

ARE YOU READY FOR THE JOURNEY?...

ADVENTURE



26 FAMILY
DEVOTIONALS



BROUGHT TO YOU BY

THE
RESOURCE

WELCOME TO ADVENTURE

What do you need if you are going on an adventure? My children LOVE adventure walks - we go all over the place. Sometimes those places are familiar, other times we see a public footpath and off we go on a new adventure, and see new things. But, we can't enjoy it if we are not prepared. Do we have the right things on our feet? Strong walking shoes or welly boots? Do we have a bit of food to keep us going, a drink to refresh us? A rucksack with jumpers and coats if it gets a bit chilly?

WHAT ELSE DO WE NEED? WELL, THREE THINGS IF WE WERE GOING ON A JOURNEY IN THE REAL WORLD WOULD BE A ; TORCH + MAP + COMPASS.

Now, those three things are also just what we need as we journey towards advent! Jesus is our torch - John talks of Jesus as being the light that is coming into the world. The Bible is our map - someone once said that the Bible is B.I.B.L.E. the Best Instructions Before Leaving Earth. The Holy Spirit is our compass - helping us not to get lost as He guides us through tricky bits of the Bible and keeps us focused on Jesus.

Each day as we get nearer to Christmas (eek, so exciting!) we will look at a bit of the Bible that helps us understand God's amazing plan to send Jesus - from hundreds of years before Jesus was born, right up to his first cry as a new born baby in Bethlehem. There will be something to think about too, maybe an action you can do by yourself or as a family all together and a prayer for each day ... do join in with your own prayers as we go along!

So, are you ready? Then let the ADVENTure begin!

YOUR ADVENTURE STARTS HERE...

PRESS A BOX TO NAVIGATE

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**"THE LORD GOD ASKED, "HAVE YOU EATEN FROM THE TREE WHOSE FRUIT I COMMANDED YOU NOT TO EAT?"
(READ GENESIS CHAPTER 3 VERSE 8 - 15)**

REFLECTION

We are just three chapters in to the first book of the Bible and things have gone wrong.

Genesis means "beginnings" and after a GREAT beginning disaster strikes. Wait a minute ... what does this have to do with advent? Well, right here in the midst of trouble and pain and sin - God is already making a plan. We are at the start of our adventure! Sometimes when we read the Bible we have to pick up on some clues, just as if you were going on a long trek ... is that rock supposed to be on my left or right? Is the sun behind me or just coming over that hill ... ah. Now I know where I am!

THERE IS A CLUE TUCKED AWAY IN THIS CHAPTER ABOUT WHAT IS GOING TO HAPPEN, A CLUE ABOUT JESUS.

The serpent who has tricked Adam and Eve is cursed by God, give verses 14 and 15 another read. See where it says, "He will crush your head, and you will bruise his heal."? Well - although sin has entered the world, God has a plan already. Jesus will be coming to "crush" sin and death! Jesus will be "bruised" for us when he dies on the cross.



IN THE BEGINNING



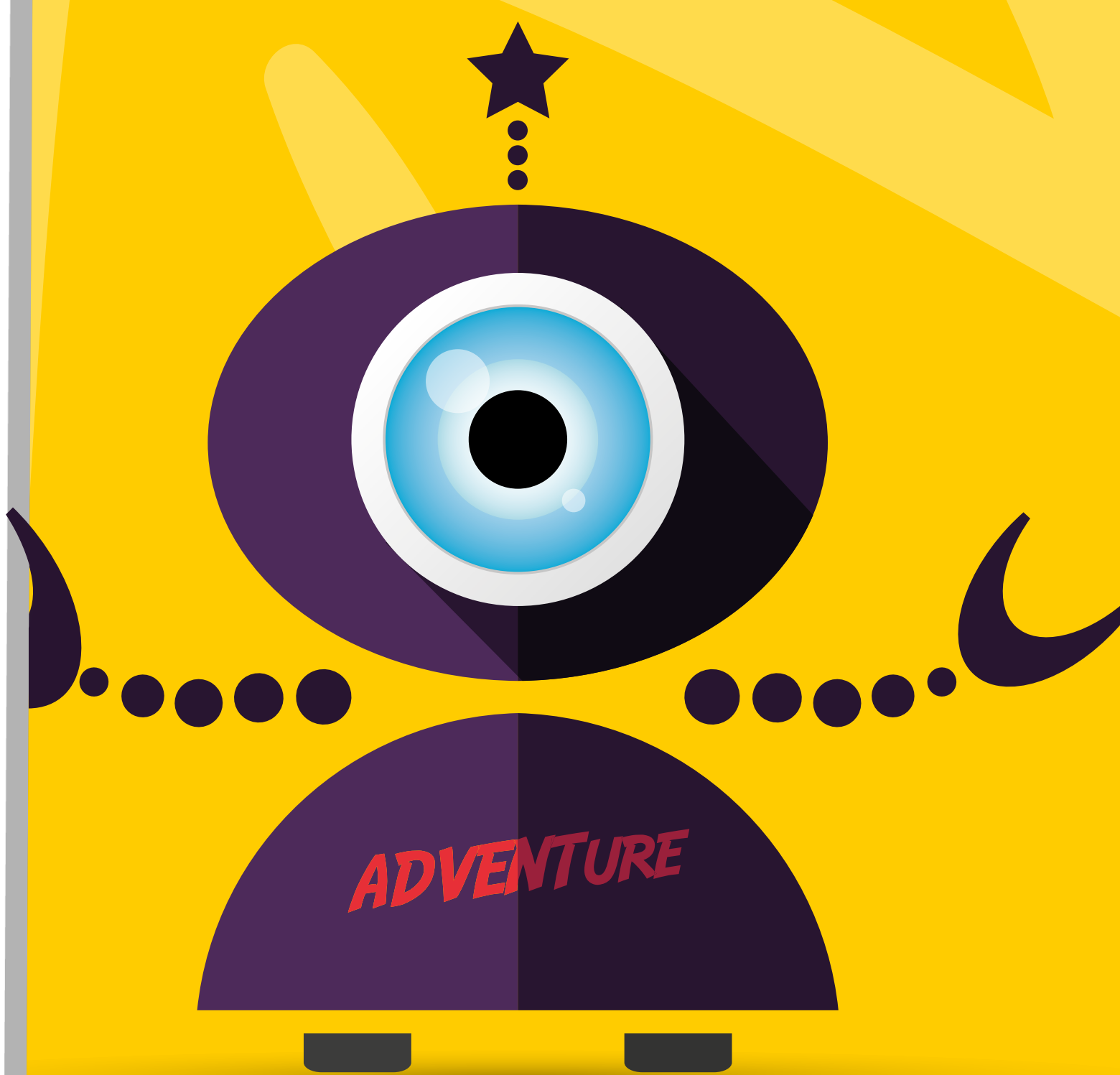
ACTION

Look at your thumbprint. Your finger prints are on everything you touch. You can't see them, but they are there. When you open the fridge for a snack, on your toothbrush, your pillow, your football. God's fingerprints are on everything he has made. God is always paying attention, always loving, always good. God sees where we go and what we do, the good and the bad. God made a plan for Jesus to come and walk among us, be with us and show us what He is like.

Scribble on your thumb with a washable marker pen. Now press your thumb on a clean sheet of paper. Cut it out and hang on to it to remember :: God's finger prints are right there for us to see all through the Bible, we just need to look for the clues.

PRAYER

Dear God, thank you so much for your promises. Thank you that even when things were such a mess, you were already planning how to put things right through Jesus. As we start this journey together, help us to discover just what an adventure it is to follow you. Amen.



DAY 2





"AND THROUGH YOUR DESCENDANTS ALL THE NATIONS OF THE EARTH WILL BE BLESSED - ALL BECAUSE YOU OBEYED ME."
(READ GENESIS 22 VERSES 1-19)

REFLECTION

Have you ever had to really trust someone? Like, REALLY? Sometimes this can be so hard - what if they let us down? What if they are wrong? Abraham has a huge "faith test" in Genesis Chapter 22. He loves His son, but God asks Him to do a really hard thing - give His son back to God, offering him as a sacrifice.

