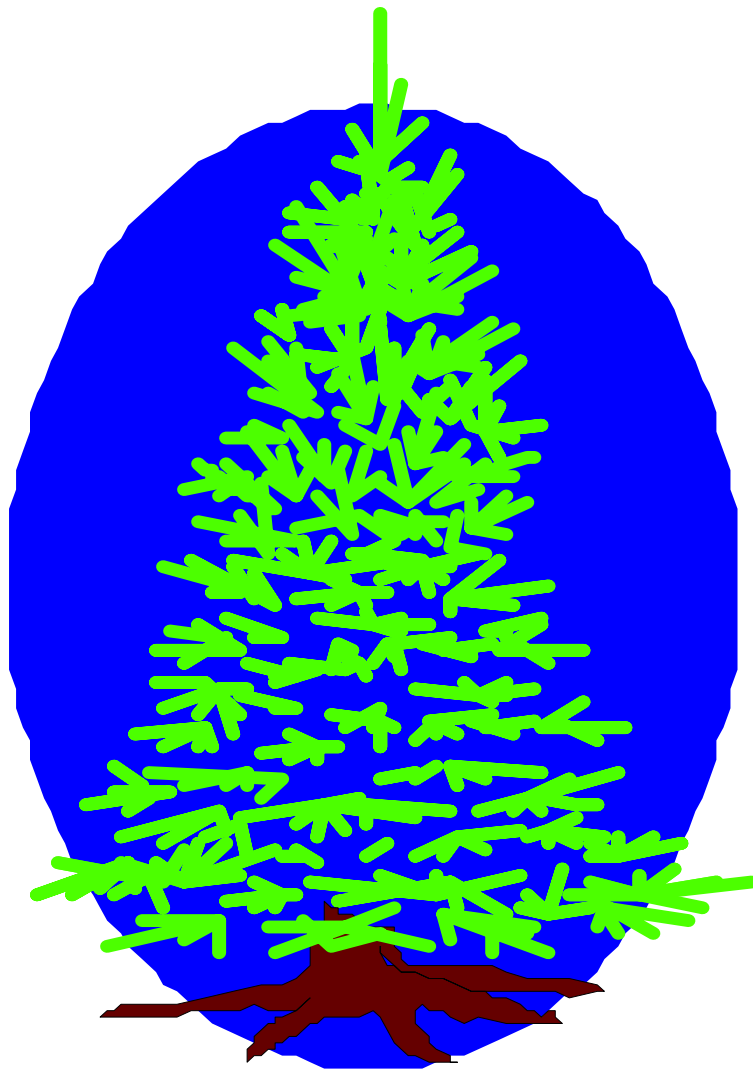


Blessing of the Christmas Tree

History of the Jesse Tree

History of the Jesse Tree



CHILDREN'S PRAYER SERVICE FOR ADVENT

Opening Hymn: O Christmas Tree, Verse 1

O Christmas tree! O Christmas Tree!
Thy leaves are so unchanging;
O Christmas Tree! O Christmas Tree!
Thy leaves are so unchanging;
Not only green when summer's here,
But also when it's cold and drear.
O Christmas Tree! O Christmas Tree!
Thy leaves are so unchanging.



Leader: Read the story about the history of the Christmas Tree

One of the most recognizable images of the Christmas season, the Christmas Tree originated in Germany. Martin Luther, in 1530 was moved by the sight of stars shining through the forest of firs near his home that he apparently cut a small one and brought it indoors. He then placed lit candles in its boughs as a salute to the star of Bethlehem. By the 1800's, the Christmas tree custom was widespread throughout many parts of Europe, and was brought to America by the German immigrants in the 1820's.

Hymn: O Christmas Tree, Verse 2 & 3

O Christmas Tree! O Christmas Tree!
Thy candles shine so brightly!
O Christmas Tree! O Christmas Tree!
Thy candles shine so brightly!
From base to summit gay and bright,
There's only splendour for the sight.
O Christmas Tree! O Christmas Tree!
Thy candles shine so brightly.

O Christmas Tree! O Christmas Tree!
How richly God has decked thee!
O Christmas Tree! O Christmas Tree!
Thou bid us true and faithful be,
And trust in God unchangingly.
O Christmas Tree! O Christmas Tree!
How richly God has decked thee!



Leader: Read story of the Birth of Jesus in Bethlehem; Luke 2: 4-14

Quiet moment for the children to thank Mary and Joseph for the new born babe - Jesus.

Leader: May this tree, arrayed in splendour, remind us of the life-giving love of Christ, that we may always rejoice in the new life that shines in our hearts.

All: Amen.

Leader: Lord Jesus, Son of God and Son of Mary.

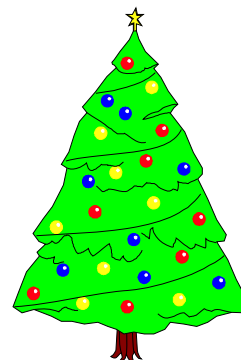
All: *We welcome you, O Lord.*

Leader: Lord Jesus, hope of the shepherds and the poor.

