

Wonders *of* His Love

WATERMARK FAMILY ADVENT GUIDE

Wonders *of* His Love

HELLO FRIENDS!

Thank you for joining us on this journey for the next 25 days through God's amazing story of Christmas. As we count down the days to Christmas, our hope is that God would give you a better understanding of His purpose in the world, grow the wonder of the Christmas story in your own hearts, and produce awe and wonder in the hearts of your children. This year's theme is "The Wonders of His Love" and our desire is that you and your family will take time this Christmas season to let your eyes widen and your jaws drop open at the glory of God displayed in the story He's written from creation to the stable in Bethlehem!

A few thoughts on how to use this Family Advent Guide. First, just use it. Our hope is that you would, at the very least, make a commitment to read through the Scripture each day for the next 25 days and be encouraged by the truths of God's Word that will never return void. We want this to be "doable" for your family, so do what is best, but do something.

Second, depending on the age and maturity of your children, the daily Scripture readings are accompanied by devotions written to help your family connect the dots of the amazing story that God has been writing and continues to write in human history today. There are two discussion questions intended to spark conversation around your dinner table or your child's bedside each day. Let them help you further consider how the ancient stories of Noah, Abraham, Moses, and Elijah (among others) connect with our world today.

Lastly, we have fashioned this in the tradition of "The Jesse Tree". Each day, your family will have an opportunity to draw/color an ornament to hang on the tree that tells a little piece of the Christmas story. A Jesse Tree can be something as simple as a dead branch from your yard or a small Christmas tree you buy. Either way, find a way to display the ornaments for each day for the next 25 days as you build anticipation leading up to Christmas morning.

We hope that these next 25 days will draw you closer to the Savior we worship, not just at Christmas, but all year long! May the Lord fill your hearts and homes with the wonders of His love this Advent season! Come quickly, Lord Jesus!

The Watermark Kids Team

For the full Family Advent Guide, visit Watermark.org/Advent

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DAILY SCRIPTURE READING

- December 1: Isaiah 11:1-2
- December 2: Genesis 1:24-31
- December 3: Genesis 3:1-21
- December 4: Genesis 6:5-8
- December 5: Genesis 12:1-7
- December 6: Genesis 21:1-7
- December 7: Genesis 22:1-14
- December 8: Genesis 28:10-22
- December 9: Genesis 37:31-33; 50:15-20
- December 10: Deuteronomy 5:1-22
- December 11: Joshua 2:1-21
- December 12: Ruth 1:1-2:3; Matthew 1:5, 16
- December 13: 1 Samuel 16:1-13
- December 14: 2 Samuel 5:1-5
- December 15: 1 Kings 18:17-39
- December 16: Isaiah 9:2, 6-7
- December 17: Isaiah 11:1-9
- December 18: Micah 5:2-5
- December 19: Esther 4:10-17
- December 20: Luke 1:5-25
- December 21: Matthew 3:1-6
- December 22: Luke 1:26-38
- December 23: Matthew 1:18-25
- December 24: Luke 2:1-5
- December 25: Luke 2:6-21

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Wonders of His Love – December 1

SCRIPTURE: Isaiah 11:1-2

DEVOTION:

What is the most wonderful surprise you've ever received? Talk about it for a minute as a family. Where were you? How did you feel? Did you have any idea the surprise was coming?

Surprises can make our eyes widen, our mouths hang open in shock, and our hearts race. More than that, the best surprises are full of purpose: purpose to make someone feel loved, to make them feel known, or to give them something that they desperately need.

Thousands of years ago, God gave the prophet Isaiah hints about the greatest surprise the world would ever know. He told of a family whose father's name was Jesse, whose most famous son was a king named David. No one had heard anything about this family for hundreds of years. It looked like Jesse's family was long forgotten, a dead family tree only to be remembered in history books.

Then with eye-popping, jaw-dropping joy, Isaiah let it be known that the dead family tree would sprout a branch, another Son, a King full of the Spirit of God, full of wisdom, understanding, power, and knowledge. Could it be? The world would be so surprised, and like the greatest surprises, this surprise would serve the same purpose: to let all people know that we are loved, that God knows us, and to give us something we so desperately need – A Savior!

Christmas is not only a time for great surprises around the family Christmas tree. As good as those can be, Christmas is a reminder of the true story of the world's greatest surprise that served the greatest purpose. It is the purpose the angels sang about in that Bethlehem sky: "Glory to God in the highest, and on earth, peace!" God's purpose is His own glory, and His glory is our only hope for peace and purpose in our own lives.

Like a branch coming from a dead tree stump, God's purpose comes in the most surprising and wonderful ways! These are the wonders of His love! Let us be amazed!

QUESTIONS:

1. What is your favorite Bible story? How did God surprise the people in your favorite story and what did they/we learn about God from what He did?
2. What are the things that God has done in your family this last year that make you say, "Wow! Look what God has done!"? Pray together as a family and thank Him for what He has done and pray for what you hope He will do this next year.

ACTIVITY:

Print off the ornament pages from the back of this Advent guide and draw a picture of the stump of a tree on today's ornament. Read John 3:16 together and talk about how much God must have loved the world that He would send His one and only Son! If you haven't already, challenge your family to memorize this verse together as a reminder of God's amazing love for you.

Wonders of His Love – December 2

SCRIPTURE: Genesis 1:24-31

DEVOTION:

Before, “In the beginning,” God existed in perfect community. Father. Son. Holy Spirit. One day our perfectly holy God started speaking, and whatever He spoke, that is what happened. Out of nothing came light, oceans, mountains, solar systems, and galaxies. Our infinite God simply spoke and the whole universe was created. His glory shines through the stars, His might is seen in the roaring waterfalls, and His strength revealed in the mountain ranges.

God isn’t just concerned with the big and mighty. He also created each grain of sand, delicate flowering plants, and every animal from the tiniest ant to the largest whale. The soft scent of wildflowers and song of a mockingbird reveal His gentleness and attention to detail, all the while singing His praises. Romans 1:20 tells us that, “Through everything God made, they can clearly see His invisible qualities – His eternal power and divine nature.”

Look at your hand. The God who shaped galaxies drew the lines in your palm and made your fingerprints unique. Of all the amazing things God created, humans were the only ones made in His image, the only ones capable of having a personal relationship with Him. Of all God’s creatures, you and I bring Him the most glory. At the end of the 6th day, God looked over all His creation and said that it was very good. Adam and Eve had an intimate relationship with God in the garden, and He set them above the rest of creation. There was no death or sorrow or crying or pain.

We may look around at the world as it is now and wonder what happened. One thing we can know for sure: God is still God. His love never fails and His wonders never cease. The purpose He had from before “the beginning” will be fulfilled.

The rest of Scripture will show us how.

QUESTIONS:

1. What is your favorite thing/place in all of God’s creation? What can that thing/place tell you about who God is and what He is like?
2. What is your favorite thing about how God created you? As a family, have everyone share their favorite thing about each member of your family. Pray and thank God for who He made each of you to be.

ACTIVITY:

Today, draw a picture on your ornament showing the world. Be sure to include your favorite part of God’s creation in your drawing. Think about how amazing it must have been when God spoke and things just came to be! Pray together as a family, thanking God for being the all-powerful, all-knowing, all-seeing Creator of everything. Thank Him for what you can learn about Him through His creation.

Wonders of His Love – December 3

SCRIPTURE: Genesis 3:1-21

DEVOTION:

Have you ever made a decision or done something you wish you hadn't? Have you wished there was a way to hide the fact that you messed up? If you have ever felt that way, then you know what Adam and Eve felt after they chose to listen to the serpent, eat the fruit, and disobey God. They literally ran and hid from Him! But God was so gracious and loving that He went looking for them. When He found them, He talked with them about what they had done. Then, do you know what He did for them? That's right! He killed an animal and used its skin to make clothes for them.

When God said, "Where are you?" do you think He knew where Adam and Eve were? When He said, "What have you done?" do you think He already knew what they had done? Absolutely! Remember that time when you messed up? God knows what you did, but just like with Adam and Eve, He wants to talk with you. He wants to have a conversation with you! This is called prayer. God loves us so much that He wants to have a relationship with you, and part of a great relationship is talking!

Another part of a great relationship is forgiveness. After Adam and Eve sinned, God forgave them, killed an animal, and made coverings for them. Now, let's think about this for a minute. Sin is anything we think, say, or do that does not please God. You and I mess up all the time and there is nothing we can do to cover up our sin. God, however, had a plan and provided a "covering" for us. He loved us so much that He made a way that we can be forgiven, but it wasn't an animal that died for us. It was God's own Son, Jesus!

Isn't that incredible??? Through the story of Adam and Eve, God shows us a picture of what was to come... the wonder of His love found in His Son, Jesus Christ!

QUESTIONS:

1. Was there anything new you learned about the story of Adam and Eve? Why do you think God asked them questions even though He already knew the answer?
2. How can you thank God for His amazing love that resulted in Him sending His Son to cover the sins of everyone who believes in Him? Take time to do that now!

ACTIVITY:

Satan came into the Garden as a snake to tempt Adam and Eve into believing God didn't really love them. Draw a picture of a snake on your ornament for today, reminding us of the temptation that we all face to not trust God. Read Romans 6:23 with your family and be thankful that although we are all sinners deserving of death, God offers us the free gift of eternal life through Jesus.

Wonders of His Love – December 4

SCRIPTURE: Genesis 6:5-8

DEVOTION:

Imagine the most beautiful painting you've ever seen. What do you picture? Maybe there are fields of flowers or a bubbling stream. It may be a painting of the night sky or a beautiful face. The artist would be proud of the work, knowing all the details are perfect and how much joy it would bring to the people who saw it. When God created the earth, it was more beautiful than any painting you could imagine. His creativity shone through the stripes on the tigers, the colorful flowers, and even the platypus' face! Every detail was perfect.

Think about the painting again, but this time imagine that someone took black paint and splattered it all over the picture. It's no longer perfect. It doesn't bring joy anymore. The artist has no choice but to start over. When sin entered the world, it ruined everything. And it just kept getting worse. God's creation was no longer perfect. Every thought that man had was wicked. Every action that man committed was evil. When God looked at the people and saw all of their sin, it made His heart sad. He decided to flood the earth and start over.

In the midst of all the sin, there was one man who stood out. While everyone around him chose to follow their own way, Noah made wise choices and worshiped God. Noah found favor in the eyes of the Lord. Do you remember what happened next? God, in His wondrous love, made a rescue plan for Noah and his family.

