

In the beginning God made the heaven and the earth. He began by saying, 'Let there be light' and there was light. Next he made the water and that was good. Then God made the land and he saw that that was good. After that came the sun, moon and stars to give light for the day and the night. This too was good. Then he filled the waters with fish of all kinds and the air with birds and he said that that was good. Finally he made the creatures and he also made people—you and me—and put them in charge of his world, to look after it. When God saw everything that he had made, he said, it was very good. When he had finished creating the world, God rested.



*Which part of God's world do I like the best?*

God made everything good but soon the world began to go bad. People chose not to care for God's world or even for each other. God was sad and decided to start all over again by sending a flood. Only Noah's family truly believed in God so they were kept safe in a boat called an ark. On board were representatives of all the animals that God had made so that God could fill his cleaned-up world again with life after the flood.

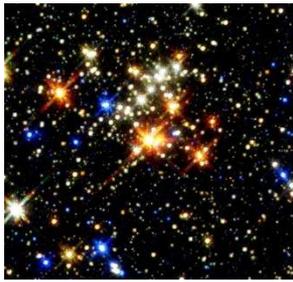
When the flood was over Noah and his family and the animals came out. They remembered to thank God for all that he had done. Then God gave them a sign that he would never stop loving his world and its people in future. He gave them a rainbow.



*What do I want to thank God for?*

And God kept his promise. He never stopped loving people. He wanted to help them trust him whatever happened. Once he spoke to a man called Abraham and told him and his wife Sarah to set out on a dangerous journey across the desert to a new place to live called Canaan. Abraham could not see God but he believed he was always close. God kept them on their long journey. He gave them a safe place to live. He also promised them that he would give them a son and that from this son would come a family and a great nation. In that nation one day a very special person would be born, who would bring God's love to the

whole world. God's family would be world-big and contain as many people as there are stars in the sky or grains of sand in the desert. God kept his promise.



*How many countries in the world can I name where I know God's people are today?*

God's people didn't find it easy to trust God. They often make mistakes and often deliberately chose to go their own way, ending up in trouble. Many years after Abraham, they ended up as slaves in Egypt. Their situation seemed hopeless but God did not forget them. He sent Moses to bring them to freedom. The Pharaoh in Egypt let them go only when a terrible thing happened. All the eldest boy children of the Egyptians, including the Pharaoh's own child, died. God's people, however, were kept safe from this. They had put lambs' blood around the doors of their houses. The angel of death had passed over them and they were saved. Moses led them across the Red Sea to freedom. They had been in such a rush to leave, however, that there had been no time to bake proper bread for the journey. It had no yeast or leaven in it, so it was flat. They called it unleavened bread. Whenever they ate this bread, they remembered how God had brought them from slavery to freedom.



*What helps me to remember and 'taste' important moments in my life?*

God guided Moses and he led them through the desert to a new home. God gave them miracle food to eat and water to drink. But even then some of them began to doubt God's love. It was so easy to forget the best way to live. So God called Moses up a mountain and gave him the Ten Commandments. These ten rules would help people know how to come close to God. They told the people how to love God and to love other people.



*What are my suggestions for the best ways to live?*

After a journey of 40 years the people were finally ready to come to God's Promised Land. This was the place where they would be safe. In order to get into this land they had one more thing to do. They needed to cross the River Jordan. It seemed impossible but Joshua, who had taken over from Moses by now, trusted God to show them how. The priests went out into the water first, carrying the great golden chest that contained the Ten Commandments and they stood in the middle of the river. As soon as they were there, the River Jordan began to dry up so that they could cross safely. After many years of walking through the desert, they could walk into God's special home for them. Their feet were dusty from their desert journey but as they crossed the wet riverbed they were cleaned, ready for a new beginning.



