

## The Best Gift at Christmas Is Hung on A Tree!

My favorite Christmas tradition is the Christmas Tree (go ahead and put that picture up).

Finding it, cutting it down, dragging it, decorating it, enjoying it.

In my family it's my job to put up the tree, & then hang the lights & the garland. And then together as a family we hang the ornaments as we listen to Elvis' Christmas CD. As we decorate the tree our kids always ask us about certain ornaments. Many of our ornaments have a story behind them and our kids want to hear those stories every year. So as each one is hung on the tree we remind each other of the meaning & significance each one has.

Examples:

For the Toot family, Christmas isn't Christmas without the Christmas tree & all that hangs on it!

But tonight I want to share with you 2 other trees that are of even greater significance to the Christmas story than the Christmas tree. These 2 particular trees are truly what makes Christmas, Christmas!

The first one goes all the way back to when God created the world. God created man and woman, and placed them in the Garden of Eden to work it and to take care of all that He had created. God had given them everything in the garden to enjoy except one thing. In Genesis 2:17 the Bible tells us that in the middle of the garden was a tree, named the "tree of the knowledge of good and evil" (Go ahead and put that image up). This tree had quite the ornaments – fruit that was pleasing to the eye, good for food and it had the ability to make one wise (atleast that is what Adam & Eve were led to believe when they were deceived by the serpent). But, God commanded them "To not eat of the fruit from this tree!" They didn't know why God said "no", they just simply knew that this tree represented a divide between God, the Creator, & man, His creation! Well, you know how the story goes. We don't want what's been freely given to us, we want what we can't have, and that's exactly what Adam & Eve thought, and that's exactly what Adam and Eve did – they took and ate from the fruit of the forbidden tree, and when they partook of it, Scripture tells us that they plunged themselves into a state of ruin. All that God created, all that was declared

good at creation had now been stained by sin. The effect of this we feel even to this day. Scripture tells us in Romans 8 that to this day creation is still growing for the day when all of creation will be redeemed from this curse.

We have been singing of this reality these past 3 weeks when we sang "Joy to the World." Verse 3 declares – "No more let sin and sorrow grow. Nor thorns infest the ground. He comes to make his blessings flow. Far as the curse is found, far as the curse is found, far as far as the curse is found!"

It was the curse that originated with the eating of forbidden fruit, from this forbidden tree, and it caused the fall of all of humanity from that day forward. The brokenness that still plagues this world is a result of this great disobedience.

What this tree in the Garden represents, even to this day, is the very reason Jesus had to come to earth in the first place – it is truly the reason for Christmas as we know it – the world, all of creation, needed a savior, needed someone to redeem what had been lost and broken in the Garden. Jesus would be that savior. He would be the one who would redeem those under the curse of sin. So, without this tree and the failure it represents Christmas – the coming of a savior, would not have happened. This tree, though it represents a tragic story, it is of utmost significance to the true meaning of Christmas. And it ultimately points to the most significant tree of this season, the most significant tree of every season.

Galatians 3:13 – Christ redeemed us from the curse of the law by becoming a curse for us – for it is written, "Cursed is everyone who is hanged on a tree."

1 Peter 2:24 – He Himself, Christ, bore our sins in his body on the tree, that we might die to sin and live to righteousness. By his wounds you have been healed.

The most significant tree at Christmas is the cross (put up the image on the screen, and if that isn't real enough for you, how about this one?)! Now you might be saying, "that's not a tree!" Well it is made of wood, that comes from trees, and it kind of has a shape like a tree, but even more so it is the antidote for the curse that came about from that first tree, the tree of the knowledge of good and evil." God declared that man was cursed because of

that first sin, the ground was cursed, all of creation was cursed because of Adam and Eve's failure at the tree in the garden, but God provided a way for that curse to be lifted, for that curse to be given to another in our place. Where death came about at the foot of one tree, life could be brought about at the foot of another – at the foot of the cross.

