

**Sermon for Sunday, December 13, 2015**  
**St James Episcopal Church, St James NY**  
**The Very Rev. Canon Dr. Raewynne J. Whiteley**

One of the traditions in this parish  
as part of our Advent preparations for the coming of our Savior  
has been to decorate a Chrismon Tree,  
with a whole range of symbols  
of Jesus Christ.

This year  
we are doing something slightly different.  
We are decorating a Jesse tree.

Jesse  
was the father of King David,  
and is referred to in the book of the prophet Isaiah,  
when it says,

“A shoot shall come out from the stock of Jesse,  
and a branch shall grow out of his roots.  
The spirit of the Lord shall rest on him,  
the spirit of wisdom and understanding,  
the spirit of counsel and might,  
the spirit of knowledge and the fear of the Lord.  
His delight shall be in the fear of the Lord.”

As Christians, we understand  
that Jesus is that shoot, that branch  
Jesse.

We sing about it  
in the fourth verse  
of O Come, O come, Emmanuel.

And in the middle ages  
in the great cathedrals of Europe  
they began to make stained glass windows  
of the tree of Jesse.

At the bottom  
was a reclining figure of Jesse;  
from him  
a tree grew,  
and on each branch

was a pictures of an Old and New Testament figure  
 who was an ancestor of Jesus.  
 And at the very top of the tree  
 were figures of Mary and Jesus.

But for those of us who don't have stained glass windows of the Jesse tree,  
 another tradition grew up,  
 of decorating a branch  
 with symbols of the ancestors of Jesus, his family tree,  
 as a way of counting down to Christmas.

Some of the symbols are chosen  
 because a person in the story is in the lineage of Christ;  
 others  
 because they were prophesied about,  
 and others  
 because Jesus talked about them.  
 Together  
 they remind us  
 of the way God worked throughout history,  
 preparing for the coming of Christ.

And so today, we will be decorating a Jesse tree.  
 But we'll be adding to it from our own tradition -  
 I've asked the Godly Play kids  
 to bring in the stories  
 that they have learned  
 that belong to the Jesse tree  
 and out them  
 in front of the altar.

So let's begin.

Jesse (Stump)

Isaiah 11:1; Jer. 23:5; Matt. 1:1-6; Rom. 15:8-12

It was prophesied that a righteous Branch would come from the lineage, or family of Jesse. In the book of Matthew, Jesse is listed as an ancestor of Jesus. The stump reminds us of the promise God fulfilled through the family of Jesse.

Creation (Earth); Godly Play - Creation

Genesis 1:1; John 1:1-3

Jesus is the Word of God through whom all things were created.

First Sin (Fruit)

Gen. 2:15-17; Gen. 3:1-6; Rom. 5:12-21

The fruit reminds us the story of Adam and Eve. Christ is called the “second” or “new” Adam because he brings about a new creation, forgiving sin and restoring us to God’s grace.

Noah (Rainbow); Godly Play - Ark

Gen. 9:8-13; Hebrews 9:15

God made a covenant with Noah and used the rainbow as a sign of His promise to never flood the earth again.

Abraham (Starry Sky); Godly Play - The Great Family

Gen. 12:1-2; Gen. 15:5-6; Matt. 1:2; Rom. 4:18-25; Gal 3:6-9

This symbol is a field of stars, representing God’s promise to Abraham, the first of the great Jewish forefathers, whose descendants became the chosen people of God.

Isaac (Ram)

Gen. 22:1-14; Matt. 1:2; Heb. 11:17-19

The ram on this ornament is the sacrificial animal that God provided for Abraham when he saw that Abraham was willing to give up his only son, if that was what God required of him.

Jacob (Ladder); Godly Play - The Exodus

Genesis 28:12; Matt. 1:2; John 1:51

Jacob is another ancestor of Jesus. He dreamed of angels walking on a ladder that reached from Heaven to Earth, and heard God reminding him of the promises God had made to Abraham and his descendants.

Joseph (Coat)

Gen. 45:5; Gen. 50:20; Romans 8:28; Acts 3:13-15

Even though Joseph was sold into slavery by his brothers, God eventually made him a leader and used him to save those brothers and their families from starvation. Jesus was a descendant of one of those brothers.

