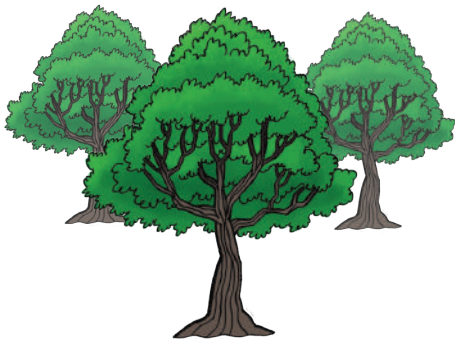


Gifts from the JESSE TREE



Sticker Fun for You and Your Family

Let's start!



Do you ever think of trees as a gift? They are one of God's most important gifts! Trees help breathe out the oxygen we need. And we are a gift to trees! We breathe out the carbon dioxide they need.

That's what Advent and Christmas are like: God gives gifts to God's People. God's People give gifts back to God. That's why in Advent we make a Jesse tree in our homes. The Jesse Tree shows the gifts of God and the gifts of God's People.

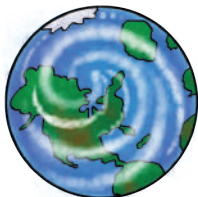
DAY 1

So, what is a Jesse Tree? A Jesse Tree is many things. First, a Jesse Tree is a way to count the days of Advent. Hang the Jesse Tree poster on the refrigerator or on a door. Then, beginning on the First Sunday of Advent, read the story for the day and then peel off the corresponding symbol ornament and stick it on the Jesse Tree poster. As the days go by more ornaments will be on the tree, leading at last to Jesus' manger.

But a Jesse Tree is more! It is also Jesus' family tree. Just as you have a family tree made up of parents and grandparents and all the people that have helped make you who you are, the Jesse Tree includes many of the events and symbols that God used over the years to bring Jesus into the world. The ornaments of the Jesse Tree also represent all the wonderful gifts that God has given us to help us grow in life and love.

Now what gifts can we give back? To God? To our family, friends, and neighbors?

The Gift of Creation



God created the heavens and the earth.

—Genesis 1:1

When St. Francis looked at the gifts of God all around, he sang for joy. “Praise God for Brother Sun! Praise God for Sister Moon!” St. Francis praised God for the wind, the song of a sparrow, the clapping of thunder, and the cool water. In return for God’s good gifts, we give the gift of care. We care for the earth when we save water. We care for the earth when we put a bottle in the recycle bin. We care for the earth when we plant a garden or turn off a light switch.

Ask your family: This week, how will we celebrate God’s gift of creation with our gift of care?

The Gift of Parents



Male and female he created them.
—Genesis 1:27

Adam means “man,” and the Bible says Eve means “mother of all the living.” Adam and Eve were our first parents! Adam and Eve were free to love God, but like all humans they needed to obey God to know how to be truly free. God gives us the gifts of choices and of teaching us how to use our freedom well.

Ask your family: What gift could we make to God this week by making one good choice together?

The Gift of Promise



I set my bow in the clouds as a sign.
—Genesis 9:13

Did you ever lose a game? Mess up a test at school? Hurt a friend? If so, what you needed was a second chance to do better. Everybody needs second chances. In the story of Noah, God gives all people a rainbow. The rainbow is a sign of God's promise to give each of us second chances. Our gift back to God is using those second chances to grow in God's love. Maybe God wants us to give a second chance to someone else!

Ask your family: When did someone give each of us a second chance?

DAY 5

The Gift of Family



***Look up at the sky and count the stars if you can.
—Genesis 15:5***

Abraham and Sarah were old. They were sad that they never had children. Then God amazed them! God said that Sarah would have a child, even though she was old enough to be a great-grandmother! God said their family would have as many people as there were stars in the sky. God gives us families so that everyone in it can be cared for—and everyone in it can care for others, too.

Ask your family: How can we care for one another even better tomorrow?

