

Searching for
Suhail

A family devotional for Advent

Searching for Suhail



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www.elkedagnieuw.nl

Text: Saar van de Woestijne

Illustrations: Elsemieke van Leersum – ME Visuals

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INTRODUCTION FOR PARENTS

Thank you for your purchase of this special family devotional for Advent!

In the coming weeks, you will:

- ◇ count down and look forward to Christmas as a family. Each day, the story is accompanied by a Bible passage to read, questions to discuss, and a fitting Psalter in order to think about Advent.
- ◇ learn about the need that exists in this world, and teach your child(ren) about compassion towards people in need.
- ◇ contribute, through your donation, to Bible distribution and support for Christian field workers on the Arabian Peninsula. These funds will also support emergency relief for Yemen. On behalf of the *Ishmael* charity, thank you very much for your gift!
- ◇ learn about what life is like for mission families on the Arabian Peninsula. In the story we get to know 'mission kid' Mark.

Level

The family devotional is geared towards children in grade 1 through 6, but younger and older children have been included as well. There is often an easy discussion question for a Kindergartener, and children in middle or high school will definitely enjoy the story as well!

Building a village

As in previous years, we want to make the setting in which the story takes place visible through a crafted village which will be added to each day. This year includes beautiful illustrations and 3-D figures (which will likely require a bit more time than the easy pictures we've had before.) Each day, children can color and cut out a picture. We are not providing a printable layout of the village to glue the figures onto. The village can be designed according to your child's or family's own wishes. If you glue the pictures onto thicker paper/cardstock first, they will remain standing better. You can also decorate the images in other ways, for instance, with cotton balls, glitter, paint, etc.

What you will need

- ◇ Sturdy cardboard for the base of the village. You might be able to purchase this or simply use a large, flat piece of cardboard (from a box, for instance) that can be decorated as you wish. The dimensions will depend on its location for the remainder of the calendar, which could be a desk, the top of the piano, a crafting table, or a piece of the dining table.
- ◇ Wooden skewers to allow taller elements (such as trees) in the village to stand up straight.
- ◇ On December 12: clay to make an incense holder.
- ◇ On December 17: crafting paper or fabric and string to create a banner.
- ◇ On December 25: glitter to decorate the star.

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facebook

Competition

Children can win a prize by submitting a picture of their village. You are also welcome to send a picture half-way through already!

This is how:

- ◇ Share one or more picture of your village with the hashtag #searchingforsuhail on Instagram or Facebook. If you don't use either, you may send it to info@elkedagnieuw.nl.
(Social media is preferable since our email server did not have enough capacity to save all the pictures last year. If you're submitting via email, please send one picture that is not too big.)
- ◇ Include the name(s) and age(s) of your child(ren).
- ◇ Submission deadline is December 29, 2020 D.V.

How to start

The story of Salem and Nura starts on Tuesday, December 1. On the next page you will find ways to prepare on the preceding Sunday and Monday, November 29 and 30.

Psalters

Each day you can finish the devotional with a song. On [this](#)* website you can find the text and the melody of the suggested Psalters.

*<http://www.prca.org/resources/worship-devotional/psalter>

Thank-you

A big thank you goes to 'Saar van de Woestijne' for writing this beautiful story, to Colinda Bouma, Gertrude Vanessen, Maaïke van Beek, and Maaïke Rosendal for the English translation, and to Sarah Maljaars and Jorina Mulder for editing.

We wish you the Lord's blessing in the coming weeks of Advent!

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PREPARATION

Sunday, November 29 (the first Advent Sunday)

1. Read Genesis 1, or read about creation from a Children's Bible.
2. Why did the Lord not only create the sun and the moon, but also the stars? What do you think? Were they necessary? Compare this passage with Psalm 8:3-4.
3. Why is it that everything did not stay good and beautiful?
4. Read together the first text in the Bible that has something to do with Advent: Genesis 3:15. Try to explain in your own words what this text means. Copy it in your best handwriting, or make a drawing about it.
5. Sing a Psalter, hymn, or song about creation.

Monday, November 30

1. Read Psalm 98.
2. Starting tomorrow, we will read a story about children who have never heard about the Lord Jesus. They live in a country where (almost) nobody is a Christian. What does this Psalm say about such people?
3. What are we called to do in this Psalm?
4. What does the last verse of Psalm 98 mean? Try to express it in your own words.
5. Find out in an atlas or on Google Maps where the Arabian Peninsula is. Which countries do you see there? What do you know about these countries? Did you know that there are (almost) no churches there?
6. Sing together Psalter 424:1.

Searching for Suhail

DECEMBER 1 - SALEM, SON OF RASHED, SON OF SALEM

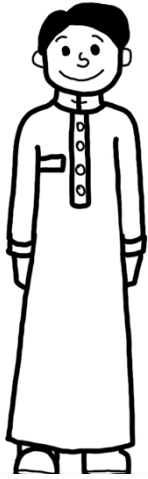
This is the most beautiful moment of the day...

From the shadow of a big rock, Salem watches the sky. It almost seems like someone is turning on the lights. Against the dark sky, more and more stars become visible. Slowly but steadily the warm air turns into a cool breeze.

Salem sighs. He had better enjoy this a little longer. He wants to wait and see what the heavens show today. But he shouldn't stay away too long! Otherwise he'll be late for prayer at the mosque. Between the fourth and fifth prayer he is allowed to go wherever he wants. Usually he chooses this spot, on the hill behind the village. His grandfather once showed him this place and together they often looked at the sky. Salem's heart swells with pride when he thinks of his full name: Salem, son of Rashed, son of Salem el-Kawkabani. He is named after his grandfather, and he loves to make that known! Especially on a day like this: the first day of school after a long, long summer. The new teacher had smiled when he jumped up to call his name. He liked the new teacher. At least he seemed to understand what it meant to be the son of Rashed, son of Salem el-Kawkabani.

Meeehhhh... The sad cry of a goat from the village startles Salem out of his thoughts. Quickly he puts on his sandals and his kuma*. He still needs to visit Grandpa before the prayer. He promised the new teacher! When Salem exited class today, he had said: "Salem, son of Rashed, son of Salem, send my regards to your grandfather. I've heard a lot about him! You are lucky to have a grandpa like that."

*traditional hat, worn by men and boys in the south of Arabia



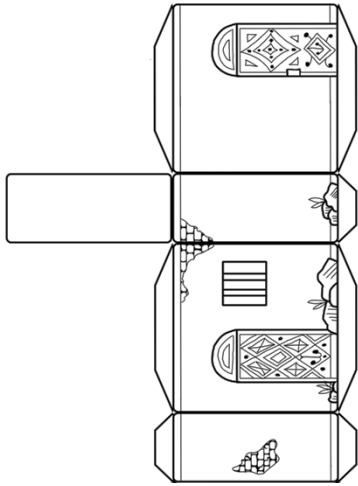
*"Hi! I'm Salem.
You may glue me
somewhere on a
big piece of
cardboard!"*

1. Whose son or daughter are you? Do you know your grandfather's first name? And what is your family (or last) name? Is it important to know what family you belong to? What was Jesus' family name?
2. Read Matthew 1:1-17 together.
3. What is another word for 'generation'?
4. How are verse 1 and verse 17 connected? Can you count to 14 already? Then count all the names. Is it true what is written in verse 17?
5. Why is it important for Matthew to start his book about the Lord Jesus with so many names?
6. Can you make a family tree of your father's family? How far back can you go?



Psalter 37:1

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"This is my house. Can you build it for me? You can make or print more houses, then I have neighbors!"

DECEMBER 2 - ONE FATHER, TWO MOTHERS

While holding the hem of his *disdasha**, Salem sprints back home. Not so long ago he would've seen Grandpa at the mosque for evening prayer at the end of the day. Sadly, Grandpa is too old to go now. They might live in the same house, but it's better if Salem visits him now. Grandpa might be asleep later.

When he enters the family home through the gate, he notices his mother and a few aunts in their usual spot in the courtyard. They are sitting on a mat on the floor around a large bowl with fruits and dates. "Salem! Where are you going? It's almost time for prayer!" his Aunt Maryam calls out.

