

The Tree of Jesse

A Traditional Lesson Plan for Home, Groups, or Church School

Our spiritual family tree is named after Jesse, the father of King David. “The royal line of David is like a tree that has been cut down; but just as new branches sprout from the stump, so a new king (Christ) will arise from David’s descendants.” The name “Jesse” is found in the Old Testament:

There shall come forth a shoot from the stump of Jesse, and a branch shall grow out of his roots. And the Spirit of the Lord shall rest upon him, the spirit of wisdom and understanding, the spirit of counsel and might, the spirit of knowledge and the fear of the Lord. And his delight shall be in the fear of the Lord. (Isaiah 11:1–3)

According to the Bible, Jesse had as many as eight sons, the youngest of whom was David, who became the second king of Israel after Saul.



Since the 11th century, the Tree of Jesse has been portrayed in manuscript illuminations, wall paintings, wood-carvings and stone, including tombstones, stained-glass windows, floor tiles and embroidery. Jesse is usually shown lying down with a tree rising from his body. The ancestors of Christ are portrayed in the tree’s branches, with the prophets and Christ at the top.

MATERIALS

- Large craft paper, colored decorative papers, glue, scissors, paints

OR

- Trimmed branches from dormant trees anchored in a container with rocks (or quick-setting concrete)
- Colored decorative paper, paints, scissors and string
- Icon of Christ or the Nativity of the Lord
- For more images, readings, coloring pages, and ornament ideas for an Advent Jesse Tree, including files of images that can be printed on shrink plastic, check out Festal Celebrations (<http://festalcelebrations.wordpress.com/2007/12/27/jesse-tree-project-2008/>)

INSTRUCTIONS

During each of the four weeks before Christmas (i.e., Advent), study one Old Testament sign of Jesus and two ancestors of Jesus; see the chart on the following for the progression.

- Create a tree display, either from craft paper to hang on a wall, or three dimensionally with branches anchored in a container with rocks.
- Have students create “leaves” from their own handprints.
- Create symbolic ornaments each week to decorate the tree.
- Have students develop and create ornaments with personal symbols, such as their names, descriptive words, or collages—however they feel led to express Christ in their own lives—and add these to the tree.
- During the last session (or on the Feast of the Nativity of the Lord itself), add an icon of Christ to the tree trunk.

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Jesse Tree Chart

The Ancestry of Jesus

Ancestor	Symbol	Scripture	Meaning
Adam & Eve	Apple	Genesis 2:15–22	The happy fault that brought Jesus
David	Key	Isaiah 62:3, 11–12; Isaiah 22:22; 1 Samuel 16:23; Numbers 24:17	Royal ancestry of Jesus; authority, power to open heaven's door; joys of heaven, hope, God's leading
Jacob	Ladder/Angel	Genesis 28:12–17	Link between heaven and earth
Jesse	Root/Flower	Isaiah 11:1–19	Jesus is culmination of Jesse's line
Noah	Ark/Rainbow	Genesis 6:8, 9:14–17	Jesus, our ark of safety, promise, hope
Rachael	Water jug	Genesis 29:15–20	Working on God's promises, faithfulness
Ruth	Wheat sheaf	Ruth 1 & 2	Faithful ancestor by choice
Judah	Lion, scepter	Genesis 49:9–10	Kingship, courage

Old Testament Signs (“Typos”) of Jesus

Typos	Symbol	Scripture	Meaning
Elijah	Fire & water	1 Kings 18:30–39	The prophets, love, wisdom
	Jug & bread	1 Kings 19:3–8	Nourishing word of God
Jonah	Man in whale	Jonah 2:1	Jesus's resurrection prefigured
Joseph	Colorful coat	Genesis 37:3, 45:24	Trust and forgiveness, integrity
Moses	Tablets	Exodus 24:12, 16–18	God teaches the people
	Burning bush	Exodus 3:1–8	God's presence; holy ground; mission