

Building God's family tree

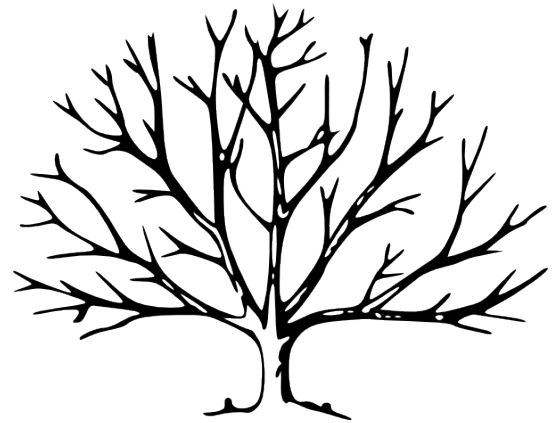
The Jesse tree: characters from Creation to Christmas

The Jesse tree is something families and churches can use as a powerful, tactile and visual journey, exploring the history of our faith during Advent.

Advent is the season of preparation: preparation of ourselves, our homes and our gifts that we give at Christmas, celebrating Jesus coming into the world. This year the light, hope and peace which Jesus brings is more significant than ever. The winter is dreaded by many, with Covid-19 related restrictions on socialising and contact with others.

In this Advent season, a Jesse tree on display in a window or garden at home or outside a church could be a really wonderful symbol of hope, as onlookers watch the scene develop bit by bit.

Jesse was the father of King David and a prophecy in the book of Isaiah says that the Messiah would come from David's family, 'A shoot will spring forth from the stump of Jesse, and a branch out of his roots.' Isaiah 11.1. Early Jesse trees showed Jesse, from whom sprang a tree or vine bearing David and Jesus. Later artists added more figures. Jesse trees today trace the family of God from Creation right through to Jesus. In a year when we have been and may still be separated from our own biological and church families, building this family tree has even more hope and significance. There will also be opportunities to add in your own families/friends as well.



How to create the family tree

Within your home or church, use a simple bare tree or a small branch, a window display or wall space. You can have either a three-dimensional tree, or a two-dimensional tree made from paper, card, or fabric. The tree is added to throughout the period of Advent with small homemade objects and symbols, building the story of God's love for the and the people of God, from the beginning of the Old Testament to the birth of Jesus.

your recycling bin. Allow creativity to blossom by exploring a range of craft supplies and coming up with your own ideas. There are no fixed rules. Each person taking part can make their own interpretations of the symbols based on the biblical stories.

If you are building your Jesse tree in church or on church grounds, why not share the stories and symbols on your social media pages or on posters and invite others to join in the creation of this family tree.



The symbols (as shown) can be the templates provided here printed and coloured in; you could draw/copy your own versions on paper, card, or fabric; or make three-dimensional models from craft materials or things from



When to create the family tree

Advent begins on Sunday 29 November 2020 and continues until Christmas Eve. The symbols fall into four natural sections (plus one for Christmas Eve), often defined by the four weeks of Advent, and you could follow this pattern, building the tree week by week on a day which suits you.

However, the sharing of the stories and the creating of the symbols can be done in any way you like. It may be that you have a weekend where you have the space to create the symbols in a large creative session, or you could take time each day to share a story and from this, produce a decoration.

If the decorations have all been created at once, then take it in turns each day to add the new decoration to the tree. Once you have added all the symbols within each group (see five groups below), you can use the corresponding prayer as a focal point to talk about the stories and decorations you have added.

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Advent week 1

29 November – 5 December

The Patriarchs and Matriarchs

These are all the people of God who have watched and waited for God's promises to be kept. Now it is our turn to watch and wait.

Prayer

God of history, thank you for everyone who has watched and waited for you. Help us to learn from their lives. God of hope, help us to get ready for Christmas. When we are busy and excited, help us to remember that we are watching and waiting for Christ to come.

Come, Lord Jesus, come!

