

Advent for kids

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Invitation for Families

It's easy to have a love/hate relationship with Christmas. We might love the family time, the cute nativity plays featuring our children and the traditions that remind us of our own childhoods, but we might also resent the commercialism and the stress of so many expectations. The cheap Christmas decorations that adorn every surface in our shops and the tinny Christmas music blaring through elevator speakers can make the whole experience feel shallow. But the gathering of our family at the dining table to celebrate and remember the birth of Christ can bring a depth of meaning that is hard to find throughout the year.

This book is an invitation to dive deeper into the story of Jesus. It is an invitation to take the time to really look at the humble scene represented in books and art and ceramic figurines. To examine the role each one of the players had, from the largest to the smallest. To get a bird's eye view of why the birth of Jesus mattered then and why it matters now. To look at the birth of Jesus in the context of the bigger gospel story. To use our imaginations to look at how the arrival of Jesus changed people then and continues to change people now. And most of all, it's an invitation to go on this journey of exploration with your children. Together.

In the traditional Christian calendar, the four weeks leading up to

Christmas were known as the season of Advent. It was a time to re-read and re-tell the stories surrounding Jesus' coming into the world and to reflect on the different aspects and implications of this story.

If you have not previously spent much time with the story of Jesus and His birth, we invite you to spend this time considering the deeper significance and claims that surround this seemingly simple story. We also invite you to re-read the original stories of Jesus' birth in the Bible. You can find these at the beginning of the New Testament, in Matthew Chapters 1 and 2; Luke Chapters 1 and 2; and John Chapter 1. You will find these stories in any edition of the Bible—although a contemporary translation of the Bible is easier reading. If you don't have a copy of the Bible at home, you can read it freely online.

We have written this book especially for families with children aged 5–12. It can be read on its own but works best as a companion volume to *Advent: Hearing the Good News in the Story of Jesus' Birth* (by Nathan Brown, Signs Publishing, 2020). We encourage the adults in your family to read through the daily readings in Advent throughout the month of December, then spend 10 minutes of your day exploring the birth of Christ with the children in your care using this child-centred Advent for Kids book.

We have included an overview of the story in the pages that follow. This might be helpful to reorient you to the main events surrounding the birth of Jesus before you launch into the story together and prepare you for questions from curious kids. The narrative of the birth of Jesus is placed in the context of the overall gospel story, because if Jesus' birth isn't part of something bigger, then why is it important at all?

We have also included a "How To" guide to help you get familiar with the structure of the daily readings.

And once you have spent time with this book, we invite you to share it with someone else, whether in the form of the book itself or simply by sharing a conversation about what you have learnt or appreciated. The best stories are worth re-telling; the best news is worth sharing.

As you read this book, we invite you and the children in your care to hear—or hear again—the good news in the story of Jesus' birth.



The Story

The birth of Jesus is part of a much bigger story. Filled with drama and courage and failure and faith, this story is found in the Bible from start to finish.

In the beginning, God created the heavens and earth, including the first humans, Adam and Eve. Adam and Eve lived in close relationship with God. Everything was perfect.

But Adam and Eve decided to trust a serpent's word over God's word. The relationship of trust was broken. God came looking for Adam and Eve that day. And He's come looking for every person ever since.

You see, God had a plan right from the beginning to restore the relationship between Him and the people He created. It would take time and many people across many generations. It would take an enormous sacrifice. It would alter the course of history.

That plan was Jesus, God's son.

The battle between good and evil was no longer some cosmic event. It was personal.

The Bible tells us clearly that Jesus was there at Creation (see John 1:2). Jesus was part of the triune Godhead—God the Father, God the Son and God the Holy Spirit. But of the three parts of God, it would be Jesus who would be sent to save the world. He wouldn't come as a mighty warrior or a strong king. No, He would enter the world as a helpless baby.

The timing of Jesus' birth was no accident. The faithful followers of God were reeling under prolonged foreign rule. Written about by prophets centuries earlier, the hope of a Messiah felt distant. In a culture where power and money and influence were everything, many people had all but given up. Maybe God had forgotten them.