Even though the earth was destroyed, there is still sin. Just like God had a rescue plan for Noah and his family, God has a rescue plan for those of us who choose to follow Him. That rescue plan came as a baby and is the reason we can celebrate Christmas and God's wonderful love today!

QUESTIONS:

1. What are some ways you notice that your family stands out from others around you who aren't believers? Think about the movies you watch, places you go, and words that you use.
2. Are there families around you that need to hear about how God rescued Noah and how God can rescue them? Pray about how you can invite them to your home or church this season and share God's wondrous love with them.

ACTIVITY:

Draw a picture of the ark and think about this: God told Noah to use the wood from trees to build a boat that would rescue them from certain death. Did God use the wood of a tree in any other story in the Bible as part of His big rescue plan? (Hint: it was "T" shaped.) Pray and thank God for His amazing love, that even though we sinned against Him, He sent Jesus to save us!

Wonders of His Love – December 5

SCRIPTURE: Genesis 12:1-7

DEVOTION:

What do you know about Abraham? He lived a life of amazing faith and was a great-great-great (lots of greats)—grandfather of Jesus. Before he did any of the things we remember him for, he was simply Abram.

Abram was an ordinary man living a good life with a beautiful wife, a lot of servants, plenty of wealth, and wisdom that came from living for 75 years. Even though Abram might have been pretty comfortable with his life, he responded to God's call to change just about everything that he knew. The Bible says, "Abram departed as the Lord instructed," and did it without knowing exactly what was going to happen. How scary is that? It's only scary when you are trusting in your own understanding and forget WHO you are following...the almighty God of the Universe! All Abram had to rely on was God's promise to give him land, make him a great nation, and bless the whole world through him.

We follow the same wonderful God who loves us just as much as He loved Abram. God has the best plan even when we can't see or understand it. Abram's example of faith to believe in God's unlikely yet wonderful plan to save the world reminds us that God always keeps His promises. As we celebrate the very unlikely birth of our Savior Jesus Christ in this season, we can thank God for choosing Abram and blessing the whole world through his family.

Sometimes God asks our families to have faith like Abram and trust His plan. In any situation, we can remember WHO we are following: the all-powerful, all-knowing, all-seeing Creator of everything. We can choose to have faith that our God will keep His promise to never leave nor forsake us. When we do, we get to stand by in awe as He works out His wonderful plan in wonderful ways, just as He did with Abram.

QUESTIONS:

1. Abram chose to obey God through faith without seeing what was ahead. What is a hard circumstance in your life where you can't see what's ahead, but you have faith that God will be with you through it?
2. How did God use Abram in His plan to bless the whole world? How might God be using your story of faith and action to make a difference for His kingdom in the lives of those around you?

ACTIVITY:

Draw a picture of a tent on today's ornament showing how Abram and Sarai lived while they waited on God to fulfill His purpose for them. Part of God's promise to Abram was that His family would bless the whole world. Go to operationworld.org/countries-alphabetically and pick a country. Read how God has already kept His promise to that country and pray even more people from that country will hear about the good news of Christmas this year!

Wonders of His Love – December 6

SCRIPTURE: Genesis 21:1-7

DEVOTION:

Do you know how old your mom was when you were born? If not, ask her! How close was she to 90 years old? What about your dad? How old was he? Was he close to 100? Probably not! In fact, you're probably laughing just talking about it! That's exactly what Sarah did when she found out she was going to have a baby: she laughed!

God promised Abraham that he would be the "father of a multitude" (that means a bunch) and He promised Sarah that she would be the "mother of nations." But, for a very long time, they didn't have any children! It seemed more and more impossible that God would keep His promise as they got older and older. Our God loves to show up just when we think things are impossible! He takes the impossible and creates a "did you hear that?!" moment to bring Himself glory and to remind us that we can trust Him. When Sarah was 90 years old and Abraham was 100, at just the right time, God gave them the son He had promised. They named the baby Isaac, which means "laughter."

If Sarah and Abraham had a child at a "normal" age, there wouldn't have been as much to wonder at and be amazed by! God's purpose is always His glory, and even though it was hard for Sarah and Abraham to wait so long to have a child, God received more glory because they trusted His promises even when it was hard. The best part is that this wasn't just any child! This was a child that would begin the family line of Jesus, the true Savior of the world, whose birth was nothing short of another miracle!

QUESTIONS:

1. What is a situation that your family has gone through or is currently going through that seems impossible?
2. Which of God's promises do you need to remember to help you trust Him through this situation? Pray as a family that you would wait together patiently and trust God fully as His purposes are revealed.

ACTIVITY:

Today, draw a picture of a baby on your ornament to show how God kept his promise to Abraham and Sarah to give them a baby even in their old age. Read Hebrews 11:11-12 and, if it's dark enough, go outside with your family and try to count all of the stars in the sky. Thank God that His wonderful love for us means He always keeps His promises, even if it's not in our timing.

Wonders of His Love – December 7

SCRIPTURE: Genesis 22:1-14

DEVOTION:

Think about what you treasure the most. Is it a toy? A game? Is it your mom or dad? Now imagine having to give up that treasure – or even worse, imagine seeing it destroyed. How does that make you feel?

God gave Abraham and Sarah the amazing gift of a son after they had waited for years and years. But then God told Abraham to take his only son, Isaac, and offer him as a sacrifice. That is hard to think about. Abraham didn't understand why God would ask him to do that, but He knew God loved him and he trusted God's plan.

In faith, Abraham took his only son up on the mountain, along with wood, a knife, and coals. Isaac carried the wood up the mountain and knew there was going to be a sacrifice, but he did not know it would be him. On top of the mountain, they built an altar and Abraham placed Isaac on it, just as God had said. As Abraham prepared to sacrifice his son, an angel shouted, "Abraham, Abraham!!!" – and everything changed.

Isaac did not have to die! God provided them with a ram to take Isaac's place. Abraham thanked God he did not have to sacrifice his son and God reminded him of all the promises He has made.

Abraham's sacrifice is just a small picture of God's wonderful love for us. God gave up the thing most precious to Him. What was it? His Son, Jesus. Jesus offered Himself as the perfect sacrifice for the sins of the world. He took our place. He died on a cross and came back to life on the third day, paying for our sins. God wants His people to live, not die. God wants to rescue His people, not punish them.

We can always trust Him, even when we do not understand, and accept His wonderful gift of grace which is only possible because of Jesus' sacrifice. That sacrifice is something worth celebrating!

QUESTIONS:

1. Abraham was asked to do something very hard. Why did God ask Abraham to do this? When was a time you had to obey God or your parents when it was very hard?
2. How did God continue to keep His promises to Abraham? How does this story give you hints about what God will do through Jesus?

ACTIVITY:

The ram died so that Isaac could live. God provided a sacrifice! Draw a picture of a ram on today's ornament, showing how God provided for Isaac and gave him life. Read Romans 5:6 & 8. Thank God that because of His love for us, He sent Jesus at just the right time to die for us so that we might be saved.

Wonders of His Love – December 8

SCRIPTURE: Genesis 28:10-22

DEVOTION:

Have you ever broken a promise? Did you say you would do something and forgot to do it? Sometimes it is hard to always do exactly what we say we will do. Now, who always keeps His promises? God!

One night Jacob had a really different and unusual dream, but it wasn't just because he used a rock for a pillow! God used this dream to speak to Jacob and promise him that he was going to have a really big family, be given land, and that his family would be a blessing to the whole world. Who else did God promise that to? That's right – Jacob's grandfather, Abraham!

When Jacob woke up from his dream, he was a little afraid. He was afraid because he was so overwhelmed by the wonder of God! He even said, "How awesome is this place!" Jacob knew this moment was "awesome" because the all-powerful, all-knowing, all-seeing Creator of everything had shown up and made a promise to him! This wasn't just a small promise that he was going to get something cool for Christmas. It was a promise of the greatest gift that there ever would be!

Christmas is a time to celebrate and remember the promises that God has made to us. It is also a time to celebrate the blessings that we have received and will receive when God keeps His promises! God's promise meant that Jacob's family would be part of a great lineage, a lineage that would produce the Savior of the world, our "ladder" (or way) to Heaven! How WONDERFUL is that?

Let's remember that God always keeps His promises, and through trusting in Jesus, we will get to climb that amazing ladder to be with Him forever!

QUESTIONS:

- God promised to give Jacob and his family good things... land, family, and blessings. What good things does God promise to give you and your family? What are some promises that God has already kept to you?
- Have you ever doubted that God would keep His promises? What can you remember is true about God when it's hard to believe He will do what He says He will do?

ACTIVITY:

Draw a ladder on today's ornament to represent Jacob's dream. Talk about how it shows God's plan to make a way for all the people of the world to return to Him. Pray for someone by name that you know who does not know the way to God and ask God to give you an opportunity to show His love to them during Advent.

Wonders of His Love – December 9

SCRIPTURE: Genesis 37:31-33; 50:15-20

DEVOTION:

Joseph was the favorite of all his father's sons, and that made his brothers very jealous. They were so jealous that they wanted to get rid of him! They sold their brother as a slave to Egypt and covered Joseph's robe in blood to trick their father into thinking he died.

If you put yourself in Joseph's sandals, you can imagine how painful and confusing this time must have been! He went from being his father's favorite to a slave in Egypt. But God was with Joseph in Egypt. When he was put in prison, God used him to interpret other prisoners' dreams. Later, when Pharaoh (the ruler of the land) needed a dream interpreted, one of those prisoners remembered Joseph. God used Joseph to interpret Pharaoh's dreams and help prepare Egypt for a famine. This famine was so bad that even Joseph's brothers, the ones who sold him into slavery, traveled all the way to Egypt to ask Joseph for food!

Just like Joseph's brothers, you might expect that he would be mad at them and not allow them to have food. Yet, Joseph forgave them and provided them with food. There was no hate or payback or revenge. Instead, Joseph treated his brothers with mercy and reassured them that what they intended for evil, God intended for good. Can you believe it? God is in control and uses every bad thing for His good. We can trust God with our whole heart because He is always with us and working things out for our good.

Joseph's story points to an even more wonderful story of forgiveness and love. When Jesus lived on earth He did everything right but was betrayed by the ones He came to save! His enemies even killed Him on a cross. However, the very act that seemed so terrible is the reason any of us can be saved! What people intend for evil, God intends for good – and turns into His glory!

