

Advent Tree Devotions – Introduction

Hello! I am Sarah Dees, blogger at Frugal Fun for Boys. My site is a source of crafts, games, and learning activities that boys would like, but it's definitely not exclusive to boys. I am the mom of four sons and one little daughter who was born in April 2014. I wrote these Advent devotions for my children, and I hope that they will be a benefit to your family as well.

I love the Christmas season because it is a time of great anticipation. Children naturally look forward Christmas Day with all of the gifts and celebration, and this is a perfect time to teach them about the Messiah who had been promised for so many years, who came to be the Savior of the World, and who is coming again!

These devotions are designed to be done together as a family. Younger children may not understand everything that is said, but they are probably picking up more than you realize! If you fall behind, don't worry about it. Do two days in one when you get a chance, skip a day, or just finish up when you can. We have finished the devotions *after* Christmas on more than one year!

Each day has an ornament symbol to go with it. You might want to make ornaments out of felt, paper, or salt dough and hang them on a tree. The easiest option, in my opinion, is to draw the symbols on paper. Our favorite way to do this is to make a large poster board Christmas tree and to cover it with 24 paper circles – one for each day of the devotions. You can see an example in this blog post: <http://frugalfun4boys.com/2013/11/26/download-and-print-advent-jesse-tree-devotions/>

Here is a list of the symbols:

1. An open Bible
2. The world
3. An apple and a snake
4. A rainbow
5. A tent
6. A lamb
7. A ladder
8. Joseph's coat of many colors
9. A door frame
10. Two stone tablets
11. A cluster of grapes
12. Wheat
13. Harp
14. A stump with a new branch growing from it
15. A crown and a dove
16. A shepherd's staff
17. A cross
18. Village of Bethlehem
19. A candle
20. A house
21. Baby in the manger
22. An angel
23. Baby at the temple
24. Star

Merry Christmas to your family from ours!

-Sarah Dees

December 1st

The Promise Fulfilled

Scripture Reading: John 20:30-31

Christmas is coming! Christmas is such an exciting time. We can't wait for Christmas to arrive because of the presents and the fun, but did you know that the children of Israel waited much longer for the very first Christmas?

This month we will be learning about a very special **promise** fulfilled. God promised at the beginning of time that He would send His Son to be the Savior of the world, and then at just the right time, Jesus was born! For hundreds of years, the church has called the weeks leading up to Christmas "**advent**" because the word "advent" means "coming." During the month of December we are celebrating the promise that God made long ago and the way in which He miraculously fulfilled that promise through the birth of His Son. We are also looking forward with anticipation to the time when Jesus will come again!

Jesus is often called the **Messiah**. Do you know what the word Messiah means? Messiah means "anointed one," and the word was used to refer to God's promised one who was coming to rescue us from our sin. The New Testament word for Messiah is **Christ**.

This month we are going to be reading Bible verses that were written by two types of people – **prophets** and **eyewitnesses**. The prophets in the Old Testament were men that God gave special messages to. We will be reading many verses written by the prophet Isaiah because Isaiah brought the people messages about the Messiah. We will also read verses from the New Testament that were written by eyewitnesses. Eyewitnesses were people who actually saw Jesus and heard him teach. Matthew, John, and the

other apostles were all eyewitnesses of the Savior. Luke and Mark were not apostles but compiled their writings from the accounts of eyewitnesses.

The verses that we read today were written by John, who was an apostle and who was very close to Jesus. What do these verses say about why John wrote his gospel? John says that Jesus did many things while He was on the earth – too many things for John to write about them all! He chose to write about the things he did so that we might see clear proof that Jesus is the Messiah. John's point doesn't only apply to his gospel, however. All of Scripture was written so that we might understand that Jesus is God's promised one! The Savior! And when we believe who Jesus is and why He came, we can have eternal life in His name. What an awesome gift!

Prayer: Thank God that He willingly sent Jesus to be your Savior.

Ornament Symbol: An open Bible

December 2nd

Creation

Scripture Reading: Genesis chapter 1 (For young children, simply talk through the days of creation, or read the creation account in a children's Bible.)

