great nation would be born. And then, God asks Abraham to carry out what must have seemed to be an impossible task; Abraham is to sacrifice Isaac. How can this be? How can God make a promise, and then seemingly, take back that promise?

Yet Abraham has faith in the character of God and trusts that God will provide what is needed in every situation. At the last minute, God does provide, and a ram is sacrificed in Isaac's place.

This story gives us our first glimpse into God's plan for us. Our father God loves us so much that he was able to send his son to take on our sin, and to die in our place.

God is faithful to provide exactly what we need. Do we have the faith to believe?

READ MORE: GENESIS 21:1-7; 22:1-18



TODAY'S SCRIPTURE - GENESIS 28:10-16

Meanwhile, Jacob left Beersheba and traveled toward Haran. At sundown he arrived at a good place to set up camp and stopped there for the night. Jacob found a stone to rest his head against and lay down to sleep. As he slept, he dreamed of a stairway that reached from the earth up to heaven. And he saw the angels of God going up and down the stairway.

At the top of the stairway stood the Lord, and he said, "I am the Lord, the God of your grandfather Abraham, and the God of your father, Isaac. The ground you are lying on belongs to you. I am giving it to you and your descendants. Your descendants will be as numerous as the dust of the earth! They will spread out in all directions—to the west and the east, to the north and the south. And all the families of the earth will be blessed through you and your descendants. What's more, I am with you, and I will protect you wherever you go. One day I will bring you back to this land. I will not leave you until I have finished giving you everything I have promised you."

Then Jacob awoke from his sleep and said, "Surely the Lord is in this place, and I wasn't even aware of it!"

APPLICATION

We would not have chosen Jacob to continue the lineage of Jesus. He was alone, a fugitive, and a disgrace, and he felt like a failure. But God, in his great love and tenderness, showed Jacob a stairway, sometimes translated "ladder," reaching from earth to heaven. The Lord himself stood at the top. At the foot was a helpless, forsaken man. The ladder showed that Jacob was never far from the arms of God.

The ladder also points to Jesus. He left his glory in heaven and became a man, and through his death the gap between heaven and earth was bridged forever. God used a helpless man to bring blessing and salvation to the whole world.

When Jacob awoke, he knew God was with him, and he would never be the same!

God promised to bless Abram and his family, and to bless the world through them so everyone would see God's love. He changed Abram's name to Abraham, meaning "father of many nations," and it is into this family that Jesus would be born.

READ MORE: GENESIS 27-28



TODAY'S SCRIPTURE - GENESIS 35:9-15

Now that Jacob had returned from Paddan-aram, God appeared to him again at Bethel. God blessed him, saying, "Your name is Jacob, but you will not be called Jacob any longer. From now on your name will be Israel." So God renamed him Israel.

Then God said, "I am El-Shaddai—'God Almighty.' Be fruitful and multiply. You will become a great nation, even many nations. Kings will be among your descendants! And I will give you the land I once gave to Abraham and Isaac. Yes, I will give it to you and your descendants after you." Then God went up from the place where he had spoken to Jacob.

Jacob set up a stone pillar to mark the place where God had spoken to him. Then he poured wine over it as an offering to God and anointed the pillar with olive oil. And Jacob named the place Bethel (which means "house of God"), because God had spoken to him there.

APPLICATION

From Jacob's twelve sons God formed a nation of people called Israel. The Old Testament is the story of the Israelites. It tells of their successes as well as their failures. Sometimes they forgot God, but God never forgot them. God continued to raise up leaders to bring the people back to him. They looked for one last leader, the Messiah, to come to save them from their troubles forever.

The leaders and heroes in this story—Joseph, Moses, Ruth, David, and Solomon—were ordinary people used by God in extraordinary ways. God always works through and in the people he chooses. It is from David that the symbol of the star came to stand for the people of Israel.

