

"I know that my redeemer liveth" (Job 19:25).

"OK, class," the teacher said. "We're done with maths.* It's craft time!"

Ismay smiled as the whole class started chatting. Ismay *loved* craft time. This was the only chance she had to talk with her friends during class.

"Can you believe Christmas is next month?" Mason asked.

Ismay nodded. "I can't wait!" Ismay thought about her favorite treat. She could almost taste the pavlova, buried in whipped cream and topped with blueberries and kiwifruit. *Mmmmmm . . .*

"What's your favorite Christmas tradition?" Ava asked.

"Oh, that's easy," Mason said. "Barbecue at the beach! Mum and Dad spend weeks getting ready for it. It's the best food in the world!"

Ismay grinned. She loved doing that too. But it wasn't her *favorite*. "Ours is going to see the pohutukawa trees," Ismay said. "We have a picnic under them."

Pohutukawa trees bloomed at Christmastime. That's why people called them New Zealand Christmas trees. Their pretty red blossoms made Ismay think that even the trees were celebrating Jesus!

"Well, my favorite is what we do on Christmas Eve," Ava said. "We go to a church service and talk about when Jesus was born. Then we each get to open one present."

Everyone around her got excited about



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opening presents. They started talking about what they wanted for Christmas.

Just then, Charlotte dropped her scissors and crossed her arms. She looked grumpy all of a sudden. "Jesus isn't even real! Besides, Christmas is just about giving presents that nobody needs."

Then Charlotte picked her scissors back up and started cutting quickly. Everyone was quiet for a moment.

"Actually," Mason finally said, "I really *do* need a new scooter."

Ismay's other friends laughed. They kept talking about what else they wanted for Christmas.

But Ismay didn't laugh. She felt sad because of what Charlotte said about Jesus. She wanted to say something. But would that only make Charlotte more mad?

Ismay kept working on her craft for another minute.

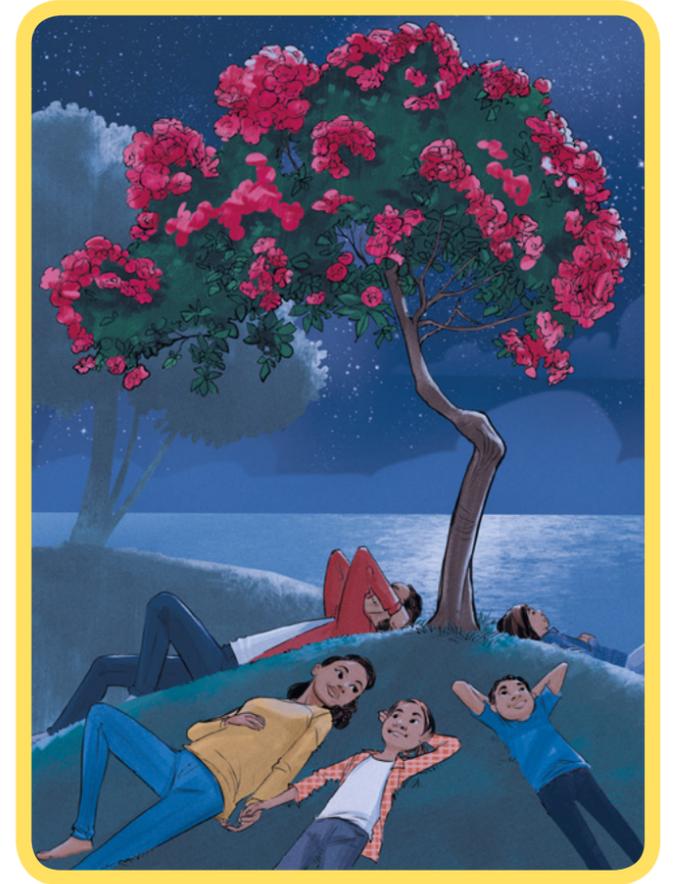
Then she turned to Charlotte. "You know what you said about Christmas? Well, I don't feel that way," she said quietly. "To me, Christmas is about being with family and friends and showing love to people." She

took a deep breath. "And it's about Jesus. He *is* real."

Charlotte rolled her eyes. "Prove it!"

Ismay blinked. *Prove* it? How? "I . . . I can't," she said. Then she put her hand over her heart. "But I feel it in here. I believe He's real and that He loves me. He loves you too."

She felt so good inside when she said that! A warm,



happy feeling washed over her. For just a second, she thought she saw Charlotte's face get brighter. But then her grumpy frown came back.

"Whatever," Charlotte said. But her voice didn't sound quite so angry anymore.

Later that night, when Ismay told her family what happened, Mum said, "I'm proud of you. I think you planted an important seed today. Who knows what that will grow into someday?"

A seed! Ismay thought again about the beautiful pohutukawa trees they would soon visit. Those trees started out as seeds too. Then, over time, they grew tall and beautiful.

"Thanks, Mum!" Ismay felt glad she could plant a seed about Jesus. That was the best Christmas gift she could give anyone. ●

* In a lot of countries, "maths" is short for "mathematics."

Turn the page to read more about New Zealand!

