

*Unwrapping
the Greatest Gift*

A FAMILY CELEBRATION OF CHRISTMAS



ANN VOSKAMP

*Bestselling Author of *The Greatest Gift**





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Unwrapping the Greatest Gift: A Family Celebration of Christmas

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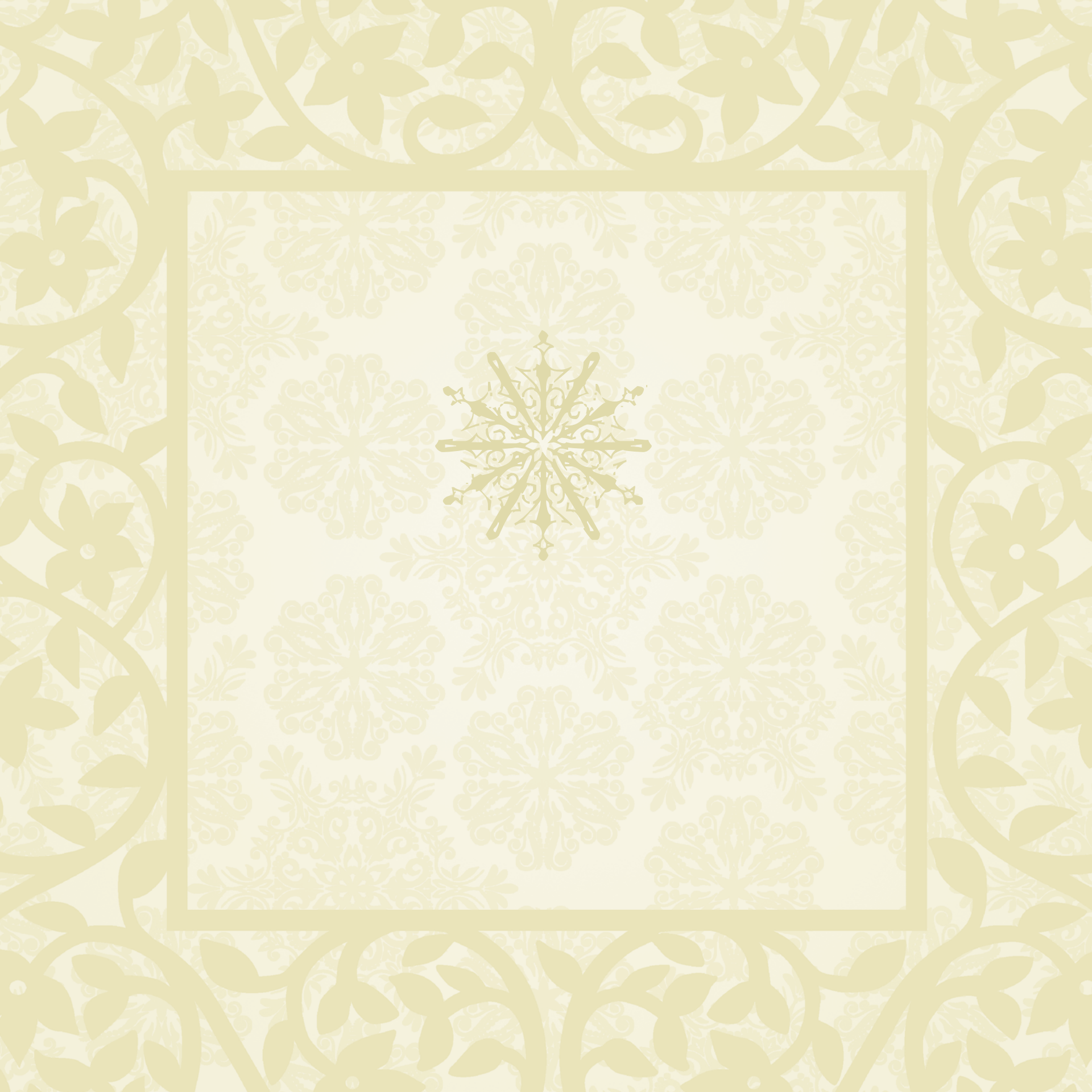
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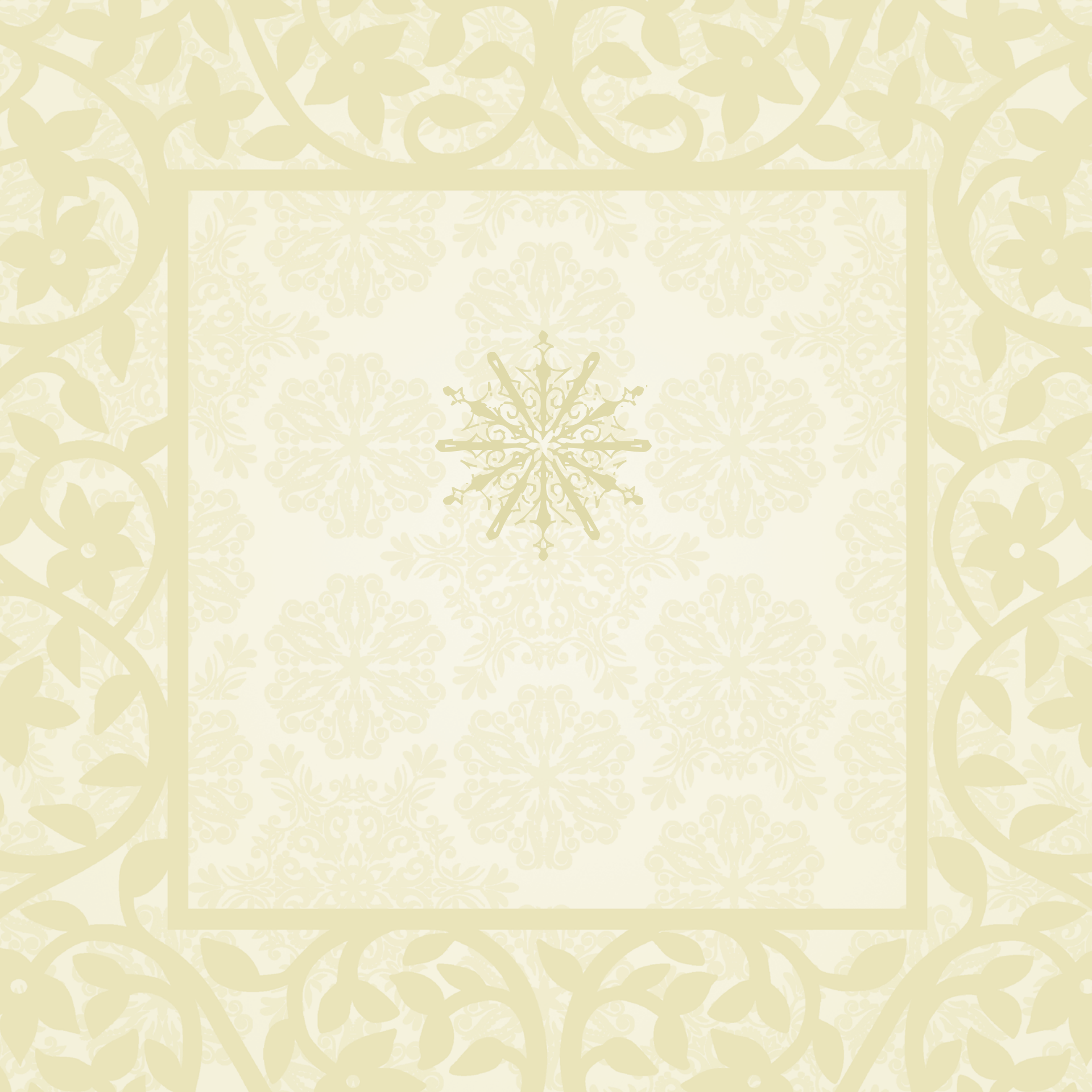
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Out of the stump of David's family will grow a shoot.