Aunt Maryam is father's second wife. Some of his friends would never listen to an aunt like that, but Salem is happy his father's wives are good to each other. "I'm going to visit Grandpa for a little while!" He kicks off his sandals outside Grandpa's room. *Knock knock*. A "Welcome!" sounds out in his grandfather's hoarse voice. As soon as Salem opens the door, he sees another visitor: Nura is already seated at Grandpa's side. "Salaam alaykum*", Grandpa. How are you?" Salem shakes his grandfather's hand, then turns to Nura. Disapprovingly, she looks at his clothing. "Ah, your *disdasha* has gotten grubby!" Oops, his mother is not going to like that... "Did you see anything special in the sky tonight?" Nura inquires. She is a few years younger than Salem and she is his father's daughter, but they both have a different mother. Nura knows a lot about the stars, just like Salem. She cannot go outside the gate as often as he does, but that doesn't make a lot of difference. Because of an app on her mother's phone, she sometimes knows more than he does!

Salem turns to his grandfather. "My new teacher sends his regards, Grandpa. May he come to visit sometime?"

"Well, well, my boy," Grandpa replies. "Of course! Let him become acquainted with the el-Kawkabani clan! Or did you already tell him where our name comes from?"

"No Grandpa," Salem explains. "I would like you to tell him the story, yes?"

Grandpa smiles. "No problem, my boy. Now get on with you, hurry to prayer!"

*a long dress/garment: traditional clothing for men and boys in Arabia

*meaning: peace be upon you

1. Do you know a man who is married to two women? Which men in the Bible had two wives?
2. Read Genesis 29:15-35 together.
3. Often there are a lot of issues in the house of a man with two wives. What happened in Jacob's house?
4. What does Leah say when her fourth child is born? What is so special about Judah?
5. Read Psalter 208:1 before you sing it together. Why did God choose Judah's tribe and her city Jerusalem to dwell in?



Psalter 208:1

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“Around our village are mountains. Will you add them today? Can you think of another way to add mountains? If you have the time, you might be able to craft them!”

DECEMBER 3 – SUHAIL IS BACK

“Nura, Nura! It's here!” His cheeks flushed, his eyes bright, Salem lunges into the women's room. He kicks his sandals back so they end up on the right side of the threshold. Nura immediately turns to face her mother, who nods at her. She quickly gets up, her veil falling to the floor, but she ignores it. Still breathless from running, Salem turns to his own mother. “Can I please take your phone, mom? Please... just for a little while. I will bring it back before I go to school.” His mother laughs. She shakes her head to Aunt Maryam. “Salem, son of Salem... Alright then.”

Nura is waiting for him at the gate. It is still dark outside but it won't be long before sunrise. Usually they go back to bed after the early morning prayer, but Salem was impatient. It should almost be that time again. He went outside the last three mornings, just to watch. And this morning... There it was! “Don't look, Nura,” he urges his half-sister, “until we are at our spot!”

Clumsily Salem lets himself fall down next to Nura on the rocks. When the sound of rolling pebbles fades away, it is quiet. Captivated the two of them watch the sky. There it is: Suhail, the second brightest star in the solar system! It is the star they wait for every year, the messenger of good tidings! Now the scorching heat will be replaced by cooler air. Winter is on its way!

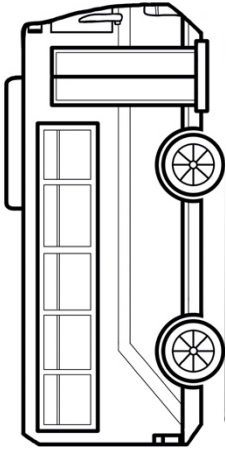
Nura activates the space-app on the phone and lifts it to the sky. On the screen the stars that are visible in the sky appear with their names. There is no doubt about it: Suhail is back.

1. Do you sometimes watch the sky when it is dark? What do you know about the stars? Do you know a constellation? There are great apps available, like Skyview or Star Walk 2, to help us become more familiar with the glorious stars, planets, and constellations that God created.
2. Read Numbers 24:10-19 together. Balaam talks about a star and a sceptre. Who held a sceptre in those days? What king is Balaam talking about?
3. In Revelation 22:16, Jesus calls himself the Morning Star. Do you look forward to that Star?



Psalter 405:1,2

Searching for Suhail



“This bus brings me to school each day. Will you add a road to the village?”

DECEMBER 4 - THE KING IS COMING

Toot toooooot! *Yes, yes... I am coming!* Salem quickly gets his backpack, waves at his mom, and walks out the door. Even before he opens the gate, the horn honks again. It's the same story every day. The bus driver is very impatient! He wants to deliver his load at school in time. It's only 6.30 am, but things are already lively on the bus. Starting the day with friends, even if just for a ten-minute drive, is always nice.

At school, Salem walks into the courtyard where all the classes gather. He can see white robes, wherever he looks. The kids are sorted by grade. At 7 am, they raise the flag and sing the national anthem. That sounded so much better last year, when he was still in a mixed class with girls as well. Now he never sees Nura during the day. She goes to the girls school. He stares at the boy reading from the Koran* today. Salem doesn't really see him. His mind is still on Suhail, that beautiful star. Salem had visited his grandfather to tell him about it that morning. Grandpa had been so proud that Salem had discovered the star by himself this year.

All of a sudden he can hear the principal's voice. Oops, the rest of the boys are already seated. Quickly he falls to his knees. Boys are poking each other and there is a buzzing of voices going through the rows. Did he really hear that right? The principal isn't pulling their legs, is he? Could it be true that the king is coming to his school on National Day?

*Muslims' holy book

1. Have you ever met a king or queen in real life? What would you think about him or her coming to visit? What would you need to do to prepare?
2. Read Psalm 45 and pay attention to what is being said about a king. (For younger children: only read verse 6 and 7.) Older children: Maybe you can make a mind map out of it?
3. Would you like to meet this King sometime? Why? Can you? How? What would you say to Him? Psalm 45 is a song of praise for the Lord Jesus, the coming King!



Psalter 124:1

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DECEMBER 5 - GOLD IN THE SOUK

Salem slowly follows his father through the narrow alleys of the souk*. They are on their way to the section where disdashas and kumas are sold. Father's youngest sister is getting married tomorrow so Salem is getting new clothes. He can also wear them on King's Day, because if he's meeting the king, he wants to look his finest!

They are not taking the shortest route through the souk. It is the prettiest though. They pass through the oldest section. Salem looks up and sees beautiful flowers on the dark wooden beams. The smell of fresh spices tickles his nose. Bags with yellow, orange, and brown contents, such as saffron, cinnamon, and cumin are displayed everywhere. A little further along the way there is another smell: it is incense. That means they are amongst at the gold souk. Salem's father picks up his pace. Gold isn't for men. Even the gold for his mother wasn't bought by father in person. Salem wouldn't mind looking at all the shiny, yellow gold. Shop after shop is full of sparkling jewelry, with one necklace even longer than the other. Bracelets with gemstones are positioned right so the people can see them. His sisters will be so jealous; they never go to the souk.

"Dad!" Salem's father slows down and looks back questioningly. "Can I take a picture of this?" Salem asks. His father hesitates, but only for a second. His hand disappears into the pocket of his white robe. "Quickly then!" Salem takes a step back and snaps a picture of one of the shop windows. Then he steps forward again and takes another one, this time of a row of bracelets. As a slow smile appears on Father's face, the phone disappears into the deep pocket again. He lays his hand on Salem's shoulder. "Let's go. We can't come back home without new clothes!"

*a souk is an indoor market

"Do you see all that gold behind the window? You can let it sparkle with gold glitter. Will you add some stores later?"

1. Read I Kings 10 together.
2. Look at the map. Where did the queen of Sheba come from? Why did she travel so far?
3. In Matthew 12:42, the Lord Jesus warns us. Try to explain in your own words what this verse means. Who does He compare Solomon to? What does He warn about? What do you need to confess to the Lord today?
4. Listen to the piece of music '[Arrival of the Queen of Sheba](#)' by G.F. Händel and try to imagine the queen of Sheba arriving in Jerusalem.



