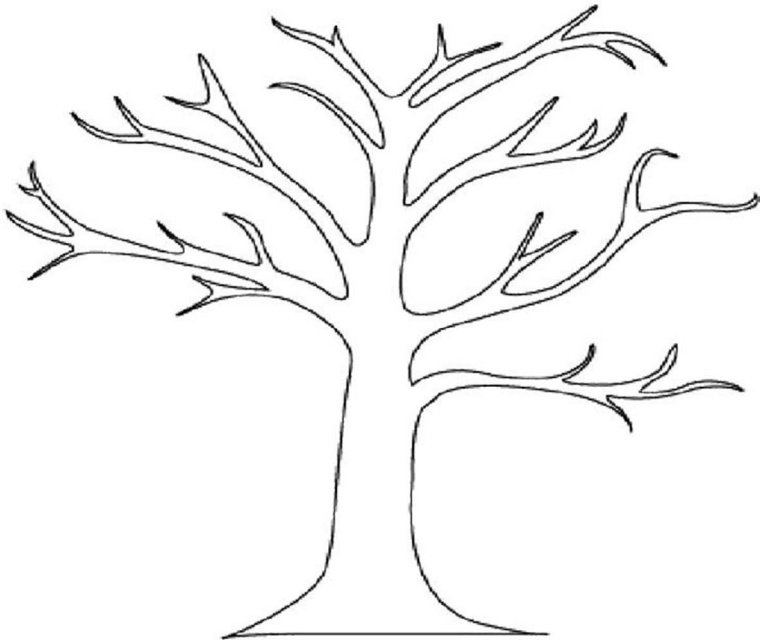


Church of the Most Precious Blood

2017

Jesse Tree

A series of daily readings and
reflections for Advent



With grateful thanks to 'Meeting Jesus through the Jesse Tree' Anne E. Neuberger, and Faith Today, Advent 2011

Welcome to your Jesse tree journey this Advent.

The Jesse tree is named from Isaiah 11:1: “A shoot shall come out of the stock of Jesse, and a branch shall grow out of his roots.” Jesse was the father of King David. Each day in Advent, we will add an illustrated symbol to our tree in the church porch. These symbols represent the people, prophecies, and events leading up to the birth of Jesus, and tell the story of God in the Old Testament. They connect the Advent season with the faithfulness of God across four thousand years of history.

In this booklet you will find a daily Bible reference for you to read and reflect on, a short commentary and a prayer. Through these, you can make your own Jesse tree journey at home in company with the parish. The symbols can be found on the back pages of the booklet, and each time you visit the church you will be able to see the new symbols that have been added and remember their importance in the story.



Sunday 3rd December

Creation

Genesis 1:1-2:4

In the beginning, God created the heavens and the earth... God saw everything that he had made, and indeed, it was very good.

The first story of the Jesse tree is set in the most ancient of times. It gives us a way to think symbolically about how the world and its order came to be, and centres not just on the actual creation of the universe but on God’s love and involvement. Creation is the first saving act of God; it is God’s pledge to the future.

Dear God our Creator, thank you for the light, the dark, the mountains and the deep seas. Thank you for the animals of the waters, the land and the air. Thank you for the grasslands, the rainforests, and the mountains. And thank you for the delightful diversity of all your peoples in your great creation. Amen.

Monday 4th December

Adam and Eve

Genesis 2:4-3:24

The woman saw that the tree was good for food...and she also gave some to her husband and he ate it. Then the eyes of both of them were opened and they realised they were naked.

Eating the fruit was an abuse of freedom and so Adam and Eve were turned out of the Garden of Eden. Thus the unhappiness and sin of the world began. Adam and Eve had chosen to become their own god, causing what seemed to be a permanent separation from God, the source of all life. Without God, death, sorrow and sin resulted. But while the story of the Fall teaches that sin is plentiful, it also sets the stage for salvation and for Christ's coming.

Dear God our Creator, we live in a world that is both good and bad. We are people who can choose which way we will be. Please help us to live as Jesus taught, so that we will make the right choices. Amen.



Tuesday 5th December

Noah

Genesis 6:51-9:17

Then God said to Noah 'Go out of the ark, together with your wife and sons and your sons' wives. Bring out with you every living thing that is with you....and let them abound on the earth, breeding and multiplying on it'.