All: *We welcome you, O Lord.*

Leader: Lord Jesus, glory of the angels.

All: *We welcome you, O Lord.*



Leader: Let us pray now for all the children of the world who celebrate Jesus' Birthday by various customs.

Response: *Lord, give light to our hearts.*

For the children of Germany who gave us the beautiful Christmas tree traditions.

Lord, give light to our hearts.

For children who are ill and cannot celebrate Christmas.

Lord, give light to our hearts.

For children who are poor and do not receive gifts.

Lord, give light to our hearts.

For children who share their toys and gifts.

Lord, give light to our hearts.

That this tree of lights may remind us of the needy and neglected children in the world.

Lord, give light to our hearts.

That the joy of Christmas may always be in our homes.

Lord, give light to our hearts.

That the peace of Christ may dwell in our hearts and in the world.

Lord, give light to our hearts.

Hymn: Away In A Manger

Away in a manger,
No crib for a bed
The little Lord Jesus
Laid down His sweet head
The stars in the bright sky
Looked down where he lay
The little Lord Jesus
Asleep on the hay.

The cattle are lowing
The poor baby wakes
But little Lord Jesus
No crying he makes.
I love thee Lord Jesus
Look down from the sky
And stay by my cradle
'Til morning is nigh.

Be near me Lord Jesus,
I ask thee to stay
Close by me forever
And love me I pray
Bless all the dear children
In thy tender care
And take us to heaven
To live with thee there.



Closing Prayer:

Lord God let your blessing come upon us this season of joy and peace. May love and cheer fill our hearts and our homes. May we take great delight each time we see a Christmas tree. Draw us close to Jesus as we celebrate His birthday and may we thank Mary and Joseph for the beautiful gift of Jesus, Emmanuel who dwells with us. Amen

Preparation for the Blessing of the Christmas Tree and the Jesse Tree

Advent begins on the Sunday four weeks before Christmas Day. The word “Advent” means “coming”. It refers to the coming of Jesus, the promised Messiah. The use of a Jesse tree during the Advent season is a great way to “show and tell” the redemption story and the “coming” of the promised Saviour!

The use of the Christmas tree is relatively modern. According to custom, the Christmas tree is set up just before Christmas and may remain in place until the solemnity of Epiphany. In the Catholic school the Christmas tree may be found at the front entrance of the school, the library or outside the principal’s office. The decorations on the Christmas tree should be appropriate to the individual school. Few times are more sacred for a school community than Christmas and the Advent Season. Christmas time is rich in traditions which despite modern commercial exploitation, still stir our hearts and imagination. The Christmas tree, the manger scene, the music and carols, the lights shining in the winter darkness joyfully proclaim the birth of Jesus Christ and call us to come and adore him. Located near the Christmas tree each school should have a Jesse tree.

Jesse trees date back to middle ages. Even some ancient cathedrals have Jesse tree designs in their stained glass windows. The idea for a Jesse tree is inspired from Isaiah 11:1, “*A shoot will come up from the stump of Jesse; from his roots a branch will bear fruit.*” Jesse was the father of King David. In Matthew chapter one, the Messiah, Jesus, is traced from the line of King David, and back to Abraham.

The Jesse tree can be a second Christmas tree, or a large banner with a symbolic tree, that is decorated each week by the children with ornaments or objects that represent Old Testament events from Creation to the Birth of Jesus. The ornaments are traditionally handmade, and are added each day of Advent with explanations of the symbols and a brief verse of Scripture from the story represented. Some Catholic schools combine the idea of a Jesse tree with Christian symbol ornaments, making and using the ornaments to correspond to the story of the Jesse tree. However, the Jesse tree is really an Advent tree anticipating the coming of Christmas. So, it may be more instructive, especially for children, to allow the Jesse tree to represent anticipation during Advent while letting a tree with the symbol ornaments be the celebration of Christmas itself.

MAKING A JESSE TREE

A Jesse tree can be either a banner or a poster on a wall, and the symbols fastened to it; or a tree, with the symbols hung from the branches.

A banner can be as plain or as elaborate as one’s imagination. The one used in the school can be cut from poster board, the design done with markers, and the symbols coloured, made from construction paper, or cut from old Christmas cards or magazines.

The background usually purple or blue (the colours of Advent), with a large cut stump and a single green branch growing from one side. The symbols are attached around the branch, usually with a star as the last symbol at the top. If Christian symbol ornaments are used for the Jesse tree, the primary colours of the ornaments should be the liturgical colours of Christmas, which are gold.

Christmas and Advent can be a spiritual feast for those who live these seasons spiritually. And where better to live them than in our Catholic schools. Christmas and Advent customs appear everywhere today. True symbols that they are, the living traditions of the season bring children and their families together and connect us with our ancient faith. Christmas and Advent seasons uphold so many precious realities presently endangered: birth, children, family, the earth itself. In celebrating Christmas and Advent, keep their message for today in mind.