Psalter 200:1

Searching for Suhail



“This is my half-sister Nura. She is looking her best today!”

DECEMBER 6 - A HUSBAND FOR AUNT FATIMA

The wind plays with Nura’s veil. Salem watches her and holds his new kuma on his head with one hand. The sound of all the horns honking is almost deafening, but Nura doesn’t seem to notice. Her face is bright with joy. This is what a party looks like: a long line of cars riding through the streets of their village, people standing in the backseat of their car, their head and shoulders through the sunroof. There is plenty of honking and yelling. Today is Aunt Fatima’s wedding, and everyone should know!

The large tent in front of the house is big enough to host everyone who wants to come. Well... at least all the women, for now. The men take the kids along and cause a ruckus with their cars. Salem is already looking forward to the moment that they’re back home. He will be allowed to enter the tent to bring the groom to his bride. She’ll be waiting for him. Salem has only met his aunt’s future husband once, when the man came to bring the dowry. That was a lot of money! His aunt went to the gold souk and bought a lot of gold with that money.

Then he feels a nudge; it’s Nura. “Help me, will you?” She’s holding her golden head ornament that has come loose. After some fussing, they get it right again. Nura had seen the photo he took at the souk and had begged her mother for some real gold for the wedding. She had gotten her way and now she is wearing one of the jewels her mother received from father when they got married.

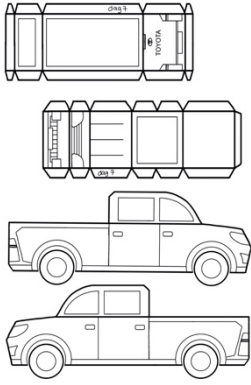
His father’s car comes to a sudden halt. Salem can hear music from the tent. The groom is straightening his clothes. Salem can see his mother inspecting him, and then they are off. The women are seated in groups on the floor. Gold shines wherever Salem looks: on their heads, on their arms, around their necks. And there are so many colors! This wedding is clearly a feast day for the women from the village. In the front, on some sort of wide throne, is his aunt. At least, it must be her, but he can’t see her face yet. When they arrive at the front, the groom lifts the veil from her face. Yes, it’s Aunt Fatima! She is looking up at her groom shyly. For her, it’s also the second time she meets her husband...

1. Read Genesis 24:1-28 together. Why did Abraham’s servant take so many gifts on his journey? What kind of gifts were there?
2. Do you have anything that is made of gold? What is so special about gold?
3. What kind of gifts did the wise men from the east bring to the newborn King?
4. Read Psalm 119:72 and 127-128. What does the psalm say about gold?



Psalter 428:7

Searching for Suhail



"A Toyota pick-up truck is the most common vehicle here. Did you know that?"

DECEMBER 7 – A STRANGE MORNING

4.30 am: It is still early in the morning. The first prayer of the day has finished. Salem is on his way back home with his father. He thinks of his aunt who now lives with her husband's family. What is that like for her? Will she be happy there? It is yet dark outside. What shall he do: sleep a bit longer, or...? He is still very tired because the wedding was finished late last night. Thankfully, he does not have to go to school today, and this afternoon he will be able to sleep for a bit.

At home Salem quickly drinks a cup of water, then quietly leaves the house again. He is supposed to ask his mom or dad for permission but doesn't feel like doing that right now. He'll be back in a minute. Calmly, he walks through the quiet streets of the village. Here and there a rooster crows. He is deep in thought. When will the teacher come to visit Grandpa? Salem wishes he could take him to his little spot... Suddenly, a white Toyota rounds the corner. Surprised, Salem stands still. What is this vehicle, a car with foreigners, doing here so early in the morning? The men in the vehicle look slightly startled, then drive away. Salem keeps walking, but his eyes are drawn to the door of a house. He looks around and notices that the entrance gate of each house has a bag hanging on it. What could be in it? Does it have something to do with the car? He remembers seeing the same kind of bags in the back seat! Salem walks to the nearest house, opens the bag at the top, and takes a peek. What is that... a book?

1. What do you think is in the bags? What would you do if you were Salem?
2. Read Romans 10:9-15. Talk about the fact that nobody in the surroundings of Salem has ever heard about the Lord Jesus. How is that possible?
3. Nearly one-quarter of the world's population is Muslim. The majority of these people have never met a follower of the Lord Jesus. There are still regions in the world where there is no Gospel witness, no church, and no mission work. Is there anything you could do to help change that? (If you're able to read Dutch, see www.woestijnleven.nl)



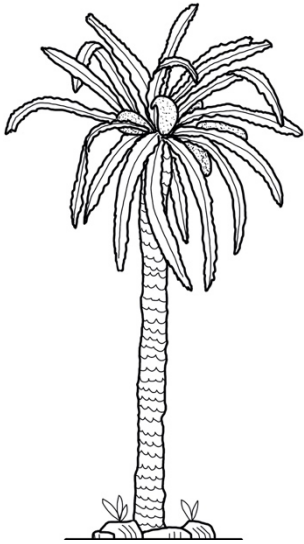
Psalter 258:1,2

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DECEMBER 8 – ANGRY EYES

Salem kicks at a small pebble. Not much of the starry heavens were visible today. He was actually a bit too late. The sun was already beginning to change the color of the sky, with wispy clouds forming throughout. At least he had enjoyed the sight of clouds since they do not show up often.

His attention is drawn back to the bags. They have not been discovered yet because on the weekend, almost everyone sleeps in. When he enters his own street, however, he makes another startling discovery: a police car is parked in front of his house. Curiously, he approaches the car. It is empty. Salem crosses the threshold and spots something white and rectangular on the ground. He picks it up. Something is written on the front. Suddenly his name rings out: "Salem!" The item disappears into the pocket of his *disdasha*. "Salem, come here!" his father's voice calls out from around the corner of the house. Salem gets closer and immediately notices the bag. It has been carelessly thrown on the ground beside the trunk of the big date palm. His father, grandfather, and two police officers are seated on a mat. "Get some coffee and bread from your mother," Salem is told. Obediently he walks to the kitchen, where his mother is busy preparing breakfast. With a full tray Salem returns to the men, who are paging through a book. Their voices are indignant, their eyes angry. "We have to find out who has done this," they agree. One of the police officers throws the book back on the mat. Grandfather responds, "*Istagfer Allah*: may God forgive you! That is a gospel book, a heavenly book, and we ought not to throw those around. But please, take it to the police station. We will let the entire village know that all these books must be handed in, and then we will deliver them to the station." Father nods. Grandfather looks at Salem, shaking his hand, and mumbles, "My dear boy, this is a first for me. The Koran is the only holy book that we need to read. In it, we can find everything we need to walk on the straight path." Salem agrees. "Yes, grandpa! *Allah akbar*: God is great."



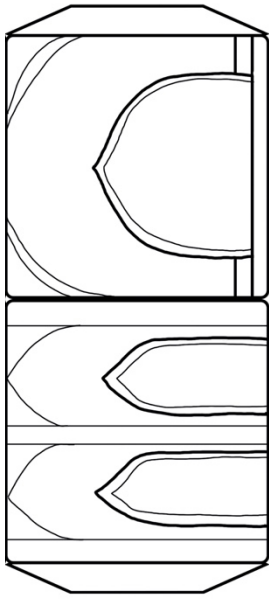
"Palm trees are very important for our village. They grow dates or coconuts. One tree is actually not enough. Will you make a few more?"

1. The rectangular white thing had fallen out of the book that the men are angry about. What do you think it could be?
2. Read John 3:14-21 together.
3. One of the texts from this passage is on the bookmark that Salem found. Which text do you think? Why?



Psalter 426:1

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"This is the small mosque in our village. If you glue the flaps on top over each other, it will make a rounded roof."

