

The Jesse Tree
Advent Devotional 2020
drawings by Leilani Pierson

We hope you'll enjoy using this year's Advent Devotional guide. It's styled after the Jesse Tree, an artistic depiction that started appearing in the woodcuts, stained glass windows and manuscripts of the church as early as the 11th century. The Jesse Tree celebrates God keeping his promises from Creation until the Advent of Jesus.

Each day we'll read a part of that story, accompanied by art that represents it and a simple prayer.



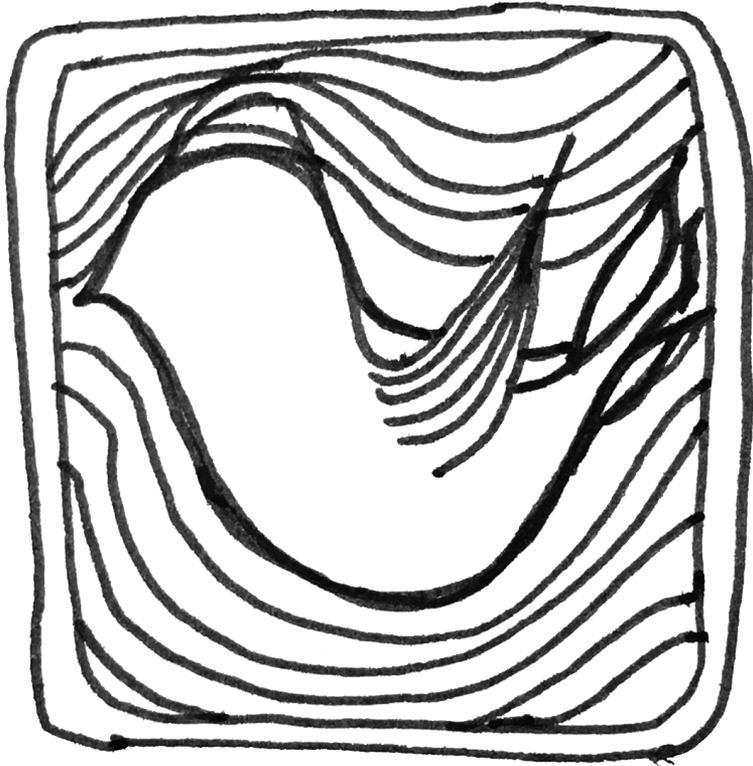


Tuesday, December 1 - Tree

Jesse was the father of King David, who was one of the greatest kings of God's people. As great as he was, though, his legacy was stained with poor decisions and eventually, Israel was destroyed by foreign invaders. Into that devastation, the prophet Isaiah said that one day, God would send a king from Jesse's lineage who would be the True King of the world, and he would establish the justice and peace the world longs for.

Isaiah 11:1-9

Father, thank you that you speak your promises into the worst times of our lives. Help us to hear them and believe. Amen.

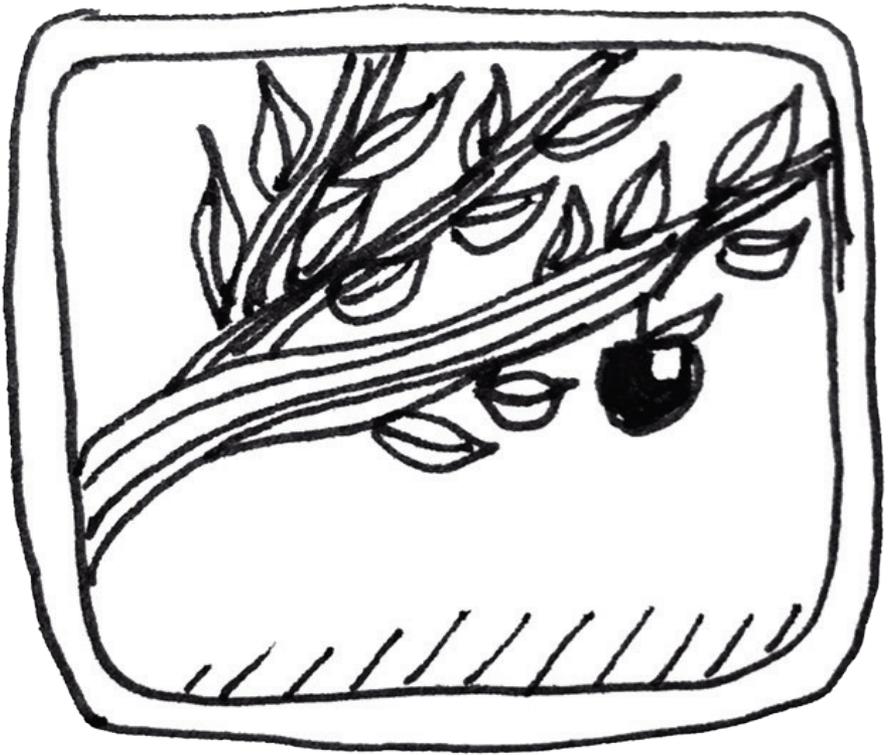


Wednesday, December 2 - Dove

In the beginning, God already was. The opening verses of Scripture picture him like a bird, hovering over the waters of chaos, ready to create. He made the world as the theater of his glory, and set people in it to worship and walk with him and to tend the world together in justice and peace. It was very good.

Genesis 1.1-2.3

Father, thank you that you made this world very good, and that you made us in your image so that we could love you and know you and be loved and known by you. Help us to never forget this is how things started. Amen.

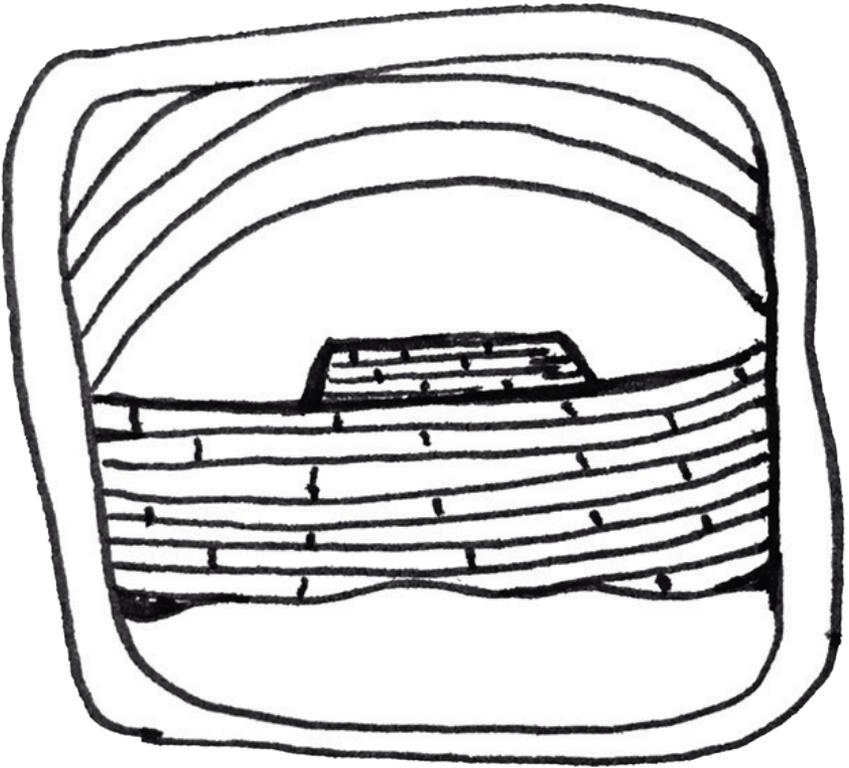


Thursday, December 3 - Tree with Fruit

Our first parents, Adam and Eve, believed the worst lie in the history of the world. They believed that God wasn't good, and that they could do a better job of being god than he could. So they took the fruit and ate it. That's how sin entered into God's good world. It started messing everything up. But even in the middle of all that mess and sadness, God made a promise that one day he would make everything right again through one of Eve's descendents.

