

3

ADVENT TREES AND CALENDARS

I attended a BYU Education Week class in 2007 by Donna B. Nielsen entitled “Explore the Family Tree of Christ: The Heritage of Jesus in Advent Stories and Symbols.” She discussed the history of Jesse trees as well as advent trees and advent calendars. She then discussed how parents have adapted this idea to help their children remember Christ at Christmas. I was excited to see her examples and shared them with my wife who was familiar with traditional advent calendars. My wife was intrigued with the possibilities for helping our family focus on and remember Christ. Last Christmas we bought a small tree and shared the ideas with our children and grandchildren.

I did an internet search for “Jesse trees” and “advent trees” to learn more.⁸ Jesse trees are based on Isaiah’s prophecy, “A shoot will come up from the stump of Jesse; from his roots a Branch will bear fruit” (NIV Isa. 11:1). Jesse was the father of David and the “Branch” refers to Christ (Jer. 23:5). Pictures of a Jesse tree show a symbolic tree with branches representing the genealogy of Christ. A Jesse tree uses stories and images to remind us of the

⁸ Some fun websites include: <http://www.cresourcei.org/jesse.html>;
<http://www.domestic-church.com/content.dcc/19971201/fridge/fridge1.htm>;
http://www.christiancrafters.com/jesse_tree.html.

ancestors of Christ (e.g., Jesse, David, Ruth) and God's dealings with them.

Advent means *arrival* or *coming* and refers to the season including the four Sundays immediately preceding Christmas. Traditional advent calendars have a picture with twenty-four "doors." Children open one "door" each day from December 1st to the 24th. Behind each "door" is a picture related to the nativity or Christmas symbols (e.g., bells, holly).



Advent Calendar

For advent trees, some families use a small tree while others use a flannel tree. Each day they put on the tree a handmade ornament or inexpensive object representing scriptural events ranging from the creation to the birth of Christ. Ornaments may be pictures or drawings on a piece of thick paper. They can be made and discussed in family home evenings. When children add ornaments to the tree, they explain what the symbol represents to them.

Donna gave examples of ornaments that illustrated several scriptural topics such as the following:

1. Events from the creation to the birth of Jesus.
2. Stories about the ancestors of Jesus (e.g., Jesse, David, Ruth) to make a Jesse Tree.
3. Titles of Christ.
4. Teachings of Christ.
5. Favorite scriptures.
6. Events related to the second coming, or *advent*, of Jesus.

Given this list of possible topics, it was easy to see how a family could make one or more sets of 24 different inexpensive ornaments. Each member of the family could make his or her own ornaments. They could each take turns selecting, explaining, and placing a daily family ornament on the tree, or each person could explain and put on a different daily ornament.



Advent Tree

Nature Ornaments

While serving as a scoutmaster for several years, I had the privilege of camping in the outdoors ten or more nights each year with scouts and other leaders. We hiked and camped in wilderness areas where we saw many types of plants and animals. We enjoyed hiking in the mountains, camping near streams or lakes, and sleeping in snow caves. Scouts learned and practiced outdoor survival skills. At night, away from city lights, we could easily see the stars and the Milky Way. At the end of our campfire programs, we sang the first two verses of “How Great Thou Art” which was “written by Carl Gustav Boberg in Sweden in 1885 ... following a two mile walk through a thunderstorm from a church meeting” ([http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/How_Great_Thou_Art_\(hymn\)\)](http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/How_Great_Thou_Art_(hymn)))).

How Great Thou Art, English trans. Stuart K. Hine

1. O Lord my God! When I in awesome wonder
Consider all the works Thy hands have made.
I see the stars, I hear the rolling thunder,
Thy power through-out the universe displayed.
2. When through the woods and forest glades I wander
And hear the birds sing sweetly in the trees;
When I look down from lofty mountain grandeur
And hear the brook and feel the gentle breeze:

Chorus:

Then sings my soul, my Savior God, to Thee;
How great Thou art, how great Thou art!

We reminded scouts that “the earth, and all things that are upon the face of it, yea, and its motion, yea, and also all the planets which move in their regular form do witness that there is a Supreme Creator” (Alma 30:44). The Lord said “all things are created and made to bear record of me ...; things which are in the heavens above, ...

on the earth, ... in the earth, and ... under the earth” (Moses 6:63). That which bears record of the Lord reminds us of Him. Unfortunately, it is not always easy to understand how *all* things “bear record” of the Lord.

Over the years I have realized that many things we saw and did in the outdoors were used as symbols in the scriptures. The things we see and do in the outdoors can be mnemonics to help us remember Christ and his teachings during the year. Understanding the meanings of nature symbols can help us understand the scriptures.

The remainder of this book is a discussion of twenty-four earthly and heavenly symbols that remind me of Christ. Each picture has a brief explanation that is followed by some other ideas and scriptures that relate Christ to the symbol. Old Testament scriptures refer to Jehovah, the God of the Old Testament, who would come down among the children of men, ... redeem his people” and dwell in the flesh as Jesus Christ (*BD*, s.v. “Jehovah”). The Hebrew word for Jehovah (YHWH) is translated as LORD in the King James Bible.

Each picture or a related object (e.g., rock) could be used as an advent ornament with a brief explanation. You may want to read the short explanation of all of the pictures first, and then read the additional information about each symbol.