DECEMBER 9 – THE HOLY BOOKS

"Salem, focus! You are not paying attention at all today!" The voice of the Koran teacher startles Salem out of his thoughts. The teacher is right. Salem isn't exactly sure why, but his mind continues to wander away from the Koran lesson. He can't help but think back to the Toyota, back to the foreigners with their fearful eyes. He hasn't said anything about it... to anyone. For some reason he feels that it is better not to speak about what he has seen. The Koran teacher was furious at the beginning of the lesson. The other boys expressed their anger as well. Can you believe that Christian books have been delivered to the entire village? The teacher had made it very clear: "There are four holy books: the *tawrat*, the *zabur*, the *injl**, and the Koran. But the Koran is the only book we need to read. That is how Allah has made his will known to us." Thankfully, Salem is one of the last boys to recite the page they had to memorize. He has heard it several times already in class, and with a beautiful voice he recites today's passage. Soon he will be able to recite the entire Koran!

The lesson has ended, and the boys walk outside. It is Saturday but much too warm to be outside for long at this time of day. Salem waves to his friends and walks home. Carefully he slides his hand into his pocket. The bookmark is still there. What should he do with it? He decides to keep it for just a bit longer. He wants to quietly read what is written on it and memorize it. That will be a piece of cake; it is such a short verse! Then he will rid of the bookmark, before his father finds out that something is missing from the bag...

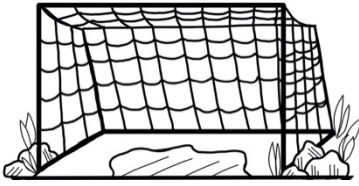
*the *tawrat* are the books of Moses, the *zabur* are the psalms of David, and the *injl* is the gospel revealed to Jesus (considered a prophet but not the Son of God in Islam)

1. How many Bible passages have you memorized? Choose a piece from the Scriptures and practice reciting it together. It won't be as hard as you think!
2. In Revelation 22:12-21 you can read much about the Lord Jesus. What does the Alpha and Omega mean? Could Muhammed, the prophet of Muslims, also be a true prophet? What does this passage say about people who want to add words to the Bible?
3. What does Advent mean? Why does verse 20 fit with Advent? Are you looking forward to the Second Coming of the Lord Jesus? If you are not sure, or it makes you afraid, you may ask the Lord to change your heart into a heart that longs for His coming!



Psalter 428:1

Searching for Suhail



“Most boys in our country love soccer. There is one goal like this in the village, but most of the time we just make a goal out of wooden stakes or car tires.”

DECEMBER 10 – AN UNEXPECTED MEETING

Salem leans with his hands on his knees to catch his breath on the soccer field. Sweat runs down his temples, which he wipes away with his arms. When his breathing has slowed down, he walks to the water tank, lets some water run into his hands, and throws it in his face. The opposite team is doing well today. Salem shakes the water out of his hair when he notices Nura walking by with a few girls from the village. Every Saturday afternoon the boys play soccer while the girls saunter through town.

“Salaam alaykum,” he suddenly hears beside him. “Wa alaykum assalaam,” he responds. Peace be upon you, too! When he looks, Salem is surprised to see a pair of blue eyes. The boy in front of him points at himself and then to the field. Does he also want to play? Salem nods. He puts his hands around his mouth and calls out, “Hey! We have a new player. Our team!” Then he notices a car on the side of the road. A man and a woman sit beside it with a little girl. “Your family?” he asks the boy, who nods. He tries to say something in Arabic. It sounds funny, but Salem can understand him. The boy’s name is Mark. He lives in the capital but today his family went on an outing to the mountains.

The break is over, and the ball is kicked onto the field again. Mark is playing well, but the other team is still better. *Man*, Salem says to himself, *that was too bad*. Mark motions to him. “Want to come and meet my mom and dad?” Together they walk to the car. Salem is surprised to hear Mark’s mother in conversation with Nura and her friends. What? The woman knows Arabic! If that is the case, he can invite them to his house. It will be fun to have special visitors! “Would you like to come home with us?” he asks. “It is close-by.” Nura looks at the woman pleadingly. “Thank you, Salem,” Mark’s mother replies, “but today does not work for us. Hopefully next time, God willing! But we will bring you home.”

Mark moves to the middle of the backseat of the car and Salem slides in the seat beside him. Then his eyes fall on a beautiful piece of material, decorated with beads, which hangs from the rearview mirror. Something is written on it in Arabic, and he recognizes it immediately...

1. Mark lives on the Arabian Peninsula together with his mom, dad, and sister. There are very few Christians in his country. What would it be like to live close to Salem? Do you have children living near you who never hear God’s Word? Can you be friends with them?
2. Read Matthew 20:20-28 together. Why did the Lord Jesus come from heaven to earth?
3. Mark is sometimes not allowed to join a soccer game because he is not a Muslim. That’s hard for him. What would you say to Mark?



Psalter 92:1

Searching for Suhail

DECEMBER 11 – A SPECIAL TASK

Upbeat music plays through the inner court of the school. Oof, it is difficult to hold his staff high! Salem looks somewhat jealously at his classmates. Most of them are much better at it than he is. The boys parade across the podium, staff in hand. Some of them even try to throw it in the air to then catch it again. Well, that is far too difficult for him. First, he will practice holding the staff high while walking. In two weeks, it will be National Day and then he must have mastered it. How embarrassing it will be if he doesn't! He is certain that the others practice at home, but he finds that so boring.

"Salem!" his teacher calls out, motioning for him to come closer. The staff clatters to the podium. Salem picks it up and jumps down.

"If I'm not mistaken, it's still hard for you, or not?"

Salem looks to the ground and nods.

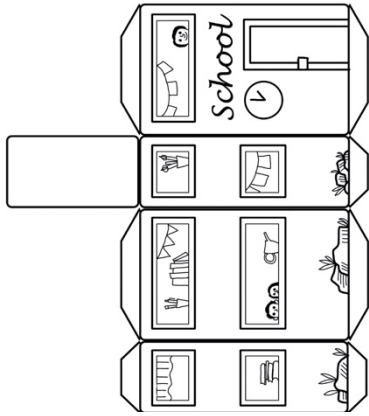
"I have an idea," the teacher continues. "What would you think about doing something else on behalf of the class?"

Salem looks up.

"Would you like to recite a poem instead of participating in the parade? You may write or pick out your own. Or you could ask your grandfather."

Salem is immediately excited. Of course, he would rather do that!

The teacher can read the answer in his eyes. "Alright," he concludes. "Come to me with in a couple of days. Then you will have enough time to practice the poem afterward."



"Today the school gets to be added to the village! Will you draw a school yard."

1. Read together the Song of Mary in Luke 1:39-56.
2. Arabs love poems. Children often learn to recite long poems already at a young age. Can you also write a (short) poem? It should be about the Song of Mary.



The Song of Mary:2,4 (to the tune of Psalter 48)

Searching for Suhail



“There is a large incense burner like this one in our village, as a beautiful piece of art. Can you make one out of clay and display it somewhere?”

DECEMBER 12 — A POEM FOR THE KING

With a sigh Salem slouches down. That was delicious! Whenever he comes home from school, he is so hungry he could eat a horse. Today his mom prepared fish. It was served with rice, of course; that is on the menu every day. Grandfather sits beside him on the ground, near the large bowl which is still half full. Tonight, they will eat the leftovers—without the fish for that is all gone. “Grandpa,” Salem asks. “Do you know a poem that I can recite at school? Not too long, not too short. Not too easy, not too hard.” He knows that grandpa hears him, even though he does not yet respond. Grandfather watches Nura, who is holding an ember in her hand. Slowly it begins to glow and turn orange. Carefully, Nura lays the ember in the incense holder and waves over it with her veil. From a small box she takes a few pieces of incense and lays them on top of the glowing ember. Immediately the incense makes a small hissing sound. A beautiful plume of smoke rises toward the ceiling; a delicious aroma begins to spread through the room. Soon the smell of food will be replaced by the wisps of incense. Nura walks over to grandfather and holds the incense close so his clothes will absorb the delicious scents. “Right,” he says. “A poem...” Grandpa clears his throat and shifts a little. Then his powerful voice vibrates through the room:

Night casts its veils on me...

As it stretches its spine,

As it straightens its hind legs

To rise like a camel,

I cry out...