QUESTIONS:

1. Joseph had to trust God even when it seemed like things were out of control. Are there times that you think God is not in control? What Bible verses help remind you that God is in control?
2. What are some ways you've seen God use hard things for good in your family?

ACTIVITY:

Jacob gave Joseph a beautiful coat of many colors which, along with his dreams, made his brothers jealous and angry. Draw a picture of Joseph's beautiful coat on your ornament for today. Read Romans 8:28 and thank God that He still takes hard and painful things in our lives and uses them for His glory and our good.

Wonders of His Love – December 10

SCRIPTURE: Deuteronomy 5:1-22

DEVOTION:

It is amazing to consider all the ways God cared for the Israelites, even when circumstances seemed impossible. God sent plagues to free the Israelites from slavery in Egypt and used a giant cloud to show them where to go. When the Israelites got to the Red Sea, God split the waters so they could walk across! When they were hungry, God sent food down from the sky for them to eat.

God led the Israelites to Mt. Sinai where they set up camp. Moses climbed the tall mountain to be close to God. There, God spoke to Moses and told him He was going to teach the Israelites how to behave as His people. Within the Law, God gave Moses ten sacred commands to take back down to His people.

The Israelites were told they could bring glory to God by following His rules. Through the Ten Commandments, God taught the Israelites how to behave towards God and towards each other. The rules include not stealing, not murdering, and honoring mothers and fathers, but the greatest command of all is to love God more than anything else!

This set of rules was the heart of the covenant that God made with His people at this time. God gave the Israelites the commandments because He loved them so much and wanted them to live in a way that brought glory to Himself. The Israelites were God's chosen people, a special family that would show the world who God is.

Though the Law was perfect, it revealed how imperfect each Israelite was. It was impossible for them to follow all of the rules. God knew that and wanted the rules to lead the Israelites to depend on Him. Did you know that we glorify God when we depend on Him? It would be many more years before Someone could follow all of the rules perfectly.... But He was coming!

QUESTIONS:

1. Why do we have laws and rules? Why did God give the Israelites rules to follow?
Who is the only one who lived perfectly?
2. What are some of the "rules" your family lives by that show you know and love God?
How can following those rules bring God glory and also care for others?

ACTIVITY:

Because of His love for His people, God gave the Israelites the Ten Commandments. Draw a picture of the stone tablets on today's ornament. Pray that God would give your family the strength to follow God's greatest command to love the Lord with all your heart, soul, mind, and strength. Parents, read Deuteronomy 6:4-9 and ask the Lord to use you to teach your children so they might walk in His ways all of their lives.

Wonders of His Love – December 11

SCRIPTURE: Joshua 2:1-21

DEVOTION:

Share with your family about the most fun game of hide-and-seek you've ever played! Now, imagine playing hide-and-seek, but just as the countdown begins, something crazy happens. Your family pet says, "Quick! Hide here!" Before you know it, the person who was counting walks right by you, thanks to your talking pet.

A similar event happened in Joshua 2, minus the talking pet! Before the Israelites could conquer the Promised Land, they needed to scope it out. Spying on the land was dangerous and took a lot of courage. Two spies were up for the challenge, and in an exciting game of hide-and-seek, God used the most unlikely person to protect them!

God provided coverage for the spies just in the nick of time. God kept them hidden right underneath the noses of their enemies! God put Rahab, a woman who had heard all about what God had already done for the Israelites, in the right place, at the right time, ready to protect them. The spies didn't know ahead of time God would provide Rahab to protect them. They just followed His command to go, and in eye-popping, jaw-dropping wonder, the Lord kept them safe!

And Rahab? Well, God's purpose for her wasn't over after the spies left. God rescued her, too, and chose her to be in the family line of Jesus!

Before Jesus was born, the Jewish people were looking for a Savior. They didn't know when He'd come and they certainly didn't expect Him to come as a baby! Christmas is a time to celebrate God's glorious and incredible provision to hide us from the consequences of our sin and provide safety from the death that we deserve. At one time, we were dead in our sin and separated from God but because of His wonderful love for us, He provided a way to be rescued from our sin through Jesus!

QUESTIONS:

1. Have you ever wondered if God would provide for you? Tell a story of a time you were afraid or asked to do something scary and God came through!
2. Is there something you know God might be asking you to do, but you aren't sure how it's possible? Where in your life do you need to trust that God's timing is perfect and His ways are perfect?

ACTIVITY:

Rahab used a scarlet rope to help the Israelite spies escape out of her window. Draw a rope on your ornament today as a reminder of how God, through Christ, provides a way of escape for us from our sins. Play a game of hide-and-seek with your family. Remind your kids that no matter where they go, they can never hide from God's amazing love for them.

Wonders of His Love – December 12

SCRIPTURE: Ruth 1:1-2:3; Matthew 1:5, 16

DEVOTION:

What is your favorite thing about your home? Do you have a favorite decoration that gets displayed every year for Christmas? Do you have a favorite spot in the house, like your bed or backyard? What words come to mind when you think of the word “home”?

In Ruth 1, we read the story of a family from Bethlehem who left the comforts of their home and people they'd known for years because there was a famine. Sadly, Naomi's husband and sons did not survive the famine. When the famine was over, Naomi returned home to experience God's provision in the midst of her grief. When her daughters-in-law, Ruth and Orpah, tried to come with her she told them to return to their own homes.

Instead of following Naomi's instruction, Ruth insisted on staying with her. Ruth chose to leave the comforts of her own home to create a new home among a new people, choosing to put her trust in the one true God. Ruth and Naomi were grieving and totally unaware of the story of redemption God had planned for them upon their return. The family that had left Bethlehem at least ten years before was back home!

You may remember that the first home Jesus had on earth was in that same town of Bethlehem. It wasn't cozy, and it wasn't comfortable. Just as Elimelek and Naomi left their home to escape famine, and like Ruth left her home in Moab, Jesus left His perfect home in Heaven to be born in a barn.

God had a perfect redemption plan for Naomi and Ruth that included being part of Jesus' earthly family. In Bethlehem, Ruth met Boaz who cared for, protected, and eventually married her. Their great-grandson was David, and we see all three of them mentioned in Matthew 1. Jesus made a home among sinners when He came to earth as part of God's perfect redemption plan for us!

QUESTIONS:

1. What does “home” mean to you? What's your favorite part of your home?
2. Is there an area where it is hard for you to see what God's perfect plan for you might be? How does this story remind you that God has a purpose for everything, even when it seems hopeless?

ACTIVITY:

Draw a picture of wheat on your ornament to remind you that God sees our needs and always provides for us, just like Boaz did for Ruth. As a family, talk about what words you hope describe your home. Brainstorm ideas for how you can invite others into your home this Christmas season with the purpose of those you invite experiencing and learning more about what it looks like to be part of God's family!

Wonders of His Love – December 13

SCRIPTURE: 1 Samuel 16:1-13

DEVOTION:

Throughout the Old Testament, the nation of Israel constantly turned away from the Lord's plan. They believed that their plans were better than God's plan for them. Even though God told Israel that He was the only King they needed, Israel still wanted an earthly king like all the other nations. Eventually, God gave Israel what they wanted. Israel chose a tall, strong, and handsome man named Saul to lead them. Though Saul started out as a good king, he turned away from God and became a terrible leader. God was not surprised, and He already had a plan.

After Saul turned from God, God used the prophet Samuel to find a man named Jesse in the small town of Bethlehem. God explained to Samuel that one of Jesse's eight sons was God's chosen king. After seeing Jesse's first son, who looked like a king because he was big and strong, Samuel believed that his search for the new king was over! However, God told Samuel that "people judge by outward appearance, but the Lord looks at the heart". It wasn't until Jesse's youngest son, David, came in from tending the sheep, that God told Samuel, "That's the one! The one who has a heart like mine!" David was anointed with oil and the Spirit of the Lord rushed over him. Despite Israel's bad choices, God had a wonderful plan for His people! God raised up David, the youngest and smallest of all of Jesse's sons who certainly didn't look like a king. Although David wasn't perfect, God had a purpose for Him and used him in wonderful ways as king over Israel. The best thing of all was that from this new king's family would later come another baby, born in Bethlehem. He wouldn't look like a king and people would judge Him by His outward appearance. But one day everyone will see Him for who He truly is... Jesus, the Savior of the world!

QUESTIONS:

1. There are times in our lives where we think that our plans are better than the Lord's plans for us. Has there been a time in your life when God's plan ended up being better than what you thought you wanted?
2. What are ways that you try and make yourself look good on the outside? If our relationship is not based on what we look like on the outside, what is it based on?

ACTIVITY:

Draw a jar of oil to remind you of the oil Samuel used to anoint David as king. God does not look at a person's outward appearance, but rather at their heart. Pray that God would strengthen your faith in the Lord as a family so that your trust is always in the name of the Lord and not in what you look like on the outside.

Wonders of His Love – December 14

SCRIPTURE: 2 Samuel 5:1-5

DEVOTION:

Sheep are not smart animals. They're cute, cuddly, soft, and warm, but no one will ever tell you that they are smart. Sheep are also not good at protecting themselves or knowing where to go. One thing that sheep do well is play follow the leader. For an animal with no sense of direction, that could mean following other sheep right off the side of a cliff. Yikes! Do you know what? The Bible tells us that we are all a lot like sheep.

Sheep need a shepherd to guide them to green pastures and water and to protect them from other animals. A shepherd's job is to lead, protect, and care for their flock. The more time sheep spend with their shepherd and know his voice, the more they trust him, come to him, and allow him to protect and care for them. Often a shepherd has to put his own life on the line to protect his sheep.

David was called the "Shepherd King". Being a shepherd taught David how to be a good leader. He learned how to care for others, defeat enemies, and show compassion for those who needed protection. After many years of hardship, David became king over all of Israel. As king, David was used by God to shepherd the people of Israel. Like a good shepherd, David protected his people from their enemies and guided them where they needed to go. Still, God had an even bigger plan in mind for David.

God promised David that someone from his family would be an even greater king than he was. Years later, that person came in the form of a baby, and is the reason we celebrate Christmas! Why did God send an even greater king? Because God loves His sheep! God knew that just like sheep, we need a Shepherd that will lead, guide, and protect us. God sent a Shepherd that loves His sheep, wants a relationship with them, and was even willing to die for them. Our Good Shepherd is Jesus!