Genesis 3

Father, you know it wasn't just Adam and Eve. We believe the same dumb lie. We think we can do better than you, too, and we make all kinds of bad decisions just like they did. We don't love you and each other like we should. We're guilty, too. Please forgive us because of what Eve's greater son, Jesus, did for us. Amen.

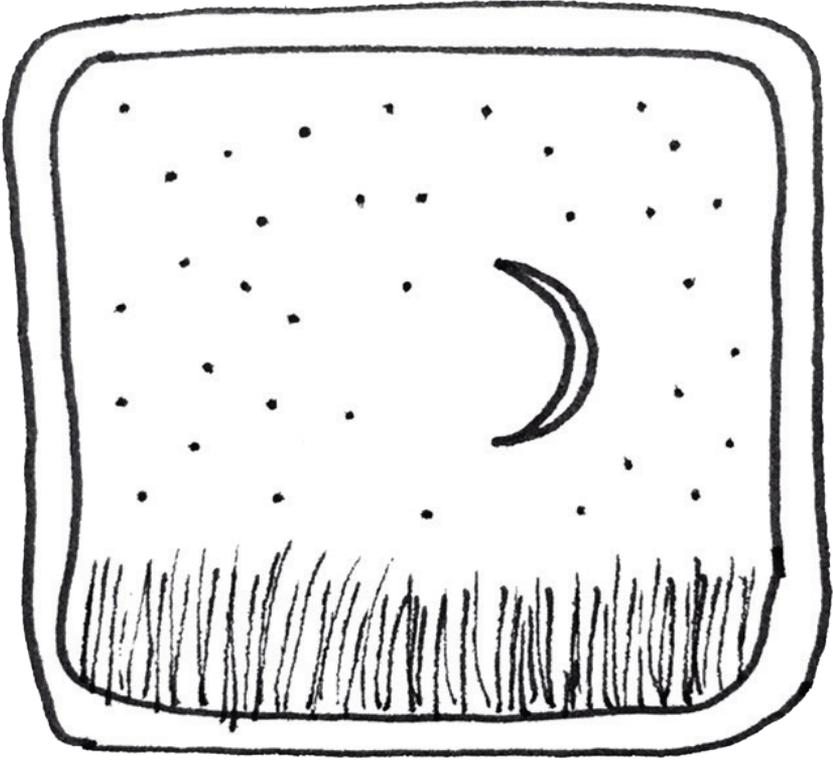


Friday, December 4 - Rainbow+Ark

Humans had become incredibly violent and corrupt. God decided to put a stop to it and start over with a new family. He sent a flood to wash the earth clean, but kept Noah and his family safe in an ark. After the flood was over, God promised Noah that he'd never destroy the earth again. He painted a rainbow onto the clouds, and he said it would always be a sign of the promise he made.

Genesis 6:11-7:24 and 9:8-17

Father, we know that the violence and corruption started back up again soon after the flood. Our world is in bad shape. But you've kept your promise, and the judgment we deserve didn't fall on our heads. Help us to remember that you always keep your promises, even when it ends up costing you everything. Amen.

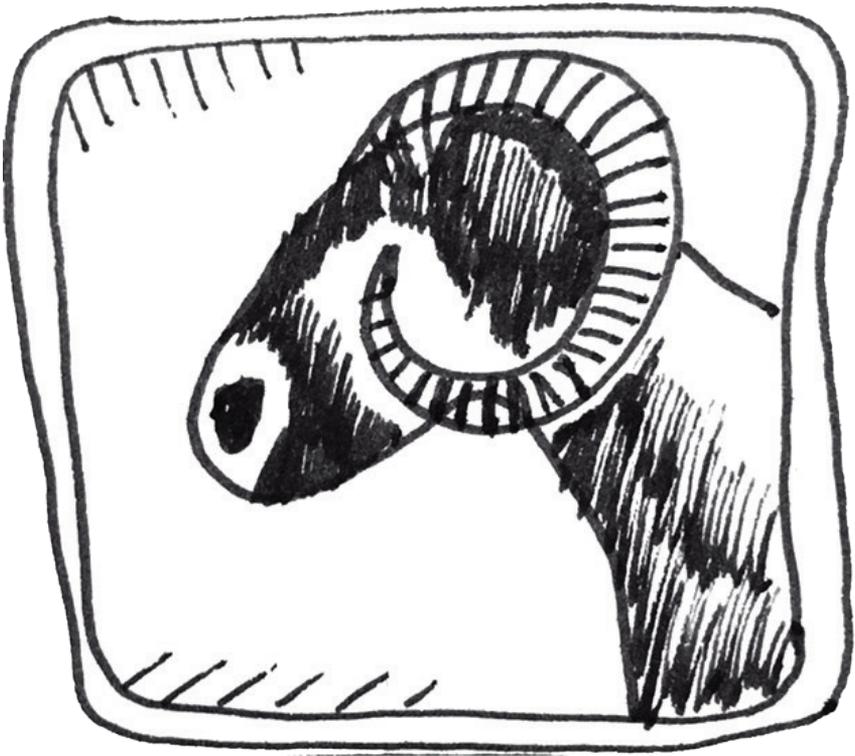


Saturday, December 5 - Field of Stars

Even though they had no kids, and were far past the age of being able to have them, God made a promise to Abraham and Sarah. He told them he would make of them a great nation, and that through their family, he would bless all the families of the earth. Of course, they struggled to believe that could really be true. One night, God took Abraham outside under the stars and told him to count them. God told him the innumerable stars were a picture of just how big Abraham's family would be one day. While he was looking at the stars, Abraham finally believed that what God told him was really true

Genesis 12:1-3 and 15:1-6

Father, give us the gift of faith. Help us to believe your promises. Help us to believe what you say is true even when we can't see it right now. Amen.