READ MORE: GENESIS 35



TODAY'S SCRIPTURE - GENESIS 50:19-21

But Joseph replied, "Don't be afraid of me. Am I God, that I can punish you? You intended to harm me, but God intended it all for good. He brought me to this position so I could save the lives of many people. No, don't be afraid. I will continue to take care of you and your children." So he reassured them by speaking kindly to them.

APPLICATION

If God loves us and takes care of us, why do troubles come? This is something we can't understand, but we have a promise from God that he will use everything (even our troubles) for our good if we love him. The bible gives us a wonderful example for this in the story of Joseph. He had many troubles, but all his troubles turned out for his good and for the good of many more of God's people.

Joseph received a colorful coat from his father, Jacob, and his brothers resented him for it. They sold him into slavery, and before long, Joseph is lied about and thrown into jail.

God used these events for a greater purpose. He needed to separate Jacob's sons from the people of Canaan so his family would remain a special nation. Joseph rose to become a great ruler in Egypt, and when his brothers came needing help, he was able to care for them. God was with Joseph every step of the way.

READ MORE: GENESIS 37-50



TODAY'S SCRIPTURE - EXODUS 3:11-16

But Moses protested to God, "Who am I to appear before Pharaoh? Who am I to lead the people of Israel out of Egypt?"

God answered, "I will be with you. And this is your sign that I am the one who has sent you: When you have brought the people out of Egypt, you will worship God at this very mountain."

But Moses protested, "If I go to the people of Israel and tell them, 'The God of your ancestors has sent me to you,' they will ask me, 'What is his name?' Then what should I tell them?"

God replied to Moses, "I am who i am. Say this to the people of Israel: I am has sent me to you." God also said to Moses, "Say this to the people of Israel: Yahweh, the God of your ancestors—the God of Abraham, the God of Isaac, and the God of Jacob—has sent me to you.

This is my eternal name,
my name to remember for all generations.

"Now go and call together all the elders of Israel. Tell them, 'Yahweh, the God of your ancestors—the God of Abraham, Isaac, and Jacob—has appeared to me. He told me, "I have been watching closely, and I see how the Egyptians are treating you.

APPLICATION

After Joseph died, God called another man to lead his people. While in Egypt, the nation had grown—and become slaves. But God had not abandoned them. God called Moses to lead his people out of slavery and into freedom. This exodus of people is another glimpse at God's plan. Just as Moses came to deliver God's people from slavery, God would send Jesus to free us from our sin.

Once out of Egypt, God gives his people a set of laws to live by. These laws, written in stone, were given by God to help his people live in a way that is pleasing to him. They served a second purpose—they were designed to bring us to Jesus. The law makes us aware of our sin so that we can see the need for salvation.

READ MORE: STORY OF MOSES IS IN EXODUS 1-20



TODAY'S SCRIPTURE - RUTH 1:15-18; 2:1-3

"Look," Naomi said to her, "your sister-in-law has gone back to her people and to her gods. You should do the same."

But Ruth replied, "Don't ask me to leave you and turn back. Wherever you go, I will go; wherever you live, I will live. Your people will be my people, and your God will be my God. Wherever you die, I will die, and there I will be buried. May the Lord punish me severely if I allow anything but death to separate us!" When Naomi saw that Ruth was determined to go with her, she said nothing more.

Now there was a wealthy and influential man in Bethlehem named Boaz, who was a relative of Naomi's husband, Elimelech.

One day Ruth the Moabite said to Naomi, "Let me go out into the harvest fields to pick up the stalks of grain left behind by anyone who is kind enough to let me do it."

Naomi replied, “All right, my daughter, go ahead.” So Ruth went out to gather grain behind the harvesters. And as it happened, she found herself working in a field that belonged to Boaz, the relative of her father-in-law, Elimelech.

APPLICATION

Ruth was a woman from the land of Moab who married an Israelite. When her husband died, she remained faithful to his family and to their God. She returned with her mother-in-law, Naomi, to Naomi’s old home in Bethlehem. There she gathered grain for herself and Naomi in the fields of a man named Boaz. Ruth later married Boaz; they became the parents of Obed, the father of Jesse, and the grandfather of David. Thus, Ruth—the foreigner—became the great grandmother of David and an ancestor of Jesus.