QUESTIONS:

1. Sometimes we wander from our Shepherd, put ourselves in danger, or look to someone other than our Good Shepherd for guidance. How can we be sure to know His voice, so that we are able to come to Him?
2. Read Psalm 23. Talk through how David describes the Lord as his shepherd. Have you ever thought of the Lord as being a shepherd? How can Psalm 23 influence the way that we see God?

ACTIVITY:

Today, draw a picture of a crown to put on your ornament to remind you of God's promise to David that his throne would last forever. Just like sheep, we need a Good Shepherd to follow. Play follow the leader with your family to remind yourselves that, although we are all imperfect, we have the perfect Shepherd King to lead us.

Wonders of His Love – December 15

SCRIPTURE: 1 Kings 18:17-39

DEVOTION:

Have you ever gotten caught in the rain or maybe jumped in the pool with your clothes on? Did it feel like forever until your clothes were dry again? Imagine for a minute what it would feel like if one minute you were soaked and the next, completely dry. That would be a miracle, right?

A miracle is something wonderful only God can do. True miracles remind us of the supremacy of our God. He is all-powerful. He can be trusted no matter what happens. His way is the best way. His purposes always succeed and He gets all the glory.

In the days of the prophet Elijah the Israelites were not loving or following God with all their heart, soul, and strength. Instead they chose whatever beliefs were easy and convenient and followed fake gods. God used Elijah to remind them who was the one, true God.

It was 450 to 1. All the 450 prophets of Baal had to do was get their fake god to set fire to an offering. After hours of chanting, the result was no fire, no sound, no reply. Nothing. Then it was Elijah's turn. He soaked everything with 12 barrels of water, eliminating any chance of a fire, outside of a miracle. Elijah called on the Lord and immediately He sent fire down from Heaven to burn up the bull, the wood, stones, dust, and even the water in the trench. Everything. Nothing versus everything. God clearly showed the people that He alone is the one true God who deserves all the glory.

Wow! What a miracle! Can you imagine seeing that firsthand? The Bible is full of stories about the wondrous acts of God displaying His power and accomplishing His purpose, including God coming down to earth as a baby, born to die for our sins. He is still doing miracles today by changing people's hearts for their good and His glory.

QUESTIONS:

1. What other miracles have you read about in Scripture?
What miracles has God done in your own family?
2. Sadly, the Israelites soon went back to their old habits.
How can your family help each other choose God's way instead of your own way, even when it seems like it's 1 versus 450?

ACTIVITY:

God sent fire from Heaven that burned up water to prove He is the one true God. Draw fire on your ornament today and be reminded that God is the only one who can do miracles. Pray together as a family and thank Him for that. Pray too for any miracles that you hope He will do in your life or in the lives of those around you.

Wonders of His Love – December 16

SCRIPTURE: Isaiah 9:2, 6-7

DEVOTION:

How quickly do you get scared in the dark? When the lights go out, do you get nervous? Does your heartbeat race as you desperately search for the light switch on the wall, a flashlight, or a match to light a candle? The dark can be a scary place to be, especially when it lasts longer than you anticipate. Even if the lights don't turn back on or you can't find a flashlight, eventually the sun will rise and you will be able to find your way again. Perhaps when it was dark, you were worried something was out to get you, but when the lights turn back on or the sun rises, you feel safe and can rest.

This is how the Israelites felt during the time of Isaiah the prophet. The Israelites were a small nation always working to provide security for themselves against enemies. Larger, more powerful countries continually threatened them. The Israelites were even forced to leave their homes to go live in a foreign land. The darkness of these threats went on and on, and the Israelites longed for relief.

The Israelites remembered the peace and prosperity they had experienced when King David and his son, Solomon, had ruled. The Israelites were afraid and cried out for security and freedom. Through Isaiah, God promised them that someday a light would not only shine on them but would grow and remain forever! Can you imagine? A light that shines so brightly the darkness runs away!

The Israelites were like us, stuck in a dark room searching for a light, knowing it was there somewhere but struggling to find it. Jesus the Messiah is the light! He is the Wonderful Counselor, Mighty God, Everlasting Father, and Prince of Peace. Jesus was who the Israelites hoped God would provide, the light for a very dark world! When we know Jesus, we don't just have to celebrate Christmas one day a year. We can rejoice and rest every day because there is no end to the light He shines!

QUESTIONS:

1. Where else in the Bible do God's people seem "scared in the dark"? Who did God provide to rescue them?
2. What are some scary or dark times your family has experienced this year? How has God reminded you of His faithfulness in those times by shining the light of Christ into your lives?

ACTIVITY:

For today's ornament, draw a picture of the sun, reminding your family how God promised the light would shine in the darkness once again. To help you remember that light chases out darkness, grab enough flashlights for everyone in your family and play flashlight tag in your house or backyard. Afterwards pray and thank God that we don't need to be afraid because nothing can turn off His light.

Wonders of His Love – December 17

SCRIPTURE: Isaiah 11:1-9

DEVOTION:

When was the last time you saw a mama cow and a hungry bear hang out? How about a ravenous wolf and a baby lamb playing together? It seems silly to think that wild animals that usually hunt or fight with one another could live in perfect harmony. The Bible tells us that one day, there will be total and complete peace on earth – even between cows and bears!

The world we live in right now is broken and ruled by sin, but God promises that someday, all of that will change. God promises us not only a Savior in Jesus, but He also promises that the earth will be different when Jesus returns to be our King forever. God first sent His perfect Son to live a perfect life with us here in a very imperfect world. Through His life, death, and resurrection, Jesus changed everything.

Because of what Jesus did, one day the entire earth will be filled with the goodness and knowledge of God. One day our chaotic and sinful earth will be filled with beauty, peace, joy, and order again, just like it was in the Garden of Eden. Jesus will return and God's glory will cover the whole earth. There will be complete peace and harmony between both man and creatures because of it.

While we may not see a cow and a bear having a tea party during our lifetime, we can trust that God's Word will be fulfilled in His perfect timing. We can trust that one day, every knee shall bow and every tongue shall confess that Jesus Christ is Lord. We can trust that God will keep His promises, including His promise that leopards and goats and lions and oxen will eat at a bountiful buffet together. One day, all of us who have been saved by grace through faith will celebrate Jesus and what He did for us!

QUESTIONS:

1. What are some ways we see chaos and sin overtaking our world today? How can we trust in the promises of God when we are facing what seems like a world that will only get worse, not better?
2. Why do you think God gives us so many promises in the Bible? Challenge your family to write down as many of God's promises as you can find in the Bible – and then to keep track of how many you see fulfilled this coming year.

ACTIVITY:

God promises that Jesus will make all things new, even creation itself. Draw a picture of a lion and a lamb together showing how Jesus will bring peace to the whole world and all of creation. Read 2 Corinthians 5:17 together. Pray that your family will be made new day by day through your faith in Jesus and His Spirit that works in your hearts.

Wonders of His Love – December 18

SCRIPTURE: Micah 5:2-5

DEVOTION:

How would you define an underdog? The dictionary says an underdog is a competitor thought to have little chance of winning a fight or contest. For example, that smartphone you're most likely holding was produced by a company that started in a garage in 1976. Or how about the 1980 USA men's hockey team who pulled off an Olympic upset so memorable Hollywood wrote a movie about it? Let's not forget the shepherd boy who God would not only anoint as king, but arm with only a slingshot to take down a giant feared by the rest of his countrymen.

It's hard not to love a good underdog story. They inspire us. They produce awe and wonder. They challenge our presumptions and teach us that giants can, in fact, be defeated. They also remind us that nothing is impossible for God, who can use the weak to shame the strong for the purpose of His glory (1 Corinthians 1:27).

Insert Bethlehem. A town considered small and insignificant compared to the others in Judah. Yet from this little town, God would bring forth a great ruler who would be a shepherd to the people of Israel and whose greatness would be to the ends of the earth. A King who God had promised to both David and Abraham, and even to the serpent in the Garden of Eden.

"Do you believe in miracles?" were the closing remarks of an awestruck commentator watching that historic Olympic hockey game unfold before him. You can almost imagine the shepherds exclaiming something similar to anyone who would listen after they found the baby Jesus in Bethlehem – approximately 700 years after the prophecy we read about in Micah. From Bethlehem came the Messiah, Jesus, who called Himself the Good Shepherd and at whose name every knee on Heaven and earth will bow. Because Jesus is the promised ruler, the Prince of Peace, God's own Son, let earth receive her King!

QUESTIONS:

1. What are your favorite underdog stories? Maybe re-enact a few as a family! What are some other stories in the Bible where all seemed hopeless or where victory was impossible apart from God?
2. Look at the promises about the great ruler in Micah 5:2-5. How does Jesus fulfill those promises?

ACTIVITY:

"Bethlehem" literally means "house of bread". On your ornament today, draw a picture of a house to be reminded again how Jesus left His home in Heaven to make His home with us here on earth. Sing or listen to "O Little Town of Bethlehem" and thank God that He can use anyone to accomplish His purpose.

Wonders of His Love – December 19

SCRIPTURE: Esther 4:10-17

DEVOTION:

Think of a time that you needed to have courage. How did you feel? Was your heart beating really fast? Did something make you too afraid to take action? To be courageous means being brave and facing your fear because you know God is with you.

Esther was an ordinary Jewish girl living with other Jews in exile in Persia, but God had a purpose for her that would require great courage. She was chosen to be queen and the king she married had a lot of rules. One of the rules was that no one could ever appear before the king without being invited!

Mordecai, Esther's cousin, learned that the king had been tricked into signing a law saying all the Jews could be killed. Mordecai sent word to Esther of this bad news and said, "You have come to your royal position for such a time as this." He asked her to go before the king for help to stop the death of her people. What should Esther do? Stay quiet and protect herself or go to the king and ask him to save her people?

Esther trusted God's purpose for her and went before the king. She showed us that through one person's sacrifice many can be saved! Imagine how thrilled the Jews were when they heard that, because of Esther's courage, they would all be saved from death.

There is another whose courageous sacrifice would save even more people. Christmas is a time to celebrate God's provision of Jesus, God's rescue plan from death and separation. Jesus would be courageous by coming to earth and going to the cross. Just as God chose Esther to stand before the king, God also chose Jesus to rescue His people from death. God's purpose is His glory and God's glorious works reveal His wonderful love for us!

QUESTIONS:

1. What are times this past year that you had to be courageous? Was it a time that God had chosen you to be in that role for "such a time as this" just like Esther?
2. Are there specific areas in your life with which you are having trouble trusting God's wonderful love for you? Why? What do you know is true about God that can help you when you're tempted to doubt?