AT THE VERY LAST MOMENT GOD STOPS HIM AND PROVIDES A RAM INSTEAD. WOW, THAT WAS CLOSE!

I don't know if Abraham knew what was going to happen, but He knew that God was good and trusted that. God then made an amazing promise to Abraham - because of his faith and trust everyone on EARTH would be blessed. Including you and me.



**ACTION**

Have a child in your home stand with a clear space behind them and then close their eyes. Have an adult stand behind them and have the child fall backwards, trying to keep their legs straight - the adult catches them!

Can you do that? Do you trust each other? Did you turn round and check the adult hadn't moved! Trusting God can sometimes feel like falling into thin air - maybe that was how Abraham felt - will God catch me? Will it be alright?

PRAYER

Dear God, thank you for always being faithful. Help us to trust you as a family - help us to see your plan for us at the right time and trust you when we are not sure or afraid. Thank you for the example of Abraham's faith. Amen.





***"HE IS THE ONE WHO WILL BUILD A HOUSE - A TEMPLE - FOR MY NAME, AND I WILL SECURE HIS ROYAL THRONE FOREVER,"
(READ 2 SAMUEL 7 VERSES 12-17)***

REFLECTION

We have leapt from Abraham to David. That is about 750 years! In that time God's people have made a home, saved a nation, been slaves, wandered in the desert, had judges and prophets and now Kings. Things have not been boring. Now we find another promise - this one is to King David. Jesus is referred to as a "Son of David" right at the start of Matthew's gospel and, a bunch of times after that in the New Testament. David was a king, but this passage in 2 Samuel talks about someone coming who will be the greatest King EVER. It would be nearly another 1000 years before Jesus was born!

***SOME THINGS LAST A SHORT TIME, SOME THINGS LAST FOR A WHILE -
BUT ONLY WITH GOD DOES SOMETHING LAST FOREVER!***

What is amazing about these linking generations - from Abraham right through to Jesus is, because of Jesus - you and me, all of us, have the chance to be part of God's family - God has linked us ALL in!





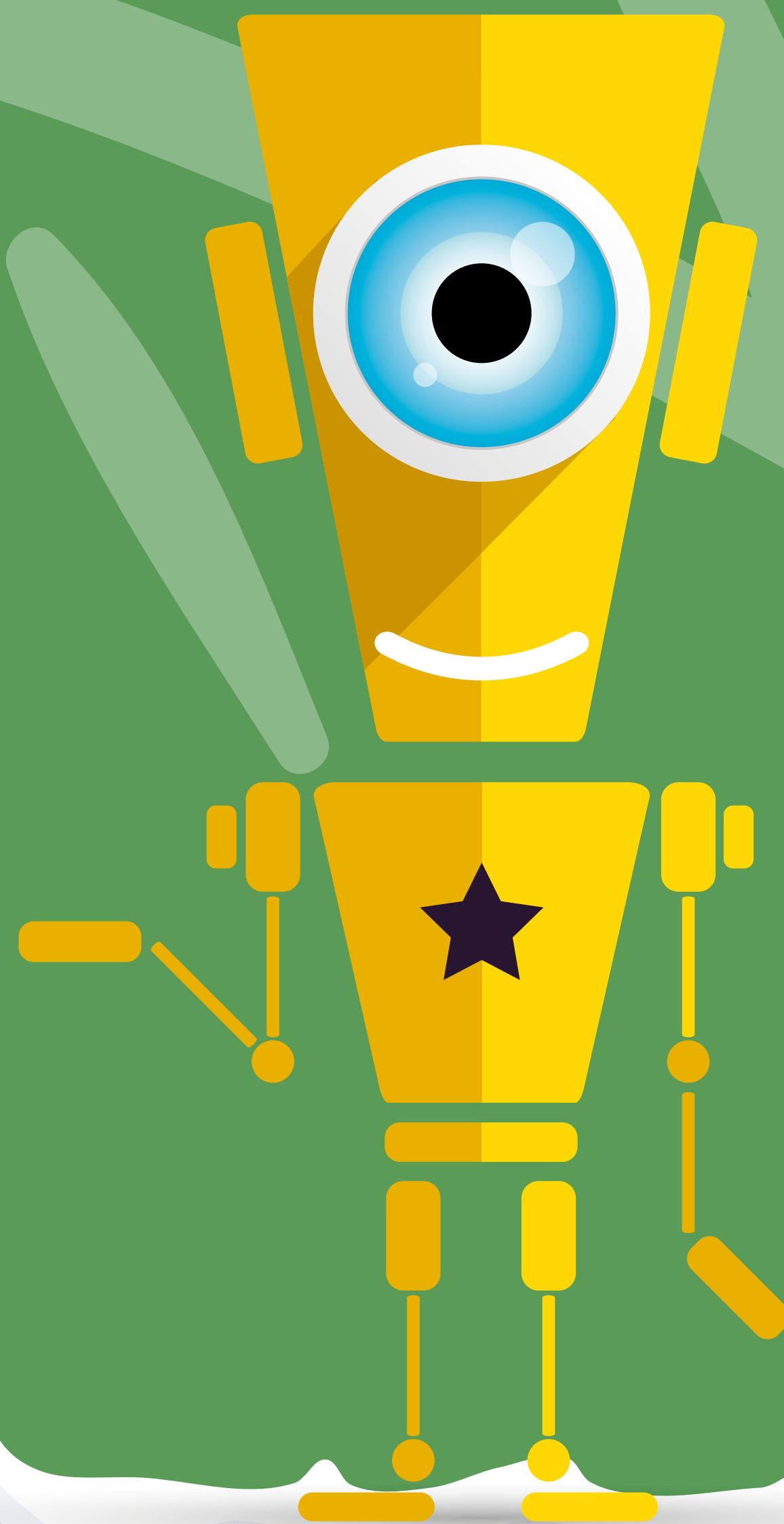
ACTION

Everyone join in with this! Make some strips of paper (cut six equal pieces width ways from a sheet of A4 paper) If your household or family or the people you want to include is greater than six, use more sheets of paper! Now, have everyone write their names on their bit - as colourful as you like, have one extra piece for Jesus.

Put Jesus as near to the centre as you can and make your paper chain. Now hang it up somewhere to remind you that you are all linked in.

PRAYER

Dear Heavenly Father,
thank you so much for your amazing Bible. Thank you too for your promise to David. Thank you that Jesus is the King of Kings and we are invited to be part of His Kingdom. Amen.





"THE LORD HIMSELF WILL GIVE YOU A SIGN. LOOK! THE VIRGIN WILL CONCEIVE A CHILD! SHE WILL GIVE BIRTH TO A SON AND WILL CALL HIM "IMMANUEL" WHICH MEANS "GOD WITH US," (READ ISAIAH 7 VERSES 13 - 14)

REFLECTION

With Isaiah we are now just 700 years before Jesus is born! I know, it's getting exciting. Through the Old Testament there were signs from God of his presence. From a burning bush for Moses; a pillar of smoke for God's people; the Ark of the Covenant which carried the Ten Commandments; a still small voice for Elijah . . . God spoke or showed himself in different ways, but now - with this promise from Isaiah a different sign, the most amazing sign of God's presence. He, "Immanuel" is coming Himself. God made flesh!

ACTION

Maybe when you are on your own today, at school or work, playing or resting - having fun with your family or being by yourself. Stop and think. What, for you, is a sign that God is with you today? What helps you remember that God is here?

PRAYER

Dear God, Thank you for this amazing promise 700 years before Jesus was born that "Immanuel" was coming. Thank you for being with us. Help me to see and to know your presence today. Amen.