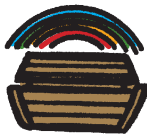
Adam and Eve

These are the first people in the Bible. They lived in the Garden of Eden until the serpent tempted them to eat the fruit of the Tree of Knowledge. (Genesis 2.15-17)



Noah

Noah and his family worked very hard to obey God's command to build the ark to save themselves and the animals during a mighty flood. Afterwards, God promised never to flood the world again, and gave the rainbow as a sign of the promise. (Genesis 9. 8-17)



Abraham and Sarah

Abraham and Sarah thought they were too old to have children. God promised them that they would have many children – as many as there are stars in the sky. (Genesis 15. 1-6)



Isaac and Rebekah

To test Abraham's faith, God asked him to sacrifice his son, Isaac. When Abraham got ready to do so, God provided a ram to be sacrificed instead. (Genesis 22. 1-18)



Jacob, Leah and Rachel

Jacob, son of Isaac, was a cheat who met with God in a dream of a stairway to heaven, with angels moving up and down it. (Genesis 28.10-17)



Joseph

Joseph was Jacob's eleventh and favourite son. Jacob gave him a special coat – but his brothers were jealous and sold him as a slave. But after many adventures, Joseph became a powerful man in Egypt and ended up saving the country – and his whole family – from starvation. (Genesis 42.6-25)



Ruth and Naomi

The story of Ruth and Naomi is one of great love, faithfulness and courage. Ruth cared for her mother-in-law when both of them were widows, and when she got married again. (Ruth 1.1-22)



David

David was the second king of Israel. As a young man, he killed the enemy giant Goliath. He was famous both as a warrior and a worshipper – and was probably the writer of some of the psalms. (1 Samuel 16.1-13)



Solomon

Solomon ruled over the golden age of the kingdom of Israel. His wisdom was famous and the kingdom was rich and peaceful. Solomon built a temple for God in Jerusalem. (1 Kings 6.1-38)



Esther

Esther was an Israelite who married the Persian king, Xerxes. Her courage and intelligence saved her people from an enemy who wanted to slaughter them all. (Esther 4.4-8)



Advent week 2

6-12 December

Moses and the Prophets Who spoke up bravely for God and looked forward to the coming of God's kingdom. Now it is our turn to tell the world about the love of God.

Prayer

God of courage, thank you for everyone who has spoken bravely about their faith in you. God of promise, help us to listen to you and speak out in your name. Help us to keep looking for the coming of your kingdom.

Come, Lord Jesus, come!

Moses, Miriam and Aaron

Baby Moses was saved miraculously from death by being hidden in a basket in the bulrushes, looked after by his sister Miriam. God called Moses when he grew up to rescue the Israelites from Egypt. Aaron, his brother, was sent to help him. (Exodus 2.1-10)



Isaiah

Isaiah lived in Jerusalem. He warned the people that the real danger was their disobedience to God, rather than the powerful empires around them. He spoke of God's plan to use the nation of Israel to bring hope to all the nations. (Isaiah 9.2-7)



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Jeremiah

Jeremiah warned the people of Israel that they were like clay in God's hands. If they continued to sin, they would be like a smashed pot. If they repented, God would make something good out of them. (Jeremiah 18.1-11)



Ezekiel

Ezekiel was taken as an exile to Babylon. He had a vision that the nation of Israel was like a valley of dry bones. He saw the bones coming back together and being revived. In the same way, Israel would flourish again. (Ezekiel 37.1-14)



Daniel

Daniel was an exile from Judah in Babylon. He trusted and obeyed God, whatever the cost – even when thrown into a pit of lions. He lived to tell the tale! (Daniel 6.1-23)



Advent week 3

13-19 December

John the Baptist Who called the people to turn away from their old lives to get ready for the coming of Christ. Now it is our turn to get ready.

Prayer

God of change, thank you for John the Baptist, who called the people to change their lives to get ready for Jesus. God of forgiveness, help us to change our lives so that we are ready when Christ comes.

Come, Lord Jesus, come!