Then came Jesus.

He was not born to someone with power or influence, but to a poor, unknown teenager from an obscure town. Mary, who would be the mother of Jesus, received a visit from an angel. This supernatural encounter informed her that she was to have a child, conceived by the power of the Holy Spirit (see Luke 1:31, 32). The stunned Mary responded with incredible courage and grace: "I am the Lord's servant. May everything you have said about me come true" (Luke 1:38).

Mary's fiancé Joseph was disturbed by the news of her pregnancy. He knew he was not the father, but he wanted to protect Mary's reputation as best he could. He planned to divorce her quietly. A visit by an angel quickly allayed his fears. Joseph was to name the baby Jesus, "for he will save his people from their sins" (Matthew 1:21).

Early in her pregnancy, Mary visited her relative, Elizabeth. Elizabeth was also pregnant with a miracle child who would grow up to be John the Baptist. He would prepare the way for the work of Jesus. Elizabeth recognised the baby of blessing that Mary carried.

Just before Jesus was born, Emperor Augustus decreed that everyone needed to return to their home towns to be counted in a census. Joseph and a heavily pregnant Mary made their way to Bethlehem. It was here that Jesus would be born.

With so many visitors in Bethlehem for the census, there were no rooms to be found. Mary and Joseph ended up in a room that was likely used for sheltering animals and storing feed during the colder months. When Jesus was born, His mother wrapped Him in cloths and laid Him in an empty feed trough.

Other people feature in the Nativity story too. Shepherds minding their sheep in the fields received a startling visit from an angel who proclaimed the birth of Jesus. Then the night sky lit up with heavenly

messengers, erupting into a song of joy. The shepherds hurried to Bethlehem to see for themselves.

When Jesus was eight days old, He was taken to the temple in Jerusalem, as the law of Moses decreed, and presented to the Lord. Two elderly people of faith—Simeon and the prophet Anna—met Jesus and recognised Him for who He was: the Messiah.

Meanwhile, learned men from the east had been studying the Scriptures and watching the stars. They followed a bright star to the place where Jesus was born, stopping along the way to ask King Herod for directions to the newborn king. King Herod was alarmed that there might be someone who would contest the throne. He cunningly asked the wise men to report back to him when they found the king so he too could go and worship him. The wise men made their way to Bethlehem, gave their gifts to Jesus and then were told in a dream to go home a different way to avoid King Herod.

Joseph also received a message in a dream. He was to take Mary and Baby Jesus and escape to Egypt in the middle of the night to avoid King Herod's rage. King Herod was none too happy with the turn of events and gave a murderous decree that all baby boys in Bethlehem under the age of two must be put to death.

After the family returned from Egypt, Jesus grew up in the care of His parents in Nazareth and apparently spent His young adulthood working in the family business with His father. The Bible is largely silent on what happened during this time, until Jesus began His ministry in earnest at the age of 30.

The pages of the gospels—Matthew, Mark, Luke and John—are filled with stories from the ministry of Jesus. The healing, the preaching, the teaching, the comforting, the laughing and the crying. Jesus shared the message of God's love to a world in crisis. This caused considerable angst among various factions of religious leaders, who were upset at Jesus' lack of concern for traditions. He seemed to value love above the law, relationships above rules. In the end, the very people Jesus came to save plotted to put Him to death.

Jesus was arrested, convicted and crucified, and He died on a Friday

afternoon. His mission of redemption was complete. He died on a cross, was buried in a borrowed tomb and His followers spent the weekend in despair. Everything they had hoped for seemed to fall apart before their eyes. It felt like it was the end of the story.

But it was just the beginning. On that Sunday morning, He rose again. The tomb was empty! Jesus appeared to His followers over the next 40 days, encouraging them to keep the faith and to continue the work He started by telling others the Good News. Then Jesus returned to heaven with the promise that one day He would come again.

The birth of Jesus is not the beginning of the story and it's definitely not the end, but it's the central point around which everything pivots. The entire plan of salvation revolves around the Messiah, the One who would save people from their sins. The birth of Jesus marks the arrival of this Promised One.

