

### *Lovely Branches*

*It is good to be children sometimes, and never better than at Christmas,  
when its mighty Founder was a child Himself.*

*(Charles Dickens)*

The Christmas tree has a long history dating back almost four thousand years. The ancient Jews, set up Yule Trees (as they were once called) outside their houses in mid-winter, decorating them with apples, nuts, wafers and cookies to help birds survive the winter seasons. About 1500 years before Christ, after the Israelites were delivered from Egyptian bondage; they began bringing the Yule Tree into their homes on special holidays. The shape of the tree reminded them of the Egyptian pyramids and served as a fitting symbol of freedom. Red apples were placed on the tree to symbolize the blood sacrifice offered during the Passover (Exodus 12:5-14). It also served to remind the Jews of the fall; that terrible event surrounding the rebellion of Adam and Eve who defied God by eating the forbidden fruit in Eden (Genesis 3:6). Unleavened wafers that spoke of Israel's redemption from bondage were placed on the tree.

After Christ's coming the early Christians adopted a similar practice, carrying the Jewish traditions over into their newfound faith. After choosing to embrace the Yule tree as a sign of their deliverance from sin these followers of Christ put red and green ornaments on the tree, calling it the Christmas Tree. The green ornaments symbolized their new life in Christ and the red ornaments represented the blood of Jesus that dripped on the cross. An angel, candles and star were added as decorations representing the details surrounding Christ's birth. The angel on the tree pointed to Gabriel appearing to Mary, announcing the fact that she would miraculously conceive God's Son, Jesus Christ the Savior of the world (Luke 1:26-33). The star represented the divine light that led the wise men to Bethlehem. The candles spoke of Christ as being the light of the world. Jesus said in John 8:12, "I am the light of the world. He who follows Me shall not walk in darkness, but have the light of life." Red and white candy was displayed as ornaments signifying the blood and purity of Christ. Madeline L'Engle comments, "When we celebrate Christmas we are celebrating that amazing time when the Word that shouted all the galaxies into existence ... came to us in the powerless body of a human baby."

The Christmas tree is a symbol of God's goodness and speak of the atoning sacrifice of Jesus Christ for the wrongdoing of humanity. The Christmas message—there is hope for a ruined humanity: hope of pardon, hope of peace with God and hope of glory.

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