John the Baptist

John was Jesus' cousin. Crowds of people came to hear his fiery preaching, getting people ready for Jesus' coming. He told people to turn away from their sins and be baptized for forgiveness. Jesus asked John to baptize him in the River Jordan. John saw the Spirit of God descending on Jesus, like a dove. (Mark 1.4-12)



Advent week 4

20-23 December

Mary and Joseph Who did what God asked them to do, even though it was very difficult. They cared for Jesus from the moment he was born, they loved and looked after him when he was a child. Now it is our turn to make a place for Jesus in our lives.

Prayer

God of the humble, thank you for Mary and Joseph, who did what you asked and welcomed Jesus into their home. God of joy, help us to make time for Jesus in our lives.

Come, Lord Jesus, come!

Mary

While Mary was engaged to Joseph, she saw an angel who said she would be the mother of Jesus, the Messiah and Son of God. Mary gave birth to Jesus and brought him up. She stood at the foot of the cross as Jesus died. (Luke 1.26-38)



Joseph

Joseph was going to leave Mary when he found out that she was expecting a baby. However, an angel told him that the baby was God's son. Joseph was an earthly father to Jesus. He worked as a builder or carpenter. (Matthew 1.18-25)



Christmas Eve

24-25 December

Jesus, ourselves and our families

We remember Jesus, who gives each of us the opportunity to be part of God's family. Now it is our turn to bring our families and friends into God's family as Jesus is born.

Jesus

Luke's Gospel says that Jesus was laid in the animals' feeding trough in the stable when he was born. We celebrate this special birthday on Christmas Day. (Luke 2.1-7)



The stars represent our own place in the history of God's people. We are Jesus' family in the world today. Even when we cannot see the people we love, we know they are there and they sparkle like the stars. You can add as many stars as you like, for the people in your family, your friends and all those you know and love. (Philippians 2.12-18)

Ourselves and our families

A Christmas prayer

God of love, thank you for sending us your Son, Jesus Christ, to live with us and to invite us to be part of your family. God of our family, help us to remember that we are all special to you and that even though we may not be together with the people that we love, we are always together as part of your family.

Christ is born in Bethlehem.
Christ be born in our homes today.
Thanks be to God!
Amen.



Adapted by Bridget Down from material first published in 2003.

Photographs by Samantha Burgoyne, illustrations by Andy Rob.

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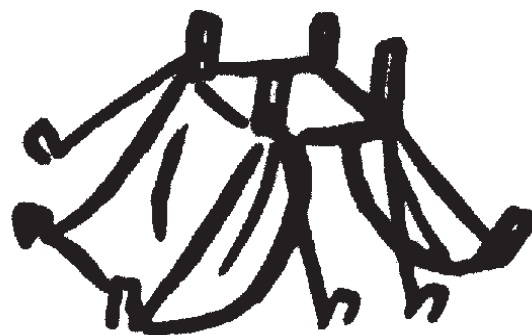
Cut out each symbol (there are 20 in total) during the Advent season – colour them in, or trace them instead, or make your own set of symbols – and add them to your Jesse tree.



