

Jesse Tree Symbols and Stories

The Jesse Tree image comes from Isaiah 11:1: "A shoot shall come out of the stock of Jesse, and a branch shall grow out of his roots." Jesse was the father of King David. God promised King David that a descendent of his would reign forever. Jesus, the King of Kings, is that son of King David. The Jesse Tree has taken many different artistic forms over the centuries, but all have symbols representing the people, prophecies, and events leading up to the birth of Jesus, the fulfillment of God's plan for the salvation of the world.

<i>Symbol/Story</i>	<i>Scripture</i>	<i>Meaning</i>
<p>Abraham's Tent/Stars</p> 	<p>Genesis 12: 1-7, 15: 1-6</p>	<p>The Angel of the Lord met with Abraham outside his tent and said, "Look up at the sky and count the stars..." "So shall your offspring be." Then he said to him, "I will make you into a great nation, and I will bless you... and all peoples on earth will be blessed through you." Jesus a descendant of Abraham born under the star of Bethlehem brings the greatest blessings to the world: forgiveness of sin, eternal life, and his continuous presence through the Holy Spirit.</p>
<p>Joshua's Horn</p> 	<p>Joshua 1:1-11, 6:1-20</p>	<p>The Lord called Joshua to lead the Israelites into the promise land. "Be strong and courageous, because you will lead these people to inherit the land I swore to their ancestors to give them." With the trumpet blast of the ram's horn the city of Jericho fell marking Israel's entrance into the Promise Land. One day we too will hear the final trumpet blast and Jesus will lead us to the eternal promise land, the Kingdom of Heaven just as Joshua led the people of God into the Promise Land.</p>
<p>Rahab's Scarf</p> 	<p>Joshua 2</p>	<p>When Joshua's men came to spy on the city of Jericho, Rahab, who believed in the God of Israel, hid them in her home. The Israelite spies told her to hang a scarlet cord from her window so that she and her household would be spared because of her courageous faith. When the Israelites attacked, the city fell and Rahab's family joined the people of Israel. Because of her faith and hope in God she also became the great-great grandmother of David, and a direct ancestor of Jesus. The scarlet cord is a sign of hope leading to Jesus.</p>

<p>Joseph's Coat</p> 	<p>Genesis 37:1-4; 45:4-15</p>	<p>The patriarch Jacob had 10 sons, but Joseph was his favorite. As a sign of his favor Jacob gave Joseph a beautiful coat of many colors. Joseph's brothers became jealous and sold him to a caravan of slave traders who sold him in Egypt. There, Joseph was falsely accused and imprisoned, but, despite his sufferings, he never lost faith in the faithful God of Israel. After Joseph brilliantly interpreted one of Pharaoh's dreams, Pharaoh made him prime minister of Egypt. During a great famine, Joseph's brothers came to Egypt seeking grain so their families would not die. When they came before the prime minister, they did not realize that he was their brother Joseph. Instead of seeking revenge against his brothers, Joseph was moved to help them and forgave them. He brought his aged father Jacob and his whole family to move to a prosperous part of Egypt where they could thrive. This Joseph foreshadows a time when the holy family would escape into Egypt. Joseph brought Mary and the baby Jesus to Egypt to protect them from danger in Israel when King Herod sought to kill the infant Jesus.</p>
<p>Moses & the 10 Commandments</p> 	<p>Exodus 20</p>	<p>On Mt. Sinai God called Moses to receive the 10 Commandments - the 10 laws by which Israel was to live peaceably and grow into a nation loving God and sharing God's love with the world. When Jesus was asked which law was the most important, He answered, "<i>Love the Lord your God with all your heart and with all your soul and with all your strength and with all your mind</i>"; and, <i>'Love your neighbor as yourself.'</i>" With these two commands Jesus summed up how to live lovingly - love God, love others. This is the Law of Love.</p>
<p>Queen Esther</p> 	<p>The Book of Esther</p>	<p>During the time of the Jewish Exile in the Kingdom of Persia, there was a beautiful young Jewish woman named Esther. She was crowned queen after she won the heart of King Ahasuerus. Haman, one of the King's ministers who hated the Jews, convinced the king to give him the power to kill all "disloyal" subjects. Queen Esther prayed, fasted, and spoke to the king to intercede for the lives of her people, the Jews. She was able to reveal the treachery of Haman to the king. Queen Esther saved the lives of all the Jews living in the kingdom.</p>