From this story we learn that no one is excluded from God’s love. It also tells us (again!) that God sometimes uses people we wouldn’t expect him to use to accomplish his purposes. Ruth made a choice; we all have a choice to make…who will be our God?

Boaz’s actions toward Ruth give us another glimpse into God’s plan. Jesus would come to redeem us, to restore us to our place with God.

READ MORE: RUTH 1-4



TODAY’S SCRIPTURE - 1 SAMUEL 17:45-50

David replied to the Philistine, “You come to me with sword, spear, and javelin, but I come to you in the name of the Lord of Heaven’s Armies—the God of the armies of Israel, whom you have defied. Today the Lord will conquer you, and I will kill you and cut off your head. And then I will give the dead bodies of your men to the birds and wild animals, and the whole world will know that there is a God in Israel! And everyone assembled here will know that the Lord rescues his people, but not with sword and spear. This is the Lord’s battle, and he will give you to us!”

As Goliath moved closer to attack, David quickly ran out to meet him. Reaching into his shepherd’s bag and taking out a stone, he hurled it with his sling and hit the Philistine in the forehead. The stone sank in, and Goliath stumbled and fell face down on the ground.

So David triumphed over the Philistine with only a sling and a stone, for he had no sword.

APPLICATION

David, Jesse’s youngest son and a shepherd, is used by God to continue his story. God continues to work in ways that surprise us. David makes his mark as he confronts Goliath, an enemy giant, not with great strength or weapons of steel, but with a faith and trust in God. In all that he did, David trusted God and tried to obey him. He made some mistakes, but he continued to turn to God for forgiveness and guidance. Israel became a strong nation under David’s leadership.

READ MORE: 1 SAMUEL 13-17



TODAY'S SCRIPTURE - 1 KINGS 4:29-34

God gave Solomon very great wisdom and understanding, and knowledge as vast as the sands of the seashore. In fact, his wisdom exceeded that of all the wise men of the East and the wise men of Egypt. He was wiser than anyone else, including Ethan the Ezrahite and the sons of Mahol—Heman, Calcol, and Darda. His fame spread throughout all the surrounding nations. He composed some 3,000 proverbs and wrote 1,005 songs. He could speak with authority about all kinds of plants, from the great cedar of Lebanon to the tiny hyssop that grows from cracks in a wall. He could also speak about animals, birds, small creatures, and fish. And kings from every nation sent their ambassadors to listen to the wisdom of Solomon.

APPLICATION

Solomon, David's son, now sits on the throne, the beginning of God's promise that David's house would rule forever. Before he died, David gave Solomon this advice: "Take courage and be a man. Observe the requirements of the Lord your God, and follow all his ways." (1 Kings 2:2-3a, NLT)

Solomon understood the weight of his responsibility. When God asked what he wanted, Solomon asked for wisdom to know right from wrong. God was pleased and granted his request, with a reminder to stay obedient. As promised to David, Solomon then built the temple, a beautiful place of worship where God would be glorified.

Wisdom and worship go hand in hand. The ability to make right choices comes from God, and our choices become clearer when our relationship with him matters most.

READ MORE: 1 KINGS 1-4



TODAY'S SCRIPTURE - 2 KINGS 22:1-2

Josiah was eight years old when he became king, and he reigned in Jerusalem thirty-one years. His mother was Jedidah, the daughter of Adaiah from Bozkath. He did what was pleasing in the Lord's sight and followed the example of his ancestor David. He did not turn away from doing what was right.

King Josiah then issued this order to all the people: "You must celebrate the Passover to the Lord your God, as required in this Book of the Covenant." There had not been a Passover celebration like that since the time when the judges ruled in Israel, nor throughout all the years of the kings of Israel and Judah. But in the eighteenth year of King Josiah's reign, this Passover was celebrated to the Lord in Jerusalem.