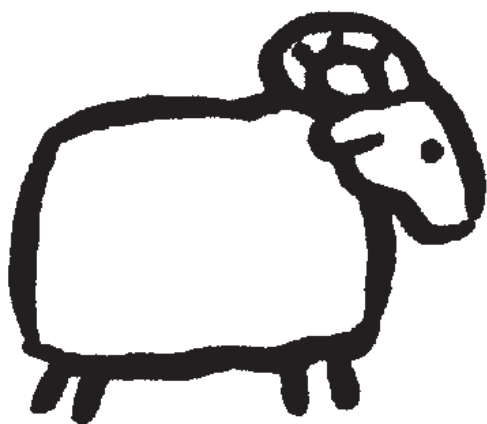
Adam and Eve



Noah



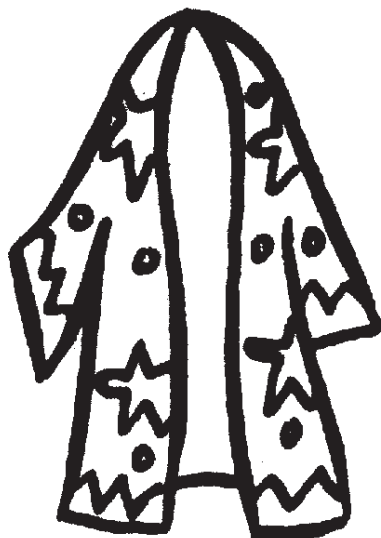
Isaac and Rebekah



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Jacob, Leah and Rachel



Joseph



Ruth and Naomi



David



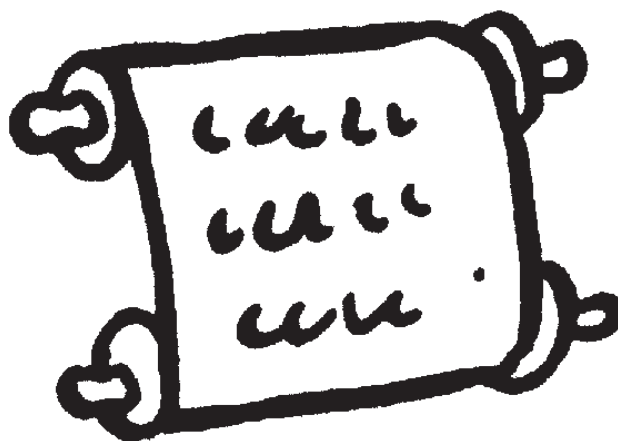
Solomon



Esther



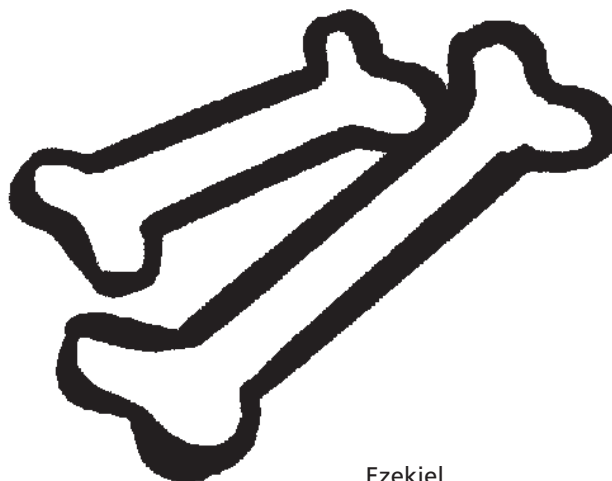