The story of Jesus coming to earth starts with creation. What word did you hear over and over to describe the things that God made? God said that all that He made was good. Then, God created man in the image of God and said that it was *very* good.

Prayer: Thank God for His creation. Praise Him for His wisdom and creativity that we see displayed in all that He made.

Ornament symbol: The world

December 3rd

The Fall

Scripture Reading: Genesis 3:1-15

What is sin? Sin is when we fail to obey God. We disobey when we do something that God has told us not to do, and we also disobey when we fail to do something that God asks us to do. Sin is not limited to our actions – we can have attitudes or thoughts that are sin because God knows what is in our hearts.

Satan came as a serpent to tempt Adam and Eve. He came to Eve and asked her a question. What did he ask? Eve answered Satan's question, and he had a response ready! He told Eve that she would not surely die if she ate the fruit. Did Satan tell the truth? Or a lie?

Adam and Eve had a choice to make. They had to decide whether or not they were going to trust that God was wise and good when He told them not to eat the fruit from the tree of the knowledge of good and evil. Don't we all have that same choice to make? We must decide whether we believe that God is wise and good in the things He tells us to do.

In Genesis 3:15, we see the first hint of the coming Messiah! Satan would bruise Christ's heel, but Christ would bruise His head. Ultimately, Satan will not have the victory!

Prayer: Confess any sin that you are aware of to God. Thank Him for His willingness to forgive.

Ornament Symbol: Apple and snake

December 4th

The Flood

Scripture Reading: Genesis 6:5-8, 7:1-12, Romans 6:23

What made Noah different from the other people in his day? Hebrews 11:6-7 gives us a clue. These verses say that Noah was “an heir of the righteousness which is according to faith.” The story of the flood is a vivid picture of Romans 6:23 which says that the wages of sin is death! Sin is a serious thing. God made a promise after the flood. He put a rainbow in the sky as a sign of His promise to never destroy the earth with a flood again. We can be so thankful for that promise, and even more so for the promise of a Savior who would come to pay the penalty for sin once for all!

Prayer: Thank God that He shows us His promises through His word and through the rainbow in the sky.

Ornament Symbol: Rainbow

December 5th

God’s Covenant with Abram

Scripture Reading: Genesis 12:1-7

Have you ever been on a long trip? It is fun to travel, but by the time a trip is over, we are usually ready to get back to our own home! Can you imagine leaving your home and traveling to a new land with no clear idea of where you were going? Abram willingly packed up his family and his possessions and followed God. God promised three things to Abram. Did you catch what they were? God promised to give Abram a new land. He promised to make Him into a great nation. And He promised that all of the families of the earth would be blessed through him. That last promise shows us the Messiah again! Jesus would come from the nation that God started with Abram.

Prayer: Thank God that He has chosen to put you in a family where you are learning about God, just like He chose Abram to be a man who would know Him.

Ornament Symbol: Tent

Activity idea: Preschoolers may enjoy packing a bag and pretending to travel to the promised land! Use blankets to make a tent to “sleep” in, just like Abram did. Or, if you have older children, you might want to take a long walk as a family and discuss what it would be like to leave on foot to travel to a new land that you have never seen.

December 6th

Isaac and the Lamb

Scripture reading: Genesis 22: 1-18, John 1:29

Do you remember Abram from the last story? God changed his name to Abraham, which means “father of many.” That name may have seemed like a funny name to Abraham because he and his wife Sarah had no children! God promised to give Abraham and Sarah a son even though they were both very old, past the age of having children. It did not happen right away, but God gave them a son, Isaac, just like He promised! But then God asked Abraham to do something very difficult and to sacrifice his only son on an altar. What was God doing? God was testing Abraham to see if he would obey, and Abraham passed the test. God did not make Abraham actually kill his son, and He provided a lamb for the sacrifice. However, God did not spare His own Son! He freely offered His own Son as the sacrifice that was needed for our sin. What an amazing God!

Prayer: Thank God for willingly sending His Son to suffer death in our place.

