

The Jesse Tree – Week 1

The Jesse Tree helps us connect the custom of decorating Christmas trees to the events leading to Jesus' birth. The tree gets its name from Isaiah 11:1: *"A shoot shall sprout from the stump of Jesse, and from his roots a bud shall blossom."*

Jesse was the father of King David, who was a great leader and lived a long time before Jesus. Jesus' family were descendants of King David.

The ornaments that we use to decorate the Jesse Tree tell the story of God and all the people who make up Jesus' family tree.

1. The First Sin (Serpent and Apple)

When God created the world, Satan realized that the most wonderful of God's creations was Adam and Eve; so he set out to destroy them by getting them to eat a fruit that God had said was forbidden to them. Adam and Eve did what Satan wanted and became the first sinners. They were no longer allowed to walk and talk with God and had to work very hard to survive until their bodies died.

The apple represents original sin; and Jesus is called the "second" or "new" Adam, because he ushered in a new creation by forgiving sin and restoring humanity to God's grace.

2. Noah's Ark (Ark)

Eventually, there were many people on the earth and sin grew worse. When God saw all the wickedness, He regretted having created mankind and decided to destroy all with a great flood. However, there was one man who loved God and followed Him in all ways. His name was Noah and he found favor with God; so God decided to spare him and his family. He instructed Noah to build a special boat to survive the flood waters. The flood was a means of judgment and the boat, the ark, was a symbol of salvation, which we find in Jesus Christ. When the flood was over and Noah came out of the ark, God acknowledged that many desires of man's heart are evil from the beginning; but for the sake of redemption, He would never again destroy the earth with a flood. To symbolize this promise, He gave us the rainbow in the sky.

The Jesse Tree symbol of the ark reminds us that, although God was displeased with the wickedness of the men and women that he had created, he also sees the best in us and renews his covenant with us through forgiveness and mercy.

3. The Call to Abram (Camel and Tent)

Abram accepted God's call to leave his family and go to another country, which he would inherit. Abram walked and talked with God and obeyed Him in all things. As a result, God changed his name to "Abraham," which meant "Father of Many Nations." His covenant with Abraham was to establish a people to bring forth His Son, Jesus Christ. Abraham's descendants became the chosen people of God.

The tent and camel represent Abraham, who went on a long trip and left behind the place that he called home; but he trusted God and, thus, God was Abraham's friend forever.

4. Isaac and the Lamb (Lamb)

Isaac was a special boy, and his father, Abraham, loved him very much. God tested Abraham's faith by calling him to kill and sacrifice Isaac. Vey saddened, but obedient, Abraham set out to trust God's will. At the last moment, God told Abraham to stop and sacrifice a lamb instead.

The lamb is a symbol of Jesus taking our place on the cross just as the lamb took Isaac's place on the sacrificial altar. Jesus had no sin, but He took our sins onto Himself and died for our redemption.

5. Jacob's Ladder (Ladder)

Jacob, Isaac's son and Abraham's grandson, was on a journey when he stopped to camp for the night. He dreamed he saw a ladder reaching from the earth into the sky. Angels were going up and down the ladder and God was at the top looking down at him. God told Jacob that the covenant He had with Abraham would also be his and that He would always be with him. Jacob vowed that if God did these things, he would be faithful to Him.

The ladder signifies the closeness between God and Jacob. It is also a symbol of Jesus descending from Heaven to become man and the gap between Heaven and Earth being bridged forever.

The Jesse Tree – Week 2

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1. Joseph (The Coat)

Joseph was the eleventh son of Jacob; and his brothers were furious that their father favored their younger brother above all of them. When Jacob gave Joseph an expensive, long-sleeved coat, they were jealous and conspired against him. The brothers sold Joseph to the Ishmaelites, who took him to Egypt.

Like Jesus, Joseph was sold for silver, but the hand of God led him to become a leader of the nation of Egypt. Later, his brothers, leaders of the Chosen People after their father, Jacob, came to Egypt and settled under his rule.

The coat of many colors is the symbol of Joseph since it was so instrumental in his life.

2. Moses (The Ten Commandments)

Moses led the Israelites, the Chosen people, out of Egypt to the Promised Land. He received the Ten Commandments from the hand of God on Mount Sinai.

God appeared to Moses in the form of a bush, which burned but was not consumed, a symbol of the Virgin Birth of Christ. The Law of Moses, as symbolized in the tablets which God gave to Moses on Mount Sinai, was fulfilled in Christ who brings a law of love.