APPLICATION

Solomon's reign was a highpoint in the history of God's people. They had been established as a nation called by God and had been witnesses to His amazing faithfulness. What followed next was a great example of God's patience and love for us. While his people chose to forget, God did not.

Generation after generation was led by kings whose hearts were easily turned to the worship of idols and the influence of the godless nations around them.

Within this darkness, Josiah became king and the bible records that "he did what was right in the sight of the Lord..." 2 Kings 22:2 Josiah demanded that the temple be cleaned and in the midst of the mess, the Book of the Law was found. Josiah read the long forgotten book to his people and began to lead them back to God.

King Josiah was just eight years old when he became king. Loving God and knowing his word is not reserved for adults; God desires that each of us, young or old, keep his word in our hearts. God can use us in mighty ways when we walk with him and know his ways.

READ MORE: 2 KINGS 22-23



TODAY'S SCRIPTURE - ISAIAH 9:6-7

For a child is born to us,
    a son is given to us.
The government will rest on his shoulders.
    And he will be called:
Wonderful Counselor, Mighty God,
    Everlasting Father, Prince of Peace.
His government and its peace
    will never end.
He will rule with fairness and justice from the throne of his ancestor David
    for all eternity.
The passionate commitment of the Lord of Heaven's Armies
    will make this happen!

APPLICATION

Throughout the history of God's people, prophets spoke his word and foretold what was to come. They guided the people in times of trouble, corrected them when they did wrong, and reminded them that they belonged to God.

Years of worshiping idols and forgetting God had consequences. But even in those sad years, God never forgot his people. He spoke through the prophets, and their words of hope and promise shone like a bright light.

The next few days will help us remember some of these prophets and the words they spoke. The people waited a long time to see those prophecies come true. But when Jesus was born, God's promises were fulfilled.

READ MORE: ISAIAH 9:1-7



TODAY'S SCRIPTURE - 1 KINGS 18:36-39

At the usual time for offering the evening sacrifice, Elijah the prophet walked up to the altar and prayed, "O Lord, God of Abraham, Isaac, and Jacob, prove today that you are God in Israel and that I am your servant. Prove that I have done all this at your command. O Lord, answer me! Answer me so these people will know that you, O Lord, are God and that you have brought them back to yourself."

Immediately the fire of the Lord flashed down from heaven and burned up the young bull, the wood, the stones, and the dust. It even licked up all the water in the trench! And when all the people saw it, they fell face down on the ground and cried out, "The Lord—he is God! Yes, the Lord is God!"

APPLICATION

The prophet Elijah lived about 900 years before Jesus, during a famine and drought in Israel. No rain fell, the crops failed, and the people were worshiping idols. But Elijah remembered God's promises and told the people about the one true God. To prove it, he challenged the priests of Baal to a contest. God sent fire from heaven, and all the people shouted, "The Lord, he is God!" (1 Kings 18:39, NLT)

Sometimes we forget God. We drift away and let other things become more important, skipping church or neglecting prayer.

Elijah challenged God's people to make a choice, and we each face that same choice. We must be strong enough to resist popular opinion. Who will we follow and serve?

READ MORE: 1 KINGS 17-18



TODAY'S SCRIPTURE - ISAIAH 11:1-3 (NIV)

A shoot will come up from the stump of Jesse;
from his roots a Branch will bear fruit.
The Spirit of the Lord will rest on him—
the Spirit of wisdom and of understanding,
the Spirit of counsel and of might,
the Spirit of the knowledge and fear of the Lord—
and he will delight in the fear of the Lord.

He will not judge by what he sees with his eyes,
or decide by what he hears with his ears

APPLICATION

The days are dark, and hope seems distant. God's people had chosen to live outside the covenant he made with their ancestors, Abraham, Isaac, and Jacob. They ignored the laws he gave Moses to set them apart. Powerful nations surround their tiny country, their own days of great power are a memory, and with enemies seeking to destroy them, they are almost convinced that God has given up on them. But God remembers, and he calls Isaiah to speak words of hope.

