

Day One

Scripture:

Isaiah 11:1-5

Reflection:

Every once and awhile, we see that trees can have a kind of resurrection. We come upon a tree stump. It sits there like a gravestone of what once was alive. A melancholy monument to long gone towering branches that shaded the ground and made home to countless birds and insects. But, every so often, we see the first strange signs that all is not as it seems. A small shoot starts emerging from the seemingly dead wood. A tiny bud. And then, a leaf. And then another. And we realize all the fury of weather or the power of ax and saw have not yet slain the giant. Far beneath what our eyes can see, deep within the spreading roots, there is life and that life will not go quietly into that dark night.

Like an old tree stump, the once-mighty nation of Israel had seen better days. The promises God had once made about renewal and restoration under a fabled messianic King were ancient history. Centuries had passed. Their once mighty nation was also ancient history. Judea was like a dry withered stump, diseased and twisted under the boot of Rome and the harsh rule of Herod the Great.

Had the story come to an end? Had the last chapter been written centuries earlier with Malachi? Or, is it possible the stump was not dead after all? Was there unexpected life and hope being miraculously born in the shadows of a

stable? Would the promises of old be renewed and the story, at long last, reveal its greatest hero? As Longfellow once wrote:

Then pealed the bells more loud and deep:
“God is not dead, nor doth He sleep;
The Wrong shall fail, the Right prevail,
With peace on earth, good-will to men.”

The Jesse Tree will help your family celebrate how Jesus' coming is part of a larger story. The stories in the Bible are, in reality, the story of Jesus. It is not a story that waits for angels and shepherd. The story begins with creation. From Adam and Eve to Abraham and Moses, the story weaves its way through many centuries. The story is about heroes and villains, the courageous and the cowardly, the faithful and the faithless. And, all the while, the story is moving inexorably toward a single great goal. Someone is coming. Someone is coming. Someone is coming. Until, one day, the story becomes someone is here. The abandoned little stump was not dead, after all. There was still life in those roots and promises that must be kept. The Son of David has come. Let earth receive her King.

Family:

In the morning, put some beans on a wet paper towel. Set a timer and come back and look at them every hour or two. Ask everyone to look closely. Has anything changed? (You may need to add a little more water to the paper towel from time to time). Do this every hour or two all day long. Keep asking everyone to look closely. Has anything changed? Promise them something is going to happen. But, explain that you just cannot see it, yet.

You can show everyone some pictures of beans that have sprouted laying on a moist paper towel. You can go to Google Images and search for “beans starting to sprout on paper towel.” Promise them those beans will look just like the sprouting beans in the picture. But, even though that is true, right now you cannot see anything happening.

Explain that God once promised His people He was going to send them a great King. This King would be a descendant of King David. But, many years had passed. Israel had a man who called himself King, but he was evil, and he was not related to David. It would have been easy to think it would never happen.

But, one night, in Bethlehem, the very same town where once King David had been born, there was a little baby born in a stable. His name was Jesus. And, guess what? He was from the family of King David. This was none other than the promised King. God never forgets it when He promises something. And God also never changes His mind when He promises something. And so, just like these beans, even though we cannot always see God keeping His promises, we can absolutely know that He will.

The ornament for today looks like a little tree stump. But, look, there is this tiny branch sprouting right out of the tree trunk. People thought the tree was gone. There was just an old dead stump. But, they were wrong. One day, that old tree stump just pushed and pushed until this brand new branch grew out of the stump: a brand new tree right on top of the old one.

That is like God, finally deciding the right time had come to send the King and to show everyone that the God is Israel had not gone away or fallen asleep or forgotten to keep His

word. The story of Christmas is about God, after a long long time, keeping his promises.

Prayer:

When you drive past brown dried fields in December, how is it that you do not doubt for a minute they will be green with new life in just a few months? How, then, could you drive past a cemetery and not know, with just as much certainty, the same is also true there?

Are there prayers you once prayed that, because a great deal of time has passed, you have stopped praying because you have given up hope for an answer? When have you mistakenly taken God's "not yet" for "no?"

What should it mean to you that, in the ongoing story of God, we are once more living in that part of the story where the promise is also "someone is coming" again?