What a night you are—relentless,

As if the stars were pegged to Mount Yathbul

*With the strongest of ropes.**

Salem looks at his grandfather in awe. He has never heard this poem before, and he thinks it is beautiful, even if he does not understand everything. It is even about stars in the night! “Again, grandpa!” Salem urges. “Teach me, please! It is for the king.” Grandfather smiles. “It is a very old poem, son.” Then he starts again. “Night casts its veils on me...”

**excerpt from an ancient poem by the Arab poet Imru al-Qays*

1. Have you smelled incense before? What is incense actually?
2. Read Exodus 30:1-10, 34-38 together. Did you know that, in the tabernacle, incense always burned for the Lord? It was a silent form for worship the Lord, 24 hours a day.
3. The wise men from the East also brought incense for King Jesus. Combined with gold, this was a very costly present. What would you like to give the Lord Jesus? Maybe something as valuable as gold or incense: your money? How can you give something to the Lord? What does the Lord want from you above all? (If you need help with this question, see Proverbs 23:26.)



Psalter 80:4

Searching for Suhail



“We have to protect these trees. Everyone wants sell the incense that comes off of it!”

DECEMBER 13 - PRAYER BY THE FRANKINCENSE TREES

A strong wind makes Salem’s disdasha flap around his legs, but he does not notice it. Wide-legged he stands on a flat piece of a rock. His hands reaching towards heaven, his head lifted, he cries out, “What a night you are—relentless!” And then a little softer, almost whispering, “as if the stars were pegged to Mount Yathbul with the strongest of ropes.” Father and Mother, Grandfather, and also Aunt Maryam and the other children clap their hands. “Wonderful, Salem! You do it very well!” They are sitting in the shade of one of the Boswellia* trees. With its branches it casts capricious shadows on the plain where they sit. In the distance some donkeys stand grazing. There is nothing better than picnicking in nature. When you look at the tree up close, you can see the scarred trunk. A few months ago, father and other men from the village were here many times. With sharp knives they carved into the bark of the tree trunks of the Boswellia trees. When they came back later, big lumps of resin stuck to the tree trunk: frankincense, valuable frankincense to sell.

Suddenly, a singing voice is coming from his mother’s phone. *God is the greatest, I witness there is no god than God. I witness that Mohammed is God’s messenger. Haste to prayer!* Grandpa stands up with great difficulty. Together with his father and grandfather, Salem walks a little away from the women. There is a stream of water where they wash themselves. Then they stand in a row. Father leads the prayer. Grandfather cannot bend and sit on his knees anymore, therefore he remains standing and murmurs along with the words. A curious camel comes closer. Salem tries to concentrate, but when he sees the camel, his thoughts are consumed by something different than the prayer... Tomorrow!

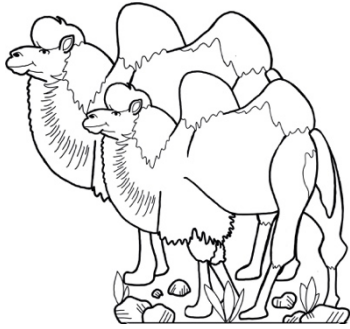
*tree from which frankincense is harvested

1. Do you know how frankincense and prayer are related to each other? Do you know a psalter about this? You may sing that one after!
2. Read together from Luke 1:5-25. What was Zachariah doing when the angel visited him?
3. Today, pray especially for children like Salem and Nura.



Psalter 386:2

Searching for Suhail



"This is number 14 and 20. You can write it on their necks. Will you make a few more camels? You can print more easily!"

DECEMBER 14 - A PRIZE FOR NUMBER 14

Nura ducks down, screaming with delight. "He walks up front! He is the first!" They are sitting in Uncle Ibrahim's car. Salem is sitting in the front seat, but Nura is standing on the backseat and pokes her head through the sunroof. Uncle Ibrahim stays calm, yet Salem sees the tension in his eyes. For months, his uncle trained with his race-camel, and today is the first day of the racing season. Salem smiles when he looks to the side. The inside ring of the racetrack is for the camels, the outside ring is for the cars of their owners. He sees how the camels give their everything to win. Foam is covering their mouths. But still, for most of the owners, this is not enough. On the back of the camels is a little robot with a small whip, which is controlled from the cars. Uncle Ibrahim also lets the whip crack on his camel. It seems to work. Number 14 is taking the lead! He is lucky with an uncle like Uncle Ibrahim. Most of the boys from his village cannot drive along in a car but must sit on the sideline. Since Uncle Ibrahim does not have any children of his own, Salem and Nura may come along with him in his car. Above his head Nura yells, "Yalla, yalla, yalla!" She is going for the first prize, a beautiful golden forehead ornament for herself. That is what their uncle promised her if his camel, number 14, comes in first. And for himself? Ah, gold is not something for boys. He has wished for something for a long time already. He would love to watch Suhail from up close... Hesitantly, he had shared his desire out loud. Uncle Ibrahim had laughed, "Hahaha, a telescope! How did you come up with that? Fantastic, Salem, then we will be the first el-Kawkabani with a modern telescope. We are going for it!"

1. Read Isaiah 60:1-6. What is Isaiah speaking about? What kind of wonderful things will happen?
2. When did this become true?
3. Together, listen to 'O thou that tellest good tidings to Zion' from the 'Messiah' by G.F. Händel. You may raise your hand whenever you recognize something from the passage you read from Isaiah 60.



Psalter 48: 5,6 or 50:2,3

Searching for Suhail



“A fire belongs in our village. We love the outdoors. We go on picnics as often as possible!”

DECEMBER 15 - AMAZEMENT EVERYWHERE!

The fire crackles. Sparks fly everywhere. They have guests! Unexpectedly, Salem had seen Mark and his father at the camel race. Today worked out very well to eat together. Camel 14, with his forelegs now bound together, is walking close nearby. Uncle Ibrahim came in third with his camel! Of course, that calls for a celebration. They are close to the camel race track and have parked their cars on the side of the road in the sand. Salem and Mark have gathered some wood and in a little while the chicken will be roasted. The women are busy with preparing the rest of the meal. “Are you coming along?” motions Salem. “I want to show you something.” Together, Mark and Salem walk a small distance away from the rest of the people. Then they lay down on their backs. For Salem, there are no secrets in the dark sky above them. He points to the stars and says their names. Astonished, Mark looks at Salem. Salem in turn is surprised about the fact that Mark has never heard about Suhail! How is that possible? He must ask his father about this later.

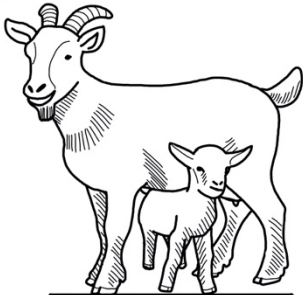
“Suhail... star... early in the morning,” he tries to explain to Mark in English. “New season, new time.” Mark seems to understand. But his reaction is strange: “Morningstar? Jesus!” Salem frowns. What does Jesus have to do with a star? Mark must be a Christian. After all, he comes from the west. Shall he...? And then, without thinking it through clearly, he starts, “For God so loved the world...” Now it is Mark’s turn to look with surprise. “How do you know this?” his eyes ask. “In your car,” answers Salem. But then they hear someone call. “The food is ready!” They stand up and walk back towards the light of the fire.

1. Do you know who is often compared to fire in the Bible?
2. John says something special about the Holy Ghost and about fire in Luke 3. Read together Luke 3:15-18. What does it mean to be baptized with the Holy Ghost and with fire? To find an answer you could also use a resource like a study Bible or Bible commentary.
3. In verse 18, it says that John proclaimed the good news, the Gospel. Mark tried to do that as well. Did you read this? He heard about a star in the early morning and immediately thought about the Lord Jesus. This week, are you going to try to tell someone about the Lord Jesus as well?
4. Someday, would you like to live in a place surrounded by people that do not know the Bible?