So much has already been written about this story, but there's still more to discover. Jesus was born. He lived and died and rose again. And one day He's coming back. It is our prayer that Advent for Kids will help you and the children in your care to experience the joy of knowing Jesus and the hope that comes from trusting Him now and forever.



How to use Advent for Kids

There are 31 daily readings for families to work through together across the month of December. These are child-centred and are structured to encourage the sharing of ideas, thoughts and feelings as you explore the Christmas story as a family.

The daily readings have the same themes as the companion book for adults, *Advent: Hearing the Good News in the Story of Jesus' Birth*. If you have access to that book, it will give you additional background for leading and prompting discussion of the daily themes.

Each daily reading is divided into five sections:

ROUNDTABLE

A starter question to encourage discussion between adults and children.

REMEMBER

A Bible text related to the theme for the day.

READ

The devotional for the day. Read this aloud.

REFLECT

A question to ponder and discuss after the reading.

REACT

An optional activity to help consolidate understanding of the theme. Activities that offer a download from the Advent website are referring to <signspublishing.com.au/advent>.

You can pick and choose which elements to use each day; however, the Read section contains the heart of the message. Feel free to substitute your own questions and activities for the Roundtable, Reflect and React sections if there is something that is more relevant to your context. We would love for you to make the Advent for Kids journey your own.

We recommend setting aside 5–15 minutes a day for Advent for Kids, depending upon how much time you wish to spend sharing and whether you choose to do the activity.

It is our prayer that as you work through this book as a family, you will make memories, build relationships and gain a greater understanding of the miracle of Christmas.



Good News

ROUNDTABLE

What's something you are looking forward to this week? It might be a playdate with friends, something fun at school, watching your favourite TV show or reading a great book.

REMEMBER

“I bring you good news that will bring great joy to all people” (Luke 2:10).

Have you ever looked forward to something good happening in your family? Maybe you were going on a holiday. Maybe someone you loved was coming to visit. Maybe you were getting a new puppy or kitten. It's so much fun to look forward to something good. And it's even more exciting when that good thing finally happens.

A long, long time ago something happened.

Something very good happened.



In a place called Bethlehem in the ancient land of Israel, a tiny baby boy was born. Do you know what his name was? His name was Jesus.

Now, at the time it didn't look like baby Jesus was someone extra special. His parents were poor, and He was born in a small shepherd village called Bethlehem. It appeared that Jesus was an unimportant baby born to unimportant parents in an unimportant town. And given that Jesus was born thousands of years ago, it's surprising that we know anything about Jesus' birth at all.

But we do.

We know that people looked forward to Jesus' birth, just like you and your family look forward to something good happening. We know that some people celebrated and announced the birth of Jesus.

The night Jesus was born, an angel appeared to a group of shepherds to tell them something had happened. And not just something—something big, something significant, something that would change the world: "I bring you good news that will bring great joy to all people" (Luke 2:10).

You see, a long, long time ago something happened. Something very good happened.

Jesus was born.

And that was—and still is—good news.

REFLECT

Why was it such good news that Jesus was born?
Talk about how much Jesus loves us and how
He showed His love for us through His life.

REACT

Set up a nativity display at your house including the stable, Mary, Joseph, baby Jesus, shepherds and angels. If you don't already have a nativity set, you can make one! Just print of the templates from [website].

CAN'T WAIT!

ROUNDTABLE

Have you ever had to wait for something exciting to happen? Perhaps it was a birthday party or a holiday or a present. Share what it was like to have to wait.

REMEMBER

“In Bethlehem in Judea,’ they said, ‘for this is what the prophet wrote’” (Matthew 2:5).

How do you get ready for Christmas? Maybe you put up a Christmas tree, listen to Christmas carols or open the door of an Advent calendar each day in December. It’s so much fun looking forward to Christmas Day when we celebrate the birth of Jesus.