Ornament Symbol: Lamb

December 7th

God Confirms His Covenant with Jacob

Scripture reading: Genesis 28:1-17

Abraham had a son named Isaac, and Isaac had two sons named Jacob and Esau. Jacob was the son that God chose to carry on God’s covenant (promise) that He had made to Abraham. One night while Jacob was asleep, something very interesting happened to him! What happened to Jacob in this story? What did Jacob see in his dream? Jacob saw a ladder that went from the earth up to heaven. Angels were going up and down on the ladder. What did this mean? God was showing that He was involved in Jacob’s life, and He was proving His faithfulness. God spoke to Jacob and confirmed that He was keeping the covenant that He had made to Abraham. Jacob’s children and grandchildren and great-grandchildren would become a great nation. Jacob would live again in the land promised to Abraham, and God would bless all of the families of the earth through Jacob. God had kept His promise for three generations, and He would continue to work in many more generations to come!

Prayer: Thank God that He works in the lives of His children.

Ornament Symbol: Ladder

December 8th

Joseph and God's plan for the Israelites

Scripture reading: Genesis 37:1-8, 18-36, Genesis 50: 18-21, Romans 8:28

Abraham had a son named Isaac, Isaac had two sons named Jacob and Esau, and Jacob had TWELVE sons! Unfortunately, Jacob loved his son Joseph more than the others, and his brothers were jealous. Isaac made Joseph a special coat with many colors in it. Joseph also had a series of dreams in which his older brothers were bowing down to him. This made his brothers even angrier! Joseph's brothers chose to do a sinful thing. One day, they sold Joseph to slave traders and then created a lie to tell their father. They put an animal's blood on Joseph's beautiful coat so that they could show it to their father and tell him that Joseph had been killed by a wild beast.

Joseph's brothers meant this for evil, but God had a plan for Joseph. God allowed Joseph to prosper in the land of Egypt, and Joseph promoted to a position of power where he worked with Pharaoh himself! God told Joseph in a dream that a famine was coming to the land of Egypt. Joseph was able to store up food during seven years of good crops so that there would be food when the famine came.

During the famine, who should come to Egypt looking for food but Joseph's brothers! How do you think Joseph treated his brothers? Joseph was kind and forgave them. He provided food for them to eat. He understood that even though his brothers intended to harm him, God had used his time in Egypt to provide food for their family. God preserved the family of Isaac and made them into a great nation, just as He had promised!

Prayer: Thank God that He is not limited by our sin. Thank God that He is always working to make us more like Him!

Ornament Symbol: Coat of many colors

December 9th

Moses and the Passover

Scripture reading: Exodus 12:1-13

The Israelites came to Egypt in order to get food during the famine, and they stayed and stayed. In fact, they stayed for 400 years! During that time, many new babies were born and grew up and had families of their own, and Israel grew to be a great nation. It was time for them to return to the land that God had promised to Abraham, but Pharaoh, the king of Egypt, did not want to let them go. And so God sent plagues. He turned the Nile river to blood, covered the land with frogs, sent a swarm of gnats and then a swarm of flies, caused the cattle to die, allowed the people to break out in huge boils, sent a huge hail storm, sent a swarm of locusts, and covered the land with darkness. And still Pharaoh would not let the Israelites go!

In the verses we read today, God gave the Israelites very specific instructions for the last plague. What were they to do with the lamb? What would happen if they did not have the blood of the lamb on their door post?

God instructed the Israelites to celebrate the Passover every year as a way to remember what God did for them in Egypt. It also served as a reminder of the coming Lamb who would take all of their sin upon Him – not yearly, but once for all.

Prayer: Thank God for His care and protection of us as His children. Thank Him for providing Jesus as a lamb who was slain for us.

