



Resource Centre

# From our Churches

*Author:*

*Church:* Zion Mennonite Church, Swift Current

*Date:*

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## The Jesse Tree:

Advent Children's Stories

### Needed:

- People to be characters
- A branch in a can [*remains in church*]
- Smaller branches in decorated soup cans for children's symbols

### Explanation:

One person introduces the characters and theme to the children, as well as closing the "story" and handing out symbols to the children at the end. One symbol is hung on the tree at the church. The character can read the following scripts or tell it in his/her own way, adding or deleting whatever feels best and suitable to the group of children expected to be listening.

### First Advent – Introduction:

- Do any of you know what a family tree is?
- Well, it's a list of people's names in your family, both living and those from a long time ago, like your great, great, great grandparents [*show examples*].
- Well, in the Old Testament, the people of Israel were given a very special promise. Out of the stump of Jesse, the tree of Jesse, or the family of Jesse [*who lived in Bethlehem*] would come a branch, a person, who would be the Messiah and Saviour – bringing the people a new way of life. This Messiah was Jesus. Jesse is a long, long time ago relative of Jesus.
- The tree that I brought today [*branch in a decorated can*], The Tree of Jesse is going to be our symbol of the special promise of the coming of Jesus. On this tree, we're going to hang more symbols of other people who came before Jesus and were given special promises by God as well.
- We're going to meet our first person today. Abraham is here this morning, and he's going to tell you his story. Listen to what he has to say, and maybe you can remember what special promise God gave to Abraham.

## ABRAHAM

Good morning, everyone. Today I would like to tell you about some big surprises that I've had in my life. These aren't ordinary surprises, either. They are surprises from God!

Long ago, I was living happily with my wife Sarah in the city of Haran. We were ordinary people, living with our parents, trying to be good people, and having a pretty good life. Then one day, out of the blue, God told me to get up and move. Just like that! He said, "Abraham, I want you to move. Go away from your parents and their household. Go away from your comfortable life, here in Haran. Pack everything up and go. I'll show you the land I have for you later."

What kind of instructions were those?! It was as if your parents would say to you, "We're going on a trip, so pack your suitcase. We don't know where we're going, though. We'll find out when we get there." And then you all get in the car and start driving!

For us, it was a very difficult decision. We had many cattle and sheep and lots of things to move. Life was good for us here in Haran. Why would we want to leave to go to an unknown strange place? Well, Sarah and I talked about it for a long time. Finally, we decided that we would trust God, and we would move.

So, we packed up headed off for...well, for the place that God said he would show to us and give us for our new home. Wow, was that ever strange! We travelled, and we travelled, and we travelled. For years we travelled. Sometimes it was hot and uncomfortable. Sometimes there were wild animals attacking our herds of animals. Sometimes, we were ready to just give up and go home. But there was one thing that kept us going – God's promise.

When God spoke to me that one day and told me we were supposed to move away, he also made a promise. This was another surprise. I was a regular sort of guy, no saint or super-religious person. Sarah and I loved God and wanted to follow him, just like others in our family. We didn't think we were particularly special. So it came as a pretty big surprise when God chose Sarah and me for a special promise. God said: "I will make you and your children and grandchildren and great grandchildren and great, great grandchildren into a great nation. You will have so many descendents, they will be like the stars in the sky – so many, that they can't be counted. People everywhere will remember you and know about you. Because of you and your family, people all over the world will learn to follow me and love me." Now that's quite a promise to a simple couple like us!

As time went on, though, it became harder and harder to keep trusting in God's promise. There was one very basic problem – we didn't have any children. How were we supposed to have as many descendents as there are stars in the sky, if we didn't have one baby? And Sarah and I certainly were not getting any younger. When God first made his promise to us, we were young and energetic, and looking forward to having a big fine family. But that family of babies just wasn't happening. Did God make a mistake? Did God forget the promise?

We got older and older, and God kept reminding us of the promise. Some days it was very hard to keep believing God. Then one day, there was yet another surprise. Sarah came to me and said, "Abraham, Abraham! God was right! It's a miracle! We're going to have a baby!" I couldn't believe what I was hearing. After all these many years of waiting

and wondering, and trusting and doubting – finally, God’s promise of a great family was starting to come true.

When our baby son was born, we named him Isaac, which means laughter, and we rejoiced in God’s goodness to us. This tiny baby was the beginning of the fulfilment of the promise that God made to us many years ago. We didn’t know how it would all turn out – one baby is a long way from having descendants as numerous as the stars in the sky – but we knew that God was good, and that God will keep his promises.

- **Symbol:** A cloud/sky shape on which children can draw stars or stick on their own. A larger one is made for the church tree.

