The Jesse Tree
The Jesse Tree

Scene One: Adam and Eve

(The play opens on a Christmas tree or empty Jesse tree banner to the back and center — upstage center — of the performance area.)

Narrator One: In the beginning, God made heaven and earth. God called it good. And God made a man and a woman to be friends.

Eve: God’s garden is so beautiful, Adam.

(She kneels to smell a beautiful flower.)

Adam: And filled with good things for us.

(He reaches for a fruit and eats it.)

Eve: (She stands and looks at an imaginary or prop/painted tree.)

And sometimes—I think that tree is the most beautiful tree of all.

Adam: We can’t go near it, Eve! God said not to eat from it!

Eve: Not to eat from it, no. But how could it hurt just to go close?

(She walks slowly to the tree, her eyes fixed on its fruit.)

Adam: (He follows Eve to the tree.)

It is...the most beautiful fruit I’ve ever seen.

Eve: (She reaches her hand to touch the fruit.)

Yes. And I have heard that if we DID eat this fruit, we would become like God.

Adam: Just like God?

Eve: Yes...

(She closes her hand around the fruit and picks it. She lifts it to her mouth and takes a bite. The bite is delicious and she offers the fruit to Adam, who also takes a bite. For one moment, they enjoy the fruit in silence. Then a great clap of thunder comes, and they drop the fruit in fear. They join hands and run.)
**NARRATOR TWO:** Blessed is the fruit of your womb: Jesus. (As the narrator recites this verse, the apple symbol is placed on the Jesse tree.)

**SCENE TWO:** **Ark and Rainbow**

**NARRATOR ONE:** People did not stay in God’s beautiful garden. They fought with one another and even killed. One day God told Noah to build an ark to save people and animals from the rains that would come and wash the earth.

**NOAH:** Hurry! The rain will start soon!

**CHILD:** There are only a few animals more.

*(Animals come two by two into the ark. Use a table draped with cloth or a cardboard appliance box with an opening at the back as the base of the ark.)*

**CROWD:** Silly man! Look at that stupid boat! Crazy old Noah! (Assign these and similar phrases to different children to create a realistic crowd sound.)

**NOAH’S WIFE:** Oh! The first drops! Come, children.

*(She takes two children into the ark.)*

**NOAH:** *(He helps the last animals inside, then turns to the crowd and says simply:)*

Goodbye.

**NARRATOR ONE:** Rain fell for forty days. The ark sailed for even more days, while all those inside the ark waited for the waters to go down.

**NOAH’S WIFE:** Come out! It’s safe now! Come!

*(She leads out one of the animals, followed by Noah and a child, each leading another animal.)*

**CHILD:** Father, what if it happens again?

**NOAH:** It will never happen again. God has promised us. And look!
NARRATOR TWO: Whenever I cover the sky with clouds and the rainbow appears, I will remember my promise to you and to all.

(Genesis 9:14-15a, Today’s English Version. As the narrator recites this verse, the rainbow symbol is placed on the Jesse tree.)

SCENE THREE: Abraham and Sarah

NARRATOR ONE: But Noah’s children and their children did not always remember God’s love for them. Again people went their own ways, and lived without paying attention to God. But God would never give up.

ABRAHAM: Sarah! I must talk to you.

SARAH: What is it, Abraham?

ABRAHAM: We must leave our home, Sarah. God has said so.

SARAH: But all our family lives here! Our mothers, fathers, brothers, sisters. How can we leave them all?

ABRAHAM: It will be hard. But God loves us even more. Can we say no?

SARAH: Abraham, where will we live?

ABRAHAM: I don’t know yet. God will bring us to our new home.

SARAH: Leave the home we know. Say goodbye to our family. Oh, Abraham. What will we have left?

ABRAHAM: We will have each other, Sarah. And God. And children! God has promised us many, many children.

SARAH: We’re too old for children!

ABRAHAM: Not if God sends them. Please, Sarah. Come with me?

(He reaches out his hand.)

SARAH: (Slowly she walks to him and takes his hand.)
Yes, Abraham.

(She looks away, to the road ahead and says, in the same exact voice:)

Yes, God.

NARRATOR TWO: Look at the sky and try to count the stars; you will have as many descendants as that.

(Genesis 15:5b, Today’s English Version. As the narrator recites this verse, the stars symbol is placed on the Jesse tree.)