ACTIVITY:

Draw a picture of a queen on your ornament to remind you that God is always with us, so we can be strong and courageous even in moments of worry and doubt. Take time to pray for each other about the things in your lives that might seem scary. Remind each other what you know is true about God and thank Him for never leaving or forsaking you.

Wonders of His Love – December 20

SCRIPTURE: Luke 1:5-25

DEVOTION:

When was the last time you wanted something but felt like God was keeping it from you? Zechariah and Elizabeth loved God with all their hearts, and they wanted to have a child with whom to share God's love. Sadly, Elizabeth was not able to have a baby. It grieved their hearts and they may have felt hopeless.

God, however, was planning a surprise. He sent an angel to proclaim wonderful news to Zechariah: they would have a son named John, later known as John the Baptist. He would get to "prepare the people for the coming of the Lord." Wow! What a beautiful gift and an important job for John to be given! But did you catch that? The angel said all of this before Elizabeth was even pregnant. How can this be?

Well the thing is, God knows everything. And I mean EVERYTHING. Not only does He know it, but He also has a wonderful purpose for it all. Did you know that every single person in God's family was created and chosen specifically by God? God's family is made of believers who know that their sins separate them from Him, but who believe that in His kindness He sent His own Son to pay for all of their sins (Hint: His Son was Jesus, for whom John prepared the way!)

See, God has always had a wonderful plan. He has chosen YOU to be breathing, alive, and reading these words in this exact moment. God, in His marvelous love, created each person in His family to carry out the good works He prepared for them before they were even born – and all for HIS spectacular glory. He wants us to know the splendor of His love, to trust wholeheartedly in His plan, and to see who He is in all of His awesome glory. The same loving God who created John to prepare His people for God's greatest gift of all, Jesus our Savior, also designed you with great gifts and purpose.

How will you bring Him glory today?

QUESTIONS:

1. How do you feel the Lord has gifted you? Think about what you are good at and what you like to do. (Ex: athletic ability, art, public speaking, teaching, etc.) How can you use your gifts to glorify God this week?
2. Is there anything in life you're waiting for or wished you had? Do you trust that whether God grants this to you or not, He, in His wonderful love, has a good plan for your life? Why or why not?

ACTIVITY:

Today, draw a picture of an old man and woman on your ornament to represent Zechariah and Elizabeth. Remind your family that what is impossible for us is possible for God. Pray as a family, thanking God for all the ways He has been faithful to your family this past year. Ask Him to help you trust His purpose for your life over this next year.

Wonders of His Love – December 21

SCRIPTURE: Matthew 3:1-6

DEVOTION:

Have you ever noticed bright orange and white traffic cones on the road while riding in the car? They are put there on purpose to get our attention. They announce that there is something we need to be aware of up ahead.

Well, John the Baptist was kind of like one of those orange and white traffic cones meant to get people's attention. God sent John with the purpose of preparing the hearts of the people as he announced that our King and Rescuer, Jesus, was coming! As you read, John was a little different from others. He lived in the desert, wore clothes made from itchy, scratchy camel hair, and ate locusts and honey. That would surely get my attention! How about you?

Not only did John get the people's attention, they also recognized that he spoke with authority. They heard the truth of his message as he told them to "Repent!" which means "to change one's mind." John told the people to stop doing what they wanted to do and to start doing what God wanted them to do. See, God loves us and always wants to lead us toward life. That is why He purposefully sent John to announce the coming of Jesus!

Many of the people who heard John's message of repentance believed. They repented of their sins, asked God for forgiveness, and were baptized by John. They were so excited about this good news that they went back to their towns to invite others to hear John's message, too. Many people came and heard the good news that God loved them and wanted them to obey him.

This is how "the voice shouting in the wilderness" prepared the way for the coming King and prepared the hearts of the people to receive Him. As God often does, He shows us His glory and purpose in unexpected ways to get our attention – just like He did with John.

QUESTIONS:

1. How has God used unexpected people or situations to remind you of His love for you? How can you be like traffic cones, getting people's attention, and pointing them towards God?
2. What are things in your life that pull your heart away from God and obeying His Word? What can you do today to love and obey God?

ACTIVITY:

John the Baptist liked to hang out by the Jordan River, so draw a picture of a river on today's ornament. Let the river remind you that God's grace never runs out for those who believe and repent of their sins. Read Ephesians 2:8-9 and remind each other that salvation is a gift from God to everyone who repents and believes. Thank God for the gift of forgiveness available to us only because of Jesus.

Wonders of His Love – December 22

SCRIPTURE: Luke 1:26-38

DEVOTION:

When receiving a gift, we can quickly move from curiosity to excitement just by ripping through a few pieces of paper. We are surprised if we are given a gift we did not expect. We may even question what we did to deserve it. But this does not keep us from accepting the gift. We simply accept it with gratitude and wonder at what we have been given.

As we peek into Mary and Gabriel's conversation we see a young, unwed woman about to receive the greatest gift the world will ever know. As Mary began to understand Gabriel's news, her fear was comforted through his greeting, "Do not be afraid, Mary, for you have found favor with God!" You see, Gabriel had great news! Mary's fear turned to curiosity as she tried to comprehend how such a wonderful gift could be given to her. "How will this be?" she asked. The news did not make sense to her as she had not yet been married. How could she be given this promised gift? Gabriel then informed Mary of God's miraculous power at work. She was reminded that, "No word from God will ever fail." God's promises are true! His purposes will always be fulfilled and He will always give what He has promised.

Through that final reminder, Mary accepted the news and gift as she declared, "I am the Lord's servant," and revealed her total submission to God's will. By God's power and grace, Mary would carry a child that would be the Savior of the world. She would get to be the mother of God's Son whose kingdom would reign forever! What would come for Mary through this gift was not fully known to her. But what she knew of God's character and promises was enough to trust the message, the gift, and the gift-Giver.

QUESTIONS:

1. What gift has God given your family recently that has brought you awe and wonder? What gift are you being given this Christmas season that is teaching you to trust God, the gift-Giver, more?
2. Are there any gifts you're wondering what you've done to deserve? What truths from God's Word can you read today to be reminded of the fullness of His grace given to you through Jesus Christ?

ACTIVITY:

Today, draw a picture of a heart representing God's amazing love that He sent down to earth in the baby the angel promised to Mary. Brainstorm as a family how you can share the gifts God has given you with others so that they can know the greatest gift, Jesus. Take time to thank God for specific things He has given you over the past year.

Wonders of His Love – December 23

SCRIPTURE: Matthew 1:18-25

DEVOTION:

Think about a time you made a decision before you had all the facts. Did getting the rest of the information change your mind? We often think we know what's best on our own, but we can be thankful for those who help us see the bigger picture.

When Joseph found out that Mary was going to have a baby before they were married, he had a big decision to make. Would he remain with Mary, or divorce her, as Jewish law allowed? Joseph was a righteous man who followed the law, but he also didn't want to publicly shame Mary, so he decided to divorce her in private.

Before Joseph could act on his decision, God sent an angel to reveal His wonderful plan to Joseph in a dream. The angel told Joseph he didn't need to be afraid to take Mary as his wife. The baby was God's Son who would save people from their sins! God was sending His own Son to earth to defeat sin once and for all and to rescue us from a life apart from Him! The angel also said this was the child God's prophet, Isaiah, wrote about. The one called Emmanuel which means, "God with us." That's exactly who Jesus is— God come from Heaven to earth to be with His people, know their sufferings, and make a way for them to be with God.

After Joseph woke up, he had a choice to make. Would he stick with the decision he had made on his own or obey God's plan? Joseph chose to take Mary as his wife and named the baby Jesus, just like God told him to do. God sure does work in wonderful ways. He used a dream to help Joseph see and understand His purpose. Joseph knew God's Word and also heard it in a dream full of wonderful news about a baby who was coming. Jesus, "God with us," would save the people from their sins. Joy to the world, the Lord has come!

QUESTIONS:

1. Why was the baby that was going to be born so special? Why did God send the baby to the earth? What did He come to do?
2. How did God tell Joseph what His plan was? Why did Joseph choose to do what God said? What is some wonderful news you have received?

ACTIVITY:

Draw a picture of tools on today's ornament to represent Joseph, the carpenter. Let Joseph's story remind you that while we can only see a tiny picture of God's plan, God has a perfect purpose and knows everything. Work together as a family to put together a puzzle this week. Thank God that He sees the big picture of our lives and that one day we will see it too!

Wonders of His Love – December 24

SCRIPTURE: Luke 2:1-5

DEVOTION:

Times were not good for the people of God on that first Christmas Eve. Looking on the bright side, the Jewish people were at least living in the land that God had promised Abraham all those years ago. Unfortunately, they were living in the land as it was being ruled by the vicious and evil Roman Empire, with Caesar Augustus as its king. Caesar was the ultimate ruler of most of the known world at that time and considered himself to be a god. He was in complete control of nearly everything... or was he?

"The king's heart is a stream of water in the hand of the LORD; He turns it wherever He will." (Proverbs 21:1)

Caesar woke up one day and thought, "I've got an idea! We need to make sure that we are getting everyone's tax money, so let's send them all back to their hometowns to get their taxes from them!" Caesar was proud of himself for this plan. Only it wasn't his plan. It was God's plan to accomplish His purpose. Like the rivers that God tells where to go, God turned Caesar's heart to get a poor young man and his very pregnant wife from the town of Nazareth to his hometown of Bethlehem, 100 miles away.

Hundreds of years before, the prophet Micah had told God's people that their King would come from this small little town of Bethlehem. Nothing could stop God from keeping his promise... not even the powerful Caesar Augustus.

God is still accomplishing His purposes and keeping His promises today. On this Christmas Eve, we can be sure that God is in control of the kings and rulers of our world, just as He was 2,000 years ago. Fear not! The King of Kings is on His throne!

QUESTIONS:

1. Parents, what are some stories from your family history that, looking back, you can see how God used life's circumstances and even the decisions of others to accomplish His purposes? Share one or two stories with your children to show how God has controlled your steps as a family.
2. What are the "hopes and fears" of your family on this Christmas Eve? Not just the hopes and fears of what will or won't be under the Christmas tree tomorrow morning, but the hopes and fears your family has been talking about, praying for, or dreaming of going into the new year.