If we were to look back to the story in Genesis when Adam and Eve fell and the curse was given to them, another tree was mentioned there as well. In Genesis 3:22 there is a mention of a "tree of life." We don't know much about this tree because Scripture doesn't say much about it except that it was a tree that Adam & Eve were no longer able to reach out and touch and enjoy the fruit from because they were banished from the garden. The reality of living forever, Eternal life, was removed from Adam & Eve's grasp. This tree of life represented what had been lost and what they, from that day forward, were forbidden to partake from. We don't know much more than that, except for when the New Testament ties eternal life, that which had been lost in the Garden of Eden to something, to someone else. This Jesus that was born in Bethlehem would bring about eternal life for all those who would believe in Him. Believe "that this Jesus came to this earth from God, he lived the life each one of us have failed to live, a sinless life, and then he died the death each one of us deserves, on a tree with the curse of sin upon him. Then in His rising again from the dead He conquered the power of sin and death, he broke the chains of the curse passed down from Adam and Eve and He secured redemption for those who would embrace Him as their savior and Lord. This is the good news of what the coming of Christ, what "Christmas" truly ushers in. And it was all made possible because of this tree, this cross. Let me ask you, What is the focal point of your Christmas? What tree is of greatest importance to you this night? Is it the one that stands in your family/living room all decorated with presents beneath it? Is it the tree of the knowledge of good and evil that explains why Christmas sometimes becomes the most selfish, self-centered and chaos ridden time of the year? Or is it the tree that sits at the very focal point of all of history, the tree that makes salvation possible for all of us? The tree that truly is the "tree of life" – and it is no longer out of reach for us! The one who was hung upon Calvary's tree, the one born to us this day in the city of David is Christ the Lord our savior. There is no greater Christmas tree than this one. The Christ of Christmas was born to be hung

on this tree. I know that sounds harsh, but the good news of great joy that is for all people is that this savior has been born to us, and in order for him to save us, He must first pay the debt we owe, and that debt is the curse of death itself. Scripture tells us, For the wages of sin is death, but the gift of God is eternal life through Jesus Christ our Lord.

You see the good news that Christmas ushers in is that The curse of sin upon us will be paid by Jesus Christ, and eternal life is ours by faith in Him. Christmas is all about Christ, the Christ that was hung on a tree for you and for me. You see the best gift of Christmas is not found under the tree, it is the gift of the one who hung on a tree. The best gift of Christmas is Christ Himself. Have you received Him? Is He your Lord and Savior? This Christmas can be the best Christmas ever, because it can be the one when the greatest gift of all can be yours. It's free, but it cost Him/Christ His life. Christmas is not Christmas without the cross. This is why on this night we partake of Communion. For in it we look back to that Calvary tree, the source of our salvation. We also look to the resurrected Christ today, in order that we might be strengthened for the fight against the lingering effects of the curse all around us in this world. We also look to the future when we will celebrate the coming reality of all that Christ secured for us in His resurrection. Jesus Christ hung upon this tree, but He is no longer there. He has risen and He is preparing a place for us in glory. This is what Christmas is all about.

Let's Pray. Lord, Tomorrow we will be sitting around a Christmas tree and admiring it's ornaments and beauty, and we will unwrap the gifts beneath it. But let us not do that until we take the time to remember these other two very significant trees that make what we celebrate at Christmas what it truly is. The Tree of the knowledge of good and evil, with it's ornaments of fruit brought forth death, but the tree of life – the cross, with it's ornament of Christ Himself, has made eternal life possible. The good news of Christmas, for all people of all places & times is dependent upon this one tree and who was hung upon it! Let this Christmas be all about Him and let Calvary's tree, the cross, be the true Christmas tree that is the focal point of not only this holiday season, but the focal point of our entire lives. Remind us of this good news of great joy once again through this sacrament that we are about to partake of. In the precious name of Jesus we pray. Amen.