David

[As we trace the branches of the Tree, today we reach the story of Jesse and David.]

When Samuel was already an old man, and the people had been living in towns and cities in Israel for many years, a boy called David was born. No one in his family had much time for David; he was the youngest of eight brothers and he spent his childhood doing a lot of the odd jobs that no one else wanted to do. This meant that he spent days in the hills, caring for the family’s flock of sheep. He used to sit on the hillside playing his harp and making up songs to himself. He became very good with a slingshot — this was the weapon he used to keep the mountain lions away from the sheep. He would shoot stones at them until the lions ran away. He was a brave boy, but rather lonely.

One day, David’s home was full of excitement. There was lots of cleaning and cooking going on, and all his brothers were trying on their best clothes. ‘What’s happening?’ David asked. ‘Get back to the hills,’ his eldest brother Eliab told him. ‘This is nothing to do with you — go and look after the sheep.’ David went and asked the servants, ‘What’s happening today?’ One of his father’s manservants told him, ‘The judge and leader of all Israel — Samuel — is coming to dinner. Now go and get your jobs done like a good boy.’

David went back to the hills and sat down to watch over the sheep. He felt sad. Why had nobody told him that the great Samuel was visiting their house? Why was he left in the hills while all the rest of the family feasted together and welcomed their honoured guest? ‘Oh well,’ David thought, ‘I suppose someone has to look after the sheep, even on a special day like this.’

Later, as the sun was going down and David was staring into the distance, humming to himself, he suddenly saw his brother Shammah hurrying up the track towards him. ‘You are to go to the house right away. I’ll look after the sheep for you. Samuel wants to see you.’

‘Samuel wants to see you.’ David kept thinking about this as he jogged down the track to the house. Why would Samuel want to see him? He rushed into the house, pushing his hair back from his face. ‘I am honoured to meet you,’ he said, bowing to Samuel. Samuel looked at him for a long time. He looked deep into David’s eyes, as if he were reading David’s soul. David’s brothers and his father were also looking at him. They seemed to be holding their breath, waiting for Samuel to speak. Samuel said, ‘This is the one.’ David could feel the shock which his family felt at that moment. ‘Which one?’ David thought. Samuel announced, ‘You are to be the next king of Israel. Bow your head.’
David obediently looked at the floor, as Samuel poured the sacred oil over his head and began to say a solemn prayer. Next king of Israel! David could feel the oil and hear Samuel’s voice and he knew that this was a moment that would change him for the rest of his life. He was going to be the next king — but this was not something to show off or boast about, it was a sacred trust. David realised that his whole life belonged to God now. ‘Whatever happens,’ he thought, ‘I will always be your loyal servant, O God.’

David grew up to be a famous warrior and a poet and musician. After many years and many adventures, David did become king. He ruled for 40 years. Sometimes he was a wise king and sometimes he was a foolish one, but he never forgot his promise to God: to love him and to live as his servant.

[We hang the symbol of a harp on the tree today to remember that David wrote many songs and poems about God and that he loved God all his life.]

**A moment to wonder**

I wonder what it felt like to be anointed with the sacred oil?

**A prayer**

As green as a healthy tree, the story of God’s love keeps growing. We remember David, who started as a shepherd boy and became a king. We pray for everyone who is taking on a new task. Amen.