“AND THROUGH YOUR DESCENDANTS ALL THE NATIONS OF THE EARTH WILL BE BLESSED – ALL BECAUSE YOU OBEYED ME.”
(READ ISAIAH CHAPTER 9 VERSES 2 – 7)

REFLECTION

Yesterday we were thinking about Immanuel, a name Jesus would be called.

Today - we are BLOWN AWAY by these other names to describe Him! A name tells us something about a person, we have surnames today like “Baker” or “Butcher” or “Miller” because of the jobs people have done in the past. Someone baked bread or sold meat or ground wheat. These amazing names in Isaiah tell us who Jesus is. Wow.

***THIS IS NOT JUST WHO HE IS,
THIS IS WHAT HE DOES.***

A counsellor draws alongside others; as the Prince of Peace - Jesus will make peace for us and make right our relationship with God; Mighty God tells us that Jesus is not just from God, He is God! How incredible ... what amazing words to describe our amazing Saviour (ohh look, Saviour, there is another one! We will get to that later in our journey ...)



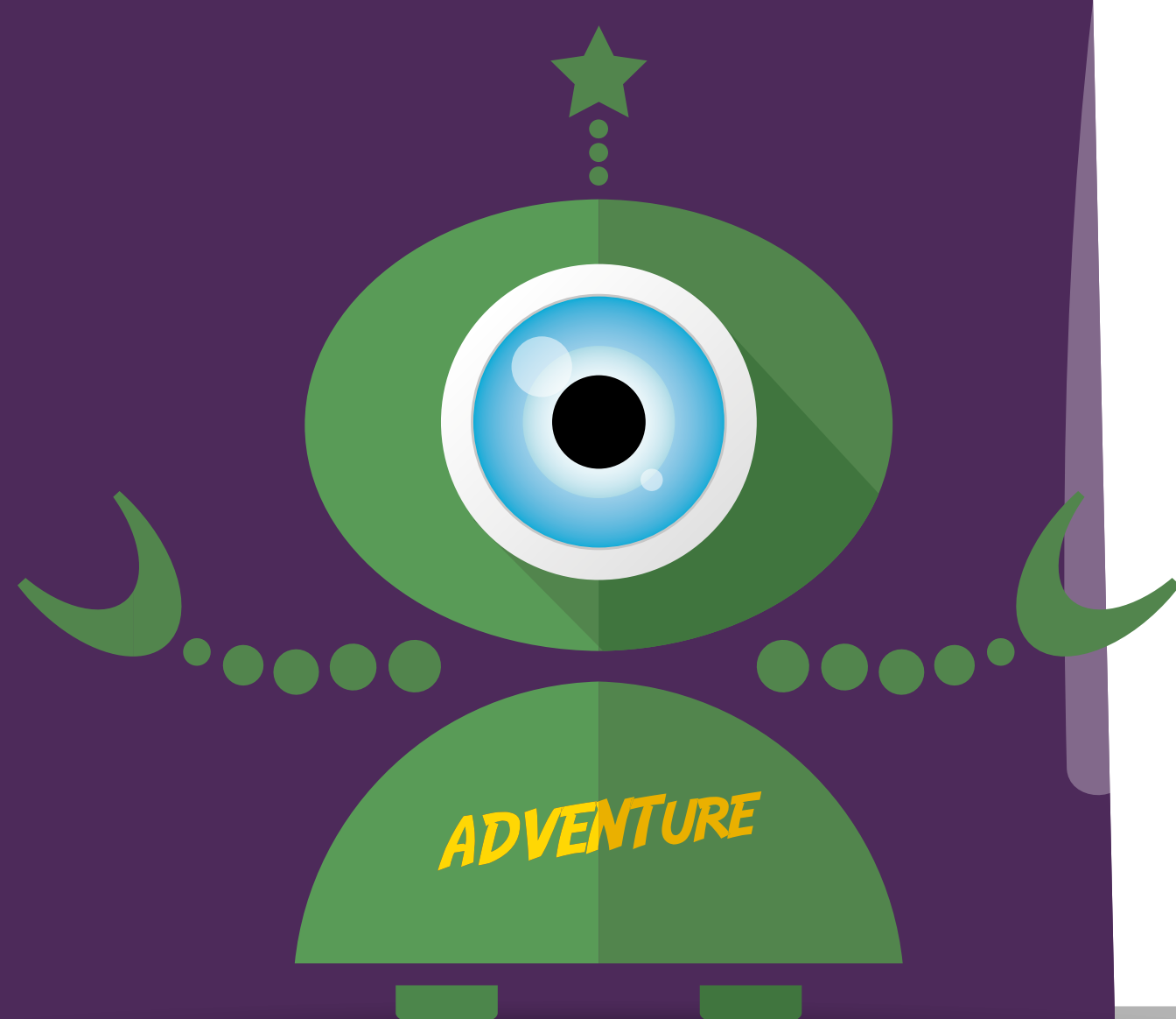
**ACTION**

Look around the room at the people you are sharing this Advent Journey with. How would you describe them? What words would you use? Kind? Loving? Helpful? Funny? Think about the different people you live with today.

When you have had time to think, come together again later and share with each person words that you think describe them really well! Be encouraging and thoughtful!

PRAYER

Dear God, although these words cannot fully describe how amazing you are - thank you for these words that help us understand your love, your power and who you are. Help us to get to know you better. Amen.





***"A SHOOT WILL COME UP FROM THE STUMP OF JESSE;
FROM HIS ROOTS A BRANCH WILL BEAR FRUIT"
(READ ISAIAH CHAPTER II VERSES 1 - 9)***

REFLECTION

Have you ever seen a tree stump? A dead thing. Maybe it has been cut down, maybe the tree has died. Sometimes a shoot might spring up, new growth - but, there is not much chance of it surviving. It won't be noticed. Well, Jesse is King David's father and, as we know, Jesus will be born from his line . . . and from a place that nobody paid much attention to - a little place called Bethlehem. As a boy Jesus would then grow up in a place called Nazareth. Not important, easily overlooked - yet, right where the one who was the King of Kings would live! God does things in surprising ways and often in surprising places! Are we paying attention to see what God might be up to?

ACTION

It is so easy to miss things - especially the little things! Take time today to notice and thank God for things you don't normally pay attention to. Maybe you take them for granted, maybe you don't spot them. Ask God to help you see what is going on - even right under your nose!

PRAYER

Dear God, we don't want to miss a green shoot of your goodness today. Help us to see where you are doing small things and help us to celebrate, say thank you and join in. Amen.





***“A VOICE OF ONE CALLING: “IN THE WILDERNESS
PREPARE THE WAY FOR THE LORD”.
(READ ISAIAH 40 VERSES 3 - 5)***

REFLECTION

How do you get ready for something? Just calmly prepare? Or do you run about madly at the last minute! Maybe you are the first to get ready and have to wait for everyone else ... or, maybe you are the one everyone else is waiting for, “hurry up!”. Today, these verses look ahead to a time when someone will walk out of the desert and say these very words. This is what John the Baptist said as he helped people get ready for Jesus. We might be way off Christmas still, but part of the reason for these reflections each day is to take our time, get properly ready to welcome Jesus when He arrives (and we arrive!) at Christmas.

ACTION

Are you ready? For some things, Christmas eve will be too late - whether you are writing out a list of stuff you would like (!) or thinking about something to make for your sister or brother. You have to make a plan - then do some things to make that plan happen (like actually make some presents or buy them). Think what you need to do if you are going to be ready - make a list, check it twice.

PRAYER

Thank you God for your plan to send Jesus. Thank you for the clues we are finding all through the Bible that show us just how many people were involved in getting things ready. Help us to get ready for you too. Amen.





“I WILL TAKE YOU BY THE HAND AND GUARD YOU, AND I WILL GIVE YOU TO MY PEOPLE ISRAEL, AS A SYMBOL OF MY COVENANT WITH THEM, AND YOU WILL BE A LIGHT TO GUIDE THE NATIONS.”