Isaiah's words point to the birth of a child called Immanuel, "God with us." This child would be a new branch on the Jesse family tree. That child is Jesus, whose birthday we are preparing to celebrate.

God needed Isaiah for a special job: to share the story of a Savior. That message of hope still needs to be told today. What if Isaiah had said no? What if we say no?

READ MORE: ISAIAH 7-11



TODAY'S SCRIPTURE - JEREMIAH 24:7; 29:11-13

I will give them hearts that recognize me as the Lord. They will be my people, and I will be their God, for they will return to me wholeheartedly.

For I know the plans I have for you," says the Lord. "They are plans for good and not for disaster, to give you a future and a hope. In those days when you pray, I will listen. If you look for me wholeheartedly, you will find me.

APPLICATION

Jeremiah was hesitant when God asked him to be a prophet, but what wonderful words God gave him to speak! God wanted a relationship with his people. The first covenant required them to obey a set of rules, but they always fell short. They could not resist temptation, and they trusted earthly kings instead of God. God had called them to be different, to belong to him, but too often they preferred to be like everyone else.

God did not give up. He promised a new covenant, one in which he would write his law on our hearts so that we would choose to come to him. Through Jesus, everyone could have a relationship with God, and our sins would be forgiven and forgotten.

God wants us to love and obey him, not because of a set of laws, but because our hearts want to. Jesus makes this new relationship, built on love rather than laws, possible.

READ MORE: JEREMIAH 1 (AND PROPHECIES THROUGHOUT THE BOOK OF JEREMIAH)



TODAY'S SCRIPTURE - DANIEL 6:13-16

Then they told the king, "That man Daniel, one of the captives from Judah, is ignoring you and your law. He still prays to his God three times a day."
Hearing this, the king was deeply troubled, and he tried to think of a way to save Daniel. He spent the rest of the day looking for a way to get Daniel out of this predicament.

In the evening the men went together to the king and said, "Your Majesty, you know that according to the law of the Medes and the Persians, no law that the king signs can be changed."

So at last the king gave orders for Daniel to be arrested and thrown into the den of lions. The king said to him, "May your God, whom you serve so faithfully, rescue you."

APPLICATION

Daniel was among God's people who were captured and taken to Babylon. There he became a favorite in the king's government, which stirred jealousy. His rivals looked for a way to discredit him, but they could find no fault in his character. His reputation was so secure that they knew the only way to bring him down was a new law that targeted his faith in God.

Even under attack, Daniel remained faithful and kept praying to God every day. Facing a frightening situation, he trusted that his God was in control.

God used Daniel's steadfast faith. The king of Babylon declared that Daniel's God is the living God, whose kingdom will endure forever.

Daniel's example reminds us that God is in control and can use our faithfulness to be a witness to others.

READ MORE: DANIEL 6



TODAY'S SCRIPTURE - NEHEMIAH 2:16-18

The city officials did not know I had been out there or what I was doing, for I had not yet said anything to anyone about my plans. I had not yet spoken to the Jewish leaders—the priests, the nobles, the officials, or anyone else in the administration. But now I said to them, "You know very well what trouble we are in. Jerusalem lies in ruins, and its gates have been destroyed by fire. Let us rebuild the wall of Jerusalem and end this disgrace!" Then I told them about how the gracious hand of God had been on me, and about my conversation with the king. They replied at once, "Yes, let's rebuild the wall!" So they began the good work.

APPLICATION

Things looked hopeless for God's people held captive in Babylon. Jerusalem was destroyed, and the people were scattered to other lands, with no king and no country. Yet Isaiah and Jeremiah had told them that God would save a small group and bring them back to Jerusalem to wait for the Messiah.

Nehemiah was a man of prayer, and God used him to lead the rebuilding of Jerusalem's walls. The task seemed impossible, and obstacles stood in the way. But Nehemiah never wavered in his faith that God could make the impossible possible. He surrounded his work with prayer and always gave God the credit.