Psalter 415:2 or 60:3,4 or 85:3

Searching for Suhail



*“Most people here
have a few goats.
Several times a year
we butcher a couple
and eat goat meat.”*

DECEMBER 16 - BAD NEWS

The flags on the side of the road are waving cheerfully. Everything looks perfect, from the roundabout by the first houses of the village, all the way to the school. They even put out flower baskets! Tomorrow is the celebration. Salem still does not understand why the king has chosen their village in particular. It is not special at all! When Salem thinks about how the king will hear him tomorrow, he feels a flutter in his stomach, but he is sure that he knows the poem well. His teacher is satisfied, no, more than satisfied. Today he recited the poem on the stage at school when they practiced. A loud applause followed for Salem el-Kawkabani. The feeling in his stomach disappears again. He thinks about Grandpa Salem. Today, the teacher had said that soon he would come visit: after National Day.

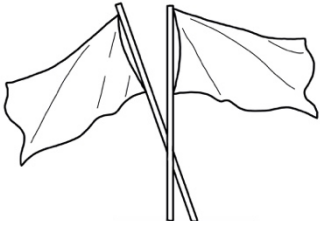
Just as he reaches to open the gate that leads to their piece of land, a herd of goats passes by. A few older boys are bringing the animals back to the village. During the day the goats graze in the area, but at night they stay within four walls. A goat will not hesitate to sneak inside when it sees the gate open. And then try to get such an animal out again. There is way too much tasty food on their piece of land: fresh grass and fallen dates. When the last of the animals walks past, Salem enters through the gate, climbs in one of the palm trees, cuts of a bunch of dates, and climbs back down again. Suddenly, he hears footsteps running. The gate closes shut. There stands Nura. Her hair sticks from under her veil and she looks at Salem with a bewildered look on her face. “Grandpa fell! Dad is already on his way to the hospital!”

1. Where was King Jesus born? Was that an important city in Israel?
2. Read the answer in Micah 5:1. Also read verse 2 and 3.
3. What is Jesus compared to in verse 3? Look also at John 10:16. Is the flock of the Lord Jesus already complete?



Psalter 217:4

Searching for Suhail



“Make a banner for in the village! You can use paper or fabric.”

DECEMBER 17 - THE EYES OF THE KING

Salem sighs. For an hour the boys of his school have been sitting in the courtyard. The flags are waving in the wind. Everyone is looking their best in new disdashas and new kumas, some with linen cloths tied around them. All the boys have their staff in their hand. Salem was even allowed to take along a small scimitar*. It is tucked into his belt, where it can easily be seen. The musicians of the school are lucky. They have been playing music for a long time already. The drums are beating loudly. Mentally, Salem is not really present. How is Grandpa doing? Father stayed with him overnight. This morning he had sent a message to mother that something was wrong with Grandfather's brain. Today they would do more tests. Salem is feeling somber... and all this on National Day.

The principal comes walking onto the stage. Whispers go through the rows: “The king! The king! He is coming!” Placed in the front is the most beautiful chair in the school, visible for everyone. The principal motions that they should rise. The music starts with a prelude of the national anthem. Then, the doors behind the stage open... Suddenly, Salem forgets everything and everyone. There is the king! Salem loudly sings along with the national anthem. When a few moments later the plays begin, he enjoys them thoroughly. And as soon as the show of his classmates is finished, he squares his shoulders and walks onto the stage. He briefly nods to the king, who sits in front of him, but then Salem lifts his eyes upward. Through the tarps he can still see a small piece of the sky. His voice varies from loud to soft, as he recites Grandfather's poem with gestures and expression. Will he be able to tell Grandpa about this day himself yet?

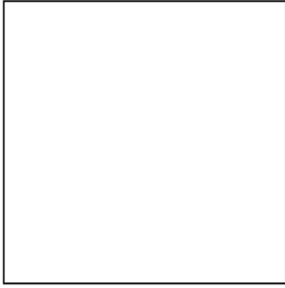
*a small (traditional) sabre with a curved blade

1. Read Zachariah 9:9-10. A king has a kingdom. Over which kingdom is the King of Jerusalem lord and master? What is said about this King?
2. When the king comes for a visit there is a celebration, right? Was King Jesus also received with open arms when He came to this earth? Who were glad?



Psalter 196:1,2 / 197:1,2

Searching for Suhail



“There is still a lot of room in our village. I don't know what will be built in this spot.”

DECEMBER 18 – AN ANXIOUS NIGHT

Sighing, Salem turns over once more. He had slept for a while but startled awake in the middle of a scary dream. He had been in Grandfather's room. The door had slowly opened by itself and the light had started to blink. It had to have been a djinn* that was entering. Grandfather had been scared too. Together they'd begun to pray. Salem had started to say verses from the Koran, but the unsettled feeling hadn't gone away. With a loud bang the door had slammed shut... and then he woke up. His heart was beating in his throat. What did this dream mean? Could Grandpa...? Suddenly he can't stay on his mattress anymore. Quietly he walks over to the door, takes a drink of water, and sits down outside on a mat under the palm tree. The night is dark and frightening. Salem tries to think about something else. The wall around their house is high and sturdy, but it cannot keep djinns from coming in. He actually needs to go to the bathroom, but he doesn't dare to go into that little space. Everyone knows that djinns often live in bathrooms; that is why you make your trip there as quick as possible. Salem stands up and uses the palm tree to climb on top of the wall. He dangles his legs over the edge. Now he can see the sky much better. Hundreds of stars twinkle at him from up high. His eyes rest on Suhail, the brightest star. He sighs deeply and feels very small. He thinks back to the two words that Mark had said: Suhail and Jesus. Slowly the heavy feeling lifts off of Salem's heart. He feels calmer now. When will he meet Mark again? It is nice to spend time with him and his parents.

Before he climbs back into his bed, Salem prays for his grandfather, asking God to be with him and also forgive him. Salem gets a drink of water, uses the bathroom, and calmly falls asleep.

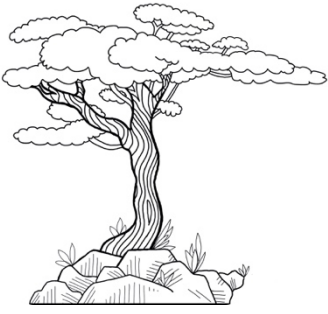
*a spirit that can live in people according to Islam

1. Salem thinks that he saw an evil spirit in his dream. Do you know a passage in the Bible that talks about evil spirits? When do you not have to fear them? Read Isaiah 9:1 and 5.
2. There is no church in Salem's village. You could say: it is dark there without the light of a church. Today you may create a space in the village where a church could be built. It is still an empty spot...
3. Imagine that for the next while it is forbidden to build a church in Salem's village. Imagine that yet there will be people who come to believe in the Lord Jesus. What then? Is a church building a must to be a Christian congregation together?



Psalter 440:1,5 or Psalter 209:1,8,9

Searching for Suhail



"I love my country.
Look at this myrrh
tree! You won't
quickly find that
in another part of
the world!"

DECEMBER 19 - A MYRRH FRAGRANCE IN THE HOUSE

Glad to have a few days off because of National Day, Salem wanders around outside the village. He can't imagine being at school right now. *Grandpa is not doing well. Grandpa is not doing well. It's not going well with Grandpa. It's not going well...* Those are the only thoughts going through his head. His mother didn't wake him this morning. It was already late when he opened his eyes for the first time. There was no breakfast. Mother had said, "If you want something to eat, grab something easy. We will fast and pray today. For Grandpa." He didn't take anything either. He only drank some water.

Grandpa's room was in a blue haze from the smoke. The penetrating scent of perfume spread through the house. Mother had put myrrh in the incense jar today. She probably wanted to chase the djinns out of Grandpa's room... Salem had gone inside for just a moment and inhaled the scent deeply. His eyes stung and it was hard to stay, but it calmed down his heart. Mother used myrrh more often to calm down, though myrrh is actually good for everything. Aunt Maryam has even specialized in the making of perfume, using the oil of the myrrh tree.