God’s Name (Burning Bush)

Exodus 3:14; John 8:58; Heb. 13:8

Moses was raised as an Egyptian by the pharaoh's daughter. He was a witness to God's word when an angel appeared to him as a burning bush, and instructed him to lead the people of Israel to the Promised Land.

#### Passover (Cup)

Ex. 12:17-27; Matt. 26:26-28

When the people of God were in Egypt and Pharaoh didn't want them to leave, God told Moses and Aaron to slaughter a year-old male lamb for each member of Israel, and to mark every doorpost with the blood, thus beginning the tradition of Passover and marking the exodus of the Israelites out of slavery.

#### Bread from Heaven (Manna)

Ex. 16:4; Ex. 16: 14-15; John 6:31-35; John 6:48-51

Manna was the special bread from Heaven that God provided for His people while they were in the wilderness.

#### Ten Commandments (Tablets); Godly Play - Ten Best Ways

Ex. 20:1-17; Deut. 6:1-5; Lev. 19:18; Mark 12:29-31; Rom. 13:9

God delivered the commandments to Moses on Mount Sinai and Moses brought the resulting tablets—and the commandments—back to his people to show them how to live.

#### Moses (Bronze Snake)

Num. 21:4-9; John 3:14&15

While the Israelites were wandering in the wilderness, many were bitten by poisonous snakes. If they looked at a bronze snake on a pole as God had commanded, they would live.

#### Rahab (Horn)

Josh. 2:1-21; Josh. 6:22-25; Matt. 1:5; Heb. 11:31

Rahab was a foreigner who believed in the one, true God. The horn reminds us of how God protected her when Joshua's men blew their horns and the walls of Jericho fell. The gospel of Luke tells us that she was an ancestor of Jesus.

#### Gideon (Jar & Torch)

Judg. 6:11-16; Judg. 7:1-8; Judg. 7:15-22; John 1:46; John 7:40-52

The jar and torch remind us that God chose Gideon, who was an unlikely hero, to lead an army of 300 to defeat more than 100,000 at Midian. Gideon followed God's instruction to have his men approach the town with their torches hidden under jars. Then they broke the jars and blew horns, and scared the people of Midian, who ran away.

### Ruth (Grain)

Ruth 4:13-17; Matt. 1:1-5

Ruth was a foreign widow who believed in the one true God. Boaz met Ruth when she gleaned grain from his fields. He later married Ruth saving her from a life of poverty. The grain reminds us that just as Boaz was Ruth's savior, Jesus later came to save us. She was blessed to be a great-grandmother of Jesus.

### Samuel (Crown)

Sam. 7:16; Is. 9:6-7; Acts 13:20-23

Samuel, son of Elkanah, was repeatedly called by God. When he finally recognized the LORD's call, he remained faithful to it without fail. When God's people asked for a king, Samuel anointed Saul first and then David. The crown reminds us of God's promise to David that his rule would never end.

### David (Staff); Godly Play - Good Shepherd

Is. 40:11; Sam. 16:1&10-13; John 10:11-16

David was first a shepherd, but when God called him to lead the nation of Israel, he became a shepherd of people to help them become what God wanted. Jesus was descended from David, and we know him as the Good Shepherd.

### Jonah (Big Fish)

Jonah 1:1-17; Matt. 12:38-41

Jonah spent three days and three nights in the belly of a big fish. Jesus described how long he would be in the tomb using this familiar story.

### Isaiah (Tongs) - Godly Play - Prophet

Is. 6:1-10; John 12:37-41

The prophet Isaiah was called to holiness, but he was afraid that he was not worthy to speak about God. Isaiah saw angels around the throne of the LORD and one of them took a hot ember—like the one on today's ornament—from a fire with tongs and touched it against Isaiah's lips. He was forgiven for his sin, and went as God's messenger and prophet to the people.

That's as far as we'll go today. Next week,  
we will add the final ornaments, the ones about Jesus' birth.  
But meanwhile,  
as we wait for the coming of our savior,  
I wonder,  
what belongs on your personal family tree of faith?  
Who are your forebears,

the people  
who have led you and inspired you in faith?

Which bible stories  
have shaped you?

If you were to create a Jesse tree  
that had symbols of your own faith,  
what would you put on it?