Noah was a man of integrity in an unjust world, faithfully following the ways of God. God chose to destroy everything in order to preserve what was right, and then use it to start again. Although God was displeased with the wickedness of the men and women he had created, he also continues to see the best in us, and renews his covenant with us through forgiveness and mercy.

Dear God our Creator, you gave us all the animals, and the earth to live on. You who gave us all of life, grant us wisdom to live this life with care, respect and dignity, and to care for this beautiful gift of creation you have entrusted us with. Amen.

Wednesday 6th December

Abraham

Genesis 12:1-7, 15:1-6

He took him outside and said, ‘Look up at the sky and count the stars, if you can. Just so shall your descendants be.’ Abram put his faith in the Lord, who credited it to him as an act of righteousness.

Abraham was the first of the great leaders whose family of faith traces forward to Jesus. His name means ‘father’ and he is known as the first of the patriarchs. Abraham was called by the God of Israel to begin a new nation of believers. He teaches us that God is calling us, and that our response should be love and trust.

Dear Father God, may we be faithful to your ways and wait for your blessings. Amen.



Thursday 7th December

Sarah

Genesis 18:1-15, 21:1-7

They said to him, ‘Where is your wife Sarah?’ and he said ‘There, in the tent.’ Then one said, ‘I will surely return to you in due season, and your wife Sarah shall have a son... Is anything too wonderful for the Lord?’

Abraham’s cherished wife Sarah travelled with him and enduring all the hardships and uncertainties of his strange journey, but the greatest trial of her life was her inability to have children, for she lived in a society that looked down on women who did not have children. But God rewarded Sarah for her faithfulness, and joy and laughter came her way when she no longer expected it.

Thank you that you are a God of surprises, and that nothing is too wonderful for you. Thank you that you love to bless your people with joy and wonders. Amen.

Friday 8th December

Jacob

Genesis 25:19-28, 27:1-29, 28:10-22

Then he had a dream: a ladder rested on the ground, with its top reaching to the heavens; and God's messengers were going up and down on it. And there was the Lord standing beside him and saying, 'I, the Lord, am the God of your forefather Abraham and the God of Isaac; the land on which you are lying I will give to you and your descendants.... Know that I am with you; I will protect you wherever you go. I will never leave you until I have done what I promised you.'

Conflict and deception within his family caused Jacob to flee his homeland, but on this journey Jacob encountered God, who pledged to Jacob what was promised to his grandfather Abraham years before. And, like his grandfather, Jacob accepted God, worshiping and following Him as the one true God.

Dear God, our lives can sometimes be very complicated, just like Jacob's was. May we feel your presence and your protection, and help us to make the right decisions. Amen.



Saturday 9th December

Leah and Rachel

Genesis 29, 30:1-24, 35:16-20

Now Laban had two daughters; the name of the elder was Leah, and the name of the younger was Rachel. Leah's eyes were lovely, and Rachel was graceful and beautiful. Jacob loved Rachel; so...Laban said 'It is better that I give her to you than that I should give her to any other man.'

The women chosen to create a people of God with the patriarchs often had fascinating stories themselves. The two sisters, Leah and Rachel, who both became Jacob's wives, undoubtedly led bittersweet lives. However, they are the matriarchs of the House of Israel for they gave to the world the twelve men who led the twelve tribes of Israel.

Dear Jesus, as we prepare to celebrate your coming, we read in Rachel and Leah a story that speaks of life being good and bad. Thank you that you are with us always; please help us to learn to appreciate the good in life, even when it is difficult to see. Amen.

Sunday 10th December

Joseph

Genesis 37-46

Now Jacob loved Joseph more than any other of his children...and he had made him a long robe with sleeves. But when his brothers saw that their father loved him more than all his brothers, they hated him, and could not speak peaceably to him...But Joseph said to them, 'Even though you intended to do harm to me, God intended it for good, in order to preserve a numerous people, as he is doing today.'

Joseph was destined to leave Jacob to bring the people of Israel into Egypt where they would realise God's plan and love for them. Joseph trusted in God's providence and faithfulness, and became a great and wise leader.

Dear Jesus, you teach us to forgive one another, even when we have been wronged. Help us to be forgiving, as Joseph was able to forgive his brothers. Amen.



Monday 11th December

Moses

Exodus 14:15-16,15:20-21,16:1-3,31:18

When the Lord descended upon Mount Sinai, to the top of the mountain, the Lord summoned Moses to the top of the mountain, and Moses went up...When God finished speaking with Moses on Mount Sinai, he gave him the two tablets of the covenant, tablets of stone, written with the finger of God.