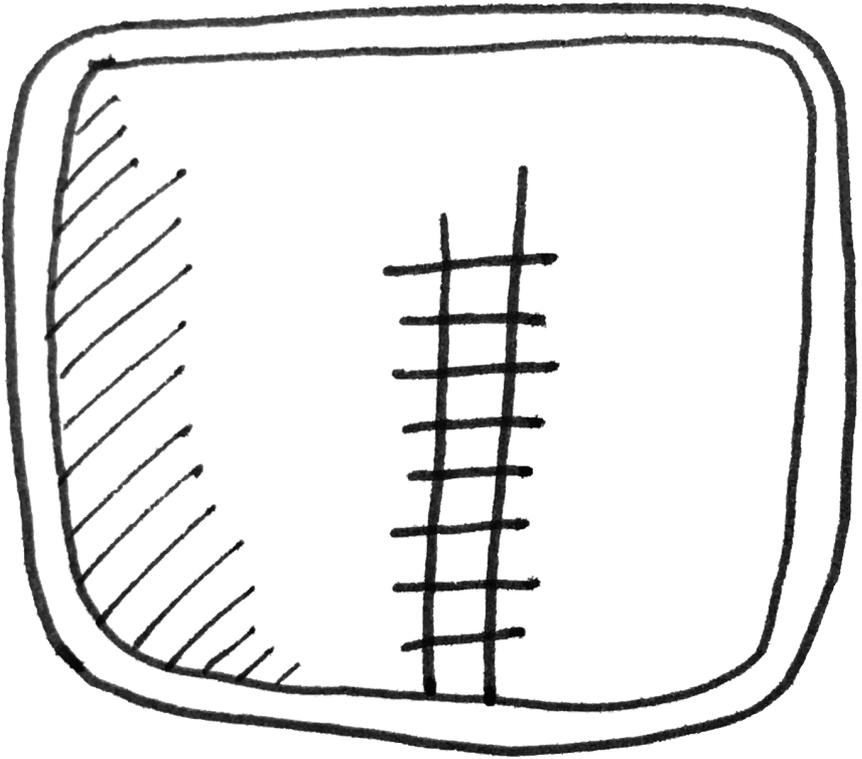


Sunday, December 6 - Ram

God kept his promise to Abraham and Sarah and gave them a son named Isaac. Then, he tested Abraham's faith by asking him to sacrifice Isaac on an altar. Of course, God dramatically stopped Abraham from following through. He provided, instead, a ram for the sacrifice.

Genesis 22.1-19

Father, thanks for providing a substitute for Isaac and making it so that Abraham didn't have to lose his only son. We know that story is a pointer to you. You're the Father who actually did give up his only Son as a substitute for us. That's how much you love us. Thank you. Amen.



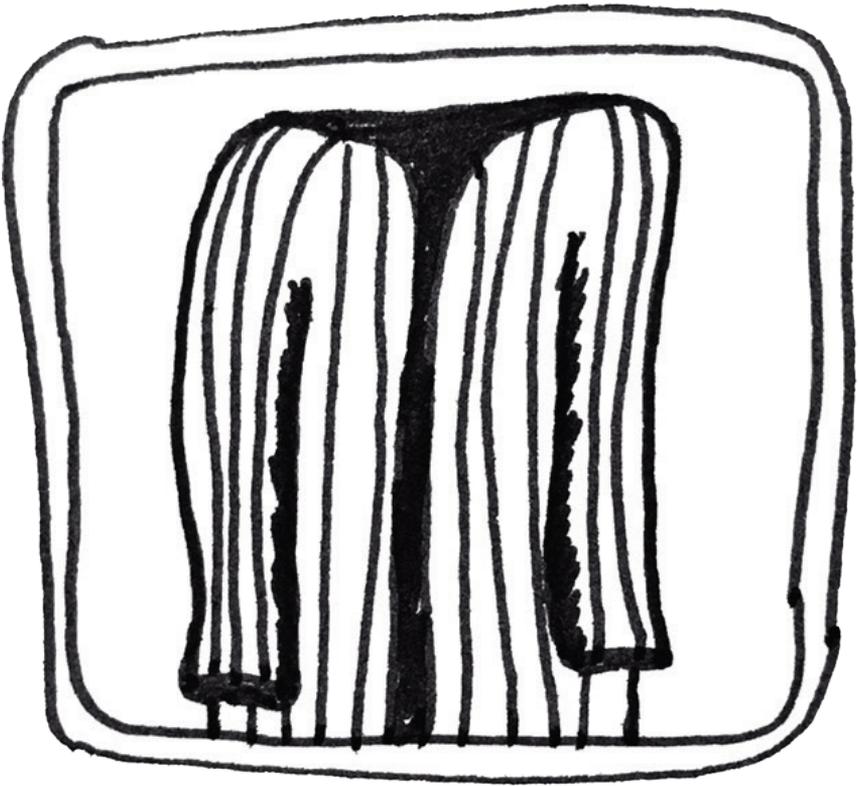
Monday, December 7 - Ladder

Isaac's youngest son, Jacob, went to sleep one night in the wilderness with a rock for a pillow. While he slept, he dreamed of a ladder that went all the way to heaven. God was at the top of the ladder, and he told Jacob he was definitely going to keep all of the promises he made to his father and grandfather. When Jacob woke up, he named the place Bethel, which means *house of God*.

Genesis 28:10-22

Father, thanks not just for keeping your promises, but for using all kinds of things to remind us of them all the time. We forget a lot, so we need you to remind us. And thanks that thousands of years after Jacob had that dream, Jesus said he was Bethel, the place where God dwells. Amen.

(Read John 1:43-51 to see where Jesus alluded to Jacob's dream.)

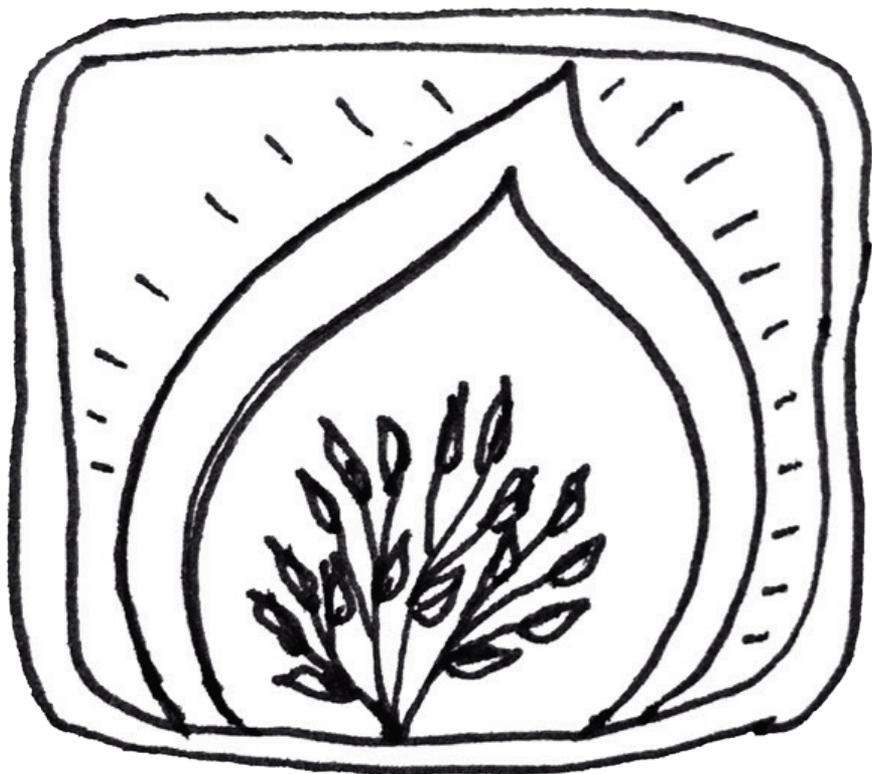


Tuesday, December 8 - Coat

One of Jacob's sons, Joseph, was hated by his older brothers. He was kind of a jerk, and one of the things that really bothered them was that Jacob played favorites with Joseph, even giving him a coat of many colors. They hated him so much they sold him to be a slave. Joseph ended up in Egypt, and after lots of bad years of trouble, he became a powerful person in Pharaoh's court. That allowed him to take care of his family even though they didn't know it was him. Eventually, he forgave them and they were reconciled. God used the evil they did to do good. He kept his promises through them.