<p>Apple and the Serpent</p> 	<p>Genesis 2 & 3</p>	<p>The apple and serpent represent the story of Adam and Eve. The serpent enticed Eve to eat the forbidden fruit which she then shared with Adam. From the very beginning God planned a way to bring forgiveness of sin and reconciliation between humankind and God: Jesus!</p>
<p>Resurrection Church</p> 	<p>Psalms 122:1</p>	<p>What does our Catholic faith community mean to us? So many things: singing and praying at Mass; celebrating baptisms and weddings; making friends in youth groups; finding fellowship in prayer and gardening, learning more about the Bible; enjoying community meals; giving to people in need; supporting one another during difficult times; sharing holy days and seasons. And the center of all of this? Jesus Christ! During the Advent season we celebrate our spiritual ancestors and work to open our hearts more widely to Jesus and the salvation he brings.</p>
<p>Ruth and the Wheat</p> 	<p>Book of Ruth</p>	<p>In the days of the Judges, an Israelite widow, Naomi, mourned the death of her husband and two sons during a terrible famine. She moved back to Bethlehem with her Moabite daughter-in-law Ruth. Ruth promised Naomi, "Where you go I will go, and where you stay I will stay. Your people will be my people and your God my God." Ruth married Naomi's kinsman, Boaz, whom she met in a wheat field, and became King David's great-grandmother and a direct ancestor of Jesus.</p>
<p>David's Harp</p> 	<p>2 Samuel 7:11-16</p>	<p>King David was a shepherd when God called him to be king of Israel. He was also a musician (he played the harp) and composed many Psalms. God called him "a man after my own heart" because David always loved God. Because of this, God made a very special promise to him: "The Lord declares to you that the Lord himself will establish a house for you: When your days are over and you rest with your ancestors, I will raise up your offspring to succeed you, your own flesh and blood, and I will establish his kingdom. He is the one who will build a house for my Name, and I will establish the throne of his kingdom forever. I will be his father, and he will be my son.... Your house and your kingdom will endure forever before me; your throne will be established forever." This king who would reign forever is Jesus, a descendent of King David.</p>

<p>Solomon's Temple</p> 	<p>1 Kings 6:11-14</p>	<p>King David had a son named Solomon. When Solomon became king of Israel he built a temple for the Lord. The Lord said to Solomon, "If you follow my decrees, observe my laws and keep all my commands and obey them, I will fulfill through you the promise I gave to David your father." The promise made to David and Solomon was that their lineage and throne would be established forever and that a king would come after them who would reign forever: Jesus, the King of Kings.</p>
<p>Joseph's Tools</p> 	<p>Matthew 1: 19-25</p>	<p>Joseph was Mary's husband and Jesus' earthly father, and a carpenter. He used these tools to make practical, strong, and beautiful things, and he taught Jesus how to use them, along with a manly example of Holy Chastity (represented by the lily). Jesus shows us how to use God's tools for a strong and beautiful life: prayer, the Mass and Sacraments, care for the suffering, obedience, and chastity.</p>
<p>Creation of the Earth</p> 	<p>Genesis 1 & 2</p>	<p>"In the beginning God created the heavens and the earth." God spoke and the world and all that exists came into being. God is Love and he chose to create our world, you and me and all the people of the world so that He could love each of us. God created man and woman from the elements of the earth and breathed life into them so that they could love God in return and love one another and all of creation.</p>
<p>Star over Bethlehem</p> 	<p>Matthew 2: 1-12 Luke 2: 8-14</p>	<p>The prophet Micah foretold that Jesus would be born in Bethlehem ("House of Bread"). Many people were expecting that a great king was coming, and three very special wise men in the east were waiting for a sign, so God caused a special star to guide them to the baby Jesus. This special star has come to be known as the Star of Bethlehem because it led these three men to Bethlehem and to baby Jesus.</p>
<p>Nativity at Bethlehem</p> 	<p>Luke 2</p>	<p>When the Roman government wanted to count all the people, Joseph and Mary went to Bethlehem, the City of David, since Joseph was a descendent of David. When Mary and Joseph got there, they found that all of the inns were full. The only place that they could find was in a stable with the animals. When Jesus was born Mary wrapped him in blankets and used a manger for his crib. Jesus, the Bread from Heaven, was born in the City of Bread and put in a feeding trough!</p>