(READ ISAIAH 42 VERSES 5 - 9)

REFLECTION

The word “covenant” simply means promise. God always keeps his promises! Through sending someone special to his people, Israel everyone will be blessed. This light that will guide the nations is for us. Whatever nation you are in, whatever nation you are from. A light for all. Something marvellous is going to happen when Jesus comes. Isaiah sees it - not as it happens - but like a vision or a dream and years before Jesus comes he is used by God to tell the future! What Isaiah says here comes true in Jesus. It is just one of the ways that we can know we can trust the Bible!

ACTION

Get a candle and some tea lights. Place the candle in the centre and light it. Now, using the light from the candle, light the tea lights (have three or four ready for this). Obviously do it carefully, parental supervision and all that. Notice that the candle can “give” light without losing any. This light for all, coming from God is Jesus. This light guides not just nations, but you and me. Nothing can ever put this light out!

PRAYER

Thank you God that Jesus, the light of the world is coming!
Thank you for being our light and hope in our family and in our lives. Would your light shine on us today. Amen.





***"BUT IT WAS THE LORD'S GOOD PLAN TO CRUSH HIM AND CAUSE HIM GRIEF, YET WHEN HIS LIFE IS MADE AN OFFERING FOR SIN, HE WILL HAVE MANY DESCENDANTS, HE WILL ENJOY A LONG LIFE, AND THE LORD'S GOOD PLAN WILL PROSPER FOREVER,"
(READ THE WHOLE OF ISAIAH CHAPTER 53)***

REFLECTION

We can be in wonder and amazement as we think about Jesus - but, when he was on earth, he did not win popularity contests! These are some tough verses to read, yet, really important. As we said yesterday, Isaiah has pictures or words from God about what is going to happen. This chapter talks about why Jesus came and what He did to put things right between us and God. Have you ever suffered or felt misunderstood? Left out? Laughed at? Been treated wrongly? Jesus knows and understands. He was perfect and took our place to pay the price for the wrong we have done. He suffered for us, but having suffered - He made things right with God, because of what Jesus did we are forgiven!

ACTION

If you can, sit quietly and read this chapter again. Then sit quietly and thank God for all that Jesus has done for you. If reading is not your thing, maybe draw a picture to remind you of what Jesus has done.

PRAAYER

Lord help me when I feel rejected and left out. Help me when I feel awful about things I have done. Help me to say sorry and know that because Jesus died for me I can be your friend and know I am forgiven. Thank you for your wonderful love. Amen.





***“HERE IS THE MAN WHOSE NAME IS THE BRANCH, AND HE WILL BRANCH OUT FROM THIS PLACE AND BUILD THE TEMPLE OF THE LORD . . . AND HE WILL BE CLOTHED WITH MAJESTY AND WILL SIT ON THE THRONE.”
(READ ZECHARIAH CHAPTER 6 VERSES 12 - 13)***

REFLECTION

ANOTHER name, this time . . . er, branch. Yep, I know . . . branch! Imagine being called a shoot (think back to that root of Jesse), then maybe a twig (or twiglet when you were little!) and then as you grow up a branch. Well, names were so important in the Bible and here it is used to refer to the one who is going to be the Messiah - and when you “branch out” from somewhere you build and grow and strengthen. Someone is coming who is going to serve as a Priest (deal with our sin) and reign as a King (rule God’s Kingdom!)

ACTION

Jesus grows God’s Kingdom as he plants the seed of God’s goodness in our lives. Each of US can impact and make a difference to others as we branch out. Track down a pond or lake together, each take a stone and throw it in. Now, watch those ripples - how far can you see them stretch out? Ask God to help you be a good and kind influence on those around you.

PRAAYER

Thank you Jesus that you are our Priest and King. Help us to live today in a way that pleases you and in the different ways that we branch out, to be good news to those around us. Amen.





NOT TOO SMALL



***“BUT YOU, BETHLEHEM EPHRATHAH THOUGH YOU ARE SMALL AMONG THE CLANS OF JUDAH, OUT OF YOU WILL COME FOR ME ONE WHO WILL RULE OVER ISRAEL, WHOSE ORIGINS ARE OLD, FROM ANCIENT TIMES.”
(READ MICAH CHAPTER 5: VERSE 2)***

REFLECTION

How old are you? How big are you? Have you ever been told, “You are too young”, “You are too small”, “Maybe when you are older”? It can be tough waiting to be “big enough” to do some things. But we learn something GREAT today - you can never be too small to be used by God. All thorough the Bible God uses small things - not just places like Bethlehem, but people. What we read today in one little verse is true all through scripture! Gideon, David, King Josiah, a slave girl, a little boy sharing his packed lunch with Jesus and thousands of others! Being small we can think we don't matter. We matter so much to God! Whatever our age or height ... but more than that, God wants to use us today - His promises and his power are for everyone, grown ups and children.

ACTION

There are lots of things we can do for God - **WHATEVER** our age. Here are just three :: We can talk to God; We can use our gifts and talents; We can tell others about Him. Pick just one of those today and ... **DO** it. You are not too small.

PRAYER

Thank you that you are the God of small things and small places and small people - like us. Help us to know just how **BIG** you are as our God. Thank you for loving us and giving all of us a place in your family. Amen.

DAY 12





**“SEE, I WILL SEND MY MESSENGER WHO WILL PREPARE THE WAY BEFORE ME, THEN SUDDENLY, THE LORD YOU ARE SEEKING WILL COME . . .”
(READ MALACHI CHAPTER 3 VERSES 1)**

REFLECTION

Have you ever been taken by surprise? Maybe someone creeps up behind you and shouts . . . BOO! Maybe you thought you had ages for that piece of homework and then, suddenly, it's due tomorrow! This “Suddenly” in today's verse is because although there are lots of hints and the picture of who is coming and what they will do is getting clearer - the prophet doesn't know when. Part of being ready is about not missing the signs, not missing that the more time passes then the closer we are getting to the special arrival! Even if we are ready, even if we have listened and paid attention . . . there is still the suddenly of the doorbell ringing, the knock on the door, the phone ringing. “Suddenly” appears again in one of our later readings - but, I'm not telling you which one - it will be a surprise :-)

ACTION

Play the game of snap together!
Some times this can feel boring when no cards are matching and you just put them down and have to wait it out . . . then suddenly! SNAP!!

PRAAYER

Dear God, help us not to be so desperate for Christmas to be here that we miss the fun of getting ready and preparing for it. When you suddenly come - fill us with joy and excitement. Amen.





"LOOK, I AM SENDING YOU THE PROPHET ELIJAH BEFORE THE GREAT AND DREADFUL DAY OF THE LORD ARRIVES. HIS PREACHING WILL TURN THE HEARTS OF FATHERS TO THEIR CHILDREN AND THE HEARTS OF CHILDREN TO THEIR FATHERS."
(READ MALACHI CHAPTER 4 VERSES 5 - 6)

REFLECTION

Have you ever had to wait for something? We have done a few days of Advent now, but Christmas still seems like AGES away. Imagine this then - imagine being told someone special is coming and they are going to get things ready for someone even MORE special to come - that is what Malachi says here. Then - nothing. This is the last book of the Old Testament.

***WE HAVE TO WAIT 400 YEARS FOR THE STORY TO CARRY ON!
400 YEARS!***

Today we live in a world where we don't have to wait for anything - with a click of a mouse we can order something in less than a minute, we can microwave, download videos really quickly, drive places, fly in aeroplanes ... Have you ever said, "Are we there yet"? When a journey has only just started ... and then asked the same QUESTION again just five minutes later? Waiting is good for us. We don't have to wait 400 years, but, today, we are only half way through Advent. Sometimes, when we get what we want straight way we don't value it or appreciate it.



**ACTION**

Can you be patient all day? Are you able to wait without demanding or getting fed up that something isn't happening right now? What do you need to wait for?

