

“The Birth of the Christmas Tree” – Ezekiel 17:22-24  
Sermon for Christmas 1  
Our Redeemer Lutheran Church of Emmett, Idaho  
Pastor Michael L. McCoy

---

The Roots of the Christmas Tree.

*So He drove out the man; and at the east of the Garden of Eden He placed the Cherubim, and a flaming sword which turned every way, to guard the way to the Tree of Life - Genesis 4:24.*

Dearly Beloved,

It is reported that the custom of bringing a tree into the house to celebrate the Birth of Jesus began in the 18<sup>th</sup> century, or perhaps, some will argue, it started in Germany in the 16<sup>th</sup> century. Actually, the birth of the Christmas Tree goes back a couple thousand years and the prophet’s promise of that Tree was given almost another thousand years before that Tree’s Birth. However, to find the roots of the Christmas Tree, we must follow the holy thread all the way back to the Garden of Eden. Of course, we can’t go there because of that flaming sword and the Cherubim who stand guard, as well as our inability to time travel. But we can, through the Scriptures, peak over to the other side. There we see the Tree of Life with its fruit of eternal life. Had Adam and Eve eaten the fruit of the Tree of Life they would have lived forever, being taken from Paradise to Heaven.

Alas, it was not so. Our oldest parents neglected the fruit from the Tree of Life. Instead, they ate the forbidden fruit of the Tree of the Knowledge of Good and Evil. Then was ushered in – along with sin – disease, decay, death – affliction, infection, putrefaction – enmity, entropy, endingness. This is our inheritance in time and this is our eternal due. Had God not interceded in both His mercy and grace, we would be eternally dead and dying. That this would not be so, God acted in His mercy. He barred the way to the Tree of Life lest man live forever in continuing corruption. Thus was born the need for the Christmas Tree. In other words, a new way to heaven was necessary. We could not ascend to heaven, so the Lord must come to us and take us to heaven. That this would be so, God acted in His grace. With the need well established, what was now needed was the promise of the Christmas Tree.

Done. Many centuries after the expulsion from the Garden of Eden, the Holy Spirit caused Ezekiel the Prophet to write the Promise. Listen to what was revealed to us from above in the 17<sup>th</sup> Chapter of Ezekiel . . .

*Thus says the Lord JEHOVAH, "I, I will take the highest Sprig from the lofty cedar, and I will set it; I will crop off the topmost of its young twigs a Tender One, and I will plant it on a high and exalted mountain. In the mountain of the height of Israel I will plant it."*

*- Ezekiel 17:22-23a.*

Thus far the Word of the LORD our God.

So, how is one to begin the true story of the Christmas Tree? How about like this: Once upon a time . . . that's always a good way to start. So, listen dear children of God and hear of . . .

### The Planting of the Christmas Tree.

Picture in your mind the tallest tree that you can – the God-Tree, if you will. The towering tree of Heaven's height. The Lord said that He would take the highest Sprig from this tall Tree and crop off from the very heights of this Tree a Tender Twig. This little Twig, this Sprig, the Lord would take from Heaven. He would plant this Tender One on this earth. In other words, the Father would send His Son to this earth, being conceived by the Holy Spirit within the womb of Mary. This Divine Seedling grew in the depths of the woman's clay for nine months. Then this Sprig burst forth in the little town of Bethlehem and continued to grow. Indeed, the Son of God had come to be the way for man to be in Heaven – the Tree rooted on earth and extending to the heights of the Third Heaven. In fact, Jesus is the Way, the Truth and the Life; no one comes to the Father except through Him (John 14:6). He has come to be your Way to Heaven – to be your Christmas Tree.

Hymn 645, 1.

Behold, a Branch is growing  
Of loveliest form and grace,  
As prophets sung, foreknowing;  
It springs from Jesse's race  
And bears one little Flow'r  
In midst of coldest winter,  
At deepest midnight hour.

## The Growth of this Ancient Christmas Tree

The Son of God is eternal. He Who is the Ancient of Days (Daniel 7:9) has become an infant and is born of Mary. He Who never changes, grows up. He Who is Wisdom and knows all things, begins to grow in wisdom and knowledge. He Who created the universe is, even as a baby in a manger, sustaining all creation. From Bethlehem's stable, the infant Christ is giving Joseph the strength to protect Him and granting His mother the milk that feeds Him. There's even more. From the manger the Infant Priest interceded for you with His Father. He still does. While wrapped in His priestly garb of swaddling cloths, the Savior prayed on your behalf and eight days later the first drops of His Divine Blood were shed for you in the fulfillment of the Law and for the remission of all your sins. Our Redeemer and His Redemption, which was planned in eternity and conceived in time, is born in this little alcove known as Bethlehem. So, dearly beloved, *fear not; for behold, I bring you Good News of a great joy which will come to all the people; for to you is born this day in the City of David a Savior Who is Christ the Lord. And this shall be a sign for you: you will find a baby wrapped in swaddling cloths and lying in a manger (Luke 2:10-12).*

Why lies He in such mean estate  
Where ox and ass are feeding?  
Good Christian, fear; for sinners here  
The silent Word is pleading.