Moses, Miriam and Aaron



Isaiah



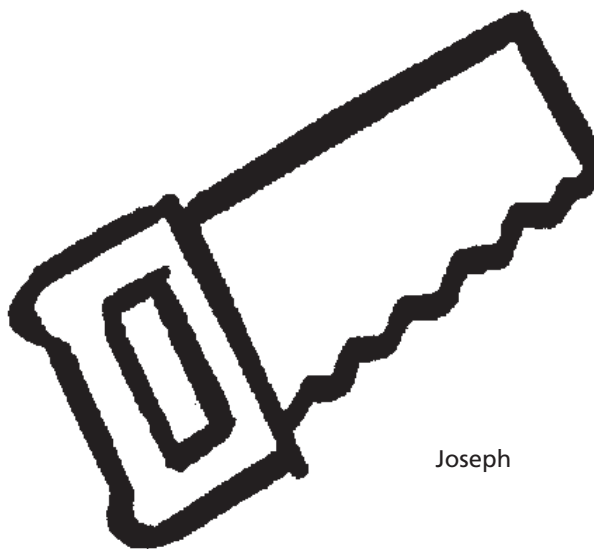
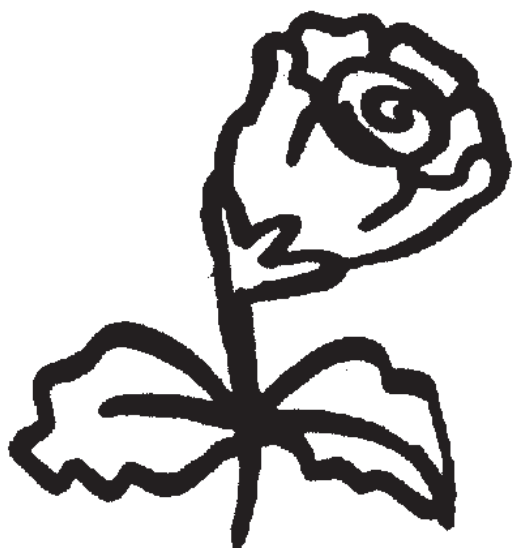
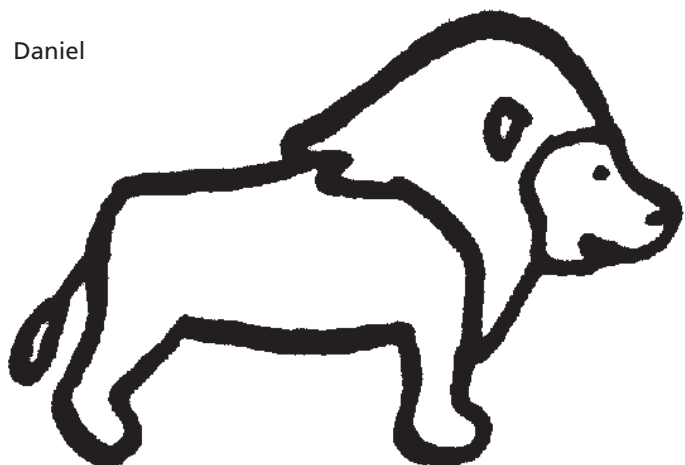
Jeremiah



Ezekiel

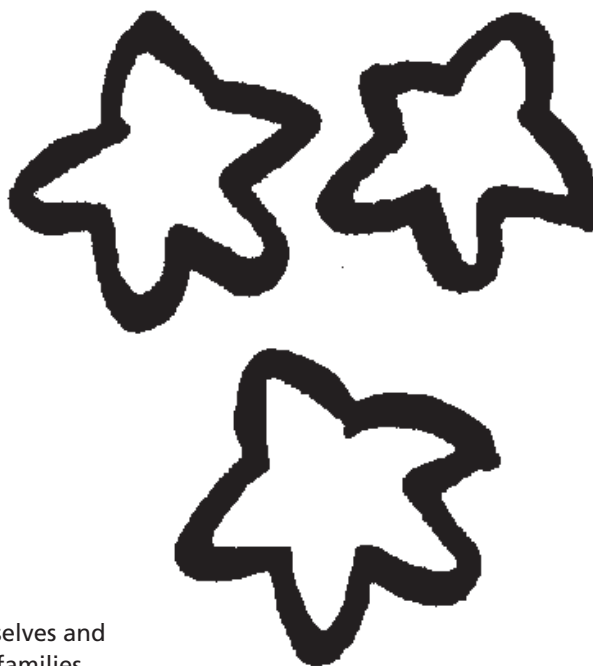
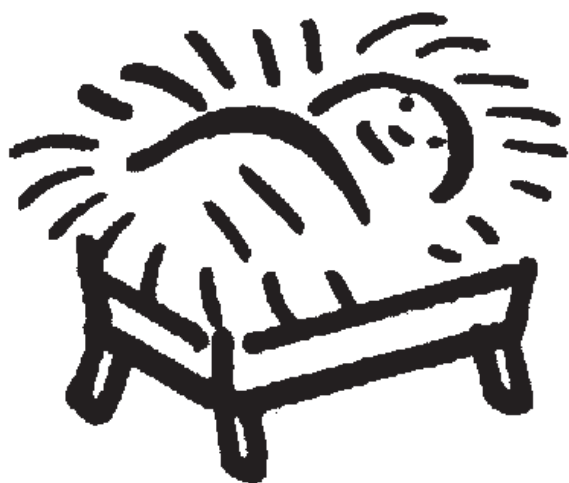
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