What do you need to wait for? What are you looking forward to that is coming . . . but isn't here yet (yes, I know . . . Christmas!)

PRAYER

Dear God, we can't imagine waiting for 400 years when we struggle with a couple of minutes! Help us to be patient and keep trusting. Knowing that Jesus came at just the right time, as you planned it. Help us to trust you in the same way when we have to wait for things. Amen.





***“THEY WILL CALL HIM IMMANUEL (WHICH MEANS GOD WITH US)”
(READ MATTHEW CHAPTER 1 VERSES 18 - 24)***

REFLECTION

Here we are then, as we get closer to Christmas Day we will be looking at some of the really well known verses in the New Testament about the birth of Jesus! Matthew starts this chapter (which I didn't make you read) with a LOOOONG list of names. This is the “line” through which the King of Kings has come. A bunch of people well known to us from the Old Testament like Abraham and David, but also some not so famous people and some you might be a bit embarrassed by! “Oh, no auntie Mabel, not again!” Finally though, after all these generations and the hints and the waiting and the promises we will know what it is like to have Immanuel, God WITH us!

ACTION

Draw your family tree, as much as you can - include aunts and uncles, nephews and nieces, dogs and cats, grandparents ... how are you all connected to each other? Who do you know? Who have you never heard of or never met? We all have a family history. Whatever our family tree looks like we are all here now because of some of these connections. God made us. God knows us. God loves our family!

PRAYER

Dear God, thank you for the promise of Immanuel, thank you that God is with us. Help us to keep you right at the centre of our family. Amen.





***“YOU WILL CONCEIVE AND GIVE BIRTH TO A SON,
AND YOU WILL NAME HIM JESUS. HE WILL BE VERY GREAT
AND WILL BE CALLED THE SON OF THE MOST HIGH.”***

(READ LUKE CHAPTER 1 VERSES 31)

REFLECTION

What? Ok, we know Jesus is coming, we know Bethlehem will have something to do with it and we know he will be both priest AND King. But, he's going to be BORN? The “son of the most high”? Just like one of us? Is it possible for Jesus to be both God AND a human being?

***WE WORSHIP A GOD OF THE IMPOSSIBLE –
FROM CREATING EVERYTHING OUT OF NOTHING TO THE
PARTING OF THE RED SEA TO A BOY DEFEATING A GIANT
TO PROPHETS THAT COULD RUN AS FAST AS CHARIOTS,***

Impossible stuff. This though is a really important part of God's rescue plan. To rescue us, God had to become one of us. Experience all that we are - the creator becoming like his creation!



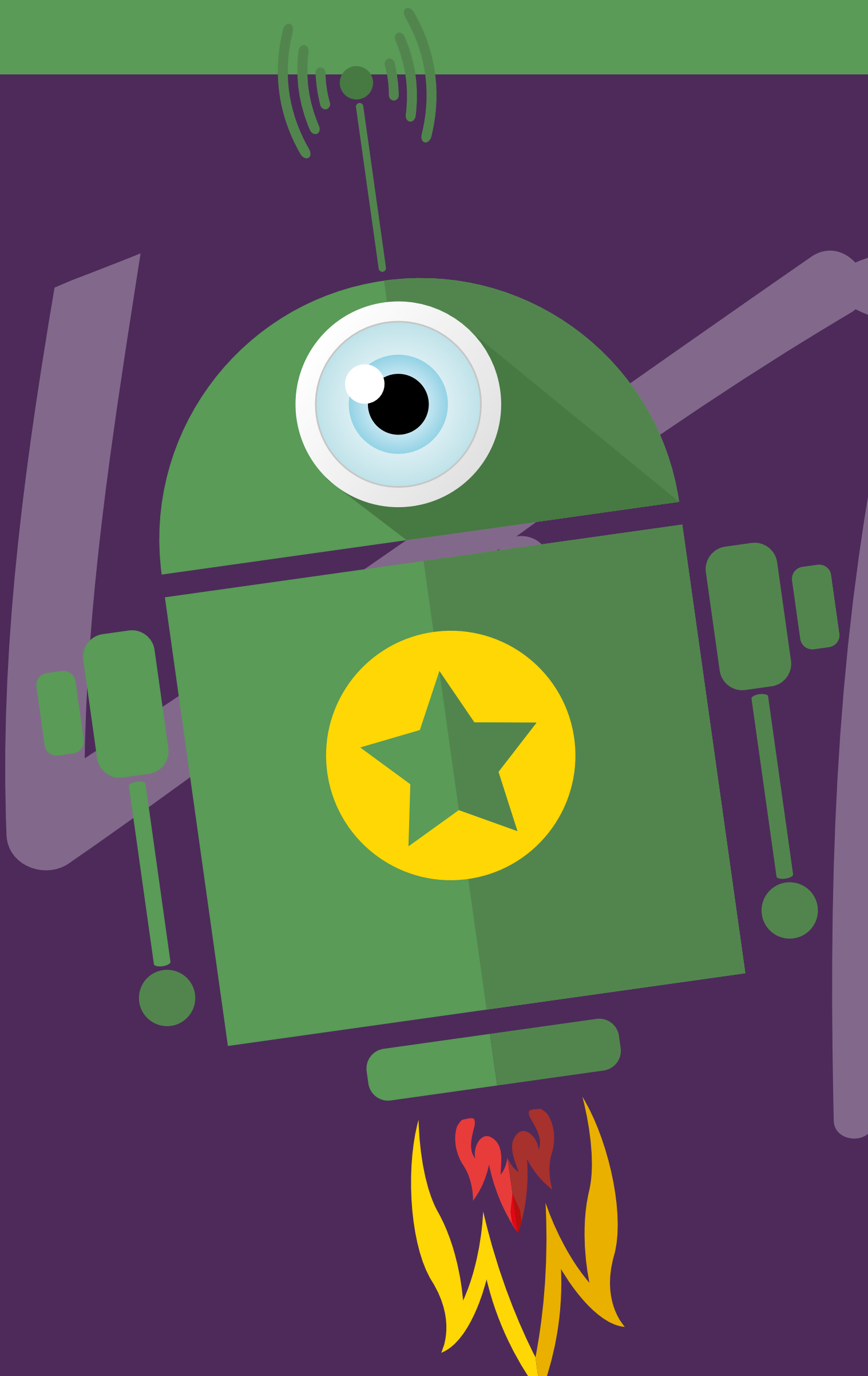
**ACTION**

Get some plasticine and make a person. Maybe make it to look like you or someone in your family! Now, look at your creation. You made it, you can do anything with it. Now - imagine becoming a plasticine creation yourself - crazy!

God became one of us - He was fully human and completely God at the same time.

PRAYER

This sounds so incredible. Thank you God for becoming one of us. Being a child, a baby and knowing what it is like to grow up. Help us to know that you are always with us as we grow and become the people that you made us to be. Amen.





***"MARY RESPONDED, "I AM THE LORD'S SERVANT,
MAY EVERYTHING YOU HAVE SAID ABOUT ME COME TRUE,
AND THE ANGEL LEFT HER."
(READ LUKE CHAPTER 1 VERSES 36 - 45)***

REFLECTION

Remember how we said a few days ago that you are never too small to be used by God? Well, you can't get much smaller than a baby who hasn't been born yet! Elizabeth is carrying a baby who will grow up to be John the Baptist. This is the prophet mentioned by Malachi - the 400 year wait is over! Mary's baby will be the son of God, her relative who is too old to have children will also have a baby ... all this seems impossible - but Mary just trusts and believes.

ACTION

What do you put your trust in? Mary was a young girl visited by an angel, told something amazing would happen and seemed to just say, "OK then". Make a note of these words from today's reading, "For nothing is impossible with God". That "with" is important - are we living our lives day by day WITH God... or just calling on him when things are tricky? Stick those few words on the fridge, by your bed, wherever you will look and be reminded that with God - anything could happen - let's trust Him!