Genesis 37, 45:1-15 and 50:15-21

Father, thanks for working with messed up families. Thanks for working with our families. It gives us great hope. You can change anything. Please forgive us for the harm we do to each other, and somehow use it for good in our lives and in the life of the world. Amen.

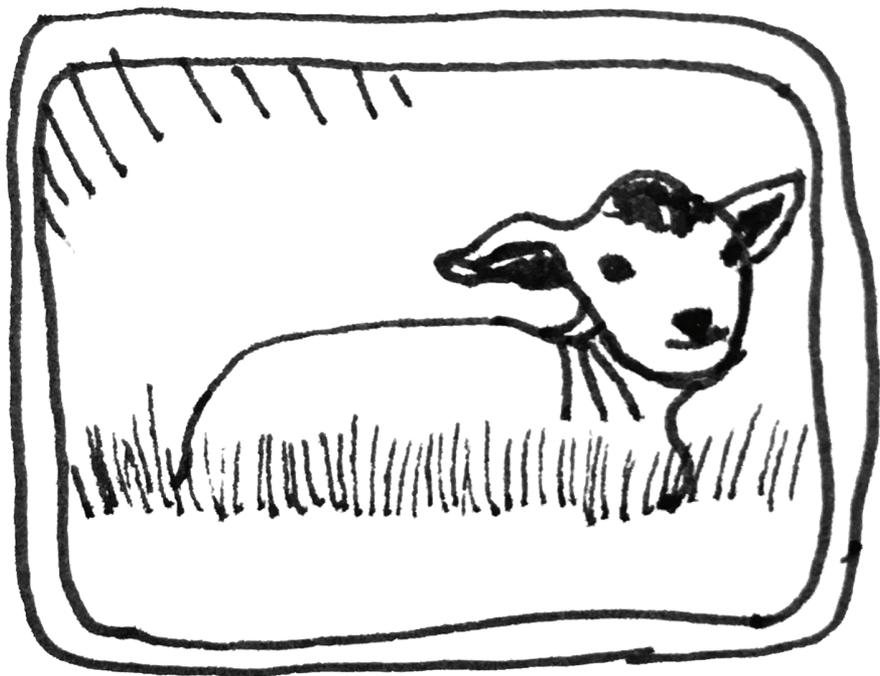


Wednesday, December 9 - Burning Bush

Egypt was a good place for God's people for a while, but eventually it turned bad. They went from being honored guests to being slaves. When God decided it was time for his people to be free, he introduced himself to a man named Moses in a strange and beautiful way.

Exodus 3.1-15

Father, thanks for promising to be with Moses even though he was afraid to do what you were asking him to do. When we're afraid, please show us who you are again and give us the faith that burns our fears away. Help us to believe that you're with us. Amen.

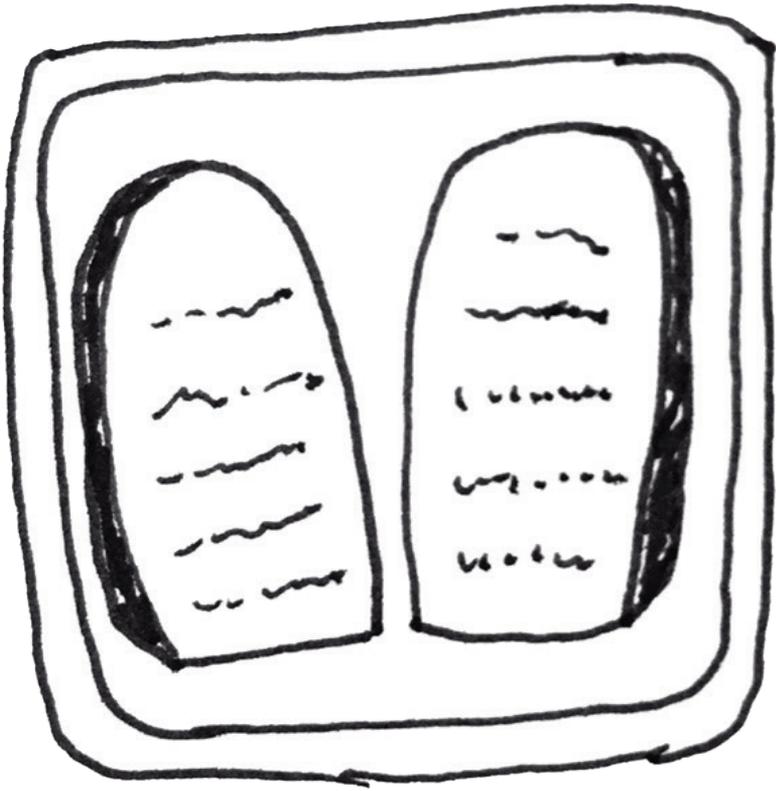


Thursday, December 10 - Lamb

Pharaoh didn't listen to Moses when he asked him to let God's people leave Egypt. God sent plagues to catch Pharaoh's attention, but he ignored them all. So God had Moses tell the people to prepare a special meal which included a spotless lamb that was to be sacrificed and prepared. The blood from the lamb was to be placed on the doorposts of their houses. This would spare the firstborn son of each house; God would pass over their houses. Finally, after the death of his own son, Pharaoh relented. He set God's people free.

Exodus 12:1-32

Father, thank you for sending us Jesus, our own Passover lamb, whose sacrifice sets us free. Amen.

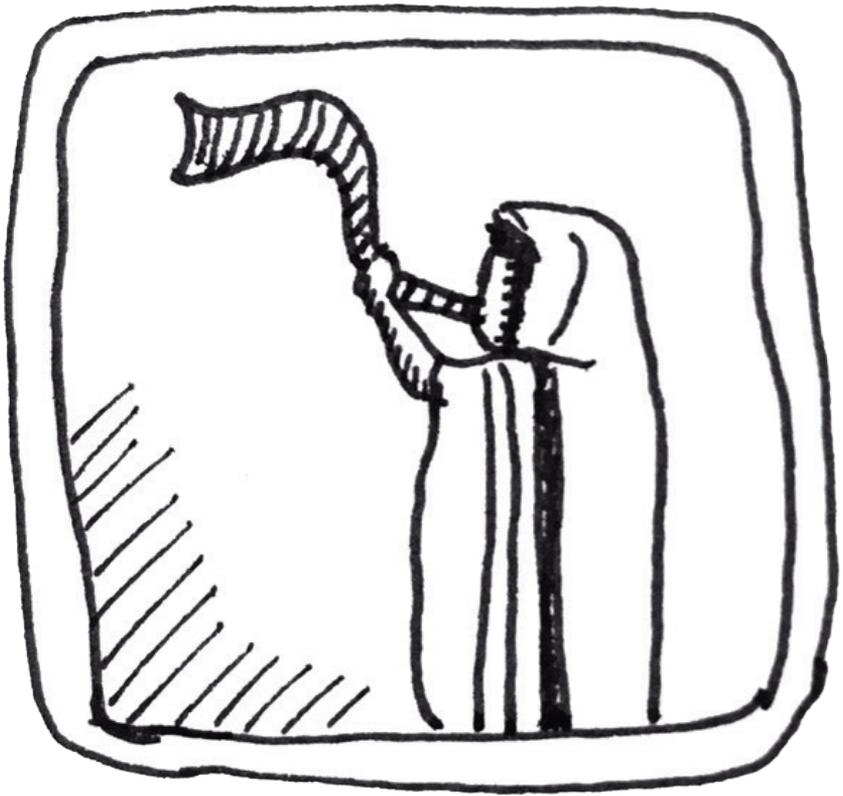


Friday, December 11 - Tablets of Torah

Shortly after God's people left Egypt, God gave them the law at Mt. Sinai. The Ten Commandments reminded them that God loved them, told them how life worked best, and showed them how to love God and other people.

