



Jesse Tree Bible-Story Guide

Person

Scripture

Symbol

Adam and Eve	Genesis 3:1-24	an apple
Noah	Genesis 6:11—9:17 (or 8:21—9:17) (or Genesis 6:5-9, 7:7-16, 8:13-17, 9:12-16)	ark or rainbow
Abraham and Sarah	Genesis 12:1-7, 15:1-6	camel, tent or star
Isaac	Genesis 22:1-19	ram
Rebecca	Genesis 25:19-34; and 27	a well
Jacob	Genesis 28:10-22 or 32: 25-31	a ladder
Rachel and Leah	Genesis 29:15-30	a veil
Joseph	Genesis 37:3-4 and 17-36; 50:15-21 (or Genesis 37:1—45:28)	coat of many colors
Moses	Exodus 3:1-15 Exodus 20:1-21	bush Ten Commandments (tablets)
Rahab	Joshua 2:1-21	rope
Joshua	Joshua 6:1-20	trumpet
Deborah	Judges 4:1-16	palm tree or tent peg & mallet
Gideon	Judges 7:1-8, 15-20	torch
Samson	Judges 13:1-5; 15:14-17	jawbone
Ruth	Ruth chapters 1—4	anchor (for faithfulness) or grains of wheat
Hannah	1 Samuel 1:1-20, 24-28; 2:18-20	small robe
Samuel	1 Samuel 3:1-19; 16:1-13	oil
David	1 Samuel 16:1-16	stringed instrument or slingshot or crown (for king)
Solomon	1 Kings 3:4-15	crown or scepter
Elijah	1 Kings 19:3-13; 2 Kings 2:1-5, 9-13	chariot
Jonah	Jonah 1:1-17; 2:10; 3:1-3	whale
Isaiah	Isaiah 9:1-6 and 11:1-9	branch or lion and lamb
Ezekiel	Ezekiel 37:1-14 and 24-28	bones
Esther	Esther 2:17-18; 3:8-15; 4:7-16; 7:10	crown
Daniel	Daniel 1:1-4; 6:1-28; 7:13-14	lion
Malachi	Malachi 4:1-6	sun
Elizabeth	Luke 1:5-25	a home, angel, temple or altar
John the Baptist	Luke 1:57-80	shell and water or a reed
Joseph	Matthew 1:18-25	hammer or saw
Mary	Luke 1:26-38, 39-56 Luke 2:1-14	lily manger



Background Information

Many of us have photographs of parents, grandparents, great-aunts and uncles, and great-grandparents. Some we actually knew, many we know only through stories. People who make up our family tree hold a fascination for us.

So, too, the people who make up our family of faith tell us much about who we are and how we are related to God. As Christians we are part of the extended family of Jesus of Nazareth. His family tree is the story of salvation history, the story of a people chosen, spared and redeemed by God.

Matthew's genealogy (Mt 1:1-17), which we hear at Christmastime each year, tells us that Jesus was the son of David, Israel's greatest king, and back even further, the son of Abraham, the first patriarch of the Hebrew people, the first person called by God. Out of this family line, God would take flesh and live among the people of earth.

From medieval times, Christians have been fascinated with visual representations of the family tree of Jesus. A stained glass window at Chartres Cathedral in France, built in the early 13th century, depicts a Jesus tree, representing the family tree of Jesse, the father of King David, that blossoms in the birth of Jesus the Messiah, the "Son of David." This ancient tradition of the Jesse tree was revived in the mid-20th century as an Advent practice.

--From The Jesse Tree by Diane Houdek. Catholic Update, November 1977, C1197

The Jesse tree represents Jesus' family tree. The name is taken from Isaiah 11:1, in which Jesus is referred to as a shoot coming up from the stump of Jesse, the father of David. The ornaments on the Jesse tree tell of Jesus' ancestors, and of the events leading to Jesus' birth. While it is hard to establish when and where the custom of the Jesse tree began, it most likely started in the Middle Ages as a way to teach Bible stories. A Jesse tree is a bare branch that holds symbols of people from the Old Testament who waited and prepared for Jesus. Tradition has it that the love and preparation given the Jesse Tree would make flowers burst forth from the branch. This is why a bare branch, rather than an evergreen, is used.

Roots are important parts of a tree. As people, we need to know our roots, as well. Often, we run from one thing to another without reflecting on where we have been or where we are going. As we create a Jesse tree during this Advent season, let us pause and look at the great people of faith upon whose shoulders we stand.

Thanks to John Roberto for sharing this resource.