



Advent: The Jesse Tree

Celebrating Advent: The Jesse Tree

WHAT IS A JESSE TREE?

“The Jesse tree helps us connect the custom of decorating Christmas trees to the events leading to Jesus’ birth. The Jesse Tree is named from Isaiah 11:1: ‘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 four thousand years of history.” - Loyola Press

THE STORY OF THE JESSE TREE

Jesse was the father of the great King David of the Old Testament. He is often looked upon as the first person in the genealogy of Jesus.

In Church art a design developed showing the relationship of Jesus with Jesse and other biblical personages. This design showed a branched tree growing from a reclining figure of Jesse. The various branches had pictures of other Old and New Testament figures who were ancestors of Jesus. At the top of the tree were figures of Mary and Jesus. This design was used mostly in stained glass windows in some of the great medieval cathedrals of Europe. The Cathedral of Chartres (which was dedicated in 1260) has a particularly beautiful Jesse Tree window.

Another development in religious art during the Middle Ages was that of Mystery Plays—drama that depicted various Bible stories or lives of Saints and Martyrs. These plays were performed in churches as part of the liturgical celebrations. One such play was based on the Bible account of the fall of Adam and Eve. The "Tree of Life" used during the play was decorated with apples. (Quite possibly this is also the forerunner of our own Christmas tree.)

Combining the two ideas of the stained-glass Jesse Tree window and the Tree of Life from the Mystery Play we come up with our Jesse Tree Advent project. This custom has been used for years to help Christians to prepare for Christmas. -catholicculture.org

YOUR OWN JESSE TREE

It will take planning and work from each family member to make your own Jesse Tree. The needed materials are usually found around most homes.

First of all, you will need a Bible. If there are very small children in the family, a Bible picture story book will help them understand the Bible stories used.



...to set the mind on the Spirit is life and peace...Romans 8:6



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The tree itself can be one of several types. A small artificial tree works fine, as does a tree branch that is anchored in a bucket or a large can of sand or gravel. Another possibility is a large drawing of a tree on cardboard or poster board that can be hung on the wall.

The third thing needed is a set of ornaments to hang on the tree. These are best if they are homemade by various family members.

JESSE TREE ORNAMENTS

If you decide to use one symbol each day during December, there are 24 symbolic ornaments to make for your Jesse Tree, so each family member will need to make several. Making the ornaments is a good project for Sunday afternoons during Advent.

To make an ornament, first read the Scripture verses for the day. Then pick out one or two short verses that give the main idea. Copy these verses on the back of the ornament. By this time, you will probably be thinking of various ways to illustrate your Scripture verses.

Use lots of creativity in making your ornament! You can use pictures from magazines or old greeting cards. Or draw pictures or symbols yourself. Color them with crayons, pencils, markers or paint. Look around the house for bits and pieces that will make your design beautiful! If you prefer to have a pattern already made, Caryn Talty, at *Organic Living for a Healthy Family*, has created [26 excellent ornaments](#) which she graciously offers free – both full color and black and white.

WHY USE A JESSE TREE?

Advent is a time of joyful expectation. Using a Jesse Tree can help place the focus on the amazing faithfulness of God, our Father and Savior. The Jesse Tree encompasses over 4,000 years of history. The true faithfulness and love of God are seen in that rich history. He has kept the promise He made to Abraham and to every generation since then – to be present and faithful. God is here with us still and He always will be. In the words of the “O Antiphon” for December 19: “O Root of Jesse’s stem, sign of God’s love for all his people: come to save us without delay!”

JESSE TREE SCRIPTURES (The symbols are only suggestions)

December 1 *Creation:* Gen. 1:1-31; 2:1-4 *Symbols:* sun, moon, stars, animals, earth

December 2 *Adam and Eve:* Gen. 2:7-9, 18-24 *Symbols:* tree, man, woman



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- December 3** *Fall of Man:* Gen. 3:1-7 and 23-24 *Symbols:* tree, serpent, apple with bite
- December 4** *Noah:* Gen. 6:5-8, 13-22; 7:17, 23, 24; 8:1, 6-22 *Symbols:* ark, animals, dove, rainbow
- December 5** *Abraham:* Gen. 12:1-3 *Symbols:* torch, sword, mountain
- December 6** *Isaac:* Gen. 22:1-14 *Symbols:* bundle of wood, altar, ram in bush
- December 7** *Jacob:* Gen. 25:1-34; 28:10-15 *Symbols:* kettle, ladder
- December 8** *Joseph:* Gen. 37:23-28; 45:3-15 *Symbols:* bucket, well, silver coins, tunic
- December 9** *Moses:* Ex. 2:1-10 *Symbols:* baby in basket, river and rushes
- December 10** *Samuel:* 1 Sam. 3:1-18 *Symbols:* lamp, temple
- December 11** *Jesse:* 1 Sam. 16:1-13 *Symbols:* crimson robe, shepherd's staff
- December 12** *David:* 1 Sam. 17:12-51 *Symbols:* slingshot, 6-pointed star
- December 13** *Solomon:* 1 Kings 3:5-14, 16-28 *Symbols:* scales of justice, temple, two babies and sword
- December 14** *Joseph:* Matt. 1:18-25 *Symbols:* hammer, saw, chisel, angle
- December 15** *Mary:* Matt. 1:18-25; Luke 1:26-38 *Symbols:* lily, crown of stars, pierced heart
- December 16** *John the Baptist:* Mark 1:1-8 *Symbols:* shell with water, river
- On December 17, the Church begins to intensify the preparation for Christmas with the use of the "O" Antiphons during the Liturgy of the Hours. The symbols for the Jesse Tree from December 17 to 23 are based on the "O" Antiphons.
- December 17** *Jesus is Wisdom:* Sirach (or Ecclesiasticus in old Bibles) 24:2; Wisdom 8:1 *Symbols:* oil lamp, open book
- December 18** *Jesus is Lord:* Ex. 3:2; 20:1 *Symbols:* burning bush, stone tablets
- December 19** *Jesus is Flower of Jesse:* Isaiah 11:1-3 *Symbols:* flower, plant with flower



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December 20 *Jesus is Key of David: Isaiah 22:22 Symbols: key, broken chains*

December 21 *Jesus is the Radiant Dawn: Psalm 19:6-7 (in older Bibles this will be Psalm 18) Symbols: sun rising or high in sky*

December 22 *Jesus is King of the Gentiles: Psalm 2:7-8; Ephesians 2:14-20 Symbols: crown, scepter*

December 23 *Jesus is Emmanuel: Isaiah 7:14; 33:22 Symbols: tablets of stone, chalice and host*

December 24 *Jesus is Light of the World: John 1:1-14 Symbols: candle, flame, sun*

Activity Source: *Jesse Tree Kit, A* by Betsy Walter, Pauline Books and Media, Boston, MA, 1983

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