



PRAYING
THE JESSE
TREE



Devotions *for* Advent

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THE JESSE TREE

*And there shall come forth a rod out of the stem of Jesse,
and a Branch shall grow out of his roots: and the spirit
of the Lord shall rest upon him. ISAIAH 11:1-2*

The symbol of the Jesse Tree comes from this passage in the Book of Isaiah. Each branch—each leaf on the tree—is a story rooted deep in Scripture that tells of the relationship between God and God’s people. The symbols on the Jesse Tree represent a Biblical “family tree,” and Christ is grafted onto the family tree of Jesse, the father of the great King David.

Use these devotions each day during the season of Advent. Read the Scripture passage first to understand the devotion for the day more fully. Gather as a family and share Scripture, devotion and prayer. Sing a favorite hymn or song of the season. Add one figure to your manger scene or one more ornament to the Christmas tree. Encourage each other to share memories or images the symbols of the Jesse Tree bring to mind. As you are reminded each day how we are all part of this “family tree,” may you also be reminded of the powerful love of Christ for this—our—family.



The First Sunday of Advent

New Shoots

ISAIAH 11:1-2



One of my favorite tools is my pruning shears. There is something about the power of those razor-edged jaws. Something about the sound and feel of the steel blade slicing through a green limb thick as your finger. Something about taking out what does not belong, what is interfering with proper growth, what is dead, so the tree can thrive on the life juices flowing through it.

My problem is that I don't know when to stop. I am sorry to report that I have killed two bushes and one tree. But more than once I have been awed by green shoots reaching up from long-dead stumps that had been the victims of my pruning shears.

Today we look closely to see tiny new shoots from an old story—what some people in Bible times and many folks today might even consider a dead story. The symbol of the Jesse Tree is a shoot from a stump. God planted a tree in the Garden of Eden. His created children disobeyed God and were pruned out of that garden and cast into a world of sin and death. Time and again God called to the people of Israel, offered them his love and chopped them back to a stump when they disobeyed. Time and again God restored them to life.

The Jesse Tree is our story of how we are our own worst enemies. It is the story of how God chooses to bring life even to those who require constant pruning.

*Lord, today the first leaf on our Jesse Tree unfolds.
Help us to make room for the life you give us by stretching
our hearts. Teach us to delight in you. Amen.*

Monday, the First Week

No Accident

GENESIS 1:26-31

I have a friend who is an astronomer, who spends his life studying those various pin lights in the night sky. He puts them on grids and assigns mathematical equations to their activities. And every once in a while he looks up from his telescope and his calculations and says, “Wow, this is no accident!”

I have a friend who is a crystallographer, who spends her days studying the structure of things too small for any microscope to see. She shoots x-rays through minute crystals and assigns mathematical equations to starlike patterns on the x-rays. And every once in a while she looks up from her computer and says, “Wow, this is no accident!”



A sense of wonder and a statement of faith—that is what a close look at our creation evokes. This season is about the One who created it, called it good ... and jumped into it himself to prove it.

*Lord, for the wonders of our universe
from the microscopic to the cosmic, we thank you.
Give us the wisdom to be gentle and imaginative
in our dominion over it. For the blessing of your Son's
presence in this creation, we thank you too. Amen.*

Tuesday, the First Week

The Scary Part

GENESIS 3:1-7

When I was a child I could entertain myself for a whole evening by paging through a volume of the family encyclopedia. I enjoyed looking at the pictures and reading about all kinds of people and places. I methodically avoided the “B” volume because it contained a picture of a black widow spider that always scared me. Consequently, I never learned much about anything starting with the letter “B.”

Does the symbol of the Apple and the Snake, which represents selfishness and humanity at its worst, seem inappropriate for Christmas preparations? We would like to skip over that “scary part” of the story and get to the good parts. But that “scary” story is exactly why Christmas was necessary. The Christ child who came—the Messiah who is coming back—comes to us to save our lives from sin and its “scary” consequence: eternity separated from our Lord and Savior. The symbol reminds us that Christmas is more than a holiday ... it is more a matter of life and death.



Mighty Savior, help us not to turn our eyes away from those parts of the Advent and Christmas story that are scary or distasteful to us. Help us to face our sin and welcome the Christ who comes to forgive us. Amen.

Wednesday, the First Week

Parole

GENESIS 6:11-22; 9:8-13

Surrounded by water on the outside and by every animal God created times two on the inside, Noah awaited parole in what must have felt like a floating prison. It came in the form of a rainbow—a testimony that light had broken through the dark clouds.

Besides opening the door to greater freedom, parole also involves a prisoner's promise to refrain from escape.

The “parole” which God grants does truly liberate us, but it asks us to make a promise as well—a promise to remain captive to the Word of God. When we get liberty confused with license, when we demand freedom from our Lord instead of freedom to serve our Lord, we find ourselves imprisoned once again by our short-sightedness.

“Parole” also means promise—God’s promise that he would not flood the earth again, his promise that he would stay connected to his people (almost like our prisoner!). The promised Son did come, and we await his promised return.



*Lord, although we were prisoners sentenced to death,
you have paroled us for life. Help us to enjoy our freedom
and to remain captive to your love. Amen.*

Thursday, the First Week

The Cab Driver

GENESIS 12:1-7 and HEBREWS 11:8

A few years ago I traveled to San Antonio for the first time. My flight was delayed, so I arrived when the city was asleep. I had to hire a stranger, a cab driver, to take me to a place I had never been before. When we finally found the retreat center, it was enclosed by a fence and dark. The cabby found a rock holding open a gate, and inside was a darkened courtyard surrounded by dormitories.

At the far end of the courtyard was a meeting room with lights. Inside we found no one, but there was a piece of paper on the table. On the paper was my name with a room number next to it, and resting on the paper was a key. The cab driver took the key, found my room, turned on my lights, started my air conditioner, took his fare and disappeared into the night.



I had traveled a long time, to a city I had never been before, to a building I could not have found by myself—and discovered a place saved for me, a key to open the door, and a guide who took care of me along the way.

Abraham and Sarah didn't know where they were going either ... but a place was being saved for them and by faith they began the long journey. Sometimes, in the middle of the night, God guides a camel—or maybe even drives a cab.

Saver of a place for us, guide us along the way. Help us to see your face in those who carry us today. In Christ. Amen.

The Jesse Tree from ISAIAH 11:1

It began long ago with a tree.
Was it apple, persimmon or pear?
God's people would not obey;
God said, "No!" but they didn't care.

**But a shoot shall sprout from the stump of Jesse,
and from his roots a bud shall blossom.**

God had to prune and God had to chop;
His law he sent down on two stones:
"Hear me and love me and follow my lead."
From his children he only heard groans.

**But a shoot shall sprout from the stump of Jesse,
and from his roots a bud shall blossom.**

God gave them water and God gave them bread;
God gave them a promise to share.
From Jesse and David and on down the line
A treasure will come—oh, so rare!

**But a shoot shall sprout from the stump of Jesse,
and from his roots a bud shall blossom.**

"You need a Savior," our good God declared.
"I think I will send you my Son.
His life and his dying will pay for your sins—
Your freedom will finally be won."

**But a shoot shall sprout from the stump of Jesse,
and from his roots a bud shall blossom.**

We thank you, O Lord, for the gift of your Son,
For our families, our laughter and tears;
We thank you for tending your tree every day,
For the promise you kept all these years.

**But a shoot shall sprout from the stump of Jesse,
and from his roots a bud shall blossom. » Lois Scheer**