PRAAYER

Thank you that you are the God of the impossible! Help me to trust you and have the kind of faith that Mary did. Help me to remember that you are "with" us. You are Immanuel, God with us! Amen.





***“YOU ARE BLESSED BECAUSE YOU BELIEVED THAT THE LORD WOULD DO WHAT HE SAID. MARY RESPONDED, “OH, HOW MY SOUL PRAISES THE LORD. HOW MY SPIRIT REJOICES IN GOD MY SAVIOUR!”
(READ LUKE CHAPTER 1 VERSES 45 - 55)***

REFLECTION

These verses, Mary’s song, is known as the “Magnificat” and has been turned into a great contemporary worship song by Chris Tomlin. As Mary finishes her song she takes us back to that promise to Abraham which we looked at back on day 2! Mary praises God, not just for what He has done for her . . . but for His faithfulness through the generations, for keeping His promises, for remembering His people. Our praise should be bigger than a thank you for good things in our own lives and families. God’s grace and mercy and goodness is being poured out on the whole earth!

ACTION

Could you write your own song of praise? What would you say? What would you sing? Can you come up with a dance or actions to go with it? What ways can you tell God how amazing He is - what good things Has he done for you? Who can you share this incredible news with?

PRAAYER

Thank you God for your faithfulness - not just to us and our family. Thank you for your faithfulness through all of history! Thank you for your promises in the past, thank you for your presence today, thank you for being with us as we face tomorrow. Amen.





***"BECAUSE OF GOD'S TENDER MERCY, THE MORNING LIGHT FROM HEAVEN IS ABOUT TO BREAK ON US, TO GIVE LIGHT TO THOSE WHO SIT IN DARKNESS AND IN THE SHADOW OF DEATH, AND TO GUIDE US TO THE PATH OF PEACE."
(READ LUKE CHAPTER 1 VERSES 62 - 80)***

REFLECTION

Zechariah was told his wife would have a baby.

That his son would prepare the way for the Saviour of the world! But, he couldn't believe it so God shut his mouth! These are the first words that Zechariah has been able to say for MONTHS. And they are amazing ... a different John (not Zechariah's son) who was one of Jesus' disciples wrote,

"THE ONE WHO IS THE TRUE LIGHT, WHO GIVES LIGHT TO EVERYONE, WAS COMING INTO THE WORLD," (JOHN CHAPTER 1 VERSE 9)

When you cannot see - you need a light to shine! We can take light for granted - lamps, street lights, torches, electric light is everywhere ... but this light, this light that is Jesus guides us to the path of peace.



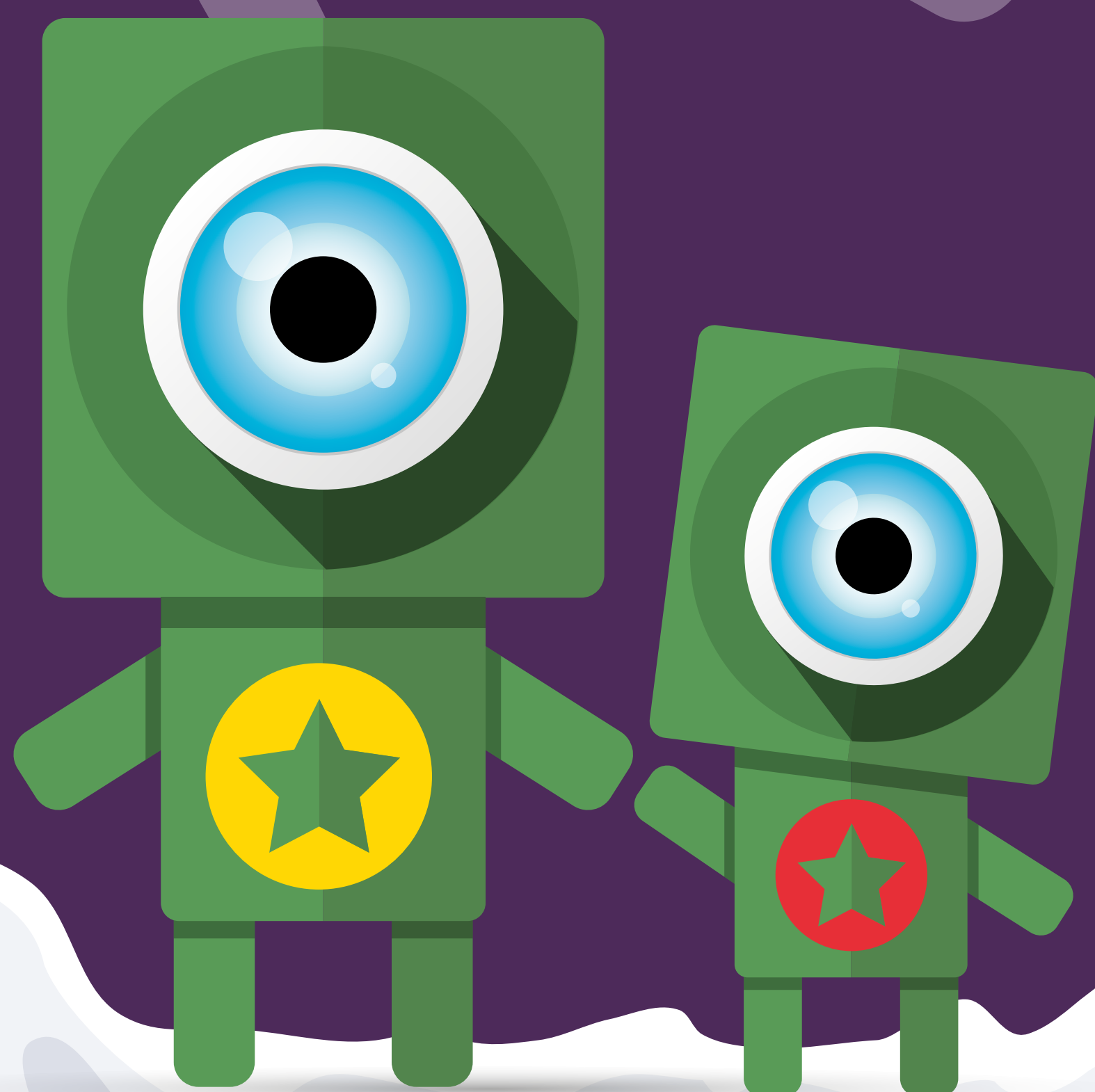
**ACTION**

Turn off the lights. Pull down the blinds and shut the curtains. How dark can you make it? Can you see a hand in front of your face? Now, have a grown up light a candle. It might be just a small light but it makes a big difference to a whole room full of darkness - now you can see!

Jesus does this for us. Jesus helps us to see who God is and how much He loves us.

PRAYER

Thank you Jesus, light of the world. Thank you for guiding us to the path of peace. Help us to walk in that good place where your light shows us the way. Amen.





***"SHE GAVE BIRTH TO HER FIRST CHILD, A SON, SHE WRAPPED HIM SNUGLY IN STRIPS OF CLOTH AND LAID HIM IN A MANGER, BECAUSE THERE WAS NO LODGING AVAILABLE FOR THEM."
(READ LUKE CHAPTER 2 VERSES 1-7)***

REFLECTION

How many MONTHS ahead do you start to get ready for a journey?

Planning the trip, where you will stay, what you need to take. How long have you been thinking and planning for Christmas? (Less than a week - eek!) Well, God has had CENTURIES to get this ready - so many things DID get sorted (as we will see tomorrow, the angels rocked up on time!) ...

DID GOD MISS SOMETHING IN HIS PLANNING? THE WORDS IN THE OLD TESTAMENT, PROMISES TO ABRAHAM, MARY, THE ANGEL . . . WHAT WAS MISSING FROM THIS SPECIAL EVENT?