Moses is the central figure of the Old Testament, the great servant and mediator of God, who in many ways prefigures Christ. Moses brought the Jewish people out of slavery in Egypt, and God gave him the Ten Commandments.

Dear God, Moses was faced with many frightening and hard challenges. Please help us to be brave and tenacious when we too face difficulties. Amen.

Tuesday 12th December

Ruth

Ruth

**But Ruth said, ‘Do not press me to leave you or to turn back from following you!
Where you go, I will go; where you lodge, I will lodge; your people shall be my
people, and your God my God.**

Over the course of many years the Israelites settled in Canaan. This was the land Moses was leading them to before his death, the land God had promised. There were times of war and famine, but also times of peace. The book of Ruth is set during this period of history, when Israel had no king but several leaders, servants of the Lord, who ruled temporarily. Ruth’s commitment to Naomi echoes Israel’s covenant with God, and Ruth and Boaz are the great-grandparents of King David.

Dear Lord, show us how to be faithful to you, as Ruth was to Naomi. Help us also to be generous to others as Boaz was to Ruth. Amen.



Wednesday 13th December

Samuel

1 Samuel 1:1-11, 3:1-20

**Samuel was lying down in the temple of the Lord, where the ark of God was.
Now the Lord came and stood there, calling as before, ‘Samuel! Samuel!’ And
Samuel said, ‘Speak, for your servant is listening.’**

Samuel is an important figure in the Old Testament because he represents Israel’s transition from being twelve tribes to a kingdom of the house of David. He became the guardian of the sacred traditions in order to keep Israel from abandoning its holy practices as it took on the ways of the world. A prophet, priest and the last judge, Samuel began life as a longed-for child, the son of a woman who, like many other key characters in the Jesse tree, hoped and waited for years to be blessed with a child. And, like many others, when Samuel was still a child, the guiding hand of God was clearly upon him.

Speak, Lord, and may we be like Samuel, ever attentive to Your word and listening for Your voice, that we might truly be your servants. Amen.

Thursday 14th December

David

1 Samuel 16, 17:1-50

**I will praise you with the harp
for your faithfulness, O my God;
I will sing praises to you with the lyre,
O Holy One of Israel.**

One of Jesus' most celebrated ancestors, David was chosen by God to become king and anointed by Samuel. He had a remarkable life. He was a wise and caring king but sometimes, hounded by controversy and heady with power, he made mistakes. When he did, he looked for God's forgiveness and began again. In his psalms we see both his struggles and his immeasurable faith in God.

Dear God, thank you that through the poetry of the psalms we too can find you. May we be inspired by David's words to seek your forgiveness, and to sing of your greatness and love. Amen.



Friday 15th December

Solomon

1 Kings 3:4-28, 5:9, 6:7:10:1-13

'And now, O Lord my God, you have made your servant King in place of my father David, although I am only a little child. Give your servant therefore an understanding mind to govern your people, able to discern between good and evil; for who can govern this your great people?'

While Jesus was born into abject poverty and powerlessness, centuries before his birth, his ancestor King Solomon possessed vast wealth and power. He reigned in a time of peace, and constructed the magnificent temple that David had hoped to build. However, Solomon is most revered for his wisdom and his understanding heart. And so, Solomon's story is a story of God's blessings; he is remembered for the gifts God gave him.

Dear Lord, thank you for the example of the good king Solomon. May we too be blessed with the gifts of discernment and wisdom. Amen.

Saturday 16th December

Elijah

1Kings 17:1-24,18:20-46,2Kings2:1-13

Then Elijah said to him, ‘Stay here; for the Lord has sent me to the Jordan.’ As they continued walking and talking, a chariot of fire and horses of fire separated the two of them, and Elijah ascended in a whirlwind into heaven.

The prophet Elijah came from the desert highlands of Gilead at a time when Israel’s leaders were choosing false gods over the true God. He was called by God to stand up to the leaders and dispel the myths of false gods, performing many miracles and preaching. He is mentioned many times in the New Testament in relation to Jesus; some people thought Jesus was Elijah returned, and at the Transfiguration it was Elijah, along with Moses, who appeared with Jesus.

Dear God, sometimes it requires clarity and strength to do the right thing and work for you in this world. Help us to appreciate Elijah’s courage and to find our own when we need it. Amen.