Before Jesus was born, lots of people were looking forward to the arrival of a Messiah, a leader who would set them free. The Bible tells us about a group of wise men from a land far away who had studied the Scriptures and

were waiting for the promised Messiah, a new king. The wise men followed a bright shining star to Jerusalem. When they arrived, they asked where they might find this precious newborn king. The religious leaders told them the baby would be born in Bethlehem, just like the prophet Micah had written long, long ago (see Matthew 2:5).

But it wasn’t just the wise men who couldn’t wait for Jesus to be born. An old lady named Anna and an old man named Simeon were also looking forward to the birth of the Messiah (see Luke 2:25–38). They waited at the temple each day, hoping that one day they might get to meet this special promised baby. After Jesus was born, Anna and Simeon got to meet him when his parents brought him to



the temple as a newborn baby. What a celebration!

Jesus was born a long time ago, but each year as we prepare for Christmas, we can re-tell His story and look forward to His birth. We can imagine how exciting it was for the wise men, Anna, Simeon, the shepherds and the angels all those years ago. We can count down the sleeps to Christmas every year, and every year we can experience that same excitement of knowing Jesus was born. When we can't wait to celebrate the birth of Jesus, we remember what it's like to live with hope.

REFLECT

What are you looking forward to most of all at Christmas this year?

REACT

Write a family "Can't Wait" list of all the things you can't wait to do over the holiday season. For some suggestions, check out the Advent website. See how many of these things you can tick off during December.

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That Was Unexpected

ROUNDTABLE

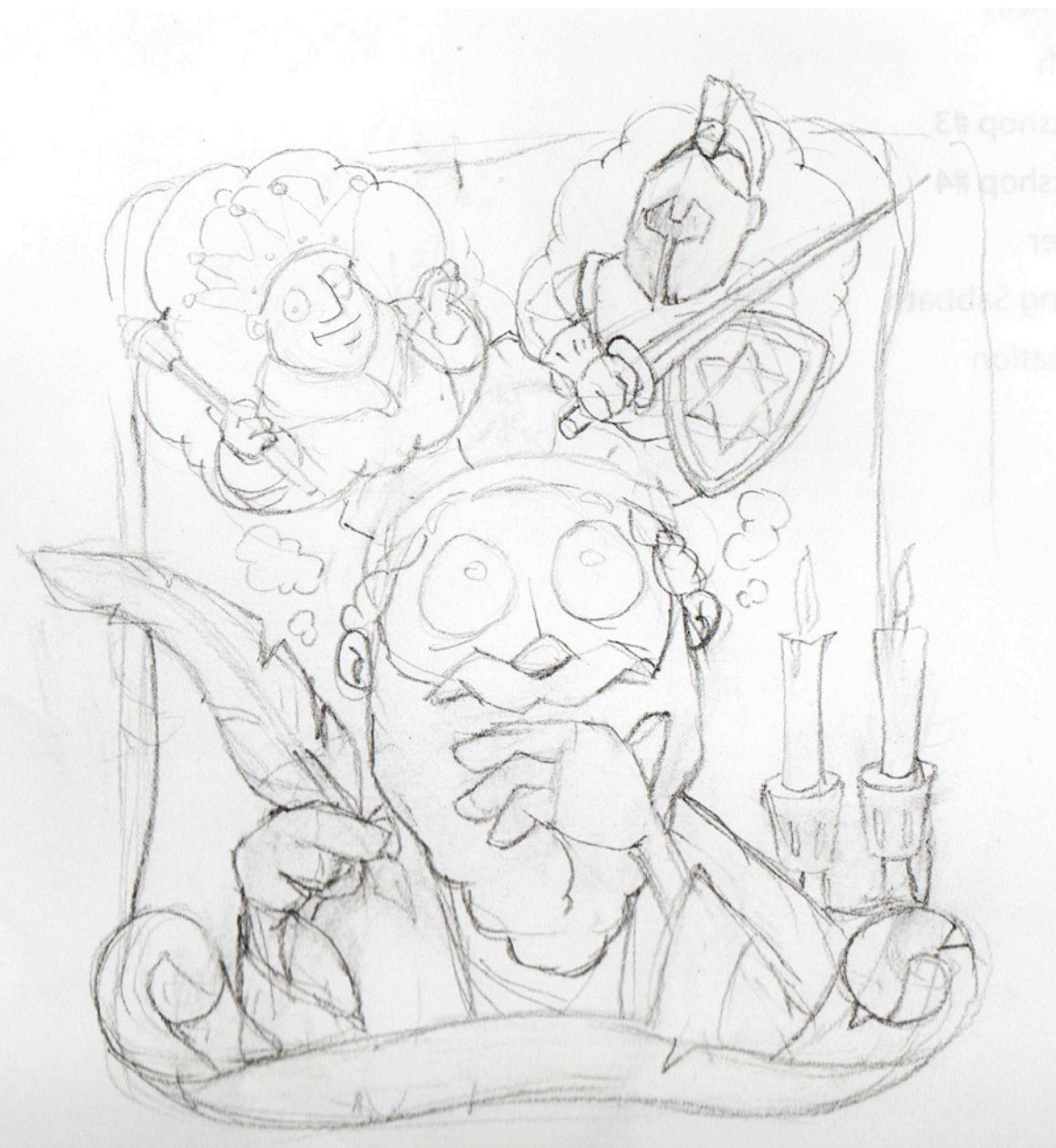
Who or what is your favourite fairy tale character and why?

