When King David was old and full of years, he died and his son Solomon became king after him. Solomon was not David’s eldest son, but he was the one that God had chosen to be king. During David’s reign, the country had grown because the two lands of Israel and Judah had become one country. The city of Jerusalem had become much bigger and it had a grand royal palace for the king to live in. The population of the land had grown, so there were many more people for the king to rule over and care for. Solomon was still a young man and he wondered in his heart how he was ever going to manage to be king. How would he know which were the right things to do? What if he made a big mistake about a war and everyone in the country suffered?

Solomon decided to go to one of the ‘high places’ to worship God. In those days, the people often worshipped God outside on mountains, so Solomon journeyed to the high place called Gibeon. There he burnt wonderfully smelling incense and prayed to God. When he settled down to sleep that night, he had a dream. Solomon dreamt that God asked him what gift God should give him.

Solomon paused to think what it was that he really wanted. What would help him be a better king? Lots of gold would be fun and he could pay other countries to be friendly to his country, but perhaps the kings of other countries would get greedy and decide to come and steal his gold. Of course, he could pay for a large army to keep the other kings’ armies out of his country, but nothing would ever pay for the sorrow and the tears when soldiers were hurt or killed. Gold was not the best thing, then. Perhaps he could ask for a long life, so at least he would know that he would be safe from his enemies. But what was the point of living for a long time if he was bad at being king? He would be all right, but it would be hard for the people in his country because they would have to put up with him for all those extra years. Long life was not the best thing, then. What if he asked for all his enemies to drop dead? If they all suddenly died then he wouldn’t have to worry about fighting wars any more. On the other hand, there was more to being a king than winning wars; a king must also deal with trade and food supplies and keep law and order and do many more things besides. The death of his enemies would help him do none of these things. The death of his enemies was not the best thing, then.

Suddenly Solomon had an idea: what he really needed was a gift which would change him from the inside. ‘Please,’ he said to God, ‘make me wise so that I will understand what to do. Make me wise so that every time I have to make a decision I can see which is the best choice. If I were wise like this, perhaps I would be able to be a good king and care for your
people as I should.' In his dream, God said to Solomon, 'I am very pleased with your choice. You have not asked for something for yourself, but for your country. I will make you wise. You will be the wisest king there has ever been. I will also make you rich and keep you safe from your enemies because you used your choice unselfishly.'

Solomon woke up. He travelled home to Jerusalem with a clearer picture of the kind of king he was going to be. Solomon grew up to be a wise king and many of his people came to him for a wise solution to their problems. He also had the wisdom and skill to complete a huge building project - the building of the temple in Jerusalem. The temple was built with the finest stone, the best cedar wood and olive wood and the purest gold and the strongest bronze. Solomon had to arrange to buy the materials, sometimes from other countries. He had to arrange for skilled workers to work in teams, cutting the materials and building them together. He had to find the best master builders who could make sure that the temple was both grand and safe. After seven years, the temple was finished.

Solomon led the prayers of the people when the temple was dedicated to God. Solomon prayed, 'O Lord, even heaven and earth are not big enough to hold you, let alone this temple which I have built. But when we look towards this house and pray to you, please hear us.' And Solomon said to the people, 'Blessed be God! May God make us all wise and help us to want to walk in his ways and do what is right.'

[We hang the symbol of an archway on the Jesse tree to remind us that Solomon built the temple.]

A moment to wonder

I wonder if Solomon enjoyed walking around the temple when he had finished it?

A prayer

As green as a healthy tree, the story of God's love keeps growing.
We remember Solomon, who was wise and a master planner.
We pray for everyone who designs and constructs buildings.
Amen.