The Gift of Climbing Higher



Its top reaching to the heavens.
—Genesis 28:12

How high can we humans go? If we turn on the computer, we see: Maybe being a football star! Maybe starring in a superhero movie! These take hard work to do, and are fun to watch. But God's gift to Jacob and to us is a sign that we can always reach higher. We can walk in God's way. We can bring God's justice and peace to the earth.

Ask your family: How can we reach higher as a family this week?

The Gift of Dreams



Here comes that dreamer.

—Gen 37:19

God loves dreamers, but sometimes people don't love them at all. Joseph dreamed that God would honor him. When he told his brothers, they got jealous and mad. Six-year-old African-American Ruby Bridges dreamed of going to her local school. Some white adults were so angry they screamed at her every day. But God gave Joseph and Ruby both what they had dreamed of. This week, put on God's gift of dreams like a coat!

Ask your family: What would make the world a better place? What gift could we give to make that happen?

The Gift of Holy Places



The place where you stand is holy ground.
—Exodus 3:5

Do you have a room of your own? Maybe you only have a shelf of your own in a shared room. What makes it your special place? We find special places that are set apart in the Bible, too. Moses came to one place with a bush on fire that did not burn. Moses said, “This is holy ground.” Where do you like to get quiet and listen to God or God’s word? That’s your holy ground.

Ask your family: How can we make our Jesse tree space a holy place for us this Advent?

The Gift of Freedom



Let my people go.
—Exodus 9:1

God's people were slaves in Egypt. They worked all day without rest. God sent Moses, Aaron, and Miriam to free God's people. God wants freedom for all people! God wants all people to be able to live in peace with God, with themselves, and with others. Our gift to God is to use our freedom to help others find peace, too. We might do this by helping someone with a hard job. We might do this by speaking kind words.

Ask your family: What can we do to help each other find more freedom this week?

The Gift of Laws



God gave Moses the two tablets.
—Exodus 31:18

What rules do you not like? What rules do you like? Rules can help families live and work together. God gave God's People the Ten Commandments to show us how to live together in peace. They were so important they were put on stone. Then Jesus came and said the most important law of all was written on our hearts: Love God. Love our neighbors as we love ourselves.

Ask your family: How does our family show that we love God? How does our family show that we love our neighbors? How does our family show that we love ourselves?

The Gift of Victory



They heard the sound of the horn.
—Joshua 6:20

Did you ever help win a tough game? Did you ever do a great job on a hard school test? Did anyone help you play that game or study for that test? Winning isn't easy! God told Joshua to have all God's People blow horns together. God's People obeyed, and down came high, stone walls that were in their way. Imagine if our shouts of the good news of God could break down the walls in the way of a world at peace!

Ask your family: What good news could we share with others? How?

The Gift of Bread



Come here and have something to eat.
—Ruth 2:14

Ruth was not born in a family of God's People. Instead she chose to join them, and take care of her mother-in-law Naomi. She went to the fields to gather grain. She brought grain home for Naomi. Many years later, David was born to her family. Many, many years after that, Jesus was born to her family, too. Just like Ruth, Jesus gathered bread and fed the hungry. Even today we eat the bread that Jesus gives in the holy Mass.

Ask your family: How can we feed the hungry today?

The Gift of God's Power



God is with you.
—1 Samuel 10:1

Did you ever get a special job that made you glad and scared at the same time? Maybe the teacher chose to lead a team. Maybe your parent asked you to babysit. God chose Saul for a great job: King of Israel! Saul knew that it was a big job, and he needed God's help. God chooses each and every one of us for the greatest job of all: following Jesus to bring God's peace and love to the whole earth. Instead of a crown, God gives us grace in baptism to live like Jesus and love like Jesus, too.

Ask your family: How can we use God's strength in us to give strength to others, too?