REMEMBER

"For we were not making up clever stories, when we told you about the powerful coming of our Lord Jesus Christ. We saw his majestic splendour with our own eyes" (2 Peter 1:16).

Fairy tales are such fun to read. We read about dastardly villains and dashing heroes, unlikely events and the battle between good and evil. Sometimes, the life of Jesus can sound like a fairy tale too—even though it isn't.

You see, before Jesus was born, lots of people had studied the Scriptures and were expecting the Messiah to arrive, but



they didn't expect Him to come like He did. They thought He might be a powerful king who would set them free from their enemies. They imagined a strong, mighty warrior who would fight for them. They expected someone important and regal and brave.

They didn't imagine the Messiah as a helpless, newborn baby. That was unexpected!

The birth of Jesus might sound like a fairy tale—but it isn't. The story of Jesus is a true story! The people who walked and loved and lived with Jesus knew this. They wrote some of their stories down to make sure people knew the truth about Him, including His birth. They didn't have to make up stories about who Jesus was and what He did because who He actually was and what He actually did was so astounding.

At Christmas, we celebrate Jesus, the Messiah who arrived in surprising circumstances as a helpless, newborn baby. The story of the birth of Jesus was a good-news story then and is a good-news story now. What happened in Bethlehem that night is important precisely because it was so unexpected.

And it's so much better than any fairy tale—because it's true.

Reflect

What else do you know about Jesus' life that was unexpected? Share your thoughts with your family.

React

Create a Christmas decoration that says, "Unexpected Saviour". You can make your own or download a template from the website.

Jesus did indeed become more important than King David, but not in the way everyone was expecting. Everyone thought that Jesus would become an earthly king, ruling over the people and their nation, and freeing them from Roman rule. Instead, Jesus talked about the “kingdom of heaven.” Jesus wasn’t interested in political or religious power. He was interested in showing people a new kind of kingdom where people loved God and one another.

In Jesus’ day, stories of kings and kingdoms were passed down from one generation to the next. Today, the story of Jesus and the kingdom of heaven is passed down from one generation to the next. That’s the story we are remembering this Christmas.

REFLECT

What are some differences between ordinary kings and Jesus? Talk about how Jesus’ love and willingness to serve others is different to many kings and queens of the past and present.

REACT

Create a Christmas ornament in the shape of a crown and write “Jesus is King” on it. You can make your own or download one from the website.



Mary’s Song

ROUNDTABLE

Ask your family what songs they sang to you when you were a baby.

REMEMBER

“God has blessed you above all women, and your child is blessed. Why am I so honoured, that the mother of my Lord should visit me? When I heard your greeting, the baby in my womb jumped for joy. You are blessed, because you believed that the Lord would do what he said” (Luke 1:42–45).