The stone tablets on the Jesse Tree remind us of the Ten Commandments given by God to acknowledge our responsibility to Him and to our neighbors.

3. Aaron (Blessing Hand)

Aaron, Moses' brother, was the high priest of Israel and was responsible for developing new patterns of religious practice among the Israelites. His role was to help Moses and tell the people what God had told Moses.

The blessing hand represents Aaron, who blessed the Israelites by saying, "The Lord bless you and keep you! The Lord let his face shine upon you and be gracious to you! The Lord look upon you kindly and give you peace!"

4. David (Harp)

David, the youngest son of Jesse, was a shepherd and was chosen by God to be king. He was the second and greatest king of Israel. He reigned forty years and is held as the model of Jewish kingship. The life and achievements of David impressed the people of Israel so much that when they longed for another king, it was for one who would be a "Son of David," that is, a descendant of David who would be like him.

King David was a skilled harpist, and he is represented by the harp ornament. In Jesus Christ, a descendant of Jesse and David, God's love for the whole world is shown. Jesus is the one anointed to be king, not just of Israel but of all people.

5. Solomon (Crown)

Solomon was King David's son and is honored in scripture as the wisest monarch. Solomon always had a heart for fairness. He was so wise that he knew how unwise he was and asked for the wisdom to judge the Lord's people and the wisdom to distinguish between good and evil. God blessed Solomon with great wisdom; and people from all the lands came to hear him, which reminds us of the three wise men who traveled from faraway lands to see Jesus. God foretold that David's son and heir, Solomon, would be the one to build a temple to the Lord God; and he did, in fact, complete the construction of the Temple in Jerusalem during his reign.

The crown represents Solomon as the king of Israel. Solomon used his gifts to give back, and to rule his people with a just heart and mind.

The Jesse Tree – Week 3

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1. Elijah (The Raven)

God's people continued to forget about their covenant with Him; so, God sent another prophet, Elijah, who performed many miracles for the people. Elijah also reminded the people to turn away from sin and follow God.

King Ahab did not listen to Elijah. His wife, Jezebel, hated God and tried to kill all his prophets. She wanted the people of Israel to worship her false god, Baal, instead.

Elijah foretold of a great drought that would occur in Israel if the people did not stop worshipping false gods. Ahab would not listen, and Jezebel sent her soldiers to kill Elijah; however, he hid in the hills where there was water to drink. Each day, God sent big black birds called ravens with food for Elijah. While the rest of the country was going hungry and thirsty, Elijah had plenty to eat and drink.

After three years, Elijah and the priests of Baal had a contest. The priests of Baal tried to set fire to wood on an altar by praying to their false god. They tried very hard, but no fire fell. Then it was Elijah's turn. He made the altar and put wood and the sacrifice on it. He had four jars of water poured on the altar three times. Then he prayed to God and God sent fire from heaven. It lit the water-soaked wood; and a mighty fire burned the wood and the sacrifice. Seeing the fire, the people all shouted: "The Lord is God! The Lord is God!"

Like Elijah, Jesus performed many miracles and reminded people to turn their lives back to God. Elijah is represented on the Jesse Tree by the raven.

2. Jeremiah (Bible)

Jeremiah was a priest and prophet while the Israelites were in exile. He is often called the weeping prophet, because of all the trouble he encountered in his forty years of warning the people about the consequences of their sinfulness. Jeremiah was an eyewitness to the destruction of Jerusalem. Many of the things Jeremiah told the people happened years after he spoke to them. The people did not believe Jeremiah or follow him; but after the events took place, they knew that Jeremiah was speaking for God.

The Old Testament books, *Jeremiah*, *1 & 2 Kings*, and *Lamentations*, were written by Jeremiah; and he is represented by a Bible ornament on the Jesse Tree.

3. Bethlehem (Star)

Bethlehem is an ancient city in Israel. Seven hundred years before Jesus was born, Micah prophesied a star would shine bright; and when it did, the King of Israel would be born in the City of David, which is Bethlehem. The story of Christ's birth begins in Nazareth; but Joseph and Mary soon make their way towards Bethlehem, so that Jesus is born in the City of David, just as Micah foretold.

Bethlehem, which means "House of Bread," was appropriately designated as the birthplace of Christ, the Bread from Heaven. Bethlehem is symbolized by the star ornament.