Ornament Symbol: Door frame

December 10th

God gives Moses the Law

Scripture reading: Exodus 20: 1-20, John 1:17, Galatians 3:21-22

After God led the Israelites out of the land of Egypt, He taught them many things before bringing them into the Promised Land. God gave ten important commandments to Moses so that Moses could teach the people. What was the point of God's law? The law showed the people what God requires. Could the people of Israel perfectly obey God's law? Can we perfectly obey God's law? Can obedience to the law earn God's favor? Absolutely not, because none of us can obey the law perfectly! And James 2:10 tells us that even if we are able to keep the whole law but sin in one part, we are still guilty of being law breakers. But John 1:17 and Galatians 3:21-22 give us great hope! The law was given to expose sin, but grace came through Jesus Christ! When we understand our guilt before God, we are in a position to receive the gift of eternal life through faith in Jesus Christ.

Prayer: Thank God for both the Law and for His grace in providing eternal life through faith in Jesus.

Ornament Symbol: Two stone tablets

December 11th

Canaan, the Promised Land

Scripture reading: Numbers 13:1-2, 17-23, 27

After leaving Egypt and traveling through the desert, the Israelites had finally come to the Promised Land, the land that had been given to Abraham! Moses sent spies to go and look at the land – one man from each of the tribes. The land sounded wonderful. It was a good land for the people to live in. Unfortunately, the spies did not bring back a good report. Most of them were afraid of the people who lived in the land, and they did not trust God to take care of them. Only Joshua and Caleb trusted God. Because of that, God did not allow that generation to enter the land. God allowed Joshua and Caleb to enter the land, however, and forty years later, God led them into the land that He had promised to give them!

Prayer: Thank God for all of the good things that He has provided for you.

Ornament Symbol: A cluster of grapes

December 12th

Ruth and Boaz

Scripture reading: Ruth 4: 9-22

Ruth was a Moabite woman and not an Israelite. But she married an Israelite man and chose to make the Lord her God. After her husband died, Ruth chose to move to the land of Israel with her mother-in-law Naomi. The two women were on their own. Ruth and Naomi were in a tough position as women could not just go out and get a job in those days! It would be hard for them to find food and shelter. Boaz was a man who was a relative of Naomi's family, and he chose to "redeem" Ruth. He would take her as his wife, and he would provide for her and her mother-in-law Naomi. God provided a son to Ruth and Boaz, and this son became the grandfather of King David! And so Jesus Christ was born from the family line of Ruth and Boaz, down through David and his descendants.

Prayer: Pray that God would help you to be as committed to following God as Ruth was.

Ornament Symbol: Wheat

December 13th

King David

Scripture reading: 2 Samuel 7:8-17

What do you know about David? David was a man that the Lord used in mighty ways. God chose David to be king over Israel when he was just a shepherd boy, taking care of sheep in his father's flocks. David was a mighty warrior, but he also loved music and wrote many of the Psalms.

Do you remember how God made a promise to Abraham? In these verses that we just read, God made a promise to David. Saul was king before David. In fact, he was the first king of Israel. Saul chose not to obey God, and God took the kingdom away from Saul. His son did not become king after him. God promised to David that he would build a house for David and that his kingdom and his throne would be established forever.

Prayer: Praise God for all of the psalms that He inspired David to write, and ask Him to help you to be faithful to Him like David was.

Ornament Symbol: Harp

December 14th

Prophecy of the Shoot from the Stump of Jesse

Scripture reading: Isaiah 11:1-5

Do you remember the promise that God made to David that we read about yesterday? Well, after David died some very sad things

happened. David's son Solomon reigned after him, and Solomon made several sinful choices. God sent the prophet Ahijah to Solomon, and Ahijah delivered a very sad message. Because of Solomon's sin, God would tear 10 tribes away from the hand of his son. Solomon's son would rule over only the tribe of Judah. God did not take the kingdom completely away from Solomon's son because of the promise that God made to David.

Then, many years later, the nation of Assyria took over the 10 tribes of Israel, and the Babylonians finished the job by taking Judah. It seemed as though any hopes of David's kingdom enduring forever were shattered.

Isaiah wrote this prophecy during the time of the Assyrian captivity – a really ugly time in Israel's history. God gave him a message of hope for Israel. God had not abandoned his people! A shoot would come from the stump of Jesse! A branch from his roots would bear fruit! It would be the Messiah, come to redeem His people.