Jesus was born and placed in an animal feeding trough because there was nowhere else for Him. Nowhere else for the King of Kings, the Saviour of the World, the Prince of Peace, Mighty God, Wonderful Counsellor. Nowhere for Jesus! But, it was part of God's plan. Jesus was born into a poor family, in a small town. He did not appear mighty and great and He was not rich and famous, He did not come to be some distant King in a remote palace. Jesus came to BE one of us. To know life as an ordinary human being. To know what it is like to be you or me.



**ACTION**

Will you make room for Jesus? That is a simple question - but with everything else crowding in on our Christmas (presents, food, family visits, decorations, church activities, more food, falling asleep in front of the t.v.) will we remember to make time. The lodging wasn't available. Will we be available?

Don't get so wrapped up in Christmas that you forget to unwrap the greatest gift of all!

PRAAYER

Lord, help us to remember that you are the reason we HAVE Christmas! May we remember your coming, celebrate your incredible gift of life to us and put you right at the heart of our Christmas celebrations. Amen.





"SUDDENLY, AN ANGEL OF THE LORD APPEARED AMONG THEM, AND THE RADIANCE OF THE LORD'S GLORY SURROUNDED THEM. THEY WERE TERRIFIED, BUT THE ANGEL REASSURED THEM

"DON'T BE AFRAID!" HE SAID."

(READ LUKE CHAPTER 2 VERSES 8 - 11)

REFLECTION

Do you remember "suddenly!" from a few days ago?

Well, the shepherds got no warning - they didn't get an email or a phone call, they didn't know it was almost the first Christmas! They were terrified. We can sometimes feel that the Bible is full of "dont's" - don't do this, don't do that.

BUT, HERE THE DISCIPLES ARE ON THE RECEIVING END OF A "DON'T" THAT IS COMFORTING AND KIND AND IT IS THE MOST OFTEN GIVEN COMMAND IN THE WHOLE BIBLE - "DON'T BE AFRAID."

They had no idea what was happening or why, they were also not important people at all ... in fact, in those days the sheep were more important than the shepherds. Yet here they are, this bunch of nobodies in a field being the first to hear the greatest news in the history of the world!



**ACTION**

Do you ever get afraid? OK, maybe you have not had a host of angels sing outside your bedroom window ... but - whatever we face - whether it is exciting, scary or just confuses us - we can be encouraged to know that God is with us and we do not need to be afraid. Maybe, like me, you can worry about things when we are trying to get to sleep! God kept his promise to send a Saviour right through the sweep of history.

He promises to be with us and never leave us - **MAYBE** write out this verse, "Be Strong and Courageous. Do not be afraid, do not be discouraged, for the Lord your God will be with you wherever you go." (Joshua 1 verse 9)

PRAYER

Lord, help us when we are afraid. Whether it is suddenly - like the shepherds. Or those thoughts and fears that are never far away. Help us to know that you are with us and will never let us go! Amen.



21

LET'S GO!



**"LET'S GO TO BETHLEHEM! LET'S SEE THIS THING THAT HAS HAPPENED,
WHICH THE LORD HAS TOLD US ABOUT."
(READ LUKE CHAPTER 2 VERSES 12 - 15)**

REFLECTION

You can get ready for something. Have it all lined up, everything is packed. Sorted. And . . . still not actually go.

The Shepherds had no IDEA what was going on as the angel appeared - but, as he shared the good news (think about this - the angel joined by "the armies of heaven" praising God, wow - what MUST that have looked like?!) they couldn't wait to get there and see for themselves.

**DO WE FOLLOW JESUS AND KNOW OF HIM BECAUSE
SOMEONE ELSE HAS SAID IT IS A GOOD IDEA - OR DO WE SHOW
UP AND SEE FOR OURSELVES?**

DAY 21



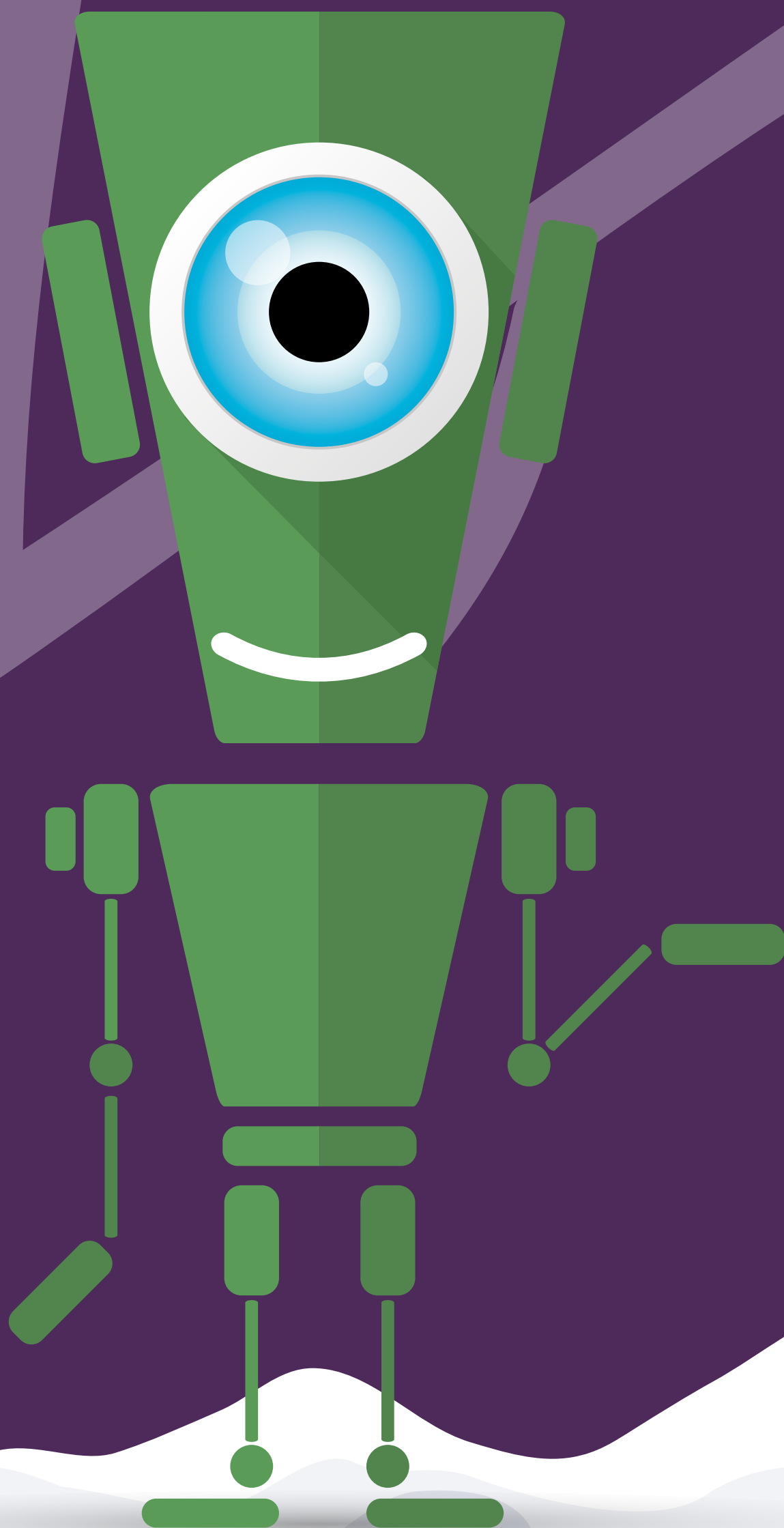
**ACTION**

Tricky this. We can't actually go to Bethlehem (well, we can . . . it is a place, it is actually there!) But, at this moment we can't follow in the shepherds footsteps as they rushed down the hillside in to the town and discovered Jesus for themselves. We CAN see Jesus though! We can see Him in the thoughts and actions of those who love Him, we can know that Jesus is with us because that is what He has promised. Others might even see Jesus as they look at us!

As we journey with Jesus and follow him in our lives, ask Him to help us with our thoughts, our words, our actions - He is here, He is with us. We can see Him. So, lets go!