When the wall was finished, the people of Israel began to wait for the birth of Jesus. This promised Messiah was their hope. Are you ready?

READ MORE: NEHEMIAH 1-2



TODAY'S SCRIPTURE - LUKE 2:9-11

Suddenly, an angel of the Lord appeared among them, and the radiance of the Lord's glory surrounded them. They were terrified, but the angel reassured them. "Don't be afraid!" he said. "I bring you good news that will bring great joy to all people. The Savior—yes, the Messiah, the Lord—has been born today in Bethlehem, the city of David!

APPLICATION

Angels appear in many stories of the Bible. They are God's messengers, usually bringing good news, and they remind us that God is always at work in the lives of his people.

The promised Savior is about to be born, and God sends angels to those he has chosen to play an important part. An angel tells Zechariah that he will have a son who will tell others about Jesus, just as Isaiah prophesied. An angel tells Mary that she has been chosen to be the mother of Jesus. An angel clears up Joseph's confusion. The angels set the stage.

When Jesus was born, an angel announced the good news, not only to the shepherds but to all people. Can God use us to be "angels" to others? Can he count on us to serve him and proclaim that Jesus is born?

READ MORE: LUKE 1-2



TODAY'S SCRIPTURE - LUKE 1:35-38

The angel replied, "The Holy Spirit will come upon you, and the power of the Most High will overshadow you. So the baby to be born will be holy, and he will be called the Son of God. What's more, your relative Elizabeth has become pregnant in her old age! People used to say she was barren, but she has conceived a son and is now in her sixth month. For the word of God will never fail."

Mary responded, "I am the Lord's servant. May everything you have said about me come true." And then the angel left her.

APPLICATION

Mary was chosen by God to be the earthly mother for his son. How like God to use the ordinary to do something extraordinary!

God must have known her heart. Mary showed her faith in God and with a willing heart did as she was asked. The request was not easy, and probably made no sense to her. Yet, because of her faith, she was able to trust God, knowing that he was sovereign.

God can use each of us. We may see ourselves as "ordinary", but God sees us as a treasure. He can use us if we have willing hearts. Will you serve him?

READ MORE: LUKE 1:26-56



TODAY'S SCRIPTURE - MATTHEW 1:18-24

This is how Jesus the Messiah was born. His mother, Mary, was engaged to be married to Joseph. But before the marriage took place, while she was still a virgin, she became pregnant through the power of the Holy Spirit. Joseph, to whom she was engaged, was a righteous man and did not want to disgrace her publicly, so he decided to break the engagement quietly.

As he considered this, an angel of the Lord appeared to him in a dream. "Joseph, son of David," the angel said, "do not be afraid to take Mary as your wife. For the child within her was conceived by the Holy Spirit. And she will have a son, and you are to name him Jesus, for he will save his people from their sins."

All of this occurred to fulfill the Lord's message through his prophet:
"Look! The virgin will conceive a child!
She will give birth to a son,
and they will call him Immanuel,
which means 'God is with us.'"

When Joseph woke up, he did as the angel of the Lord commanded and took Mary as his wife.

APPLICATION

Joseph was a carpenter. He was living a simple life working as all young men did in his day. Just like Mary, he was an ordinary person, asked to do something extraordinary.

Joseph had strong beliefs. He tried to do what was right by the world's standards, but God had a different plan. He sent a messenger to Joseph to confirm Mary's story and open another way for Joseph to be obedient—to take Mary as his wife. Joseph obeyed God, married Mary, and honored her. Joseph knew Jesus was someone special from the moment he heard the angel's words. His strong belief and his willingness to follow God's leading empowered him to be Jesus' earthly father. How do you obey God?

READ MORE: MATTHEW 1 & LUKE 2



TODAY'S SCRIPTURE - LUKE 2:1-4

At that time the Roman emperor, Augustus, decreed that a census should be taken throughout the Roman Empire. (This was the first census taken when Quirinius was governor of Syria.) All returned to their own ancestral towns to register for this census. And because Joseph was a descendant of King David, he had to go to Bethlehem in Judea, David's ancient home. He traveled there from the village of Nazareth in Galilee.