ACTIVITY:

When Joseph and Mary got to Bethlehem, there was no room or bed for them, only a stable with a manger for a bed. Draw a picture of the manger Jesus was laid in on today's ornament. Pray together for the desires of your hearts, your "hopes and fears" and then pray that your family will have the peace of God that comes from trusting in the Savior who has come and is coming again!

Wonders of His Love – December 25

SCRIPTURE: Luke 2:6-21

DEVOTION:

How do you feel when you purchase a gift for someone that you know they are going to LOVE? As you wait for the day that you can finally give it to them, you look forward with great anticipation to their excitement as they open your gift. You might even drop a few hints along the way about how amazing this gift is going to be.

For the past three weeks you have read Scripture passages that have revealed glimpses of God's excitement about the Gift He was bringing for us. He dropped hints over and over again about how wondrous and amazing this Gift would be through prophets, kings, and angels.

Now in Luke we see that it was finally time to reveal the Gift, and God did not hold back His excitement. Jesus was born to a virgin in Bethlehem, just as God promised. Heaven exploded with rejoicing! Angels appeared and shared the good news with the shepherds. The shepherds were so excited that they raced to Bethlehem to see what God had done. When they saw Him, they dropped to their knees in wonder and worship. They then left to tell everyone they could about the Gift.

You see, this Gift is not just for one person or even a select few. This Gift is for everyone who will receive Him. It is the Gift that brings us new life now and the promise of life with God forever. That is why God was so excited to give us this Gift, because He loves you! He loves you so much that He purposed this Gift long ago and left hints down through the centuries so that you and I would not miss the true wonder of Christmas. In the words of Paul from 2 Corinthians 9:15, "Thanks be to God for this Gift too wonderful for words!"

Merry Christmas!

QUESTIONS:

1. Share a memory of when you have given a gift that you were excited about giving. Why were you excited? Did you drop any hints ahead of time?
2. Jesus truly is the best Gift we can ever receive or give. What does John 1:12 tell us happens when we receive Him? Why is this such good news that we want to share it with others?

ACTIVITY:

Merry Christmas! For the final ornament, draw a gift to remind you that the best gift God has ever given you is His Son, Jesus. Spend time praying together as a family. Parents, pray that the wonder of God's love will grow in the hearts of you and your kids this Christmas season. Pray that God would open their eyes to see how deeply loved and cherished they are by their perfect Heavenly Father.

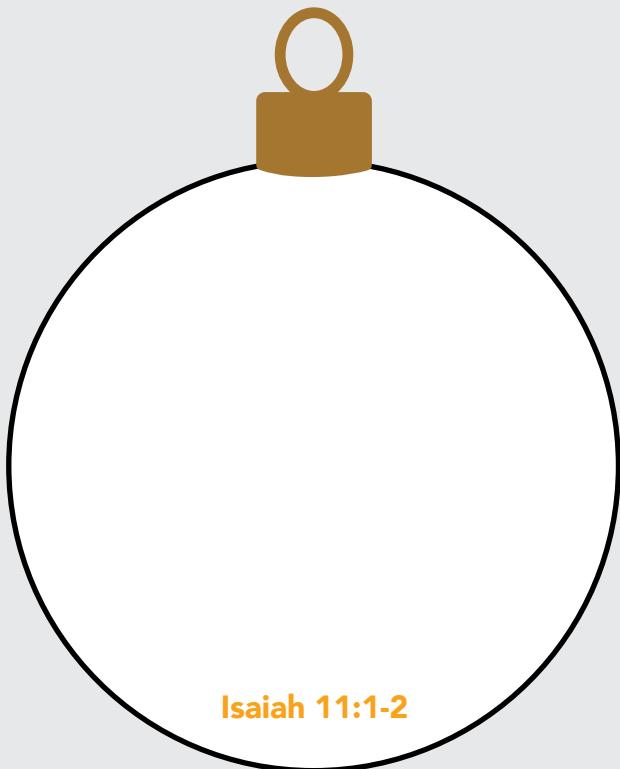
DECEMBER 1

CREATE YOUR OWN ORNAMENTS!

To go along with each day's devo, you can let your kids decorate their own ornaments.

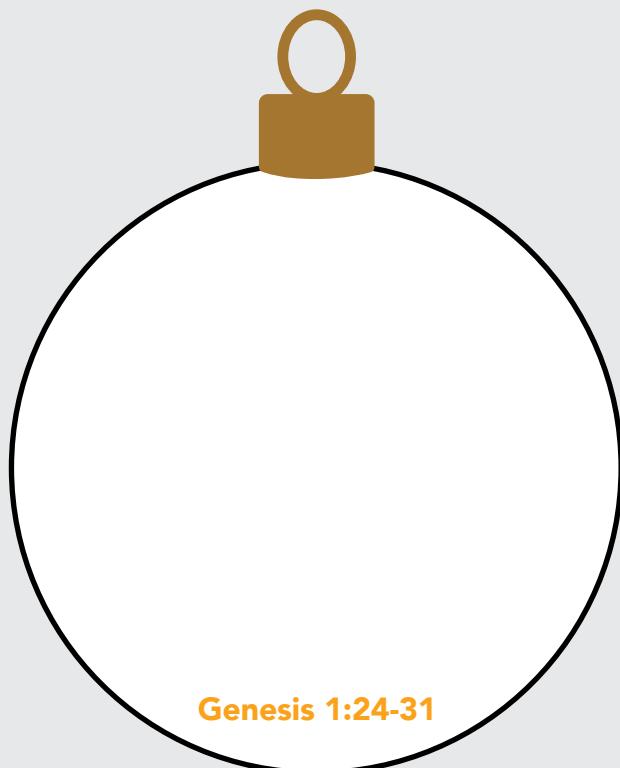
They can draw the suggested image or come up with their own picture that will help them remember what you talked about that day.

Cut out the ornament and use string or ribbon to hang it on your own Jesse Tree or someplace in your house to remind your family about the true story of Christmas.