When Mary found out she was going to have a baby, it was a big surprise for her. She was only a teenager and she and Joseph weren’t married yet. In their society, it was not good to have a baby if you weren’t married. Some people might have been cross with Mary or gossiped about her when they found out she was pregnant. Mary was probably worried about what people would think and say.



The Bible tells us that after the angel told Mary she was having a baby, she hurried to the hill country of Judea to see one of her older relatives, Elizabeth (see Luke 1:39, 40). Elizabeth was also pregnant, and when Mary arrived, Elizabeth's baby "jumped for joy" inside her belly. Elizabeth immediately recognised that something wonderful was happening to Mary.

Can you imagine how relieved Mary was? Instead of being judged and gossiped about, Elizabeth welcomed Mary and celebrated the news that she was going to have a baby. Mary was so happy she made up a beautiful song about the goodness and power of God. She sang about God's mercy and the precious baby that was growing inside her. This song is recorded in the Bible in Luke 1:46–55.

Mary stayed with Elizabeth for three months before she returned home. Soon after, Elizabeth's baby was born. He would grow up to be John the Baptist, the man who would prepare the way for Jesus to preach His message of love to the people.

Both Mary and Elizabeth had important parts to play in God's story of redemption. Mary's song captures just how amazing that story is. At Christmas, we all have a lot to sing about!

REFLECT

What is your favourite song about Jesus?

REACT

Have a go at writing your own song about what Jesus has done in your life. You might use a tune you already know like "Mary Had a Little Lamb" or create your own

Wonder-full

ROUNDTABLE

Share a time when you saw fireworks. What did you like or not like about that experience?

REMEMBER

“Jesus’ parents were amazed at what was being said about him” (Luke 2:33).

At midnight on New Year’s Eve, fireworks explode across the skies of many cities around the world. At first the fireworks might seem a little scary. The fireworks explode with a big boom and a crash, and some even whistle on their way up into the sky. But then they burst into beautiful starbursts and sparkles and patterns, and the dark sky is lit up with colour. Fireworks start out scary but then turn into something that is simply a wonderful—or wonder-full—sight.

In the Bible, Luke writes about the birth of Jesus and the stories surrounding His arrival. He often notices the fear and



surprise that people experienced. Mary was “confused and disturbed” (Luke 1:29) when the angel told her she was going to have a baby. Joseph was very surprised and afraid when he heard that Mary was pregnant. Just like when people first experience fireworks, Mary and Joseph were scared. But as the story progressed, this fear turned to something else: wonder.

This wonder increased when Mary and Joseph met Simeon and Anna in the temple. These two elderly people somehow recognised Jesus as the One they had been waiting for their whole lives. They had a sense of wonder that was contagious. They praised Jesus and proclaimed to Mary and Joseph that He was the Messiah, the one they had been waiting for. Mary and Joseph were amazed!

Luke tells us that Mary carried this sense of wonder with her. He says, “And his mother stored all these things in her heart” (Luke 2:51). The birth of Jesus was full of surprises and full of fear for Mary and Joseph, but it also became something full of wonder. It was indeed wonder-full.

Like Mary, we can keep the stories of Jesus in our hearts this Christmas and always. What a wonderful thing to do!

REFLECT

What is something wonderful about the story of Jesus for you?

REACT

Draw a picture of fireworks and write the words, “Jesus is Wonderful” on your drawing.

Generosity

ROUNDTABLE

What is the best gift you’ve ever received?

What is the best gift you’ve ever given?

REMEMBER

“They entered the house and saw the child with his mother, Mary, and they bowed down and worshipped him. Then they opened their treasure chests and gave him gifts of gold, frankincense and myrrh” (Matthew 2:11).

At Christmas time, many families exchange gifts. Colourfully wrapped presents of all shapes and sizes sit under the Christmas tree or are stuffed into Christmas stockings. Christmas morning is often a time of excitement and joy as families unwrap presents.

It’s so much fun to receive gifts, but we need to have the right attitude. Paul writes in the book of Acts, “It is more