The Gift of Being Small



You are only a youth.
—1 Samuel 17:33

It is hard to be told, “You’re too young! You’re too small!” Teams choosing players might choose the smallest last, but God has different ideas. David was just a boy when the giant Goliath fought against God’s People. Everyone thought David was too small to help, but David counted on God’s gift of strength. He won with just a slingshot and a small stone. Hunger, fear, and anger can feel like giants fighting against God’s way of love and peace.

Ask your family: What small way can we make peace for God’s world and God’s People?

The Gift of Wisdom



The king had in him the wisdom of God.
—1 Kings 3:9

Did you ever wonder what was the right thing to do? Did you ever choose wrong, and wish you had chosen something else? It's not always easy to know what's right! King Solomon prayed for just one gift from God: wisdom to know how to bring justice.

Ask your family: How can we know what's the right thing to do each day?

The Gift of a True God

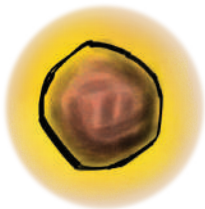


*He built the stones into an altar.
—1 Kings 18:32*

One of the best gifts of God to all people is God! That's why God called God's People to be one. That's why God sent Jesus—to show the world who God is and what God wants. Elijah built an altar on Mount Carmel to show: there is one true God who loves all the world. We all love many things, but sometimes we love them too much. We might enjoy a bit of money to spend with our friends having fun. But if we need so much money that we can't have fun without it, we love money too much.

Ask your family: How can we love God more this week?

The Gift of Purpose



“Here I am,” I said, “send me.”
—Isaiah 6:8

Sometimes we get bored! We don't want even know what we want to play! Here's a secret: you can't always have fun, but you can always have a goal. God has a goal for your life, and when you move toward that goal, you will always come closer. God's goal for Isaiah was to go say tough words to powerful people. God's call felt like a burning fire to Isaiah—he just couldn't say no.

Ask your family: What is God asking us to do or be? How can we say, “Here I am! Send me!”

The Gift of Tears



For these things I weep.
—Lamentations 1:16

Sometimes kids make fun of each other when one of them cries. That's not God's way! God gave us tears as a gift. God gave us tears to use when we are sad, and God gave tears so that others can be kind to us when we are sad. God's People were meant to be good and kind, so the prophet Jeremiah cried when they were mean and selfish instead. Jesus cried, too, when his friend died and when he knew God's People would have hard times.

Ask your family: How can we be more kind when someone is sad?

The Gift of Music

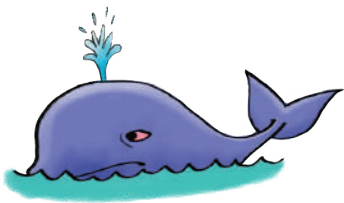


Give thanks to the Lord on the harp.
—Psalm 33:2

What's your favorite song? How do you feel when you hear it? Happy or sad? Strong or kind? Many of God's People made music: Miriam played the tambourine when God's People escaped from Egypt. David played the harp and wrote songs to God. And all God's People joined to sing the Psalms: the songs and prayers the Church still uses today.

Ask your family: What music do we love best? How can we use that music to praise God?

The Gift of Rebirth



***The Lord sent a great fish.
—Jonah 2:1***

Did you ever get a timeout? No fun! But sometimes we might need one to think things over. We might even learn to take a timeout ourselves, if we need it! Jonah was mad at God and tried to run away. The story says that a great fish came and swallowed him up. He took a timeout to learn he wanted to walk with God and do God's work.

Ask your family: How could we help each other take a “timeout” when we need to remember how we want to speak and act?

The Gift of Baptism



*A voice crying in the desert,
prepare the way of the Lord.*
—Mark 1:3

“Get ready!” Imagine you hear a voice calling to you right now! Who would be calling? Who would want you to get ready? Where would you go? What would you do? John the Baptist called out daily to God’s People: Get ready! Prepare the way of the Lord! Those who said, “Yes! We’ll answer!” came to John. He baptized them with water and promised: Someone even greater is coming to you. The Lord himself is coming to you!

Ask your family: How can we get ready for the Lord Jesus as we get ready for Christmas?