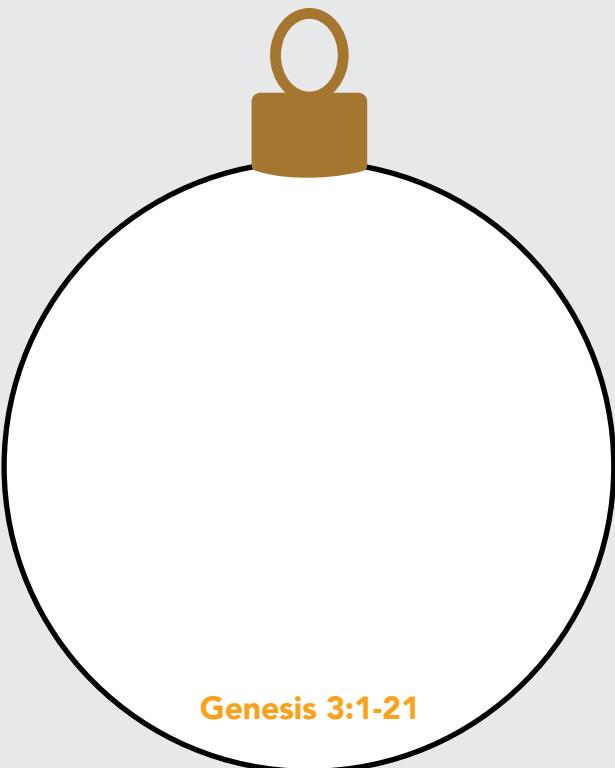
draw a stump

DECEMBER 2



draw the world

DECEMBER 3



draw a snake

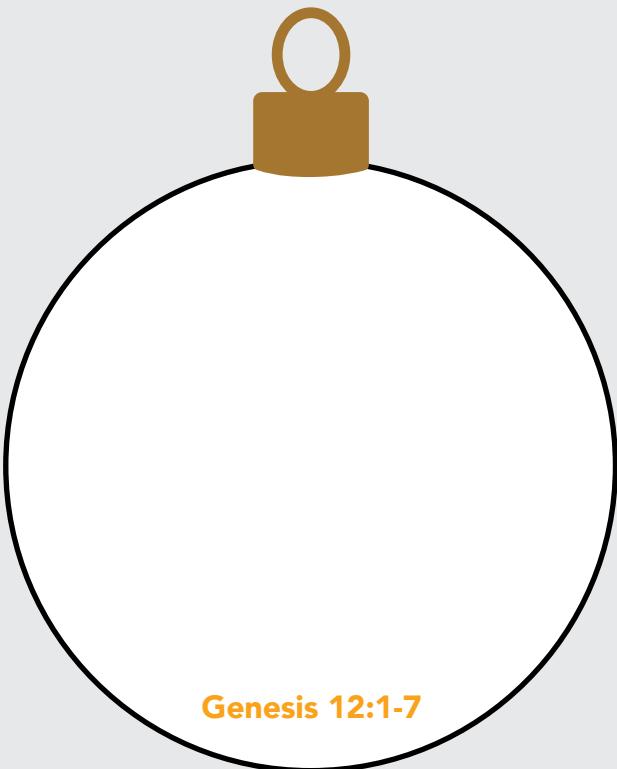
DECEMBER 4



Genesis 6:5-8

draw the ark

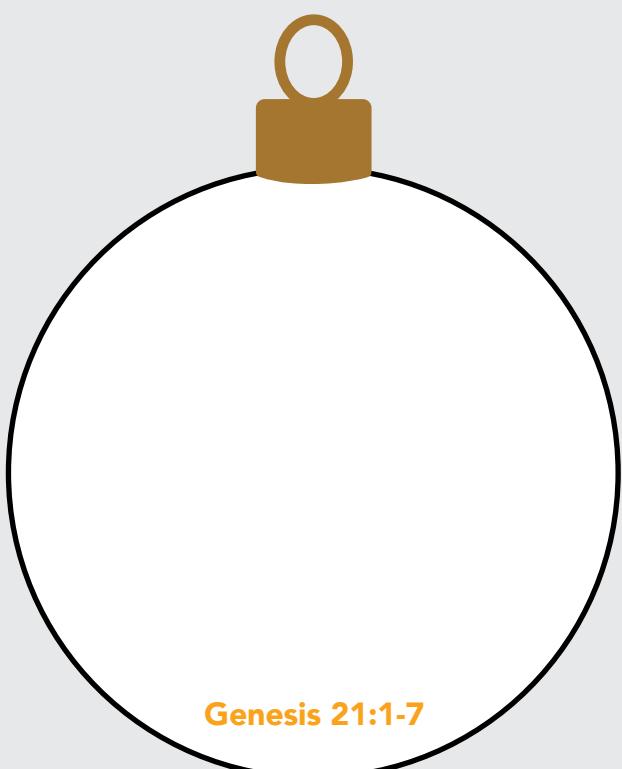
DECEMBER 5



Genesis 12:1-7

draw a tent

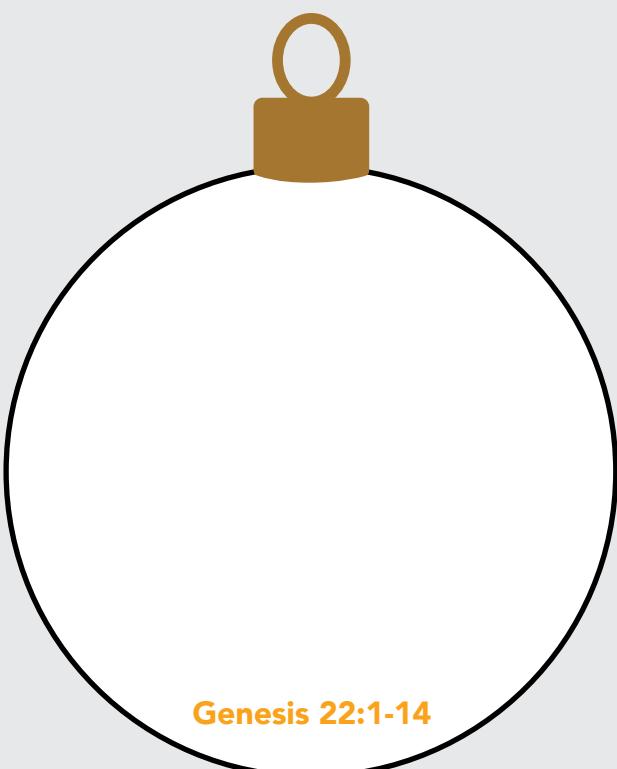
DECEMBER 6



Genesis 21:1-7

draw a baby

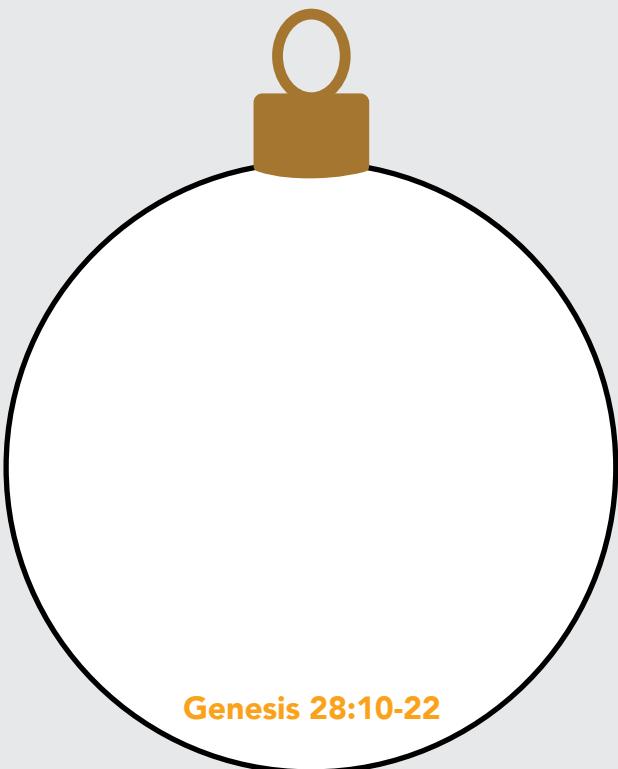
DECEMBER 7



Genesis 22:1-14

draw a ram

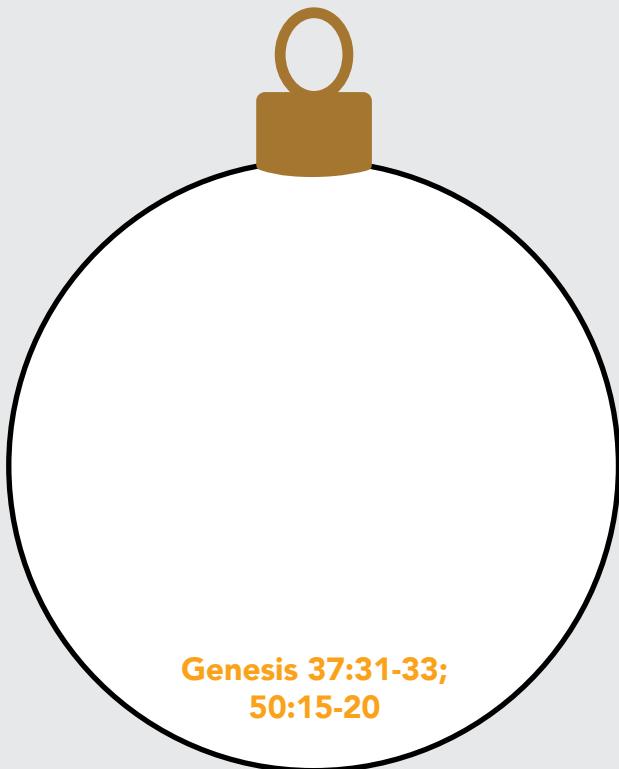
DECEMBER 8



Genesis 28:10-22

draw a ladder

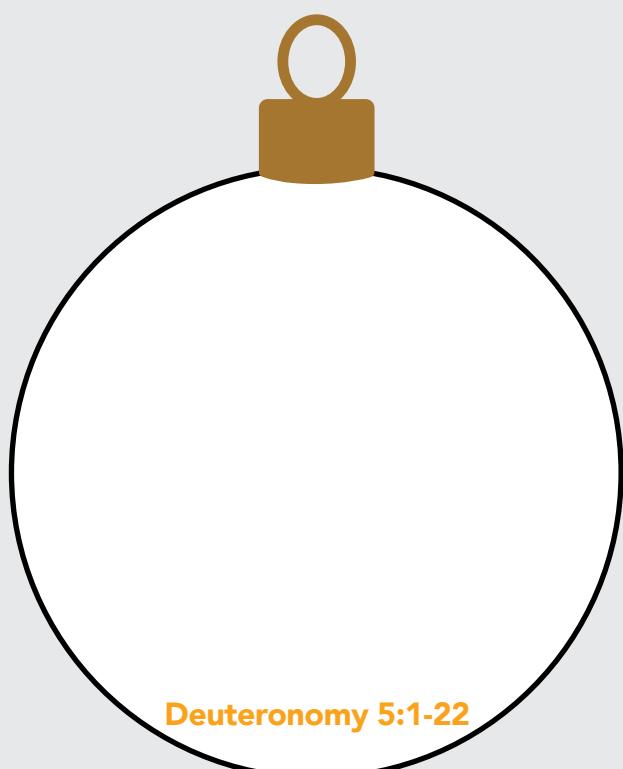
DECEMBER 9



Genesis 37:31-33;
50:15-20

draw a coat

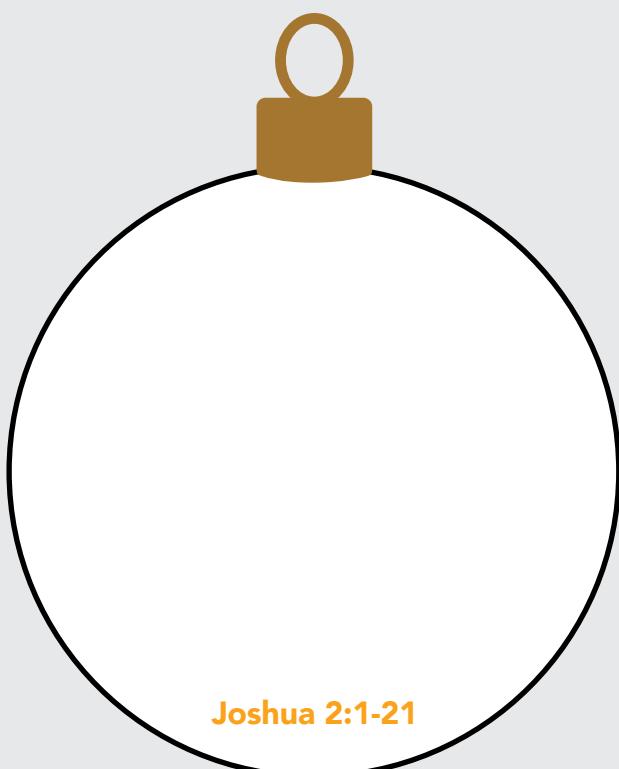
DECEMBER 10



Deuteronomy 5:1-22

draw stone tablets

DECEMBER 11



Joshua 2:1-21

draw a rope

DECEMBER 12



Ruth 1:1-2:3;
Matthew 1:5, 16

draw wheat

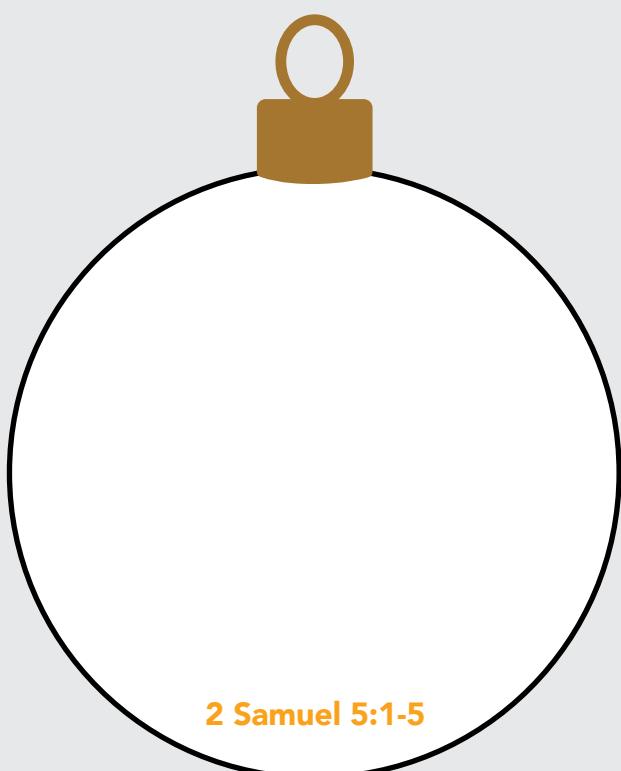
