

LITURGY BYTES

An Advent Favorite



Another popular Advent symbol that is seen in some churches is the Jesse Tree. Briefly, it contains symbols representing the ancestry of Jesus.

The Jesse Tree helps us connect the custom of decorating Christmas trees to the events leading to the birth of Jesus. The tree is named from this passage from the prophet Isaiah (11:1) which says: "*A shoot shall come out of the stock of Jesse, and a branch shall grow out of his roots.*" Jesse was the father of King David. We adorn a Jesse Tree with illustrated ornaments that represent the people, prophecies and events leading up to the birth of Jesus. The ornaments of the Jesse Tree tell the story of God in the Old Testament, connecting the Advent season with the faithfulness of God across thousands of years of history. There are numerous symbols that can be used that connect with the Bible stories like Creation, Adam & Eve, Noah's ark, Jacob's ladder, the Ten Commandments, Solomon's temple, John the Baptist, Mary, Elizabeth, Joseph, the Shepherds, and Jesus.

Believe it or not, the tradition of decorating Christmas trees actually predates the arrival of Christianity in western Europe and was adopted by the early Church. In order to associate the custom more clearly with Christianity, people made Jesse Trees with regular Christmas trees, using decorations related to the events leading up to the birth of Jesus, which included some of the Old Testament prophecies about Him. Over the years, the type of tree used changed to something sparse with just branches on it since a branch was a sign of new life and new beginnings. Jesus was a descendant of King David, and Christians believe that Jesus is the new branch.

This can be a great exercise for families with children in keeping the birth of Jesus a priority during Advent and Christmas. There are many Jesse Tree resources online to get you started.

Have a prayerful, watchful, and blessed week ahead! ~ *Michele Hall*