Exodus 20:1-17

Father, we can't keep your law perfectly. We break it pretty much every day. But our older brother Jesus kept it perfectly, and he stood in for us and took the blame for all the times we break your law. Forgive us because of what Jesus did for us, and then renew us to live life as it works best: loving you and our neighbors. Amen.



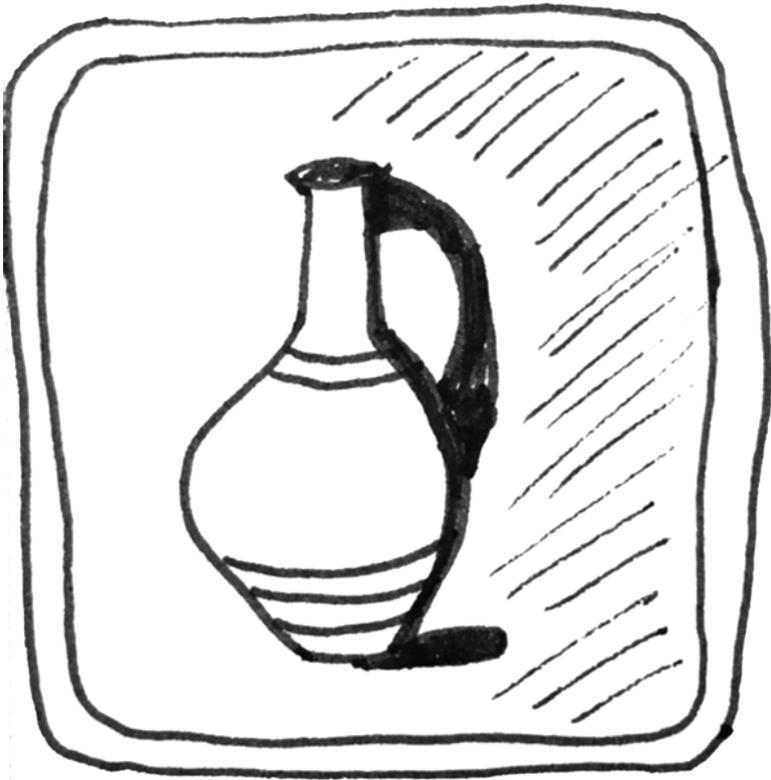
Saturday, December 12 - Ram's Horn Trumpet

After years and years of wandering around in the wilderness, God led his people into a land of their own through a leader named Joshua.

Joshua 6.1-21

Father, right before Joshua died, he told your people it was important for them to choose who they were going to serve. Help us order our lives in ways that make it easy to choose to serve you in sincerity and faithfulness. Amen.

(Read Joshua 24.14-15 to see where Joshua talked to the people before he died.)

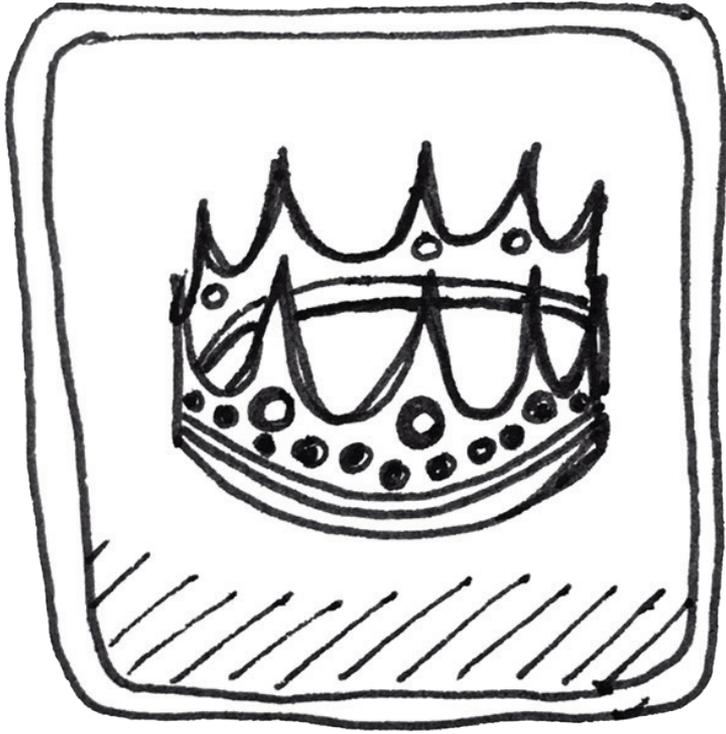


Sunday, December 13 - Clay Water Pitcher

Gideon was scared and tentative; he thought his tribe was the weakest and even in his family he thought he didn't amount to much. But God wanted to use him to deliver his people from some of their worst enemies. God was strong through Gideon, and won a great battle in the unlikeliest of ways.

Judges 6:11-24 and 7:19-25

Father, help is to believe that your strength is perfected in our weakness, and that you can use people like us to keep your promises to the world. Help us to believe, like your servant Augustine put it, that 'love slays what we have been that we may be what we were not.' The Cross looked like the weakest thing in the world, but through it you made a new creation. Thank you. Amen.

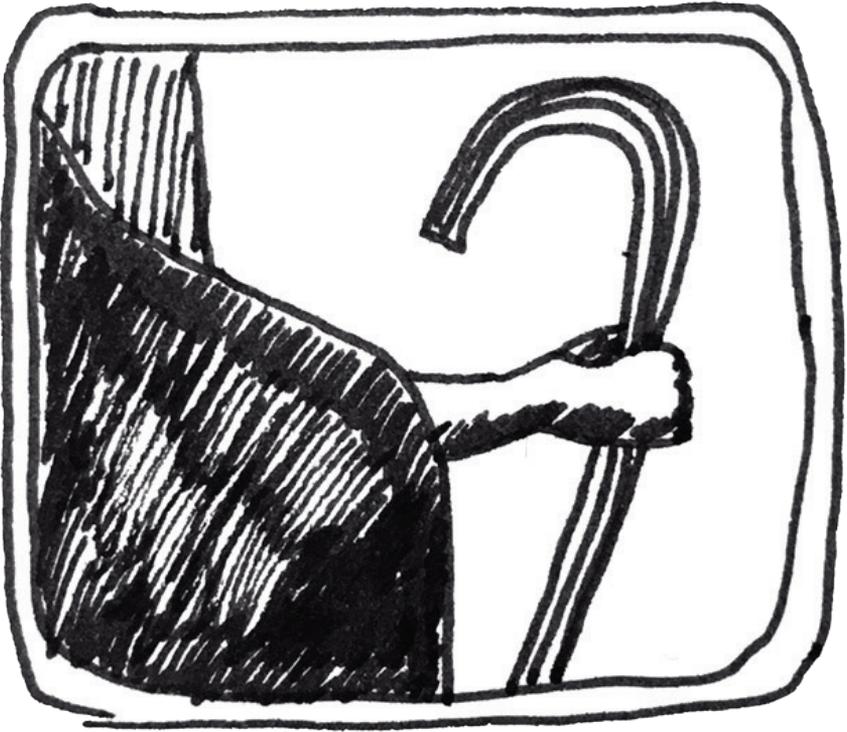


Monday, December 14 - Crown

God's people wanted to be like all the other nations and have a human king. God knew that that deep down, this desire was really a rejection of him, and that even the best king would eventually fail and disappoint his people. But he told the prophet Samuel to find a king anyway, and Samuel did. Saul became the first king of God's people.