## **SECOND ADVENT – INTRODUCTION:**

- Last Sunday, we heard Abraham tell about some surprises he and Sarah had from God. God told them to move to another land, and promises that they would have as many descendents – grandchildren and great grandchildren, and great, great grandchildren – as there are stars in the sky; so many that they cannot be counted. Abraham and Sarah finally had one baby when they were very old – their only child. That one baby was the beginning of God’s promise to them.
- Isaac had two sons, Jacob and Esau, and each of them had children, and so the family of Abraham and Sarah grew larger and larger. After many years, there were too many of them to count. God had kept his promise of making a great nation of the people of Abraham.
- This great nation became known as the people of Israel, or the Israelites. They had many leaders who tried to help them be followers of God. We are going to meet one today. See if you can guess who it is, as he tells his story.

*[If Moses is not comfortable with starting out as a mystery guest, alter introduction so that he is named.]*

## **MOSES**

Hi! I’m glad to be here today. I’m going to tell you a few things about myself as clues, and you see if you can guess who I am.

1. When I was born, my parents were afraid because of the soldiers who were supposed to kill any baby boys.
2. My parents hid me in their house as long as they could, but finally I was too big, and my cries were too loud. So, my mother put me in a basket and hid me among the reeds by the river’s edge, with my sister hiding close by to watch.
3. When Pharaoh’s daughter came to bathe, she found me and decided she would take care of me as her own child.
4. My sister Miriam came out of the hiding place, and said she knew a woman who would care for the baby until he was old enough to go live at the palace. Miriam ran to get my mother – and I ended up safely in my home until I went to live with Pharaoh’s daughter.

*[It will not take all these clues for the children to guess that the guest is Moses. When they do guess correctly, acknowledge the answer, and use the rest of the clues to briefly review the events of Moses' birth.]*

From the time of my birth God was with me, and seemed to have something special for me. When I found out what that was, I was living in the country of Midian, far from Egypt, because I was in trouble in Egypt. I was married, had a child, and was beginning to get used to life in Midian. But just as things were starting to get comfortable, God entered the picture.

I was out in the hills one day, tending the flocks, when I saw the strangest thing – a bush was on fire, but it didn't burn up. It just kept burning and burning. I went closer to see what this was all about, and then, I heard a voice calling from the bush! The voice said, "Moses! Moses!"

Can you imagine how you would feel if a voice called to you from a burning bush? I was scared! But I managed to answer, "Here I am." The voice spoke again: "Don't come any closer. And take off your sandals – You are standing on holy ground."

"Oh no!" I thought. "What if this is God speaking to me!" And sure enough, I was right. The voice continued speaking, telling me that it was God, the God who had made the promise to Abraham and Sarah. I was very afraid, and wondered what God could possibly want with me, a simple herdsman.

"I have a very important job for you," God said. "I have seen that the Israelites are suffering greatly in Egypt, and I want you to go tell Pharaoh to let them go."

I was astonished! There was no way I could do something like that. I didn't know how to make Pharaoh let them go; I wasn't anyone important; I couldn't speak well in public; I didn't even know God's name! But God didn't accept my excuses. Instead, he told me over and over that he would be with me, and he would help me. And if anyone asked about his name, I should say, I AM sent me.

God and I had a long talk that afternoon. I tried to think of all the reasons why I shouldn't have to do this, and God kept telling me that I could do it because he would be with me. Finally, I gave up and agreed to go to Egypt. I still didn't want to, but I tried to believe that God would really be with me and help me.

And God was with me. Just as he had kept his promise to Abraham and Sarah that they would have a son, God kept his promise to be with me and his people of Israel. He worked in many wonderful ways to bring us out of Egypt, far from Pharaoh, and finally, to the land he had promised to Abraham and Sarah. There are some really good stories about how God did that, but we'll have to save those for another day.

Along the way, God reminded us of his promises, and told us that we were his special people. God was making his promise of a great nation come true through us. To help us live as God's people, God gave us the law, a special gift to guide and help us, so that we would know what was the good way to live. It wasn't always easy to be the people of God. We had lots of fights, and did lots of things wrong, but God was always with us. God had promised to be with us and to help us, and we could trust in God to keep his promises.

- **Symbol: A burning bush**

### THIRD ADVENT – INTRODUCTION:

[may use only one character if two are too long]

- Today, we are going to meet two more people from the Old Testament who trusted in God and were part of his promise. The first is Ruth, and then her great grandson.

### RUTH

Good morning! Today I would like to tell you a little bit about myself.

I'm an outsider, you know. The other people who are part of the Jesse tree stories are all part of the family of Abraham, but I'm not. I'm from Moab, and not from Israel. But even though I am an outsider, God had a special place for me.