<p>Star of David</p> 		<p>The Star of David is made of two triangles, one on top of the other. Legend tells us that this was the shape of the frame that formed David's shield. He could stretch leather and wrap it over these triangles to form a circular shield. Therefore, this shape has come to be known as David's Shield and we can see it today on the flag of Israel.</p>
<p>Alpha-Omega & Chi Rho</p> 	<p>Revelation 1:8, 22:13</p>	<p>These three symbols are very important to all Christians, as all three represent something about God. The Alpha (A) and The Omega (Ω) are the beginning and the end of the Greek alphabet. God is the beginning and the ending of all things, the Alpha and the Omega. We call Jesus "Christ" which means "Anointed One of God" ("Messiah" in Hebrew). The Chi Rho are the first two letters of the word Christ in the Greek alphabet. In English it would be CH but in Greek the word for Christ is "Cristos", so CR or Chi Rho (XP).</p>
<p>The Lily of Mary</p> 	<p>Song of Songs 2: 1-2</p>	<p>The Lily of Mary has special meaning for Christians. It represents the annunciation to Mary by the Angel Gabriel that she would be the mother of Jesus the Savior. The lily also represents the Virgin Mary's purity. Jesus is the first born of the dead through his resurrection, so the lily represents Easter as well.</p>
<p>Noah's Ark</p> 	<p>Genesis 6-8</p>	<p>Noah was a righteous man and God's faithful servant. When God got ready to send a flood to cleanse the earth of evil, he told Noah to build a big boat called an Ark to save himself, his family, and two of every kind of animal on the earth. After the flood God promised Noah that he would never again send a flood to destroy the earth. As a sign of that promise God put the rainbow in the sky so that every time we see it we can remember God's faithfulness, love, and his promise to Noah.</p>
<p>John the Baptist Shell</p> 	<p>Luke 1:41 John 1: 19-30</p>	<p>John the Baptist, son of Zechariah and Elizabeth and cousin of Jesus, was sent by God to prepare the people for the coming of Jesus by calling them to repent and to be baptized in water. Jesus told John to baptize him, even though he was sinless. Jesus taught his disciples to baptize in the name of the Father and of the Son and of the Holy Spirit, and the Church continues this today. In baptism we receive the Holy Spirit, just as Jesus did at his baptism, showing that we are Children of God.</p>

Daniel in the Lion's Den



Daniel 6:1-28

Daniel, a very wise and holy Israelite, was highly respected by the Babylonian kings he served. However, some Babylonians became jealous of him and tricked the king into proclaiming that no one could pray for 30 days. The punishment for disobeying this order was to be fed to the lions. Daniel, who had great faith, prayed to God anyway and the king was forced to cast him into the lions' den. But the next morning, the king found Daniel safe and untouched! Daniel told the king that God had closed the lions' mouths. The king then decreed that Daniel's God be revered throughout the kingdom, proclaiming: "For he is the living God, enduring forever; his kingdom shall not be destroyed and his dominion shall be without end. He is a deliverer and savior, working signs and wonders in heaven and on earth..."

Jonah and the Whale



Jonah 1-3
Matthew 12: 38-42

God sent Jonah to warn the people of Nineveh that their wickedness would lead them to destruction, but Jonah didn't want to go to Nineveh and ran away to sea. God had a whale swallow him and carry him in his belly for three days to Nineveh, then was spit out on the beach. Jonah warned the people of Nineveh and they repented and were saved from destruction. When some people asked Jesus to prove that he was from God, he said, "An evil and unfaithful generation seeks a sign but no sign will be given it except the sign of Jonah the prophet. Just as Jonah was in the belly of a whale for three days and three nights, so will the Son of Man be in the heart of the earth for three days and three nights." After Jesus died on the cross he was buried, descended to the dead and rose again on the third day!