What were the 3 things that God promised to David? They were a house, throne, and kingdom. Listen to what the angel told Mary in Luke 1:32-33. All of those things were fulfilled in Jesus, who was indeed a descendant of David.

“He will be great and will be called the Son of the Most High; and the Lord God will give him the **throne** of His father David, and He will reign over the **house** of Jacob forever, and His **kingdom** will have no end.”

Prayer: Praise God for His faithfulness throughout history. Praise Him that He is always at work, even when we might not see it.

Ornament Symbol: Stump with a new branch growing

December 15th

The Prince of Peace

Scripture reading: Isaiah 9:6-7, John 14:27

What is peace? Why does our world need peace? People in the world are constantly seeking peace, but God provides true peace. Because of our sin we are separated from God, and Romans 5:10 tells us that until we become Christians we are actually His enemies!

Thanks be to God that we can have peace with Him through Jesus. And then God gives us peace in the midst of the troubles of life as we cast our cares on Him!

Prayer: Thank God for being our Prince of Peace. Ask Him to help you to bring the good news of His peace to a troubled world.

Ornament Symbol: A crown and a dove

December 16th

The Gentle Shepherd

Scripture reading: Isaiah 40:11, John 10:11-18, 27

Isaiah prophesied that the Messiah would be like a shepherd to His people, and Jesus confirmed in the book of John that He was indeed a good shepherd. Do you know very much about sheep? Sheep are not wise enough to make good decisions on their own. They need someone to take care of them and to lead them to food and water. The shepherds of Bible times led their sheep by calling to them with their voice rather than herding them with sheep dogs. Likewise, Jesus said that His sheep hear His voice and respond to Him.

The thief and robber that Jesus refers to are false teachers. Israel had many teachers who did not teach the truth, but Jesus was sent from God to bring true words to the people.

Prayer: Thank God that He leads us as a shepherd tenderly cares for His sheep. Praise Him for all the things He has done for you.

Ornament Symbol: A shepherd's staff

December 17th

The Suffering Servant

Scripture reading: Isaiah 53

In this chapter, Isaiah wrote about the purpose for the Messiah's coming to earth – to take the punishment that we deserved for our sins. Jesus was our substitute. Do you know what the word substitute means? A substitute is one who takes the place of another. A substitute teacher is one who takes the place of a regular teacher when he or she is out for the day. Or, a store might offer you a substitute for an item that is on sale but that they have run out of. So then, what does it mean that Jesus is our substitute? Jesus suffered and died on the cross – the death of a criminal. But He was not a criminal. In fact, He never did or thought anything sinful at all! Jesus died in the place of sinners on the cross so that God can treat us as though we have lived Jesus' perfect life, when in fact we have not. Now that is an amazing substitution!

Prayer: Think about whether or not you have ever repented of your sin and believed that Jesus is the only one who can forgive your sin. If so, thank God for His amazing substitution! If not, confess your sin to Him and ask Him to help you see your great need for a Savior.

Ornament symbol: A cross

December 18th

Prophecy of Bethlehem

Scripture reading: Micah 5:2

Isn't it amazing that Micah the prophet knew where the baby Jesus would be born even though he lived about 700 years before his birth? How did Micah know this? God is the author of Scripture, and even though He used men to write down the books of the Bible, it is His message. God was very generous in giving us plenty of proof that Jesus really was the Messiah!

Prayer: Praise God for being a God of details, and thank Him that He always carries out His plans.

Ornament Symbol: Village of Bethlehem

December 19th

The Light of the World

Scripture reading: John 1:1-14, John 8:12

Light is a very wonderful thing. Have you ever been in a dark room or outside in the dark night and felt afraid? The dark can be scary to us because we don't know what is around us. Light is very useful. When we turn on a light, we can see our way around the house, and we can do things easily that are very difficult to do in the dark. Jesus came as the Light of the world. Just as turning on a light shows us what a room is like, Jesus came to earth to show us what we are like. He shows us His holiness and makes our sin stand out so that we see that it is there. Jesus is also a light to show us the truth about God. John 1:18 tells us that no one has seen God the Father, but Jesus came to earth as a light to show us what God is like. Jesus also came to show us the way to salvation. Aren't you glad that instead of walking in darkness we can have the Light of life?