1 Samuel 8:1-22 and 10:17-27

Father, of course you were right. Saul hadn't been king for 5 minutes before some of the people starting complaining about him. Even the best kings are just fleeting shadows of how perfectly and justly you rule over your world. Thank you for sending us the true King when you sent Jesus. May your kingdom come on earth as it is in heaven. Amen.



Tuesday, December 15 - Shepherd's Crook

Saul ended up being a pretty awful king. Things got so bad that the people needed to be rescued from him. So God told Samuel to find another king from one of the sons of Jesse. Samuel found David, who was just a shepherd boy at the time. David became a great king, and God promised him that someone from his family would be a king over God's people forever.

1 Samuel 16:1-13 and 2 Samuel 7:1-17

Father, thanks for your great promise to David, that you would, like we sing this time of year, send a 'king forever, ceasing never, over us all to reign.' Give us faith to believe your promise is still true, and help us to faithfully inhabit Jesus' kingdom every day of our lives. Amen.

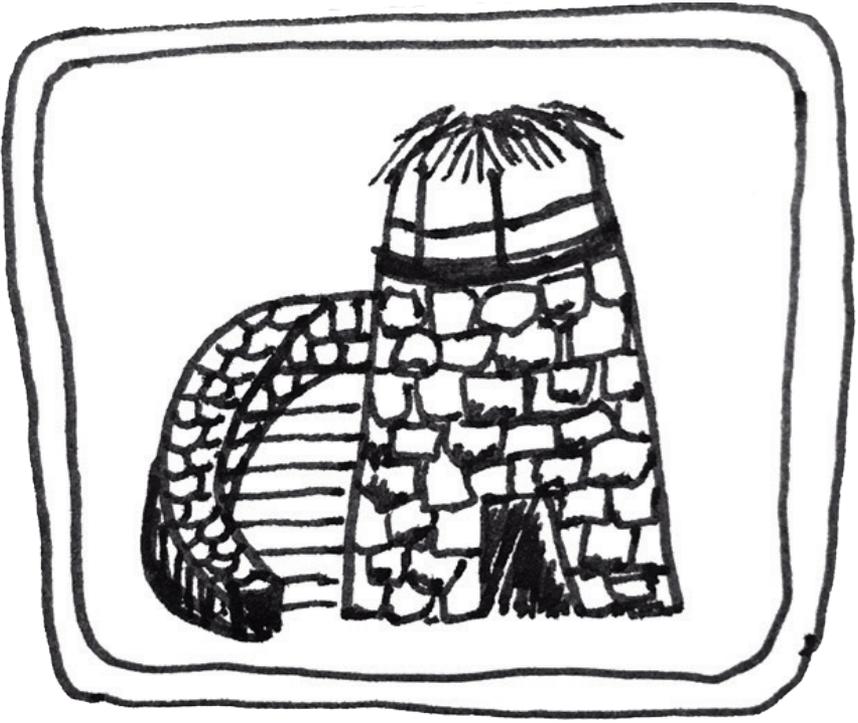


Wednesday, December 16 - Tears

Throughout the time of the kings, God's people grew further and further from him and from each other. Even their kings made choices to ignore God and hurt each other. Eventually, foreign armies invaded their lands, ruined their crops, burned their houses, smashed and desecrated their most sacred places, and took many of them as captives into exile. It was devastating for God's people, and all the more so because they knew they had played a big part in getting themselves into the mess they were in. Jeremiah spoke eloquently of the pain they felt, and he gave them hope that God would one day bring them home.

Jeremiah 8.22-9.6, Lamentations 1.1-5 and Jeremiah 31.1-14

Father, Jeremiah said our fathers and mothers in the faith found grace in the wilderness, and that you loved them with an everlasting love. Meet us with that same word when we are in our own tearful wilderness, even if we ran there willingly. Call us back to you with your everlasting love. Amen.

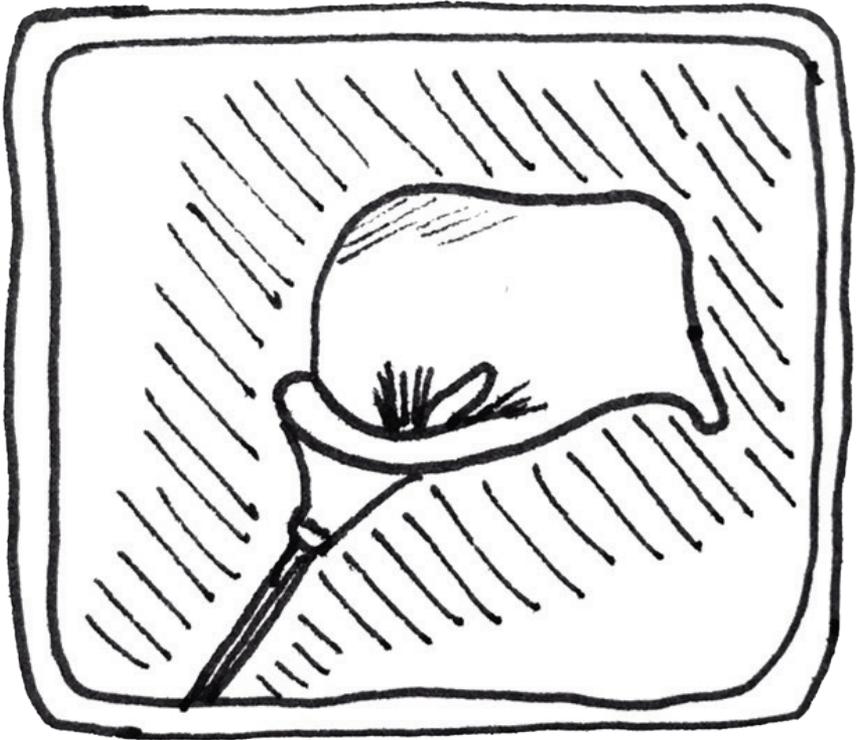


Thursday, December 17 - Stone Watch Tower

God brought his people back home from exile, but they had to wait seventy years for it. After they came back home and rebuilt, they had to wait even longer to hear from God again. It was a long, hard wait. But God sent prophets like Habakkuk, who reminded the people that God hadn't forgotten them, and that he would one day keep his promises. Until he did, though, they would have to live by faith.

