

Tis the season for decorations! I hope COVID won't dampen your Christmas spirit. In fact, because of COVID decorate even more! At this time of year, practically everyone has a decorated tree in their living room!

We do have the long tradition of having Christmas Trees. Like many of our Christian customs, the Christmas Tree originally comes from pagan roots. Ancient civilizations embraced evergreen boughs, wreaths and garlands as symbols of eternal life amid the darkest days of the winter solstice. Christians embraced this idea but point to Jesus Christ as the guarantor of eternal life. Having a Christmas Tree shows our belief that the coming Jesus brings us eternal life.

But how about putting another tree up as well? How about having an Advent Tree?

The Advent tree is also called the Jesse tree. It's named that, because there are several references in the Bible to Jesus coming from the stem of Jesse, and growing out of its roots. Jesse was the father of David, the great king of Israel, from whose family line the promised Messiah was to come.

Having a Jesse Tree in your home is a great way to teach youngsters about Bible history. The Jesse tree reminds us of the genealogy of Christ, how as a human he is a descendant of David and Jesse, coming after them, and yet as God he came before anyone else, including David and Jesse.

The idea for this "family tree" comes from Isaiah's prophecy: "A shoot will come up from the stump of Jesse; from his roots a Branch will bear fruit." Isaiah 11:1

Basically an Advent or Jesse Tree is just an evergreen branch or small tree—sometimes even a bare branch. During the season of Advent biblical symbols are gradually added to the tree, symbols that tell the story of God's redemptive plan for the world and reveal the strong ties between the Old and New Testaments.

This emphasis on the lineage of the Messiah continued in the New Testament Church. The early Christians often referred to Jesus' roots in their attempts to convince others that he was the Messiah. "Look," they would say, "he was born of Jesse's family, of the house of David—just as the prophets said. He was born in Bethlehem, just as they promised. So he must be the Messiah."

The idea of the Jesse Tree is to put symbolic ornaments on it as the days of Advent tick by. The more common symbols used on the Jesse Tree are: **an apple** to symbolize Adam and Eve and the first sin. During Advent we remember that God sent Jesus to free us from our sins. The second symbol is **an ark or a rainbow**. When we see the rainbow or hear the story of the flood, we are reminded that God loved the world enough to give us a new start and that God keeps his promises. The third symbol is **a tent**. This refers to Abraham, and how God called him to actually begin His plan of salvation history. Other symbols include: Jacob and a **Ladder**, Joseph and the Technicolor **Dreamcoat**, Moses and the **Ten Commandments**, David and a **Crown**, and many more leading up to the birth of Jesus.

The Jesse Tree is a good way to make our time of Advent more meaningful, as we recall the characters and events in salvation history, and how everything in God's plan leads up to His Son Jesus Christ. So, go ahead, put a second tree up in your living room.