APPLICATION

Bethlehem was the birth place of Jesus. The prophecy of Micah, which said that a ruler would come from Bethlehem, was fulfilled. Bethlehem was the setting for many important events in the Bible. It was the hometown of Jesus' family: Boaz and Ruth, their son Obed, his son Jesse, and Jesse's son David, all lived in Bethlehem. When a census was ordered, Mary and Joseph traveled to Bethlehem to be counted and taxed.

A bright star appeared over Bethlehem, a tiny, rather insignificant place, to mark the arrival of a king. You might not think you can do much for God, but God can do anything through you, if you let him.

READ MORE: MICAH 5: 2; MATTHEW 2:1-2 & LUKE 2:1-4



TODAY'S SCRIPTURE - LUKE 2:16-20

They (the shepherds) hurried to the village and found Mary and Joseph. And there was the baby, lying in the manger. After seeing him, the shepherds told everyone what had happened and what the angel had said to them about this child. All who heard the shepherds' story were astonished, but Mary kept all these things in her heart and thought about them often. The shepherds went back to their flocks, glorifying and praising God for all they had heard and seen. It was just as the angel had told them.

APPLICATION

The angels first announced the news of Jesus' birth to a group of shepherds, hardly the crowd you would expect to hear the greatest news ever told. Their social status was not enviable, yet it was to shepherds that Jesus compared himself.

A shepherd's work was difficult and often lonely. He watched over his flock day and night, protecting the sheep from danger, rescuing them from steep places, and searching for any that strayed. He found grass and water for them and cared for their wounds.

Because sheep were kept for their wool, a shepherd had each animal for a long time and came to know it well. A good shepherd recognized each sheep and gave it a name, and the sheep knew their master's voice and followed him.

Jesus is our shepherd, always watching over us and protecting us. He knows each of us by name. If you love and trust him, you are part of his flock.

READ MORE: LUKE 2:8-20; PSALM 23



TODAY'S SCRIPTURE - JOHN 1:1-5

In the beginning the Word (Jesus) already existed.
The Word was with God,
and the Word was God.
He existed in the beginning with God.
God created everything through him,
and nothing was created except through him.
The Word gave life to everything that was created,
and his life brought light to everyone.
The light shines in the darkness,
and the darkness can never extinguish it.

APPLICATION

Is there any story more beautiful than the Christmas story? In the manger lay the fulfillment of the prophecies—the birth of Jesus Christ, who was born into the family tree of Jesse, the "son" of David, the child of Mary, the Son of God—the greatest sign of God's great love for his people.

God needed someone to come to earth and take away the sin that entered creation when Adam & Eve ate the fruit. Jesus, the Son of God, was willing to come and be our savior. That's why the angels sang so gloriously on that first Christmas—because Jesus had come to take away the sins of the world! Jesus was willing to leave His throne in heaven and all of his glory to become a little baby for us.

This wonderful story of Jesus can be your story if you make room for him. All you have to do is to believe in him, ask him to forgive your sins, and let him be Lord of your life. He will.

READ MORE: MATTHEW 1 & 2; LUKE 1:1-2:40

Merry Christmas!

ORNAMENT INSTRUCTIONS

WHAT'S IN YOUR KIT

25 Wooden discs | 2 matching labels for each day | String

HOW TO MAKE YOUR ORNAMENT

Apply the labels. Peel one label and press it onto the front of the disc. Flip the disc over and press the matching label onto the back. Smooth out any bubbles or wrinkles.
Thread the string through the loop at the top of the ornament, then tie the ends of the string together in a knot to form a loop.
Hang it up. Slip the loop over a branch on your tree.

**Some excerpts were inspired by The Advent Jesse Tree – Abingdon Press 1988 and Jesse Tree Devotions – Augsburg Fortress 1985*