Sunday 17th December

Isaiah

Isaiah 6:1-13; 9:1,5-6

Then one of the seraphs flew to me, holding a live coal that had been taken from the altar with a pair of tongs. The seraph touched my mouth with it and said, ‘Now that this has touched your lips, your guilt has departed and your sin is blotted out.’ Then I heard the voice of the Lord saying, ‘Whom shall I send, and who will go for us?’ And I said, ‘Here am I; send me!’”

In a vision Isaiah saw the Lord sitting on a throne, being attended by seraphim. He feared he was unworthy and of unclean sinful lips, but one of the seraphs touched his lips with the coal, forgiving his sins and enabling him to go forth and deliver the Word of God. He became a great prophet, his words filled with wisdom and hope for the promised saviour. Although the people of his time did not listen, later people took them to heart.

Lord, through Isaiah’s prophesies we learn that the people who walked in darkness saw a great light. May we continue to shine that light in today’s darkness. Amen.

Monday 18th December

Nehemiah

Nehemiah 1; 2; 3; 4; 7; 12:27-43

The king said to me, ‘What do you request?’ So I prayed to the God of heaven. Then I said to the king, ‘If it pleases the king, I ask that you send me to Judah, to the city of my ancestors’ graves, so that I may rebuild it.’

During the Jews’ exile in Babylon they were assimilated into Babylonian culture, so there was great danger of losing their identity as Jews, and hence of losing sight of the true God. Once they were able to return to Jerusalem, they faced a devastated city and a damaged identity, and it was here that Nehemiah began his work. He reconstructed the wall surrounding Jerusalem, and he rebuilt the integrity of the Jews, urging them to change their ways and return to the true faith.

Please help us Lord to face our challenges, knowing that you will give us the strength we need to succeed. Give us compassionate hearts and alert minds to see when others need us to help them with their challenges too. Amen.



Tuesday 19th December

Jonah

Jonah

Then Jonah prayed to the Lord his God from the belly of the fish, saying, ‘I called to the Lord out of my distress, and he answered me; out of the belly of Sheol I cried, and you heard my voice.’

The prophet Jonah lived about two hundred years after kings David and Solomon. Jonah can be seen as prefiguring Christ: as Jesus says in St Matthew’s gospel, just as Jonah spent three days in the belly of the fish, so will the Son of Man spend three days in the heart of the earth. Jonah’s story is one of God’s great mercy and compassion for those who truly seek repentance and forgiveness.

Father God, like Jonah, we are far from perfect. We make mistakes, we get angry and frustrated, and we run away from difficulties. Thank you that you know us better than we know ourselves and that you are always patient with us. Amen.

Wednesday 20th December

Esther

Esther

‘Remember, O Lord; make yourself known in this time of our affliction, and give me courage. Put eloquent speech in my mouth before the lion, and turn his heart to hate the man who is fighting against us, so that there may be an end of him. But save us by your hand, and help me, who am alone and have no helper but you, O Lord.’

Esther’s story is set in a sumptuous palace in the Persian Empire, during the fifth century. It is a story filled with plots and counterplots, but at its heart is a brave and intelligent girl who shows great courage and saves the Jewish people from the machinations of Haman. To do this, Esther relies totally on God, praying to him for courage and asking that he save her from her fear.

God, who took on our human frailty, we thank you that we can live in safety. We pray for all those who are not safe today, that they may be encouraged in the midst of their fear. Amen.



Thursday 21st December

Daniel

Daniel 5-6

‘My God sent his angel and shut the lions’ mouths so that they would not hurt me, because I was found blameless before him; and also before you, O King, I have done no wrong.’

Daniel served the kings of Babylon, interpreting dreams for the king and rising to a position of honour. But he remained faithful to God despite his Babylonian exile, and served as an inspiring witness; his story of courage and triumph was used several hundred years later when the Jewish people were once more being persecuted, to encourage them to maintain their faith and hope in God.

Dear God our loving Father, when Daniel was in the lions’ den he would have felt scared and hopeless. We have times when we feel like this too. Help us to remember, as Daniel did, that we can depend on your continuing love. Amen.

Friday 22nd December

Elizabeth and Zechariah

Luke 1:5-14

Then there appeared to him an angel of the Lord, standing at the right side of the altar of incense. When Zechariah saw him, he was terrified; and fear overwhelmed him. But the angel said to him, ‘Do not be afraid, for your prayer has been heard. Your wife Elizabeth will bear you a son, you will name him John.’