Habakkuk 2:1-4 and 3:17-19

Father, waiting is hard because we're not like you. We can't see the big picture, especially when we're suffering or really hoping for something. So please remind us of the big picture, and help us to live every one of our days in light of the good ending you've promised for us. Help us to live by faith. Amen.

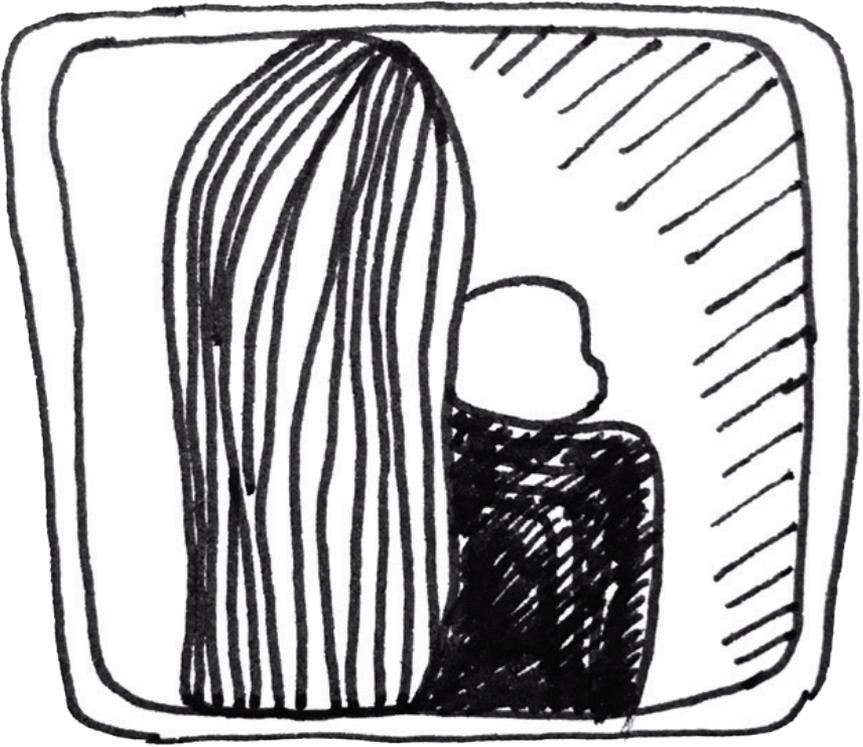


Friday, December 18 - White Lily

At just the right time, God sent his messenger Gabriel to a girl named Mary. Gabriel told Mary that she had found favor with God, and that even though she wasn't married, she was going to have a son. Gabriel told her this son would be the great king God had promised to send, and that he would reign forever. Mary believed God, and sang his praises.

Luke 1.26-38 and 46-55

Father, Mary believed you even when you told her something that sounded impossible. She sang your praises. Give us the gift of a faith like that, and help us to praise you no matter what you call us into. Amen.

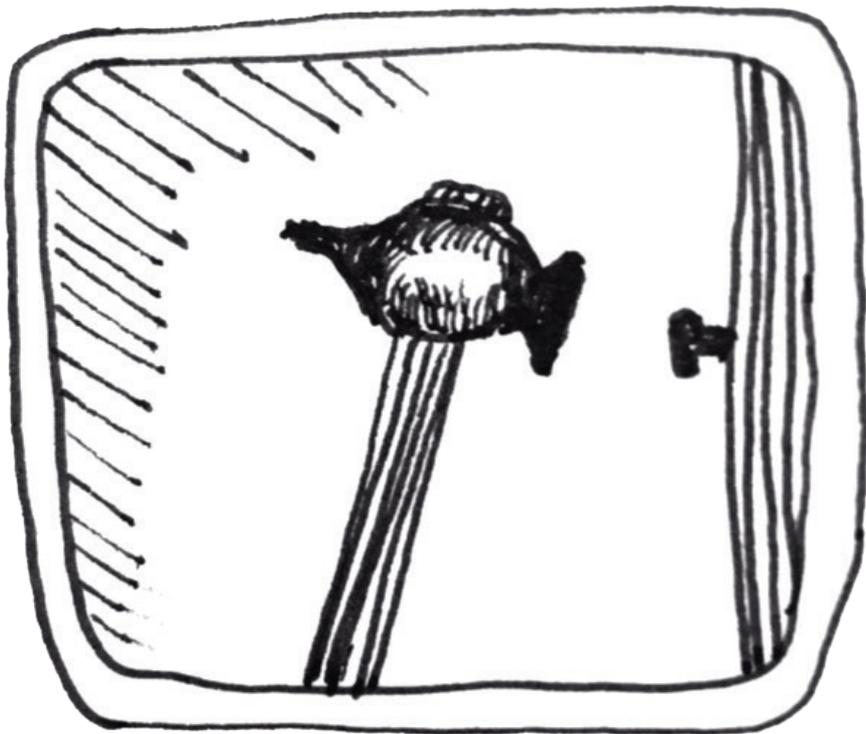


Saturday, December 19 - Mother+Child

Mary had a relative named Elizabeth. Her husband was a priest named Zechariah. They couldn't have a child, but God worked a miracle and Elizabeth got pregnant. Right after Mary heard that she was going to have a baby, she went to visit Elizabeth. When she got there, the baby inside Elizabeth leapt for joy! That was the first time John the Baptist let someone know Jesus was coming, but definitely not the last.

Luke 1:5-25 and 39-45 and 57-80

Father, fill us with joy at the coming of Jesus! Unloose our tongues to bless you. Amen.

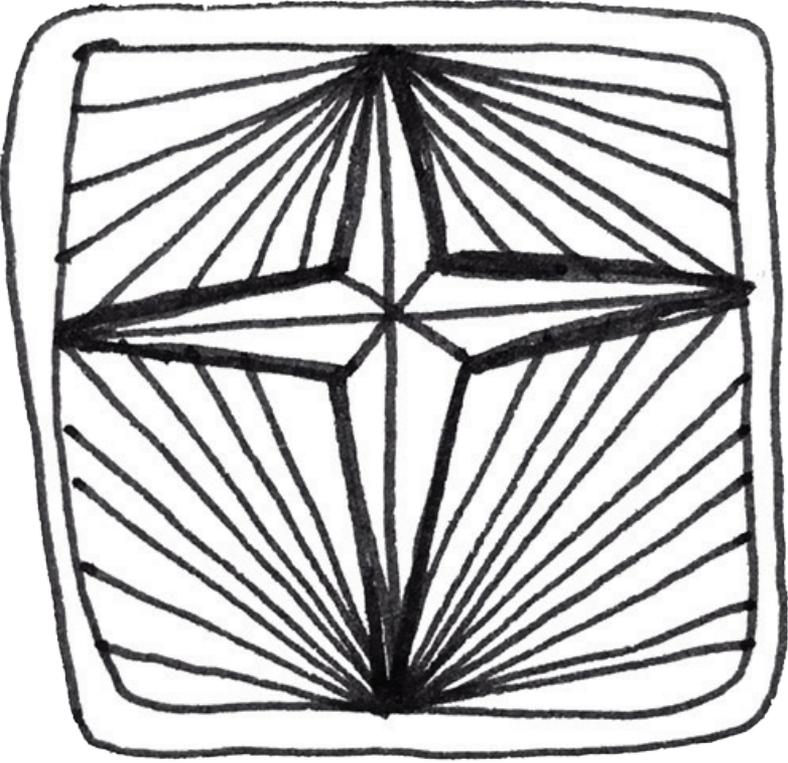


Sunday, December 20 - Hammer

Mary was engaged to a carpenter named Joseph when God told her she was going to be Jesus' mother. Joseph found out Mary was pregnant, and of course he knew he wasn't the father. But he was a good man, and wanted to protect Mary's reputation. He decided to end their engagement quietly and go on with his life. But one night, while he was sleeping, an angel came and told him what was really happening and that he shouldn't be afraid. So Joseph wasn't afraid.