ISAIAH 11:1



DECEMBER 1

The Place Where Love Grows

Once, in the truest story that you have ever heard, His-Story, which is really your very own story, there was this family—Jesse’s family. A family that was like yours, like a tree with branches of these relatives and those brothers and those sisters—a family that loved each other and hurt each other and forgave each other and failed each other. A family that failed God.

And in failing God, they fell away from closeness with God. They failed and fell and were like a fallen tree.

Their family tree was a fallen tree.

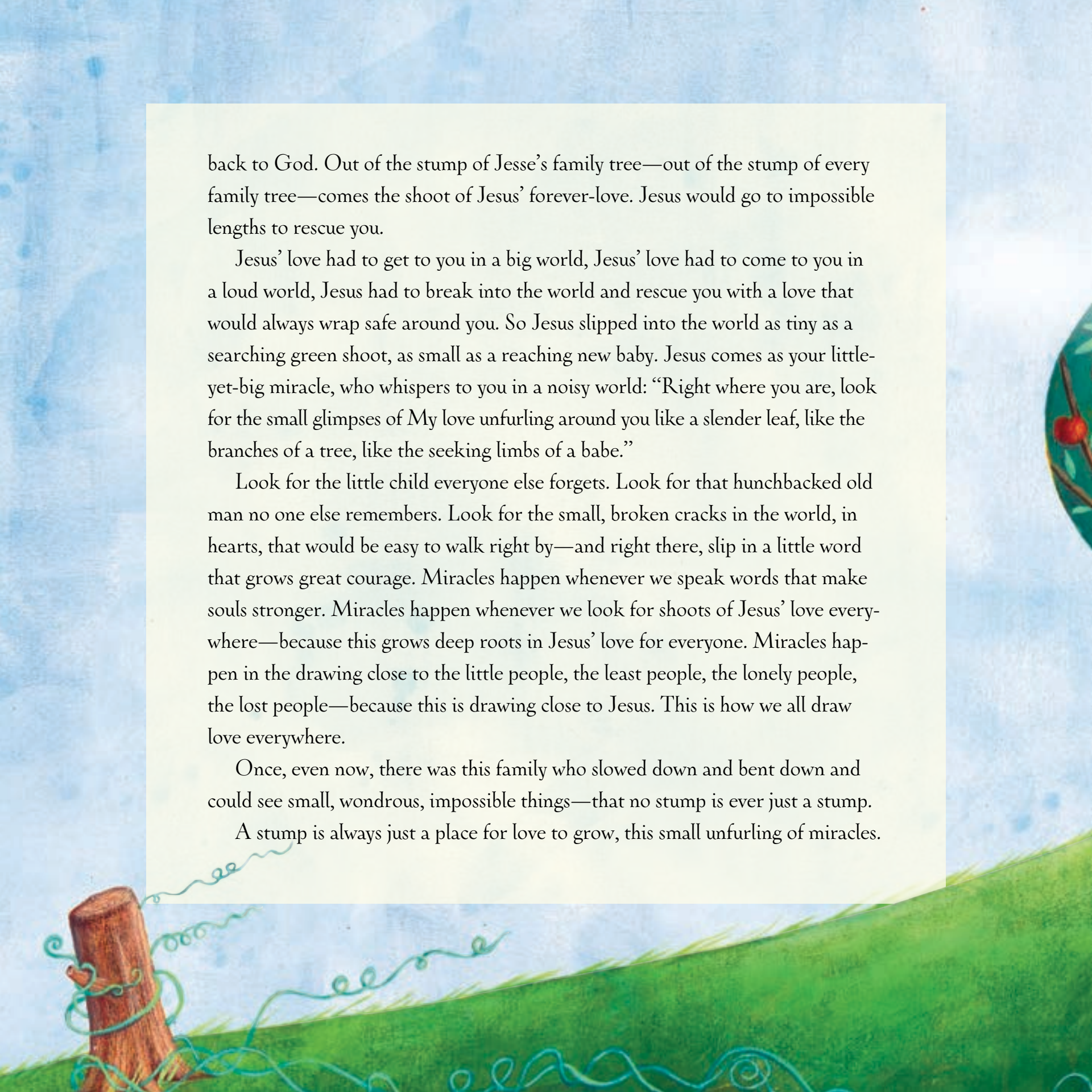
When their family tree crashed to the ground, it crushed all of their hearts.

The stump—and all of their days—felt utterly hopeless. Like their hearts had been cut right out of them.

But it happened: the wondrous impossible. It came right out of that chopped-down stump—the miracle no one ever dreamed of. Except for God. God never stopped dreaming of the miracle, the one He’d dreamed right from the very beginning, because love never stops dreaming of a way to draw close again.

If you slowed and looked very close, you could actually see it, coming straight out of that family tree that had been cut right down—a miraculous shoot was springing up out of the stump! A tender and vulnerable green shoot was growing hope again! Growing love again!

Out of the stump came one tender branch that would grow right into a crown of thorns, right into a rugged cross, right into a ladder—your ladder



back to God. Out of the stump of Jesse's family tree—out of the stump of every family tree—comes the shoot of Jesus' forever-love. Jesus would go to impossible lengths to rescue you.

Jesus' love had to get to you in a big world, Jesus' love had to come to you in a loud world, Jesus had to break into the world and rescue you with a love that would always wrap safe around you. So Jesus slipped into the world as tiny as a searching green shoot, as small as a reaching new baby. Jesus comes as your little-yet-big miracle, who whispers to you in a noisy world: "Right where you are, look for the small glimpses of My love unfurling around you like a slender leaf, like the branches of a tree, like the seeking limbs of a babe."

Look for the little child everyone else forgets. Look for that hunchbacked old man no one else remembers. Look for the small, broken cracks in the world, in hearts, that would be easy to walk right by—and right there, slip in a little word that grows great courage. Miracles happen whenever we speak words that make souls stronger. Miracles happen whenever we look for shoots of Jesus' love everywhere—because this grows deep roots in Jesus' love for everyone. Miracles happen in the drawing close to the little people, the least people, the lonely people, the lost people—because this is drawing close to Jesus. This is how we all draw love everywhere.

Once, even now, there was this family who slowed down and bent down and could see small, wondrous, impossible things—that no stump is ever just a stump.

A stump is always just a place for love to grow, this small unfurling of miracles.





Thoughts to Discuss

How do you think God wants us to treat the less popular or less loved kid?

Who in your life needs to know that God loves them?

When have you found hope in a really hard situation?

Family Activities

Plant wheat or grass seeds today. Water them and watch them grow throughout this Advent season. Discuss how your life is like those growing seeds.

Think of small ways you can help people this December. Keep a prayer list for the people you want to show love to, and ask God to use your small actions to produce great results.

As you hang today's ornament on your Jesse Tree, say a prayer for those who are less valued in our world.