

# Countdown to Christmas:

## Unwrap the Christmas Story with Your Family in 15 Days

Lisa M. Appelo  
[www.LisaAppelo.com](http://www.LisaAppelo.com)  
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## Introduction

This Nativity Activity book grew out of my own desire to be more intentional with my children about the reason for Christmas. I've always loved nativity scenes. I've collected them over the years and during the Christmas season, we display them throughout our home on the mantel, on coffee tables, in the front yard and as ornaments on the tree.

I always have one kid-friendly manger scene that is completely accessible to my kids. They can play with it, re-enact stories and rearrange it throughout the season. In the past, we've used a hand-made wooden set, a Playmobil® manger set (super popular with my boys) and a pretty, child-friendly resin set.

Last year, I put together a 15-day Nativity Activity, matching each of the standard pieces in a nativity scene with the scripture that unfolds the story of Christ's birth. I knew our busy December would make a month-long study impractical. We'd surely miss days, then fall behind and then might drop it altogether.

But 15 days works for us. It gives us plenty of margin during the month and accommodates days I know we'll be out of the house. You can start this countdown 15 days before Christmas or begin early in December, using the days that are convenient for your family.

I pray this becomes a beautiful tradition for your family and helps you set aside time to teach the meaning of Christmas and to make treasured memories with your children.

Merry Christmas!

Lisa Appelo  
[www.LisaAppelo.com](http://www.LisaAppelo.com)

## Day 1: The Stable

### **Scripture: Micah 5:2**

“But you, Bethlehem Ephrathah , though you are little among the thousands of Judah, Yet out of you shall come forth to Me The One to be Ruler in Israel, Whose goings forth are from of old, From everlasting.”

### **Discussion**

Around 700 years before Jesus was ever born, a prophet named Micah foretold that he would be born in Bethlehem. Seven hundred years is a long time! That would be like someone in the Middle Ages foretelling exactly where someone would be born today.

Bethlehem was a village about six miles from Jerusalem. It's in a very hilly part of Israel and you have to walk up steep hills to reach it. Bethlehem means “house of bread.” This would be the house of bread alright. Of all the villages and all the towns and cities in the world, Jesus, the Bread of Life, would be born in Bethlehem.

The prophet Micah foretold something else very important about the One born in Bethlehem. He would be “from of old, from everlasting.” What do you think that means? How could a newborn baby be from everlasting? He can't. Only God is from everlasting. God has always existed, before you or me or any of this world was ever created. (John 1:1-2) So Micah the prophet tells us that the Messiah would be God himself coming to Bethlehem.

Messiah is the Jewish word for Christ. The Jewish people were excited for the Messiah to come. Other prophets like Micah told them about the coming Messiah and they waited expectantly for hundreds and hundreds of years, knowing He would one day be born in Bethlehem.

### **Nativity Scene**

Put up your stable or crèche today. We still have a few weeks before we celebrate Jesus' birthday, but long before Jesus' birth, God knew right where he would be born.

## Day 2: Palm Tree

### **Scripture: Isaiah 11:1-2**

“A shoot will come up from the stump of Jesse; from his roots a Branch will bear fruit. The Spirit of the LORD will rest on him -- the Spirit of wisdom and of understanding, the Spirit of counsel and of might, the Spirit of the knowledge and fear of the LORD.” [NIV]

### **Discussion**

Today we're talking about stumps and shoots. Do you have any stumps from old trees in your yard? We have several big oak trees in our yard and one of them was cut all the way down to a stump. Do you know what happened a few weeks later? New green shoots started growing right out of that old stump.

That's the picture that the prophet Isaiah uses. Isaiah prophesied about 700 years before Jesus was ever born. To understand Isaiah's prophecy, you first need to know a little about Jesus' own family tree.

Jesus was descended from King David. In fact, both Mary and Joseph were in the line of King David. King David's father was named Jesse. And though nearly all of King David's royal line would be wiped out, God promised a Messiah would come from the stump of Jesse.

Out of what looked like a dead royal line, God would bring a new shoot. This shoot was the Messiah, Jesus, who would be a new king. But He didn't rule like King David did. Jesus didn't have a palace or throne or royal robes on earth. Jesus' kingdom is a heavenly kingdom and He left that kingdom to come to earth as a baby.

### **Nativity Scene**

Add a palm tree to your nativity scene to represent the shoot that came from the stump of Jesse.

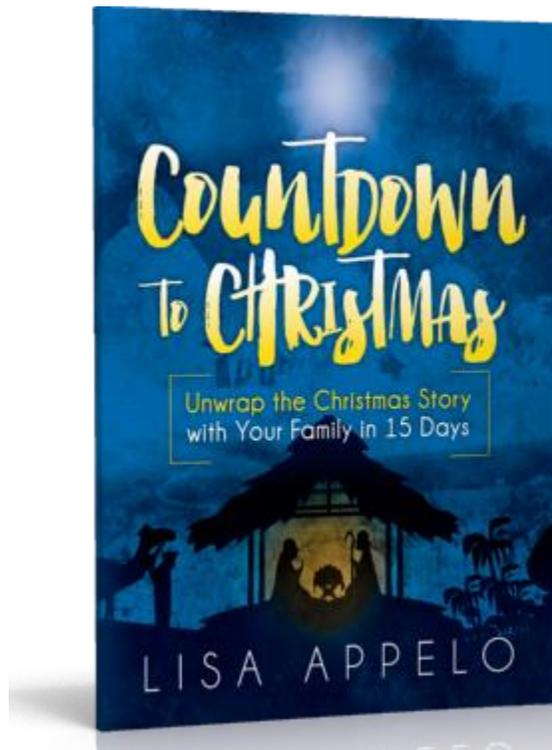
Tomorrow, we'll look at another prophecy about exactly how Jesus would be born. Thousands of years before Jesus was ever born, God was preparing his people to know the Messiah.

Thank you so much for joining me for the first two days of Countdown to Christmas: Unwrap the Christmas Story with Your Family in 15 Days.

Each day has a fresh look at the people, places, sights and sounds in scripture that lead us right to the manger. Countdown to Christmas brings together scriptures to tell each event of the real Christmas story.

This is a wonderful way to teach children the true meaning of Christmas and that presents are not the only reason we celebrate Christmas. . . I highly recommend this book. We will be reading it every year.

~ Charlene



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From our family to yours, blessed and Merry Christmas! ~ Lisa