Matthew 1:18-25

Father, you asked Joseph to do something really hard, and he had to trust you enough to not be afraid. Help us to trust you when you ask us to do difficult things. Help us to believe you so deeply that the power of fear over us is weakened. Amen.



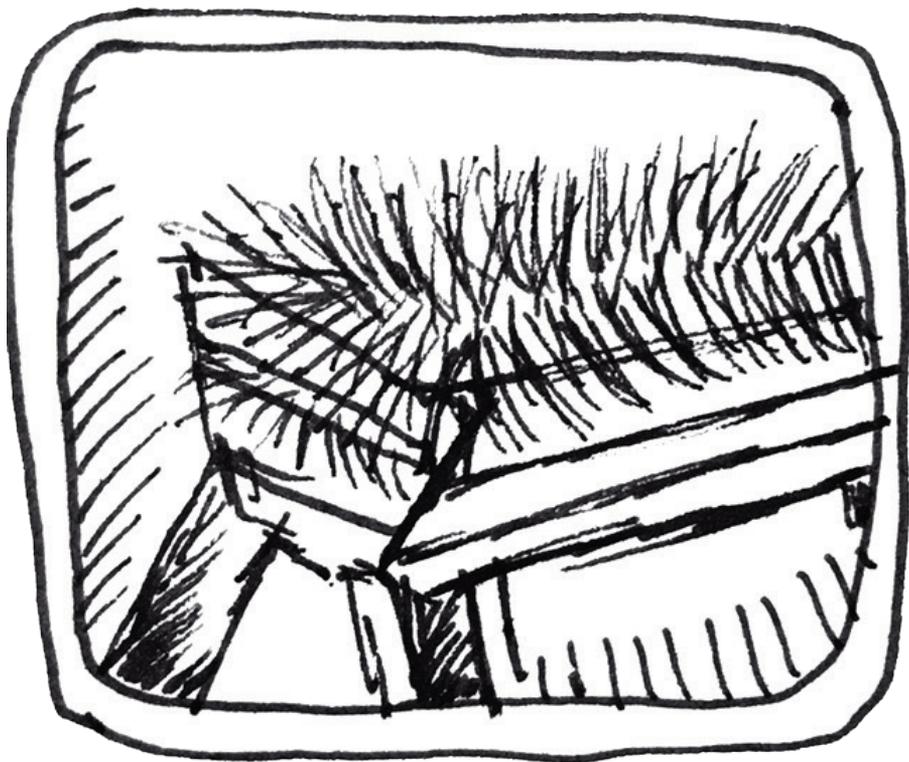
Monday, December 21 - Star

Around the time Jesus was born, God drew some men called Magi from far, far away to come to Bethlehem. He did that by putting a star in the sky that he knew they'd want to check out. Once the Magi found Jesus, they worshipped him and gave him gifts. God was keeping his promise to bless the whole world through Jesus. God was drawing people to Jesus, the light of the world.

Matthew 2.1-12

Father, you promised Abraham that you would bless his family and bless all the other families of the earth through them. Thank you for keeping that promise in Jesus. Help us, your church, to be Jesus' light to the whole world. Amen.

(Read Matthew 5.13-16 to see where Jesus said we're the light of the world.)



Tuesday, December 22 - Manger

When Jesus was born, the first people God wanted told were some shepherds working the night shift. That's beautiful. The angels told the shepherds they would know they had gone to the right place when they saw a baby lying in an animal feed box. That baby, God said, is the Savior. Christ, the Lord. That's good news of great joy for all people.

Luke 2:1-20

Jesus, you didn't consider equality with God something to be grasped. Instead, you emptied yourself and were born in humility, in our likeness, to save us from our sins and make a new creation. We confess that you are Lord! With hope, we anticipate the day when every knee will bow to you! We praise you, and we love you because you first loved us! Amen.

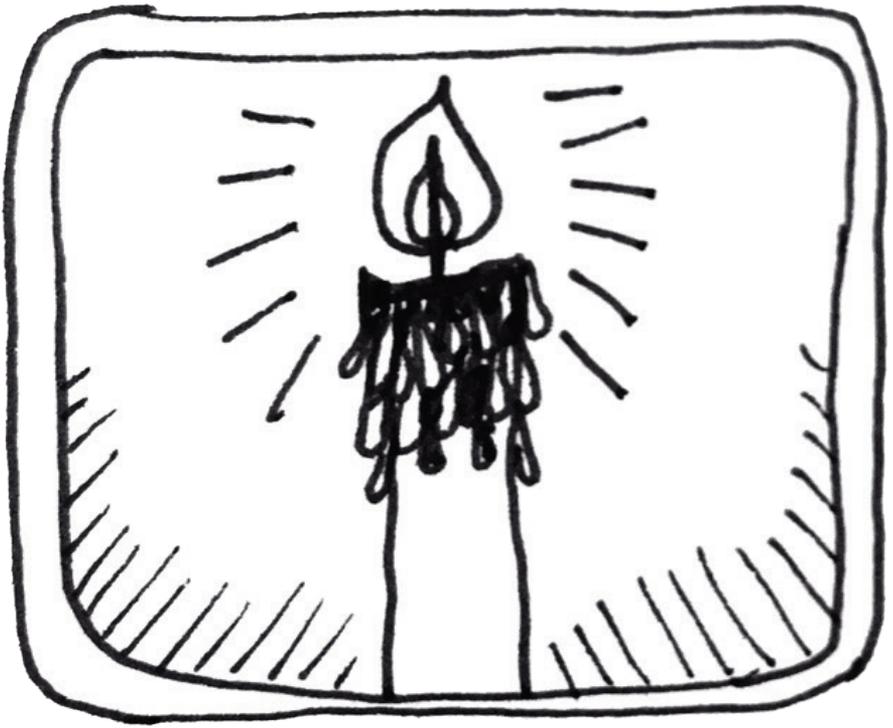


Wednesday, December 23 - Angel

On the night Jesus was born, the angel told the shepherds the meaning of Jesus birth: he was born to be the Savior of the world. Heaven broke open that night, and the sky was filled with angels who couldn't help but sing their praises to the God who had made this all happen.

Luke 2.8-20

Father, we join with the angels in singing your praise. You sent your son to be our Savior. We sing glory to you with full hearts. Glory to you forever and ever. Amen.



Thursday, December 24 - Candle

Many years after Jesus' birth, this is how the Apostle John described it: the true light, which gives light to everyone, was coming into the world.

John 1:1-18

Jesus, thank you for being the Yes to all the promises God has ever made. Thank you for making known the God we can't see. Thank you for giving us the right to be called the children of God. Strengthen our faith and grow us into your likeness as you continue your work of remaking the world. Help us to keep working out our faith, alert and awake, until your second Advent. Amen.

