Tree symbol: an oil lamp

[We are going to trace the stories of the Jesse Tree right up through the branches of the people who carried the story of God's love.]

Many years after Moses had led the people across the desert to live in the Promised Land, a woman called Hannah was longing to have a baby. She promised God, 'If ever I do have a child, I will give the child to you, to live as your servant.' Hannah was so happy when she gave birth to a baby boy. She named him Samuel. She loved him in a special way because she had waited many years to have a child. Hannah remembered her promise to God.

When Samuel was still a young child, she arranged for him to go and live in the place where all the people in the land came to worship. Samuel lived in a house of prayer. He was cared for by a man called Eli and he learnt to care for the house of prayer – to sweep the floor and put oil in the lamps and to help the people who came to offer sacrifices. It was a long way from his family home, so his mother and father could only come to see him once a year, when they came to worship at a special festival. Each year, his mother brought him a new coat, and each year she made it in a larger size because she knew that Samuel would have been growing up all through the months when she could not visit him.

One night, when Samuel lay down on his mat to sleep, he heard a voice calling him, 'Samuel! Samuel!' He got up and went through to the room where Eli was. 'Here I am, what can I do for you? You called me,' he said. Eli said to Samuel, 'I didn't call you, go back to bed.' Samuel went back to his mat and rolled up in his blanket to get comfortable. He had just lain down, ready to go to sleep, when he heard a clear voice calling him again, 'Samuel, Samuel!' He got up and went through to Eli and said, 'Here I am.' Eli said, 'Son, I didn't call you, go back to bed.' So Samuel went and settled on his mat again. He was just closing his eyes when he heard the voice again. 'Samuel! Samuel!' It was such a clear, strong voice that he knew he was not imagining it. 'Eli must be calling me this time; perhaps he is testing me,' he thought. Samuel got up and went back through to Eli. 'Here I am, what can I do for you?' he asked.

Then Eli realised what was happening: Samuel was not hearing a human voice calling him, he was hearing the voice of God. 'Samuel, God is speaking to you,' said Eli. 'Go and lie down on your mat and when you hear the voice calling again, say: speak, for your servant is listening.' So Samuel went back to his mat and lay down in the soft warm light which came from the oil lamps in the house of prayer and waited. Sure enough, the voice came again, 'Samuel! Samuel!' Samuel felt nervous, but he sat up and said, 'Speak, for your servant is listening.' And God spoke to Samuel
that night and told him many things. As the years went by, God spoke to Samuel like this again and again.

Samuel grew up to be an important leader in the land. Samuel listened very carefully to what he felt that God was saying, and he tried to tell the people the messages that he had heard from God. Samuel became a judge in Israel. This meant that people would come to him and ask him to settle their dispute. If two neighbours were arguing about where the fence should be between their gardens and they both thought that their own garden should be bigger, they would come to visit Samuel and each side would state their case. Samuel would listen very carefully, and try to give a judgement that was fair to both sides. The people soon came to realise that Samuel was a wise judge who could help them find the best way to live. He became a leader among the people and the people relied on him. Samuel made decisions about whether to go to war and it was Samuel who chose the first kings of Israel. Samuel ruled wisely as a great leader because, even when he was a little boy, he had learned to listen to God.

[We hang the symbol of the oil lamp on the tree to remind us of Samuel and the night when he first listened to God.]

**A moment to wonder**

I wonder what it was like to grow up living in a temple?

**A prayer**

As green as a healthy tree, the story of God's love keeps growing. We remember Samuel, who listened to God and gave the people good advice. We pray for those who make decisions for their countries. Amen.