PRAYER

Dear God, help me to see you this Christmas time. In the actions of those around me who love you - but Lord, help me to be a light. Help me to shine for you this Christmas so others might see you at work in me. Amen.





***“WHERE IS THE NEWBORN KING OF THE JEWS?
WE SAW HIS STAR AS IT ROSE,
AND WE HAVE COME TO WORSHIP HIM.”
(READ MATTHEW CHAPTER 2 VERSES 1- 6)***

REFLECTION

We don't know how many wise men there were. They were known as “magi” (which is a bit of Latin - where we get the word magic!) We don't know much about them except they have travelled a long way. They pitch up in Jerusalem, so they are in the right area . . . but aren't sure exactly where the new King is to be born. What might seem strange - seeing as they don't all rush off to worship Jesus - is that the leading priests and teachers DO know where Jesus is to be born! Knowing though, is not enough! It is the wise men, these people from a different land, who want to worship Him!

ACTION

We have to choose to follow. We can know the story, we can know what the Bible says about Jesus - but we have to choose, like the wise men, to come and worship. Will you be like the Magi or the priests and teachers?

What will you choose?

PRAAYER

Dear God, help us not to just watch from sidelines or be so familiar with the story that we don't pay attention, we don't follow the star and we don't worship. Help us to follow and worship you this Christmas time. Amen.





***"THEY ENTERED THE HOUSE AND SAW THE CHILD WITH HIS MOTHER,"
(READ MATTHEW CHAPTER 2 VERSES 7 - 12)***

REFLECTION

Have you ever missed something? Maybe you have turned up on the wrong day, got the time wrong or the wrong place. Well, this bit of the story is GREAT. The wise men aren't there when the shepherds make their dash to Bethlehem - who got there the day Jesus was born. According to the time the star has been guiding them, they could be up to 2 YEARS late! Jesus might have had at least one more birthday before they eventually get there. But, it is not too late to worship, it is not too late to bring their gifts. They had to WAIT for their moment with the King of Kings, but when it came they were filled with Joy!

ACTION

Write four W words on a piece of card : Waited, Wasted, Wow, Worship! Sometimes we have to wait for things - like Christmas!! The Wisemen had to wait to worship. Sometimes we waste things, we have them, we know they are good for us - but we waste a chance or waste something good. Herod wasted his chance to worship. We don't have to wait, lets not waste it. Wow Jesus is here - lets worship!

PRAYER

Dear God, help us to be patient when we have to wait for things. Help us not to waste the good things you have given us. Fill us with joy this Christmas time as we say WOW and worship. Amen.





***"THEN THEY OPENED THEIR TREASURE CHESTS AND GAVE HIM GIFTS OF GOLD, FRANKINCENSE AND MYRRH."
(READ MATTHEW CHAPTER 2 VERSES 7 - 12)***

REFLECTION

What? What kind of gifts are those for a baby? Even if Jesus is toddling by now where is the fluffy rabbit that squeaks when you squish it's tummy? Where is the blanket? Where are the baby clothes? I thought these were WISE men?! These gifts might be strange but they are special gifts for a special King. Each gift has a meaning. Gold is a gift for a King. Frankincense was used by a priest in worship (remember, we had a day when we read about Jesus being our King and our Priest?) and Myrrh was used on cuts and bruises, but also for embalming when people died - pointing to Jesus' death. Amazing costly, precious gifts.

ACTION

We might not have much (do YOU have a spare bar of gold lying around?), and we only have a few days to go until it is Christmas . . . but, what are YOU going to give Jesus? What do you think He would like? We can offer ourselves! Just as we are. We can be a gift! (You don't need to be wrapped up and have a bow on your head and a gift tag). As we follow, worship and love Jesus - we ARE a gift.

PRAYER

Dear Jesus, help us to offer ourselves as a gift to you. Help us to give you our thoughts, words and actions. May the gift of our lives be like a star that points others to the light of your love. Amen.





***"SO, THE WORD BECAME HUMAN AND MADE HIS HOME AMONG US. HE WAS FULL OF UNFAILING LOVE AND FAITHFULNESS. AND WE HAVE SEEN HIS GLORY, THE GLORY OF THE FATHER'S ONE AND ONLY SON."
(READ JOHN CHAPTER 1 VERSES 14 - 18)***

REFLECTION

The first four books of the New Testament are called the Gospels.

Matthew and Luke tell us bits of the nativity story. Mark's gospel is very short and punchy, more like an action film than a book - he launches straight in with Jesus getting baptised as an adult - missing out his birth altogether! John's gospel is different again. He deliberately starts his book with, "In the beginning" (Can you think of another book in the Bible that starts like that?) John pulls together some of the things we have been thinking about on this journey to Bethlehem. He picks up on God's plan to send the light and links Jesus with God's "word" saying they are the same.

JESUS IS THE "LIVING" WORD OF GOD!

This is not just someone special, this is not just a good person, this is God himself stepping down in to our world in human form. Um, WOW.



**ACTION**

In Greek, “word” is “logos”, which is where we get logo from. Can you draw a famous logo (try the logo for Nike or McDonalds or Pepsi). Now, can you think of a Christian logo?

The cross is the most recognised logo or symbol in the world.

PRAAYER

Thank you Jesus for your unfailing love and faithfulness. For becoming one of us and for dying for us on the cross. As we celebrate Christmas and your coming, help us to remember Easter too and the gift of your life that brings us home to a place of goodness with God. Amen.





***"AFTER SEEING HIM, THE SHEPHERDS TOLD EVERYONE WHAT HAD HAPPENED AND WHAT THE ANGEL HAD SAID TO THEM ABOUT THIS CHILD,"
(READ LUKE CHAPTER 2 VERSES 15 -18)***

REFLECTION

We are there! Our last day. It is Christmas Eve! In the mad rush of these last few days, finishing with the preparations for family and friends, we can miss what is most important. Remember what we said about Shepherds before? The sheep were more important than they were - but, they seem to get carried away with what they have seen - forgetting about their sheep, they dash about Bethlehem telling everyone they meet about Jesus. He has become the centre of their world - even when they go back to their flocks, they do so "praising God" - I'm guessing, belting out worship songs at the top of their voices!

ACTION

Sometimes, something so amazing happens we can't keep it to ourselves. It spills out. What we have watched on t.v. a special treat, a surprise present, our favourite band has just released a new single, we saw someone famous on the way to school . . . so, today - who will you tell about the amazing news of Jesus' birth? Nothing tops this in the whole history of the planet! Don't keep it to yourself :-)

PRAAYER

Dear God thank you for the amazing gift of Jesus! Help us not to keep Him to ourselves - but be so excited that everyone around us knows that Jesus is born, Jesus is here, Jesus has come! Amen.



2560 BC

Pyramid of Giza is finished
(the tallest man made
structure for 3,800 years!)



2000 BC

Abraham's
promise from God

1700 BC

Alphabet
invented

ABC

1000 BC

The Chinese invent
gunpowder (boom!)



1600 BC

Chocolate is made
for the first time
(yum!)

1000 BC

Go fly a kite for
the first time

776 BC

The first Olympic Games

1000 BC

David is King of Israel



750 BC

Lots of chatter about
the first false teeth

700 BC

Isaiah's prophecies
about Jesus

520 BC

Zechariah
branches out

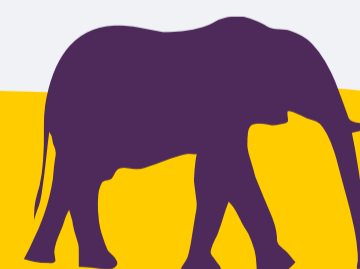


400 BC

The last word from Malachi

218 BC

Hannibal crosses the Alps with 40 elephants



51 BC

Cleopatra is Queen of Egypt



6/5 BC

Jesus is born!



**TIMELINE
MAP**