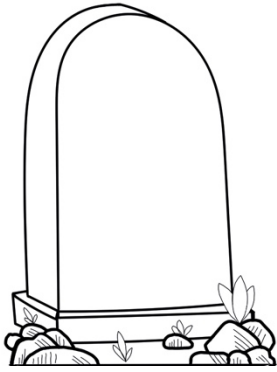
Ouch! Salem pulls up his sleeve and watches an ugly red scratch take shape. He walked too closely past one of the shrubs which nestle between the rocks. Those miniature myrrh trees have ugly thorns on their branches. He bends down and spots some lumps of myrrh attached to the trunk. The harvesters have probably missed those. He will take them along and give them to his mother. Then she will soon be able to burn myrrh again.

1. Read together from Song of Songs 5. Can you count how many times you hear the word 'myrrh'?
2. Myrrh is known for its pungent, penetrating fragrance. It is often used in perfumes. The Song of song speaks about the beautiful fragrance of the Lord Jesus. Do you have that feeling too sometimes, that you long for the Lord Jesus?
3. In the New Testament myrrh is not mentioned very often. Try to find two passages together. Hint: both times it has to do with the Lord Jesus.



Psalter 124:7,8

Searching for Suhail



“By us, people who have died are buried by the village men as soon as possible.”

DECEMBER 20 – WITH GRANDFATHER TO THE CEMETERY

Salem watches the first rays of sunshine fall on the houses of the town as he walks up the hill just outside his village. He looks behind him. A long procession of white disdashas follows. He will never be able to visit his grandfather again. *Grandpa has died!* His dear grandfather, whom he was named after, is no longer alive. Grandpa had made him so proud. Salem hadn't seen him anymore since he was brought to the hospital and he will never see him again. The thought brings tears to his eyes. Bravely he swallows them away. God gave Grandfather, and God took him away.

Salem heard the news from Father after he had woken up. Nura was up already. She sat crying in the corner of the women's room. Mom was busy in the kitchen because they would be having a lot of guests in the coming days—and guests have to be fed. Father had quickly sent a message to all the members of their family and the village: Grandpa would be buried after the morning prayer. Now the men are walking to the cemetery. A hole is dug already, in the direction of Mecca, of course. Grandfather's body is wrapped in cloths and will soon be laid in the grave. In between the cloths are a few of the chunks of myrrh Salem had found yesterday. The other pieces he had stuffed in the pocket of his disdasha. He resolves to keep those with him forever.

1. Yesterday we learned that myrrh is used in perfumes and smells deliciously. Today, we will read John 19:38-42 and learn that myrrh is also a symbol of sorrow and suffering.
2. What does Nicodemus bring along for the Lord Jesus after He has died? Try to find out what the value was. What does that say about Nicodemus?
3. Do you know the meaning of the Arabic word for 'myrrh'? It is the same word as Naomi's new name: Mara. It means 'bitter' because the bark of the myrrh tree has a bitter taste, but it also points to bitter suffering.



Psalter 247: 4,5 or Psalter 244: 2,3

Searching for Suhail



"This is Mark, together with his dad, mom, and little sister. They regularly come to visit us. Mark is a good friend!"

DECEMBER 21- THE STARS ARE NOT ALIGNED

With the garden hose Salem sprays the blood from the tiles towards the drain. This was already the third goat they had to slaughter. The third day to express condolences to his family for the loss of grandfather has arrived. Again, they expect dozens of people to come and sit with them and pray for Grandfather's soul. They pray that he will arrive in heaven, and not go into the fire. These people will all be served food: rice and meat and fruit. Father has ordered him to clean the heads of the goats and hang them on the outside of the wall around their house. Salem knows why. He had heard Uncle Ibrahim say: "The stars are not aligned; we need protection." Nura had received the assignment to cut out Koran texts from a piece of paper. Mother will burn those pieces of paper in the little incense pot with myrrh. In this way, the house is purified of all dark spirits and evil powers.

Salem drops the hem of his disdasha again and walks along the side of the house to the gate. The first guests are already arriving. Happily surprised, Salem looks up. There is Mark's father! Apparently he has been informed by Father as well. Is Mark with them too? Yes, holding his little sister's hand, his friend is following behind his father. And Mark's mother is there too. She looks like someone from their country, wearing a long black coat and a headscarf on her head: how good that she did that! Salem is sure that his mother will be happy with her visit. Mark lets go of his sister and walks towards him. "How nice of you to come!" Salem says. "Sorry about your grandfather..." Mark replies. For a moment they look each other in the eyes. "Yes," Salem says, nothing more. Then he takes Mark to the back. They sit down on the little wall by the outside kitchen. The goat skulls are next to them. After a while Mark points at them. With his hands he asks: why? Salem stands up and taps against the wall around the house. He knows how to say "protection" in English. Mark doesn't understand it, but explaining it in English is just too hard. He will teach Mark an Arabic word. Salem points at his eye and says: "Ein." "Ein," says Mark.

1. Can goat skulls protect your home from an evil spirit? Salem's family believes so. The Bible says that people who are afraid of ghosts and death are like slaves: slaves of the devil. However, the Lord Jesus has come to save people from fear. Read it together from Hebrews 2:14-18.
2. Salem teaches Mark the Arabic word for eye, which is 'ein'. In a store you may have seen jewelry which is a bluish circle with a black circle in the middle: a kind of eye. Many Muslims believe that this can ward off evil spirits or evil eyes. Also horoscopes (constellations that predict something) and other omens (signs of bad luck) are widely believed. Why would people believe that?
3. Read verse 14 and 15 again and try to explain the meaning in your own words.
4. What do you think: is it harmful to read the horoscope pages in magazines or to talk about unlucky days (like Friday the 13th?) Is it innocent? God is very clear about such things. Read about it in Deuteronomy 18:9-14.



Psalter 248:1,2

Searching for Suhail



"Sand and rocks: that is what our village is built on. If there is no house or road, there's sand. Will you sprinkle some sand in between the buildings and trees? You may even be able to add some pebbles from outside."

DECEMBER 22 – THE ARABIAN TRIBES

Finally it is a normal school day again. After so many strenuous events Salem is ready for something normal. He stretches his legs under his table and slides down a bit, his arms crossed. The back of his chair gently sways back and forth. The teacher is a good storyteller. They talk about the history of Southern Arabia and the origins of the present tribes in their country. "Who knows where his family, his tribe, originally came from?" Salem sits up straight. He immediately thinks of Grandfather again, who still had to tell his story to the teacher. He closes his eyes for a moment and takes a deep breath. Abdullah raises his hand. "My family is from the southwestern Arabian Peninsula." Salem listens captivated when Abdullah explains what he knows. "I have distant family living there. It's terrible. There has been war for a long time. Millions of children have far too little food. There is not enough clean drinking water." The teacher replies, "You are right, Abdullah, thank you for this information." More hands go up in the air. The teacher is happy to see that. "Anyone who wants to tell something about the origins of his family is allowed to make a presentation about it. Go home and gather as much information as possible. You may take turns telling us about it this week."

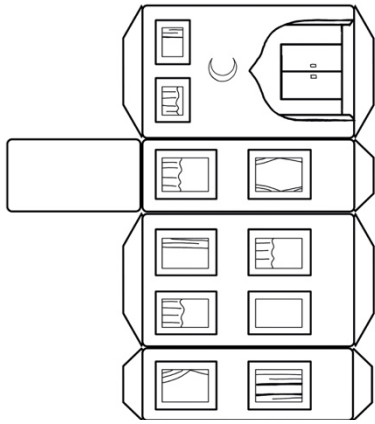
That evening Salem finally finds his usual spot on the wall again. Suhail already stands a lot higher in the sky than at the beginning of the school year. It even gets a bit chilly in the evening. Just a little while longer and he will have to wear something over his *disdasha* when he goes to look at the stars. He tries to remember grandfather's story, about their family. It's the most beautiful story he ever heard coming from his mouth. Slowly the sentences form in his head. *Yes, that's how he will tell it to his teacher.*

1. Before the Lord Jesus comes one more time, life on earth will become harder. You can read about this in Matthew 24:1-14. Is this something that should make us afraid?
2. For a long time already, life is very hard for the people in Yemen. The money that you donated to buy this calendar will (amongst other things) be used to fill up a shipping container. That container will go on a ship and the contents will be given to Christians in Yemen. They will distribute the contents to people in need, without making distinctions.
3. This week, read something about Yemen. Perhaps you can find an informative video. There are many of them. Will you pray for Yemen today? Please pray for God's peace there, beginning in the hearts of the people.
4. Look at verse 14 again. When will the Lord Jesus finally come back?