SCENE FOUR: Leaving Egypt

NARRATOR ONE: God did send children to Abraham and Sarah. Those children had children of their own, and the children of Abraham were as many as the stars in the sky. But even the lives of these people of God were not always easy. Hard times came, and God’s people became slaves in the land of Egypt. Even in Egypt, God remembered them.

MOSES: Come! This is the night. You will leave the land of Egypt and never be slaves again.

HEBREW ONE: But, Moses, the Egyptians will catch us and bring us back!

HEBREW TWO: Or even kill us!

AARON: No! Have faith in God. God will never let us down.

HEBREW THREE: And then what will we do, Aaron? We’ll starve in the desert.

MIRIAM: God feeds every bird in the sky, every horse in the field, every fish in the sea. God will feed God’s own people.

MOSES: Listen to Miriam. We must go NOW!

(They begin to make their way. They come to a “river” of blue cloths.)

HEBREW ONE: Look! The Egyptians are close behind!

HEBREW TWO: And the river is too deep for us to cross!
HEBREW THREE: We’ll never get away now.
MIRIAM: Don’t give up!
MOSES: The Egyptians will be sent back.

(He stretches his arm out over the water, and two children pull the cloths apart. The people walk across, cheering. Aaron, Miriam and Moses go last. On the other side, Miriam brings out a tambourine.)

MIRIAM: We’re saved! Let us dance.
AARON AND MOSES: Praise God!
HEBREWS: Yes, praise God!

(The people clap, cheer and dance.)

NARRATOR TWO: The prophet Miriam took her tambourine, and sang for them: Sing to the Lord, because he has won a glorious victory.

(Exodus 15:20-21, Today’s English Version. As the narrator recites this verse, the tambourine symbol is placed on the Jesse tree.)

SCENE FIVE: The New Land
NARRATOR ONE: Moses led God’s people back to the land of Abraham and Sarah. He chose spies to go and see what the land was like.

HEBREW ONE: Look, the spies Moses sent are coming back.
HEBREW TWO: What did you find?
JOSHUA: Listen! The land is good, and we will be happy there. Plenty of food grows there: grain and olives and grapes.

(Shows basket of food.)

HEBREW ONE: Yes! God has brought us to a good place.
SPY ONE: Wait! Yes, good food grows there. But so do giants! The land is full of them!

SPY TWO: We’ll never be able to live there. The giants will chase us out.

HEBREW TWO: Giants? What should we do?

HEBREW ONE: We must turn back at once.

JOSHUA: No, don’t be afraid! God has brought us here. God will take care of us in our new home.

HEBREW TWO: But we can’t fight giants!

JOSHUA: God will fight for you!

HEBREWS AND SPIES: No! We won’t go!

JOSHUA: No? Then we will go back to the desert. Some day I will bring your children to this land, but not one of you will ever taste its good food.

NARRATOR TWO: Taste and see that God is good. Happy are those who trust in God.

(Psalm 34:8, paraphrased. As the narrator recites this verse, the grapes symbol is placed on the Jesse tree.)

SCENE SIX: Family Stories

DAVID: (He is seated on a bench. He gives a small scroll to the messenger standing by.)

Go and take this message to the general.

HEBREW ONE: Yes, King David.

SOLOMON: Father! Father!

HEBREW TWO: Your father is busy, Solomon.

DAVID: But not too busy for you, Solomon. Come here.
(He pats the bench next to him. Solomon runs to him and sits down.)

Now what do you want from your father this morning?

**SOLOMON:** I want a story!

**DAVID:** *(He laughs.)*

Always a story! And which story do you want to hear?

**SOLOMON:** The story of your great-grandmother Ruth, please.

**DAVID:** Ah...she was a brave and loving woman, my great-grandmother, who came from so far away. And so was my great-great-grandmother Naomi, who went to live with her sons in a far-away land.

*(Scene shifts to the women about whom David tells his story.)*

**NAOMI:** Ruth. Orpah. Come walk with me.

**RUTH AND ORPAH:** Yes, Naomi.

**NAOMI:** So many sad days this year. When Mahlon and Chillon died, who was more sad? I lost my sons, but you lost your husbands.