4. Nehemiah, the Builder (Synagogue)

Nehemiah lived among strangers in a faraway place; and he became very sad when he heard how awful things had become back in God's City. The people who were left there had little to eat and very little protection; so he began praying that God would provide a way home for the faithful. He asked the king he served if he could return home and rebuild the temple, the gates, and the wall. The King agreed, and Nehemiah returned to Jerusalem. It was not easy rebuilding and God's people still struggled with following His ways; but as

Nehemiah built the wall, he was able to strengthen God's people and their dedication to God.

Nehemiah returned to Jerusalem to rebuild the city, foreshadowing the restoration that will be completed in Christ. He is represented on the Jesse Tree by the synagogue.

5. The Shepherds (Shepherd's Staff)

Shepherds abound in the salvation story. Jesus, the Messiah, comes from the lineage of the shepherd boy who became King of Israel, David, son of Jesse; Jesus is referred to as our shepherd and we are His sheep; and it is to the shepherds that the angels announced His holy birth.

When the shepherds receive the good news, they hasten to adore Him. Like the unnamed and fortunate shepherds, let us, too, run to meet the One who comes to save us and whose kingdom will never end.

The shepherds are represented on our Jesse Tree by the shepherd's staff.

The Jesse Tree – Week 4

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1. Joseph of Nazareth (Carpenter's Tools)

Joseph was a man from the tribe of Judah and an ancestor of King David. He lived in Nazareth, a city of Israel, where he worked as a carpenter, and was betrothed to the Virgin Mary. When Mary was found to be with child, Joseph was going to quietly dismiss her; however, an angel spoke to Joseph in a dream and convinced him to take Mary into his home. He trusted God that Mary had conceived a child through the Holy Spirit and would bear the Savior, who would bring salvation to all.

Joseph loved Mary very much. He loved Jesus, too, and was a very good father to Him. He taught Him carpentry skills and he shared his Jewish faith with Him. Joseph is represented on the Jesse Tree by carpenter's tools.

2. The Magnificat (Mary)

When an angel appeared to Mary and asked if she would be the Mother of God, she said to the angel, "I am the handmaid of the Lord, let it be done unto me according to thy word." She totally trusted and said yes to God.

The angel also told Mary that her cousin, Elizabeth, was expecting a baby; so she went to visit her. Upon entering the house of Zechariah and Elizabeth, Elizabeth was overjoyed and cried out, "Most blessed are you among women, and blessed is the fruit of your womb."

Mary then responds in a beautiful song of praise that is called "The Magnificat" or "The Cantic of Mary." This song expresses the goodness of God and the

wonderful things that He has done for her – the wonderful things that He has done for all of us.

Mary is often called the new Eve; because, although Eve disobeyed God and had to leave the Garden of Eden, Mary always listened. The beautiful “Song of Mary” is represented on the Jesse Tree by the Blessed Mother ornament.

3. Birth of John the Baptist (Baptismal Font)

Since Zechariah and Elizabeth were quite elderly and had no other children, the birth of John the Baptist was an event of great joy for his parents and their friends; but there was another reason for rejoicing as theirs was a child of promise. He was the prophet sent to prepare the way for the Messiah. John baptized with water, but he told everyone that Jesus was coming and He would baptize with the Holy Spirit and fire.

John the Baptist’s cry re-echoes from generation to generation: “Prepare the way of the Lord; make his paths straight.” He is represented by the baptismal font ornament on the Jesse Tree.

4. Angels (Angel with Candle)

The existence of angels and their actions in the life of the Church, as well as in human beings’ lives, has always been a very present element in Scripture. Angels are part of the Communion of Saints. In heaven, they participate in the joy of the vision of God. They are united to God, and, therefore, they want what God wants: our salvation. Thinking about the beauty of the angelic world gives a glimpse of the beauty and greatness of God.

The word *angel* comes from the Greek *angelos* which means “messenger,” which describes their role in interacting with this world. St. Augustine stated that angels were “the mighty ones who do His word, hearkening to the voice of His word.” Throughout Sacred Scripture, the angels served as messengers of God, whether delivering an actual message of God’s plan of salvation, rendering justice, or providing strength and comfort.

The role of angels in the lives of Jesus, Mary and Joseph, along with all of His ancestors, is symbolized on the Jesse Tree as an angel holding a candle.

5. Christ Our Lord (Chi Rho)

When sin first came into the world, God made a promise. Even when the people forgot about God and the promise, God didn't forget about the people. God guided the people, protected the people and loved the people, even when they were sinful. God was faithful; and the promise made to our ancestors and renewed by the prophets has been fulfilled.

Our final ornament is the Chi-Rho monogram, which is a combination of the first two letters for the Greek word *Christos* or *Christ*. Joy to the world! The Lord has come!