Prayer: Thank God that He sent Jesus to show us what He is like. Thank God that He does not leave us in the darkness, but that He shows us the way to go.

Ornament symbol: A candle

December 20th

Immanuel, God with Us

Scripture reading: Luke 1:26-38, Matthew 1:18-25

When the angel Gabriel appeared to Joseph and to Mary, what did he say the baby's name should be? They were to name him "Jesus," which means "Savior." Gabriel also reminded Joseph of a prophecy in the book of Isaiah and said that Jesus would also be called "Immanuel," which means, "God with us." What does it mean for us that God became a man and lived among us? It means that Jesus understands what it is like to live on this earth. He became a real baby and grew up as a real boy and then lived as a real man. He dealt with being tired and catching a cold and relating to difficult people. Hebrews 4:15 tells us that Jesus experienced all the things that we experience, and yet He did not sin. Because of that, we can draw near to Him and know that He will help us when we are in need. He is compassionate with us. Jesus does not excuse our sin or overlook our sin, but He is willing and able to help us find the way out of temptation. Thanks be to God that He lived with us!

Prayer: Praise God for His willingness to send His Son to live as one of us.

Ornament symbol: A house (to remind us that God lived on earth like us)

December 21st

Jesus is Born

Scripture reading: Luke 2:1-7

The day had finally come! God's promised Messiah, His own Son, was born! Was he born in a comfortable hotel? Or in a palace? No, the king of heaven was born in a stable for animals and laid in a feeding trough. It was clear from the beginning that Jesus was going to be a different kind of king.

Prayer: Thank God for the birth of His Son. Ask Him to show you how you can share that good news with others this Christmas.

Ornament symbol: Baby in the manger

December 22nd

The Angels Announce the Birth of Jesus

Scripture reading: Luke 2:8-20

Can you imagine what the shepherds thought when angels suddenly filled the dark night sky? How do you think they felt? What was the message that the angels brought? The angels announced that they had news of great joy. A Savior was born in the city of David! And how interesting that the first visitors to the newborn king were lowly shepherds. This was *definitely* going to be a different kind of king!

Prayer: Thank God for the message of the angels. Thank God that salvation is not only for the rich or the important, but that God cares for all people.

Ornament symbol: Angel

December 23rd

Jesus visits the temple

Scripture reading: Luke 2:21-38

Today we read about two people who saw the newborn baby Jesus in the temple and rejoiced at God's goodness. Both Simeon and Anna recognized that Jesus was the Messiah, the promised one sent from God. They must have been very familiar with the words of Isaiah and the other prophets, and they were waiting with eager anticipation for the Messiah to come. What did Simeon say when he saw the child? Simeon was very old. He said that he was now ready to die and to go to be with the Lord, for he had been able to see the Savior. What a privilege Simeon had!

Prayer: Ask God to help you love Jesus as much as Simeon and Anna did.

Ornament Symbol: The temple and the baby

December 24th

Wise men visit from the east

Scripture reading: Matthew 2: 1-12

When Jesus was born, a new star appeared in the sky over the place where He was. Some magi (magicians or astrologers) saw the star and followed it to Jerusalem where they approached King Herod and asked where the King of the Jews had been born. Why do you think Herod was upset by that question? Why did Herod want to know where the child was? Did he really want to worship him? No, he did not! He wanted to put Jesus to death so that he could not grow up to be a powerful king. God warned the magi to return to their home by a different path and to not go back to Herod. The magi were not looking for the Messiah, exactly, but they saw the star and were curious. We do not know if they believed in Jesus as Savior, but we do know that God used them to protect Jesus!

Prayer: Thank God that He works in the lives of all people to accomplish His plan.

Ornament Symbol: The Star