**RUTH:** I thought our tears would never stop.

**NAOMI:** And this will be another sad day. I must return home and leave you, dear Orpah and Ruth.

**ORPAH:** No, Naomi! Don’t leave us! Come back with us to our country!

**NAOMI:** I want to go back to my home. But you, my daughters, go back to your homes with God’s blessing and mine.

*(Orpah hugs Naomi, and leaves, waving goodbye.)*

**RUTH:** Ruth? Will you let me bless you, too?

**RUTH:** No, Naomi. And I will not let you leave me, either!

**NAOMI:** Ruth, I want to go home to the land of Abraham and Sarah and my God.
RUTH: Then I will go, too. Don’t tell me to go away, Naomi! Your God will be my God. Your people will be my people. Please, Naomi.

NAOMI: Oh, Ruth. My dearest daughter.

(They embrace.)

RUTH: Now. Let us go to your home together.

(Scene returns to David and Solomon.)

SOLOMON: And did they live here forever, Father?

DAVID: Yes, Solomon. And Ruth was the mother of Obed, who was the father of Jesse.

SOLOMON: And Jesse was the father of YOU, king of all God’s people.

DAVID: And I am the father of YOU! And it is time for YOU to run to your lessons. Learn them well, Solomon, because some day you, too, will be king and must know how to serve God’s people.

NARRATOR TWO: I will make him my first-born son, the greatest of all kings. I will always keep my promise to him.

(Psalm 89:27-28a, Today’s English Version. As the narrator recites this verse, the crown symbol is placed on the Jesse tree.)

SCENE SEVEN: From Far Away

NARRATOR ONE: Not all the kings of Israel followed God. In those days, God’s people knew the hardest times of all. The rich did not share with the poor. The people did not listen to God’s word. God’s people lost great wars, and were taken away to strange countries. But even in those far-away places, God sent prophets to tell God’s word.

HEBREW ONE: Can God have forgotten us?

HEBREW TWO: I do not know. We are gone from our homes. We work long hours for our masters.
HEBREW THREE: I wonder if we will ever return home.

HEBREW ONE: Look. There’s Ezekiel.

HEBREW TWO: Ezekiel, has God forgotten us?

EZEKIEL: No, God remembers us. Listen to these words from God.

(He unrolls a scroll.)

God says, “I will be like a good shepherd to my people, who are like lost sheep. I will take care of them. I will bring them home.”

(He walks off as the Hebrews work again.)

MESSENGER: Israelites! A message from Cyrus the king: Go back to Jerusalem. Build there a temple for your God.

HEBREW THREE: Home? We’re going home!

HEBREW ONE: Run and tell everyone! We’re going HOME!

(All the people drop their work tools and dance, cheer, etc.)

NARRATOR TWO: Lord, you have the words that give eternal life.

(John 6:68, Today’s English Version. As the narrator recites this verse, the scroll symbol is placed on the Jesse tree.)

SCENE EIGHT: Mary

NARRATOR ONE: And so God’s people returned home. But still they waited for another king, like good King David, who would lead God’s people. Still prophets came to promise this king who would live forever. Years and tens of years and hundreds of years passed. And all Israel waited.

(Mary hums a tune as she works at cleaning, weaving or a similar task. Her back is turned to the angel who walks onto the stage, but stays at a distance.)
ANGEL: Mary, I greet you.

(Mary turns and drops her broom, spindle, etc. She gasps at the sight of the angel.)

ANGEL: Mary, don’t be afraid. God is with you. God has chosen you, Mary, to be the mother of a special child. He will be king of all God’s people.

MARY: Me? But how can I? I haven’t even married Joseph yet!

ANGEL: This will be God’s own child, and you will be his mother. You must call him Jesus.

MARY: I will do what God wants. I will be the mother of Jesus.

(The angel bows to her and leaves.)

I must go tell Joseph!

(She runs off.)

NARRATOR TWO: The desert will rejoice, and flowers will bloom in the wastelands.

(Isaiah 35:1, Today’s English Version. As the narrator recites this verse, the rose symbol is placed on the Jesse tree.)

SCENE NINE: Joseph

NARRATOR ONE: A child is coming! But God wants someone to help Mary care for the baby who will be king.

(A line divides the stage in half. On one side is Joseph’s “house”: a sleeping pallet, his work tools and a few dishes. On the other side is Mary’s “house.” Mary runs to the line dividing the two houses. They can talk as if they are outside, face to face, or as if they are talking through adjoining windows or over a fence.)