The Gift of Goodness



Hail favored one, the Lord is with you.
—Luke 1:30

God gave us a great gift when God asked Mary to be the holy Mother of Jesus! Mary wasn't rich. Mary wasn't strong. Mary wasn't famous. But Mary knew how to listen to God. And when God sent the angel Gabriel to her, Mary gave us the great gift of saying "Yes!" Mary is our holy Mother, too! She shows us that every single one of us can listen to God and say "Yes!" to God.

Ask your family: How can we listen to God? How can we say "Yes!" to God this week?

The Gift of Life



***Elizabeth, your relative,
has also conceived a son in her old age.
—Luke 1:36***

Do you remember the story of Abraham and Sarah? (See Day 5.) Once more God works a miracle of new life from wise elders. Elizabeth had never had a baby. Like Sarah, she was old enough to be a grandmother! But God worked a miracle: Elizabeth became pregnant. Her baby grew up to be the great John the Baptist. Mary comes to her so they can rejoice together in their babies, Jesus and John.

Ask your family: What great gifts has God given us this day? How can we give back to God the gift of our joy?

The Gift of Names



He asked for a tablet and wrote.

—Luke 1:63

Families love to choose special names for their children. God chose the special name for John the Baptist! God sent an angel to tell John's father, "Be sure to name the boy John." Zechariah wrote it down for all to read: "His name is John!" The name John means "God has given favor." That's like saying, "God has given a gift!" What gifts has God given you? What gifts do you give back each day? Do you like to sing? Tell jokes and laugh? Be a good friend? All of these are ways that you yourself are God's gift to the world.

Ask your family: What gift could we give to Jesus in this joyful week of Christmas?

The Gift of Work



Is he not the carpenter's son?
—Matthew 13:55

Sometimes chores might seem hard or boring, but there's usually some kind of work we like to do! Maybe you like to help wash dishes in rainbow-colored suds. Maybe you like to get out the vacuum and make a big racket while you help. Maybe you like to fold clothes that smell good right from the dryer. Jesus learned to work from Joseph, who took good care of Jesus and Mary.

Ask your family: What kind of work do we like to do together?

The Gift of Shepherds



Now there were shepherds in that region.
—Luke 2:8

Shepherds keep their sheep safe. The sheep can eat and drink and sleep without worrying about danger! Long ago, God chose shepherds to hear the good news of the baby Jesus. God's angels told the shepherds, "He is the one who will bring all God's People safely home." Who keeps watch over you? Who keeps you safe? No matter who else watches over you, know that God watches over you to love you and protect you every day.

Ask your family: Can we sing "Silent Night" together? (Remember God's loving care when you sing, "Sleep in heavenly peace!")

The Gift of Wonder



They were overjoyed at seeing the star.
—Matthew 2:10

Do you like to look at the stars at night? People all over the world love the stars. Artists paint the stars. Scientists study the stars. Travelers even find their way by the stars. Long ago wise rulers, called the Magi, traveled to find a newborn king. They followed a star to find him. They came to a manger and there they saw him: baby Jesus.

Ask your family: How can we come closer to Jesus this week?

The Gift of a Child



***Today in the city of David a savior
has been born for you.***

—Luke 2:11

Those who love you will tell you that the day of your birth was a gift from God. Long ago the baby Jesus was born. The day of his birth was the greatest gift of all from God. God gave Jesus to love us. God gave Jesus to show us what God is really like. God gave Jesus to care for all the people in the world.

Ask your family: What happened on the day I was born? What was the best part of that day for you?



And finally....



Now your Jesse Tree is done, and Christmas is here. Now you can see all the gifts that God has given to God's People! Christmas is a great time to open gifts! It's also a great time to give gifts. All Advent long you and your family have practiced how to give gifts to God and God's People. Now that it is Christmas, you can give one gift more: a gift of thanks.

Ask your family: How can we thank God for all the good gifts God has given us? Merry Christmas!