DECEMBER 13



1 Samuel 16:1-13

draw a jar of oil

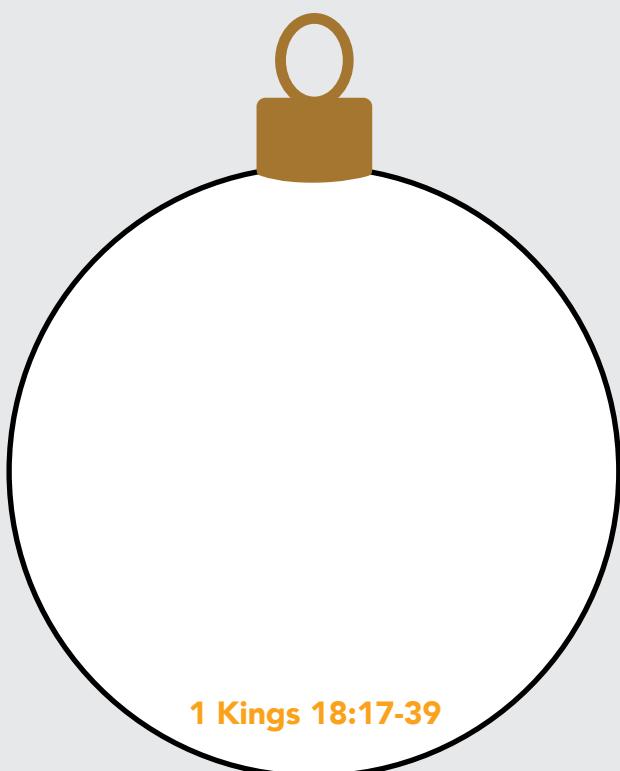
DECEMBER 14



2 Samuel 5:1-5

draw a crown

DECEMBER 15



1 Kings 18:17-39

draw fire

DECEMBER 16



Isaiah 9:2, 6-7

draw the sun

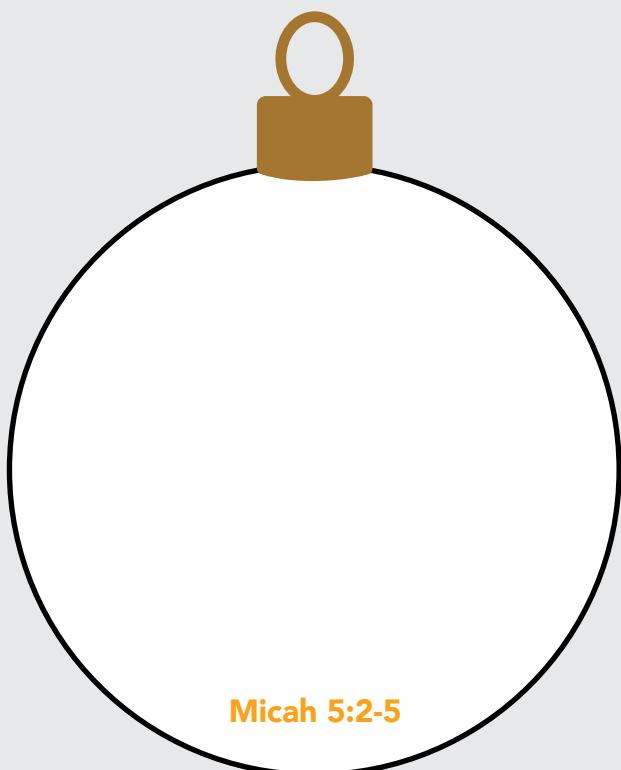
DECEMBER 17



Isaiah 11:1-9

draw a lion and lamb

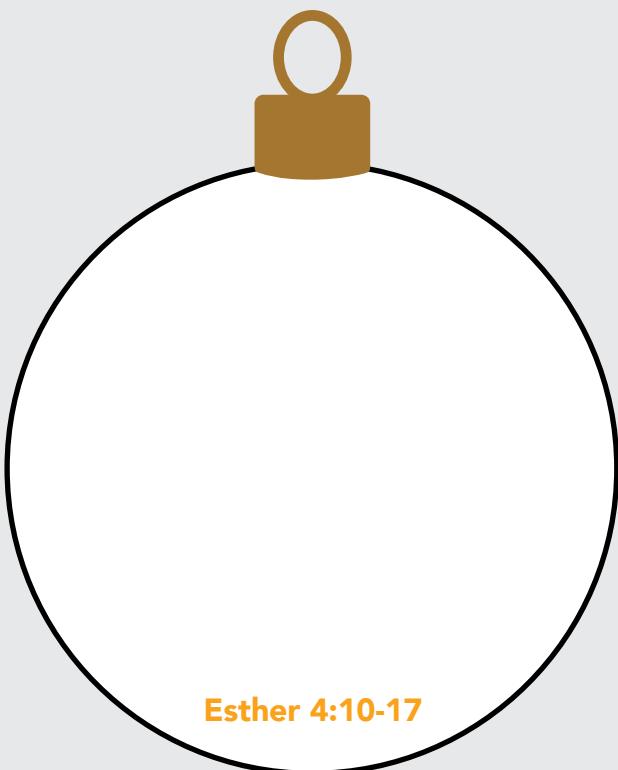
DECEMBER 18



Micah 5:2-5

draw a house

DECEMBER 19



Esther 4:10-17

draw a queen

DECEMBER 20



Luke 1:5-25

draw an old man and woman

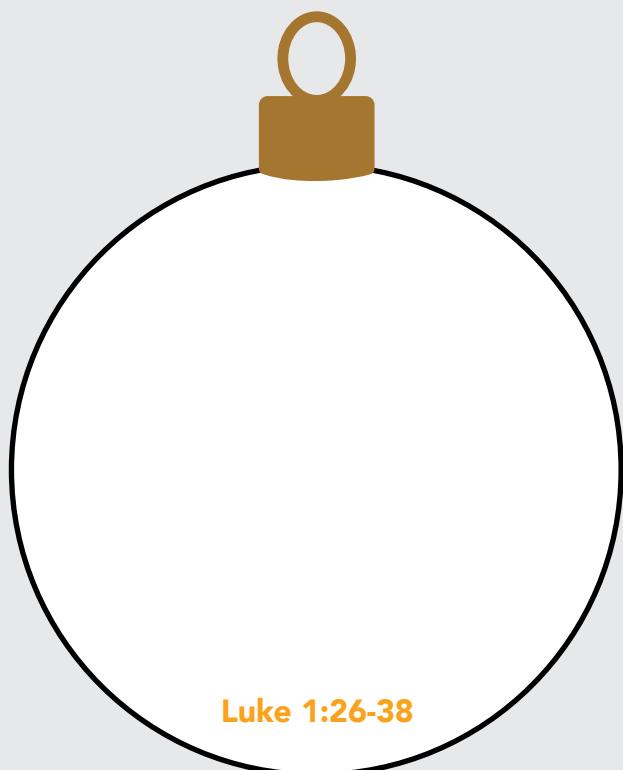
DECEMBER 21



Matthew 3:1-6

draw a river

DECEMBER 22



Luke 1:26-38

draw a heart

DECEMBER 23

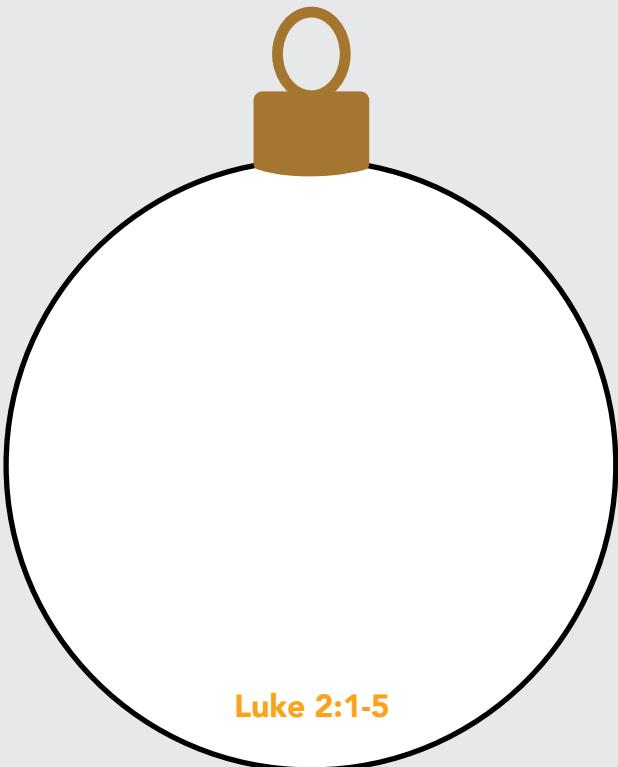


Matthew 1:18-25

draw tools

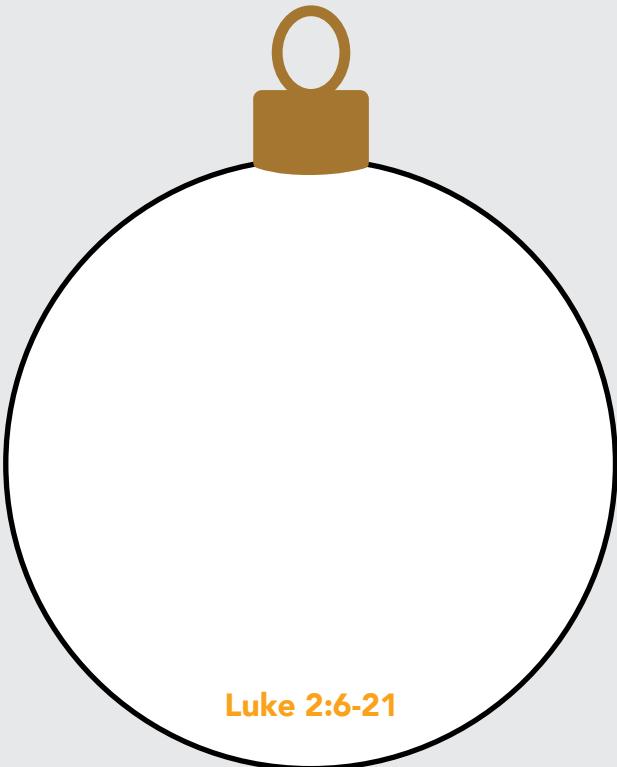
DECEMBER 24

DECEMBER 25



Luke 2:1-5

draw a manger



Luke 2:6-21

draw a gift