MARY: Joseph! I have amazing news!

JOSEPH: What news, Mary?

MARY: I’m going to have a baby!
JOSEPH: A baby? Mary, you’re not supposed to have a baby. We’re not married yet.

MARY: But this will be God’s baby, Joseph! An angel told me!

JOSEPH: An angel told you? Mary—I don’t understand this. I don’t like this. And I don’t think I want to marry you anymore.

(He turns away. Mary looks after him sadly, then goes to her bed and lies down. Joseph gets ready for bed, then lies down. Their backs are turned to each other. An angel enters Joseph’s house.)

ANGEL: Joseph! I am God’s angel. Don’t be afraid. Make Mary your wife. All she tells you is true.

(The angel leaves. Joseph wakes and looks, but the angel is gone.)

JOSEPH: Was it real? Was it a dream? What should I do?

(He paces the floor, then stops.)

I don’t know the answers, but I do know Mary.

(He runs to Mary’s house.)

MARY: (She comes to him.)

What is it, Joseph?

JOSEPH: Mary, I’m sorry. Will you still marry me?

MARY: Oh, yes, Joseph!

(They leave together.)

NARRATOR TWO: The stone which the builders rejected turned out to be the most important of all.

(Psalm 118:22, Today’s English Version. As the narrator recites this verse, the carpenter’s tools symbol is placed on the Jesse tree.)
SCENE TEN: Go to Bethlehem!

NARRATOR ONE: And so Joseph brought Mary to Bethlehem in time for Jesus to be born. They slept in a stable of animals, because no one could find them a house or even a room. Only the animals heard the baby’s first cry. But in a field far away, shepherds watched their sheep.

SHEPHERD ONE: I’m so tired tonight. I think I shall sleep until noon!

SHEPHERD TWO: And my feet are so sore running after the sheep all day!

SHEPHERD THREE: At least now we can rest for a while.

SHEPHERD ONE: What’s that light? Who is it? What is it?

ANGEL: Don’t be afraid! I have great news for you! Go to Bethlehem, you who are the poorest of God’s people. You’ll find a treasure just for you: a baby who will be your king, and who will live forever.

ANGELS: Glory to God! And peace to God’s people! (The angels disappear.)

SHEPHERD TWO: Come on! Let’s go see this baby!

SHEPHERD THREE: What about those sore feet of yours?

SHEPHERD TWO: Who cares! Let’s go!

NARRATOR TWO: You will find a baby wrapped in cloths and lying in a manger.

(Luke 2:12, Today’s English Version. As the narrator recites this verse, the manger symbol is placed on the Jesse tree.)

CLOSING LITANY: Come, Lord Jesus

(Children gather around the finished Jesse tree. They take turns leading this litany, touching or holding up each symbol named in turn. All the children join in the refrain of Come, Lord Jesus.

The audience can also participate in this response.)
APPLE: Like sweet fruit, you feed God’s people.
RESPONSE: Come, Lord Jesus.
RAINBOW: You are a sign of God’s promise.
RESPONSE: Come, Lord Jesus.
STARS: Those who love you are as many as the stars in the sky.
RESPONSE: Come, Lord Jesus.
TAMBOURINE: We will sing to you and praise you forever.
RESPONSE: Come, Lord Jesus.
GRAPES: As grapes give wine, so you give joy.
RESPONSE: Come, Lord Jesus.
SCROLL: You are God’s word, promising freedom.
RESPONSE: Come, Lord Jesus.
ROSE: You are Mary’s son.
RESPONSE: Come, Lord Jesus.
CARPENTER’S TOOLS: You were a child in Joseph’s home.
RESPONSE: Come, Lord Jesus.
MANGER: Blessed Jesus, once a baby in Bethlehem:
RESPONSE: Come, Lord Jesus.

END
About the Authors...

**RANDI GOLDSTEIN** has been a theatre professional for more than ten years. As the Artistic Director of a children’s theatre in New York, she directed more than a dozen shows for children, and developed workshops for young people interested in careers in the arts. During her time as the Director of Operations for an East Coast lighting and sound company, she provided support for shows for literally hundreds of schools, churches, and libraries, as well as national tours, and concerts for major recording artists. She is a member of Actors’ Equity Association, has degrees in Psychology and Theatre, and is currently pursuing a Master of Fine Arts degree in Theatre Management.