Psalter 176:2

Searching for Suhail



"Now a days there is a small hospital in our village, thankfully. Not too long ago, babies often died because the hospital was too far away."

DECEMBER 23 – YAHYAH IS BORN

A sad wail comes from the bedroom of Uncle Ibrahim and his wife. They have just returned from the hospital where their son was born two days ago. Fortunately, everything went well. It had taken so long until a baby was finally born to his uncle! After the circumcision last night, the baby had to stay one more night. For his aunt it was nice to be taken care of too. But now the time has come: they are home. There is no question what the little boy will be called. Of course he will get grandfather's name! His date of birth is so close to the day of Grandfather's death... there is a new Salem in the family home!

Salem patiently waits until he can go see the little one. He had already seen Nura go inside, but then again, Nura is a girl. Quietly Salem works on his homework. Moments later, Nura proudly arrives with the precious bundle, wrapped in cloths. "Look Salem!" Salem puts down his pen and touches the soft cheeks of the little boy. He doesn't make a sound. "Isn't it great, for Uncle Ibrahim?" says Nura. Salem hums. Suddenly the baby scrunches up his face and starts to cry. Mother arrives with a piece of charcoal and some clay-like stuff in a little pot. A black stripe goes from eyebrow to eyebrow. Also around his eyes the baby gets a black mark. Salem's mother puts her finger in the jar and makes a dot on his forehead. "So little man" she assures the baby, "now you are safe from evil eyes. You never know what kind of visit we'll get."

That evening Salem sits together with his father, uncle Ibrahim and some other men. His little nephew is shown to the visitors. To his surprise his uncle tells them that the baby is called Yahyah*! Yahyah? Not Salem? Uncle Ibrahim explains. "After some consideration we thought Yahyah was better. After all, don't we already have a son of Salem?" With that, Uncle gives him a big wink.

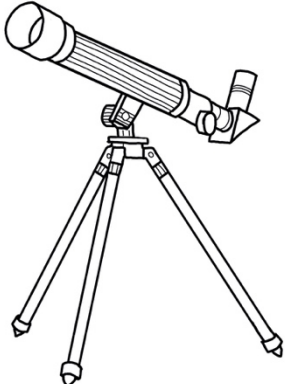
*the name used in the Koran for John the Baptist

1. Do you have a name that is a recurring name in your family? Is that important? Why do parents name their children after others?
2. Read together Lucas 1:57-66. The meaning of the name John is 'God is gracious'. Why did John receive this name?
3. In the story today Yahyah was marked with charcoal to protect him against evil. What protection did John the Baptist receive? See verse 66.



Psalter 176:1

Searching for Suhail



"Look... a real telescope! Will you put it on the roof of our house?"

DECEMBER 24 - THE PRESENT FOR SALEM

"Nura! Nura!" Salem runs through the house! Where is his sister? Finally he finds her with little Yahyah in the room of his aunt and uncle. "Come! Uncle Ibrahim has presents for us!" Nura almost forgets that she has to be careful. Auntie quickly takes Yahyah and then they run together to the men's quarters. Uncle Ibrahim looks at them, smiling. "You have waited patiently for your reward, bravo! Thanks to camel number 14, third place resulted in a big reward. Now, open up." For Salem, the present is not a surprise anymore. The shape of the present reveals what is inside. It is big and one side looks like it has a long cylinder. He is so excited, it is difficult for him to be careful. Nura leaves her package for a moment. She also realizes what the big present is.

"Woooooow.... woooooow..." Salem keeps repeating it while he slowly pulls off the paper. "A Fluorostar!" exclaims Nura. "That is the most expensive one you can buy around here!" Spontaneously she gives Uncle Ibrahim a hug. Surprised he looks past Nura's head to Salem. "You have a smart little sister. She knows everything." Nura lets go of Uncle Ibrahim and sits down beside the telescope. With her fingers she traces over the letters of the brand. "We will put the telescope on the roof. Then we can look through it often." "Right now?" asks Salem. "First my present!" Nura replies. "Pff..." jokes Salem, "as if a telescope isn't fun for you too." With a big grin Nura opens the other package. A golden bracelet slips out, but there is more: a necklace as well as a forehead ornament, all made from gold. Again, she walks to Uncle Ibrahim, but he wards her off. "No, no, this is thanks to number 14. You can give him a hug for it! Come, grab your mattresses, then we will sleep on the roof tonight." How exciting! He doesn't have to ask them twice.

Slowly, the singing voice of the muezzin* penetrates Salem's ears. When he opens his eyes, tens of little lights look back at him. Immediately he remembers where he is. He rubs his eyes, quietly stands up, and turns the lens of the telescope in the direction of the brightest light. He tries to focus, which is not quite that easy yet. It works for a few seconds. He will never come closer to Suhail than this. But the light that reaches his eyes, although tremendously far away, is almost unbearable for his eyes.

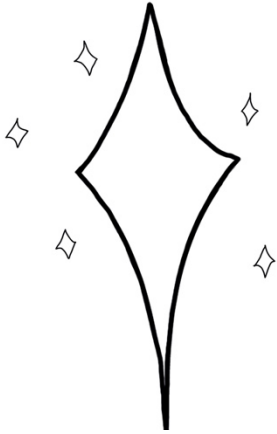
*a man who calls Muslims to prayer from the mosque

1. Today we read from Luke 1:67-80. It is the Song of Zachariah.
2. What light is Zachariah speaking about? Is it a star? Read Malachi 4:2.
3. Can you think of another text about the Lord Jesus and a light?
4. Today, pray again for the people on the Arabian Peninsula. Pray that the radiant light from heaven may also shine on them.



Song of Zacharias: 7 (to the tune of Psalter 312) or Psalter 448:4

Searching for Suhail



"With Suhail, the village is truly done. Let it shine over our village! Thank you for working so hard. Please send a picture with the result!"

DECEMBER 25 - GRANDPA'S STORY

Salem stands in front of the chalkboard and looks at the class. The teacher is sitting on his chair and gives him a brief nod. Then he starts. "My name is Salem el-Kawkabani. My tribe name is from the word 'kawkab', meaning 'planet'. For a long time the Kawkanabi's were known because of one thing: they always studied the skies. That's why they knew more than others. For this reason, for example, they found out that in the weeks after the star Suhail first became visible, the water in their water sources began to cool down. They could also, with the help of the stars, find their ways without Google Maps." There are chuckles everywhere in the classroom. Calmly, Salem continues. "In those days, everyone believed that the starry skies had a lot to tell us. They actually believed that the gods spoke their will through the stars. Therefore, every king had astronomers in his court. Sometimes they could predict what would happen. The fate of a king or a sultan was often in their hands! If a king was not happy with what an astronomer had seen, then he sometimes had him killed!" Salem sees that his classmates are listening. He pauses for a moment, then continues. "One day there was a new and very special star. A few men of the tribe were convinced that this meant that a new king was born. They felt compelled to start a journey to bring their respects to this king. Otherwise, the gods might become angry at them. It was a long journey, all the way to Palestine. They took along gold, myrrh, and frankincense. It was not easy to find the baby. The king of Palestine was so angry when he heard about it, he even wanted to kill them! But eventually they came and worshipped the baby. It was the prophet Jesus." For a moment, Salem gazes into space. Then he concludes: "This is the story of my family."

1. Have you heard Salem's story before? Why would he gaze into space at the end of the story?
2. The tribal name el-Kawkabani truly exists. The story about the ancestors of this tribe travelling to Jerusalem, long ago, to visit the Christ-child is told until this day.
3. Read Matthew 2:1-12.
4. Salem says that Jesus is a prophet. Is that true? Is he *only* a prophet?
5. We wish you a blessed Christmas together!



Song of Simeon: 4 (to the tune of Psalter 163) or Psalter 450:1,2