



# Christmas

## 2010

Over two-thousand years ago, Mary and Joseph traveled to Bethlehem where their infant Son was born. This incredible journey required that they both live out a deep faith. As Catholics, we too are on a journey of faith – both as individuals and as a community. During the Christmas season, may we draw strength from the examples set for us by our parish patrons, Saint Mary and Saint Joseph. As we continue together our own journey in faith, let us never forget that God is with us.

Pope Benedict XVI writes: “The one who has hope lives differently, the one who hopes has been granted the gift of new life.”

Christmas is a season of hope. Children hope for presents, adults hope to survive the demands of the holidays, and many share with those less fortunate – giving hope to those in need. The external traditions of the season, while important, should not overshadow, that more than anything, this is a time for us to wait in joyful and expectant hope for the coming of God’s greatest gift to the world – the Christ child.

I encourage you to focus on God’s gift of His Son during the Christmas season as we celebrate the birth of our Lord and Savior Jesus Christ. Merry Christmas! And God bless you,

*Fr. David*

### CHRISTMAS EVE – DEC 24

5:00 PM St. Mary  
7:00 PM Mt. St. Joseph  
10:00 PM St. Mary

### HOLY FAMILY SUNDAY – DEC 26

9:00 AM Mt. St. Joseph  
11:00 AM St. Mary

### CHRISTMAS DAY – DEC 25

9:00 AM Mt. St. Joseph

### EPIPHANY WEEKEND – JAN 1 & 2

Regular Sat/Sun Mass Schedule

# THE HISTORY OF THE CHRISTMAS TREE

Despite many historians' attempts to link the Christmas tree to an ancient pagan practice, it is actually Christian in origin. The Christmas tree goes back to the medieval German mystery plays. One of the most popular "mysteries" was the Paradise play, representing the creation of man, the sin of Adam and Eve and their expulsion from Paradise. It usually closed with the consoling promise of the coming of the Savior with reference to His Incarnation. These plays were performed in the open, on the large squares in front of churches, or inside the house of God. The Garden of Eden was indicated by a fir tree hung with apples. It represented both the Tree of Life and the Tree of Discernment of Good and Evil, which stood in the center of Paradise. (Gen 2:9)

## **The Tree in the Home**

When the pageant was performed in church, the *Paradeisbaum* (tree of Paradise) was surrounded by lighted candles and inside the ring of lights, the play was acted. After the suppression of the mystery plays in the churches, the only symbolic object of the play found its way into the homes of the faithful and the Christmas tree became a symbol of the Savior. Following this symbolism, in the 15th century the custom developed into the decorating of the Paradise Tree, already bearing apples, with small white wafers representing the Holy Eucharist. These wafers were later replaced by little pieces of pastry cut in the shapes of stars, angels, hearts, flowers, and bells. And finally, other cookies were introduced bearing the shapes of men, birds, roosters and other animals. The first known use of the fir tree as a Christmas tree is found in a description written by a German traveller visiting Strasbourg in 1605. He tells of trees being planted in rooms, and he notes that they were ornamented with roses of colored paper, apples, tinsel, sugar and cookies.

Until the 17th century the *Christbaum* (as the tree is called in German) had no lights. The Christmas candles, generally used in medieval times, were placed on the Christmas pyramid made of graduated wooden shelves. As time went on, the tree replaced the pyramid in its function of representing Christ as the Light of the world. The candles and glittering decorations were transferred from the pyramid to the tree. A reminder of the origin of the Christmas tree may still be found in sections of Bavaria where fir branches and little trees, decorated with lights, apples and tinsel, are still called *Paradeis*.

Although the Christmas tree is now the principal symbol of Christmas in America, it was by no means in general use in American families until late in the 19th century. German immigrants most likely set up the first Christmas trees in America as early as 1710, however. Later, during the Revolutionary War, Hessian soldiers were responsible for disseminating the practice throughout the Eastern seaboard.

In the 19th and early 20th centuries, pioneer families who settled in areas where evergreen trees were scarce made Christmas trees out of bare branches painted green or wrapped with green paper or cloth. Sometimes a "tree" would be made by drilling holes in a broomstick and inserting branches of cedar or juniper into it. Often the only Christmas tree in the community would be in the Church or in the school. In the absence of a Christmas tree, presents were often hung by ribbons from a decorated clothesline strung across the corner of a room.

## **Decorating Your Tree**

While many Christmas trees go up the first of December (or earlier!) and are in the dumpster by January 2, Catholic families often delay decorating the tree until Christmas Eve. If that is too late for your family, you may want to consider setting up the tree earlier and decorating it simply. It would be appropriate to delay lighting the tree or putting presents under it — or to save some of the especially splendid ornaments — until Christmas Eve, when we celebrate the coming into the world of Christ, the Light of the World.

On Christmas Eve, the parents might adorn the tree after small children are asleep, so that the first sight of Christmas morning is the gloriously bedecked tree. Families with older children may want to make the decorating a family affair.

## **A Blessing for the Christmas Tree**

Almighty God and Father,  
we come with joy to celebrate the birth of your Son,  
who rescued us from the darkness of sin  
by making the cross a tree of life and light.  
May this tree, arrayed in splendor,  
remind us of the life-giving cross of Christ,  
that we may always rejoice  
in the new life that shines in our hearts.  
We ask this through Christ our Lord. — Amen.

*Have a joyful and blessed Christmas!*