

Jesus, the First Fruits of Jesse's Tree

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Jesse Tree / Firstfruits, First fruits; Christmas / John 1:1-14

- › **Grace, mercy, and peace be yours from God our Father and from our Lord and Savior Jesus Christ, our Newborn King. Amen.**

I would imagine that the first Christmas was a night like many others. Around the world, people were busy doing whatever it was defined their lives at that moment. For some, it was struggling against hunger, fear, disease, desperation, depression, anxiety, grief. For others, it was enjoying their wealth and ease. For yet others, it was simply dealing with the pressures of their lives. But for all, that first Christmas was just another night lived in darkness.

And indeed, it is a dark world. God had created the world to live in union with Him. He had breathed life into the father of our race, Adam, a creature of the dust. He had formed Eve from the side of Adam and had joined the two together and to Himself. How bright the world must have been as Eden lived in harmony with the Creator.

But darkness came. Those created and loved by God rebelled against Him, bringing a darkness that permeated all creation. Death had entered through sin, and as the children of Adam filled the world, they took with them the darkness of that dreadful day in Eden when sin and death entered the world.

So it was that night in Bethlehem some two thousand years ago. It was a world of darkness cut off from the source of all light, the Creator. Yet a light was breaking into the world. A young girl carried in her virgin womb a Son. The daughter of Eve was about to give birth to the One who would be the light of the world. This infant would reverse forever the horror of humanity's fall into sin and death and darkness. This was the miracle of miracles: our human sister Mary became, by the power of the Holy Spirit, the mother of God, the bearer of the Savior of the world.

The opening verses of the Gospel of John are among the greatest and most familiar verses of the Bible—or of any literature for that matter. In soaring rhetoric, the evangelist brings heavenly truth and majesty into human words and the heavenly Lord into human sight. The One of whom John writes is not only the subject of these words but the author of all things.

The story of Jesus does not begin with the story of Mary, of Joseph, of angels and shepherds. It begins before the creation of the world and in the eternity before time was created. John writes:

English Standard Version Chapter 1

In the beginning was the Word, and the Word was with God, and the Word was God. 2 He was in the beginning with God. 3 All things were made through him, and without him was not any thing made that was made.

This is a “great and mighty wonder”—the Creator, the Word of God, now joins Himself to His broken and hurting creation in order to redeem us all.

This was the promise of God from the beginning. From the day in which human sin broke the perfection of Eden, through the lives of patriarchs and prophets and kings, through a humble man named Jesse and the tree that would sprout through his son David, one golden thread unites it all. History may change. Circumstances may change. But God’s eternal promises do not. And this day, this blessed Festival of the Nativity of Our Lord, this Holy Christmas morning, we see the descendent of Jesse, the Virgin Mary, bringing into the world a baby who will change the universe.

The prophets of God had foretold Christmas. Yet those who read the prophets still did not understand or see the presence of the fulfillment of the prophetic Word. John tells us:

English Standard Version Chapter 1

10 He was in the world, and the world was made through him, yet the world did not know him. 11 He came to his own, and his own people did not receive him. 12 But to all who did receive him, who believed in his name, he gave the right to become children of God

God has not chosen visibly great and mighty people and things to work His great and mighty acts. He chosen that which is humble and hidden to human eyes. And so it was that His fulfillment of all things came through a peasant girl giving birth in a stable. Here was the Babe, hidden in the tree of Jesse, who had now come forth as the fruit of that same tree.

So it was at Bethlehem over 2000 years ago, and so it is today. Humanity lived in a world that seems to be defined not by life but by death. The sanctity of life is denied. Homicide and suicide are in the news every day. Nations rises against nation as humanity find new and more effective ways to wage deadly ware against one another. We drive past a cemetery and, unless we choose to delude ourselves, know that the day will come when our own earthly bodies will be placed in a grave. Death is a darkness that permeates all of human history and, unless we are alive at the Second coming of the King of Kings and Lord of Lords, it will permeate our own personal history as well.

It is into that grim reality of death that the words of John ring out with hope and certainty that defies the power of death itself. This Word of God who created all things also changes all things!

English Standard Version Chapter 1

4 In him was life, and the life was the light of men. 5 The light shines in the darkness, and the darkness has not overcome it.

Yes, it is a dark world in many ways. Yes, all of us have sinned and all of us thus deserve not only earthly death but eternal death. And yet, the Creator so loves us that He has taken the darkness and destroyed it with His own light. And where His light is, life—not death—reigns.

The tradition of the Jesse Tree celebrates God's promises throughout human history, promises that are more sure and certain than anything our eyes might conceive or our minds imagine. The world, the devil, and our own flesh would have us look inward for an answer to the darkness that surrounds us and fills us. So it was for Adam and Eve, for the patriarchs, for Jesse. Yet all we find there is more darkness and hopelessness. We need God's own light to break into our darkness and change night to eternal day. And in Jesus the light world, God has

given us the blessed light! Of, that we may would learn and remember this great truth spoken by John:

English Standard Version Chapter 1

14 And the Word became flesh and dwelt among us, and we have seen his glory, glory as of the only Son from the Father, full of grace and truth.

No human eye could perceive it that night. All that could be seen was a child. Yet this child would forever destroy the darkness for He brought life into death, and His light was to be the light of the world. Every force of Stan would seek to put that light out. (He's still trying to do it!). Herod would attempt to destroy him by killing every male infant. Scribes and Pharisees would seek to silence Him as He spoke words of life. Failing to silence Him, they would seek to kill Him. Some thirty-three years after the first Christmas, the Babe of Bethlehem would be nailed to a cross. But this is what He had come to do. The Christmas story is about baby who had been born to die—yet not just to die but to be placed in the utter darkness of a tomb and on Easter morning to burst forth from the tomb. When the Child of Mary rose from the grave, the light that began at Bethlehem shone so brightly that no one can put it out.

That light shines in the darkness, a light that neither the world nor Stan can ever put out. It shines as the Babe of Bethlehem fills our lives with Himself. It shines with a brilliance perceived only by eyes of faith that gaze upon the baptismal font and the altar. It shines on you both this Christmas Day and tomorrow and into eternity He has prepared for you!

Alleluia! Christ is Born for you!

In the name of Jesus. Amen.

- › Now may the peace of God which passes all human understanding, guard your hearts and your minds and keep them focused in Christ Jesus our Lord and Savior, our Newborn King. Amen.