Jesus the Christ, the peripatetic preacher, teacher and healer, goes forth. Indeed, the Word goes forth to accomplish God's purpose. He will not return to the Father void. The Son of God calls men to be disciples in the Ministry of the Word. In a foretaste of Heaven's final healing, Jesus heals the sick and raises the dead. He calls men, women, youth, children and infants into the Kingdom of Heaven. The Savior forgives sins and calls all to repentance; that is, to confess their sins and to look to Him for forgiveness, pardon and peace. Jesus confronts those who reject, deny, teach and condemn the doctrine upon which His Church stands or falls – salvation by grace through faith in Him. The Teacher catechizes His people on the proper distinction of Law and Gospel, and gives practical internships to those men whom He would send out as Apostles.

Those who followed Him, both His faithful disciples and His growling enemies grew in numbers. The crowds swelled as the Church increased. Or, as Ezekiel the Prophet wrote: *Thus says the Lord JEHOVAH, “. . . He shall bring forth boughs,*

*and bear fruit, and be a majestic Cedar. Under Him will dwell all birds of every sort; in the shadow of His branches they will nest” – Ezekiel 17:23b.*

Joy to the world, the Savior reigns!  
Let men their songs employ,  
While fields and floods, rocks, hills, and plains,  
Repeat the sounding joy, Repeat the sounding joy,  
Repeat, repeat, the sounding joy.

### The Cutting and Death of the Christmas Tree.

But recall that the Lord cut this little Sprig from the top of the God-Tree and sent Him down to earth. The Messiah came to give His Life so that we who were dead would have His Life. Behold how that would come about. The men of this dead and dying world planted a tree with no leaves. It had but two fruitless limbs. Upon this world's tree the Christmas Tree is fastened with nails. Yes, the Lord allows His loving arms to be stretched forth and superimposed on the cross beam. His sweat soaks into the lifeless tree as His sin-atoning Blood stains the wood. Jesus petitions the Father for forgiveness – your forgiveness – as He provides payment for the same. Suspended between earth and heaven, our Redeemer looks down upon all people as one looks upon the trees of the field from a lofty height.

The Lord has brought down this lofty Tree in order to exalt the low trees. The Son of God has come down to be brought down in order to life you up and exalt you. The green Tree of Heaven was brought down and dried out in death in order to that the dead trees of this world might be re-generated and given life. The Christ suffered, thirsted and has His Life drained from Him so you could be born again unto eternal Life in Heaven. Actually, Ezekiel the Prophet wrote it much better. Listen. *Thus says the Lord JEHOVAH, “. . . And all the trees of the field shall know that I, the Lord, have brought down the high Tree, have exalted the low tree, have dried up the green Tree, and have made the dry tree to flourish: I, the Lord, have spoken and have done it.”*

### The Dead Christmas Tree is Buried.

What use is a dead Christmas tree? Its heartwood is dry and its lifeless limbs hang down. So, a couple of men take the Body of Jesus down from the cross and place it in the depths of the earth. They roll a stone over the entrance to the tomb and go home. Listen, for the Good Friday congregation sings . . .

O Tree of beauty, Tree of light,  
O Tree with royal purple dight;  
Elect, on Whose triumphal breast  
Those holy limbs should find their rest.  
(TLH 168, 4)

And there is the season of rest as the Body of our Redeemer reclines with His arms folded on His breast with its broken heart echoing the silence of the tomb.

The Christmas Tree Springs Forth and Ascends into Heaven.

Joy of joys. Christ rose from the dead. This little Sprig, clipped from Heaven above and buried by man below, bursts forth from the ground on Easter morning. Jesus is alive and He is risen. Then, wonder of wonders, forty days later, the Christmas Tree ascends to the heights of Heaven once again. Still rooted on earth it extends to Heaven where It had been from eternity. Indeed, Jesus, Who is with us always, even to the end of the world, has ascended into Heaven and sits at the right hand of the Father Who sent Him.

O Christmas Tree, O Christmas Tree,  
How lovely are Thy Branches.

The Branches of the Christmas Tree.

Oh, yes, about those branches. Do you not see them? They begin at the base of the Tree and are like a ladder with rungs that extends beyond, pierces the firmament and ends in heaven. But lo, these are not rungs for us to climb the ladder to heaven. We are not able to climb higher, higher. We could not ascend to Him. He has come down to us. God still does. The branches are the ways in which the Lord graciously comes down to us. How heavy are these boughs, being weighed down with one gift of God after another. These are the means of grace. Baptism. Absolution. The Gospel. The Lord's Supper. Jesus comes down to us and by the Holy Spirit and His Word, He calls us His own and sustains us in this life. Then, on the very best day of your life – the one that ends your earthly struggles here – the Lord's angels who do His bidding will come to take you to Himself in Heaven. Ah, yes, Christmas in Heaven. And behold! The Tree of Life will be there – that one in the Garden of Eden. How wonderful that is and how wonderful it will forever be as we live happily ever after. Amen.