Jacob's Ladder



Genesis 28:10-22

Jacob, the son of Isaac and the grandson of Abraham, was on a journey and lay down to sleep for the night, resting his head on a stone. In a dream he saw a ladder going from earth to heaven with angels going up and down. Jacob used the stone to build an altar to God there, saying, "Surely the Lord is in this place!" Jesus Christ, Emmanuel, "God with us", is the holy Ladder that we climb to get to our heavenly home with God.

<p>Tears of Exile</p> 	<p>Jeremiah 23:5-6; 31:31-34</p>	<p>Jeremiah was a prophet who lived during a difficult time in the history of the Israelites, which is why he is known as the "weeping prophet." Surrounded by false prophets, he opposed with all his strength the idolatry and wickedness, for which he suffered public disgrace and imprisonment. Despite his efforts, the king listened to the false prophets, resulting in the destruction of Jerusalem and the exile of the Israelites for 70 years. However, we remember the words God spoke to Jeremiah of the coming of the New Covenant: "The days are coming, declares the Lord, when I will raise up for David a righteous branch... This is the name by which he will be called: The Lord our Righteous Savior."</p>
<p>Passover Lamb</p> 	<p>Exodus 12-14</p>	<p>When the Israelites were still enslaved in Egypt, Moses gathered his people and ordered each household to kill a perfect lamb. They were to put the blood of the lamb on the door frames of their houses. This would be a sign for the Angel of Death to "pass over" these households, keeping them safe from God's punishment of the Egyptians for keeping them enslaved. This was the first Passover. From then on, the Jews sacrificed a new, unblemished lamb each year for all God had done for them and as an atonement offering for all their sins. This sacrifice of the Pascal lamb was fulfilled in Christ, the "Lamb who takes away the sins of the world."</p>
<p>Zechariah's Shawl</p> 	<p>Luke 1</p>	<p>Zechariah, a priest in Jerusalem, was in the holiest part of the Temple when the angel Gabriel revealed to him that he and his wife, Elizabeth, would have a son. Because they were very old, Zechariah doubted Gabriel and lost his voice. Elizabeth became pregnant and exclaimed her gratitude to God for blessing her. When their son was born they named him John (meaning "The Lord is gracious"). Immediately, Zechariah could speak again and proclaimed the beautiful prayer we know as The Benedictus. Every morning the Church prays these words, blessing the Lord, the God of Israel, who visited and set the people free.</p> <p>These are the perfect words to prepare us to welcome the celebration of the coming of Jesus, just as Zechariah's son John prepared the people for Jesus.</p>

The Ram in the Bush



Genesis 22

God had blessed Abraham and Sarah with a child in their old age. Then, unexpectedly, God sent an angel to Abraham telling him to sacrifice his son, Isaac. As painful and confusing as this message was, Abraham obeyed without hesitation because of his trust in God. He went to the mountain chosen by God with his servants carrying the fire and Isaac carrying the wood to be burned. When Isaac asked his father where the lamb for the burnt offering was, Abraham replied that God would provide. Just before Abraham sacrificed Isaac, an angel stopped him and he looked up to see a ram caught by its horns in a nearby bush. God did provide the offering and gave Abraham a divine reward for his obedience and trust: to be the father of a great nation of peoples. God's only son Jesus carried the wood of the cross up Mount Calvary and was sacrificed for our sins so that we could live with him forever.

The Ark of the Covenant



Exodus 25: 10-22; 37: 1-9

By God's precise instructions given to Moses, the Israelites made a chest, called an ark, to hold the stone tablets of the Ten Commandments of God along with some of the manna, the Bread from Heaven that God gave them during their 40 years in the desert. The Israelites, God's chosen people, considered these the most precious gifts given to them by God, and the Ark of the Covenant was kept in the most holy place in the Temple. It was a sign of God's Real Presence and love for his people.

We address Mary as the Ark of the Covenant because she, like the Ark of the Old Testament, held the most precious gift of the New Covenant - Jesus. Jesus is the Law of God made human, and the Bread from Heaven given to us in the Eucharist to keep us spiritually alive on our life journey, and remains with us as God's Real Presence in the tabernacles of our churches.