John the Baptist is yet another longed for child born to parents advanced in years. So great was their surprise at this unexpected news that Zechariah was rendered speechless. When the angel Gabriel foretells John’s father of his birth, John is likened to Elijah; in true prophetic spirit, the unborn John leapt within his mother’s womb when Mary and the unborn Jesus approached them.

Thank you God that you love to surprise us. Like Elizabeth and Zechariah, we await the arrival of a very special child. Be with us in these last days of preparation. Amen.



Saturday 23rd December

Mary

Luke 1:26-38

Then Mary said, ‘Here am I, the servant of the Lord; let it be with me according to your word.’ Then the angel departed from her.

Mary was a very young woman when she began her extraordinary journey. Her unexpected encounter with an angel led her, though terrified, to an absolute commitment to God’s will, when she said yes to becoming the mother of the child Jesus. She is our greatest model for accepting God’s plan for our lives.

My soul magnifies the Lord, and my spirit rejoices in God my Saviour, for he has looked with favour on the lowliness of his servant. His mercy is for those who fear him from generation to generation. He has shown strength with his arm; he has scattered the proud in the thoughts of their hearts. He has brought down the powerful from their thrones, and lifted up the lowly; he has filled the hungry with good things, and sent the rich away empty. He has helped his servant Israel, in remembrance of his mercy, according to the promise he made to our ancestors, to Abraham and to his descendants forever. Amen

Sunday 24th December

Joseph

Matthew 1:18-25

An angel of the Lord appeared to him in a dream and said, ‘Joseph, son of David, do not be afraid to take Mary as your wife, for the child conceived in her is from the Holy Spirit. She will bear a son, and you are to name him Jesus, for he will save his people from their sins.’

Joseph, a son of David, is the last link on our chain of Jesus’ ancestors stretching back to the beginning of the world. He trusted God that Mary had conceived a child through the Holy Spirit, a child who would bring salvation to all. He was the protector, guide and nurturer of the child Jesus, and was so important in His early life that he was guided by an angel when critical decisions were to be made.

Dear God our creator, help us to listen to Your words as Joseph did. May our trust in you never waver, and may you give us the courage we need to do what you ask of us. Amen.



Monday 25th December

Jesus

Luke 2:1-20

‘Do not be afraid; for see – I am bringing you good news of great joy for all the people: to you is born this day in the city of David a Saviour, who is the Messiah, the Lord. This will be a sign for you: you will find a child wrapped in bands of cloth and lying in a manger.’

Four thousand years of waiting for the Messiah has come to an end. Abraham and Sarah’s faithfulness, Rachel and Leah’s sacrifices, Joseph’s dreams, David’s repentance, Isaiah’s prophecies, Jonah’s trials, Esther’s courage....all lead to the moment in Bethlehem when the Christ Child is born.

Your Advent journey through the Old Testament characters has brought you here: the miraculous night when the darkness is filled with angels’ light; when a child is born for us, a son is given to us.

Glory to God in the highest heaven, and on earth peace to those on whom his favour rests! Amen.



Creation



Adam and Eve

Noah



Abraham



Sarah



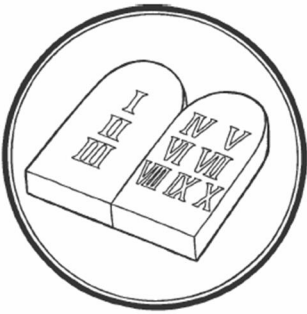
Jacob

Rachel
and Leah



Joseph





Moses



Ruth



Samuel



David



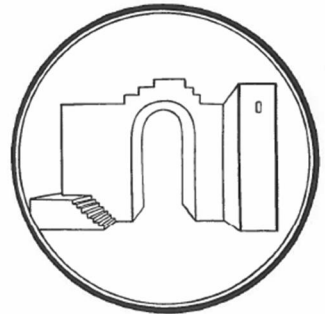
Solomon



Elijah



Isalah



Nehemiah



Jonah



Esther



Daniel

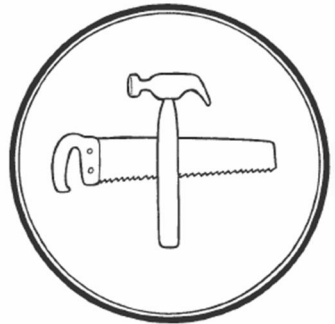


Elizabeth
and Zechariah



Mary

Joseph



Jesus