**DINA STRONG** worked with young children for more than a decade as storyteller, teacher and children’s literature specialist before becoming a writer and editor of story-based educational materials in 1987. She has a degree in Literature, with a minor in Education, and has worked with children in groups whose numbers ranged from four to a hundred. Spindle Press has published three of her previous titles: *The Vineyard and the Wedding: Four Stories of God’s Kingdom, Many Miles to Bethlehem: Stories of Advent and Christmas* and *Hosanna and Alleluia: Stories of Holy Week and Easter.*
The Jesse Tree
Production Notes

The Jesse Tree is a more elaborate Advent or Christmas pageant based on a full script, especially suitable for use with 7- to 10-year-olds. The play consists of ten short vignettes tied together with the visual prop of a large Jesse tree. (The Jesse Tree is an Advent devotion based on Old Testament symbols and stories about God’s promised Messiah. We’ve adapted this popular custom to make an offbeat play.)

After each vignette, one or more symbols are placed on the tree, as the narrator recites lines tying the symbol or symbols to the coming of Jesus Christ. The play concludes with a short litany based on the symbol-filled tree.

This format is easily adapted by religious day schools (or after-school care programs) who can make time to work with the children involved in each vignette during free play periods. If you are pulling together the pageant for a Sunday religious education program, get started early, and expect to schedule extra rehearsals as the play dates approach.

The focal point of the production will be the Jesse tree (which should be large and entirely visible to the audience) and its symbols. You can use an actual Christmas tree for the Jesse tree, or construct a large felt banner on which symbols can be taped or pinned as the play progresses. Symbols should be prepared ahead of time. We recommend inviting children to work together to construct colorful collage designs on circles cut from poster board. Make the symbols large — at least 15” in diameter.

You will need the following symbols:

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<thead>
<tr>
<th>Scene One</th>
<th>Adam and Eve</th>
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<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Scene Two</td>
<td>Noah and his wife</td>
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<tr>
<td>Scene Three</td>
<td>Abraham and Sarah</td>
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<td>Scene Four</td>
<td>Moses, Aaron and Miriam</td>
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<td>Scene Five</td>
<td>Joshua</td>
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<td>David, Solomon, Ruth, Naomi</td>
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<td>Scene Seven</td>
<td>Ezekiel</td>
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<td>Scene Eight</td>
<td>Mary</td>
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<td>Scene Nine</td>
<td>Joseph</td>
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<td>Scene Ten</td>
<td>Jesus</td>
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</tbody>
</table>

apple  
rainbow  
stars  
tambourine  
grapes  
crown  
scrolls  
rose  
carpenter’s tools  
manger
Keep costumes simple. Children will switch roles frequently. You can get an inexpensive but unified look by asking each child to dress in blue jeans and a solid-color tee shirt in Advent colors: purple, blue or rose. Add the simplest details to help each child make the transition to another part: a veil fashioned from a scarf for Mary, for example, or a broomstick staff for Noah. When children play animals, they can don a set of ears, a tail or a paper mask for the quickest possible transition.

Each scene follows the same format:

• Narrator One sets the scene with a quick background narration.

• Children act out the scene.

• Narrator Two reads aloud a Bible verse connected with the symbol for that scene, as a child carries the symbol across the stage to the Jesse tree.

List the characters and their players on the cast grid provided on page 54.

Cast of Characters

(Because each vignette stands alone, you can re-use actors again and again. This play will work well with either a small or large group of children.)

NARRATOR ONE
(adult or youth reader)

NARRATOR TWO
(adult or youth reader)

Adam
Eve
Noah
Noah’s children
Abraham
three angels
Sarah
Joseph
Joseph’s family
Elijah
Elisha
Isaiah
Jeremiah
Mary
Joseph

Moses
Miriam
Hebrews
Joshua
Orpah
Naomi
Ruth
Samuel
David
Solomon
Ezra
Nehemiah

TIP:
To make the sound of thunder, use a sheet of aluminum. Hang or lay it on a table and flex the sheet of metal back and forth to hear realistic thunder!
## Cast Grid

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Name</th>
<th>Phone</th>
<th>Character(s)</th>
<th>Permission Slip</th>
<th>Costume Measured</th>
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