Long ago, Naomi, her husband, and their two sons moved to Moab because there was not enough food in Israel. Their sons got married to Orpah and me, and we lived happily together. But then life got hard – first, Naomi's husband died, and then my husband died, and then Orpah's husband died. We three women didn't know what to do. Naomi was especially unhappy, because she was far from home, and didn't have any aunts or uncles or cousins to help her.

One day, Naomi decided that she would go back to Israel. She had some cousins there who could help her. Naomi told Orpah and me that we should go back to our own families, and stay in Moab. Orpah agreed, but I said, "No way!" I loved Naomi. I wasn't going to leave her. I wanted to stay with her and become part of her people and worship her God. I was so happy when Naomi said it was okay for me to go to Israel with her.

When we got there, I had to work very hard to find enough food for us. But I loved Naomi so much, that it was worth it. While I was working in the fields, gathering up leftover grain, I met Naomi's cousin Boaz. Well, we got to know each other better, and after a while, we got married. That was great! Now Boaz and I could have a home and Naomi could live with us.

After we were married for a while, we had a baby boy. Naomi was so glad that finally she could be a grandmother. After so many hard times, God was really blessing us.

Boaz and I named our son Obed. When Obed grew up and got married, he had a son too, and his name was Jesse [*this tree is named after that Jesse*]. Later, Jesse had a son who became the greatest king of Israel. His name was...well, here he come now. I'll let my great grandson introduce himself to you.

- **Symbol: Wheat sheaf**

## DAVID

Hi everybody! I'm David. I always feel kind of funny when people call me the greatest king of Israel. It was because God was with me and helped me, that I was to do a lot of important things.

When I was young, I was a shepherd. I helped my Mom and Dad and tried to do the right things. Sometimes I made mistakes, just like you do sometimes. But I loved God and wanted to follow Him. God was with me, and after all kinds of things happened – there are some great stories I could tell you! – I became king of Israel.

One night, through the prophet Nathan, God gave me a promise. You remember how God promises Abraham that his descendents would be a great nation and that God would be with them? Well, God told me that I had a special place in that promise. God would make my name great, and through me the people of Israel would have a home of their own, and not to fight any more wars with their enemies. Not only that, but God promised that the ruler of Israel would always be someone from my family one of my descendents.

When Nathan told me this, I couldn't believe it. I thought, "Why would God choose me and my family to be the rulers of his people?" But God is great, and we don't always know how God works things out. So I prayed to God: "O Lord, you are God! . But I loved God and wanted to follow Him. God was with me, and after all kinds of things happened – there are some great stories I could tell you! – I became king of Israel.

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When Nathan told me this, I couldn't believe it. I thought, "Why would God choose me and my family to be the rulers of his people?" But God is great, and we don't always know how God works things out. So I prayed to God: "O Lord, you are God! You can be trusted, and you have given this good promise to me, your servant. Now please bless me and my family, that we may always serve you, and that all people will know that you are great."

And that's the story of how the promise that God gave to Abraham was also given to me, and my descendents in a special way. So now at Christmas time, when you hear people talking about the "house and lineage of David", they are talking about the promise that was made to me and my family to be the rulers of Israel.

- **Symbol: Crown**

### FOURTH ADVENT – INTRODUCTION:

- We have been meeting people from the Old Testament who tried to be faithful followers of God. Today we are going to meet a prophet, someone who helped remind the people of Israel that they were special, and that they should follow God. His name was Isaiah.

## ISAIAH

David was a good king, and he worked hard to lead the people in the ways of God. But some of the kings that came after David were not so good. Sometimes the people of Israel forgot about God, and did bad things. God sent messengers to warn the people and remind them to follow God, but they didn't always listen. There were wars and the people suffered. Jerusalem was destroyed and the people were taken away to different countries.

One day, God spoke to me and gave me a message. God wanted me to be a prophet, and tell the people about God. So these are some of the things that I said:

*[Isaiah should speak in a preaching voice for the next section]*

“Stop doing wrong things. Learn to do right things.  
Try to be fair to other people. Help those who are sad or who are hurting.  
Help people who don't have anyone to look after them.  
Even though you have done very bad things,  
If you are sorry, God won't be angry any more.”

Your life now is sad and hard, and you feel as though you are living in darkness. But God will bring a light to show you the way.

“A child will be born for us, a child who can show us how to live.  
And this is the name for the child; Wonderful Counsellor, Mighty God,  
Everlasting Father, Prince of Peace.”

He will rule over the kingdom like David did, and life will be good again. *[End preaching]*

This promise from God encouraged the people and gave them hope. Even when times were hard, they waited and trusted in God, believing that he would soon send them this special leader.

### CONCLUSION:

At Advent, we waited for Christmas and remembered the coming of Jesus. We remembered these words from Isaiah, and the promise of God to send a special leader.

- **Symbol: A Scroll**