*What makes somewhere a safe place for me?*

God kept on looking after his people in the new land but there were so many temptations for the people to forget him and go their own way. There were great leaders and kings like David and Solomon but even they didn't always choose God's way. They built special places to worship God; even a golden temple in Jerusalem, but they began to forget that God was everywhere, not just in a building. God sent special people to remind them of his love and warn them of the dangers of turning away from his love. These were called prophets; but not everyone listened to their messages. Finally God decided that the only way to show his love to them was to come and live with them himself. God decided to wrap himself up very small and he quietly entered his own world, as a tiny baby.



*What is my favourite part of the Christmas story?*

God had planned this all along as the way he was going to show them what he was really like and how he could keep them safe forever. God was inside a human body, and we call him Jesus.

Jesus shone bright with God's light. When he was about 30 years old, he went to the River Jordan where his cousin John was baptising people. He asked John to baptise him. John was surprised. He knew how special Jesus was. Jesus should baptise *him*! However, Jesus

insisted and so he went down into the water and came out again. People nearby said they heard God's voice; others saw a dove coming close to Jesus. Jesus was showing everyone the way of starting a new life with God. The washing of baptism became a picture of how people enter into the safe place of trusting God forever.



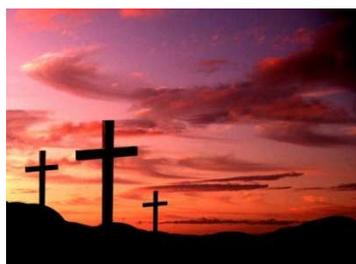
*What helps me to make a fresh new start?*

Jesus began teaching people about God and his ways. Crowds gathered to listen. Once he was speaking to a great crowd of men, women and children on a mountainside in Galilee. He told them about what things are like when God is king. He described the sort of lives God's people should lead. He said that people would be happy if they knew that they needed God; happy if they were sad about being far from him; and happy if they always put others first; they would be happy if they longed for what was good and right, and happy if they were kind and said no to all that was bad; happy if they were people who made peace. Everyone else might think they were crazy and laugh at them but this was the only way to be happy and make God happy too.



*I wonder what sort of things make God happy?*

Jesus said and did amazing things. Everyone knew that he was special and that he was showing them what God was like; however, very few really knew who he was. He called himself by many names. Once he said he was the light; on other occasions he called himself the Good Shepherd and the Way and once he described himself as the Door. But Jesus knew the only way to rescue people from the bad that keeps spoiling our lives was to go to Jerusalem and to die on a cross. Everyone now who comes to God through this door can be safe and rescued from all that is bad. The cross gave people the power to choose to do what is right.



*I wonder how Jesus' dying on a cross is the way to change everything?*

After three days Jesus was seen alive again in a new Easter way. He could now always be there for his people to lead them into what was good and true. Although people could not see him, he was there in a new invisible way and people followed him. He wanted everyone to be filled with light as he was filled with light and to take God's love out into the world so that more and more people would become part of God's new beginning. God's promise to Abraham was coming true. God's family was growing and growing and was becoming as many as the stars in the sky and the grains of sand in the desert.



*How is God's family growing today and how can I help this to happen?*

Jesus wanted everyone to remember him so that they would not forget how to come close to God wherever they were. He had given them a way to do this. Not a rainbow this time but a simple meal to share together. It had first been part of the meal he had eaten with his friends the night before he died. There had been bread to eat and wine to drink. Every time Christians eat and drink in this way they remember Jesus. They remember how he died and then came back to life to be with everyone everywhere forever.



*What helps me not to forget about Jesus?*

The story ends with a new beginning. The first creation will be over and because of Jesus all that is bad and which spoils God's world will be washed away. Everyone will be able to choose to be safe in Jesus. The Bible promises God will make a new heaven and a new earth, full of light. This is the light of God and of Jesus his Son. All that was broken will be mended and all that was painful will be healed. This is how the Bible ends but really it is just the first page of a new book that will go on forever.



*I wonder what heaven will be like?*