

2023-12.3 -DEC -ADVENT #3

KNIGHTS' CHAPLAIN'S CORNER DEC 23

ADVENT #3 -- THE CHRISTMAS TREE

Many families use a Christmas tree during the Advent/Christmas season. While the nativity scene or manger is the main symbol of Christmas in a Christian home, the tree provides the parents with a wonderful focal point for catechesis and the transmission of the faith in the home during the Advent season.



The practice of using a tree at Christmas time first in Central & Eastern Germany, where the sacred Christmas plays presented the whole history of salvation, from the original sin of Adam and Eve to the Incarnation of Jesus; it all began with the tree of knowledge of good and evil, from which Adam and Eve took the apple.

On Christmas Eve an evergreen tree was placed in the town square or church and adorned with apples and forms of hosts (non consecrated) - because, according to a popular tradition, the same tree of sin becomes the saving cross of Calvary; and from the "happy guilt" of Adam comes salvation of Christ.

Over time, the apples were transformed into colored balls and the forms of wafers (unconsecrated hosts) into cookies. Now we use little lights instead of cookies.

APPLES/BULBS = SIN

WAFER/LIGHTS = SALVATION/BODY OF CHRIST

KEY POINTS TO EXPLAIN THE CHILDREN

TREE = first tree: the Tree of Knowledge in the garden of Eden,
where Adam and Eve chose sin

second tree: the tree of the cross where Jesus chose the will of God,
salvation for all, serve/die for the good of others

The GREEN color of the pine trees = enduring life through winter,
ETERNAL LIFE

The balls/bulbs = apples, temptation, and sin

The lights = the hosts, the Body of Christ, salvation, & the light of Christ

Parents can organize a tree decorating party to explain the symbols and meanings to the children and repeat the catechesis each year as new items are added to the tree.



The ancient Germans believed that the world and all the stars were hanging from the branches of a gigantic tree called the "divine Idrasil" or the "god Odin". At each winter solstice, when they believed that life was renewed, they rendered a special cult. That belief is replaced by faith in the incarnation, the coming of our Redeemer.

The celebration of that day consisted of decorating an oak tree with torches that represented the stars, the moon and the sun. Around this tree, they danced and sang, worshiping their god. They say that St. Boniface, evangelizer of Germany and England, knocked down the tree that represented the god Odin, and in the same place planted a pine tree, a symbol of God's perennial love and adorned it with apples and candles, giving it a Christian symbolism: apples that represented temptations, original sin, and the sins of all; the candles represented Christ, the light of the world and the grace received by humans who accept Jesus as Savior. This custom spread throughout Europe in the Middle Ages and with the conquests and migrations, came to the Americas. Little by little, the tradition evolved: the apples were exchanged for spheres (balls/bulbs) and the candles for lights that represent the joy and light that Jesus Christ brought to the world.

The balls and their colors eventually came to symbolize the prayers made during the Advent period:

BLUE: prayers of repentance **SILVER:** thanksgiving
GOLD: praise **RED:** petition

It is customary to put a star on the tip of the pine that represents the faith that should guide our lives – the Star of Bethlehem. The Christmas tree is also often adorned with different figures. These represent the good deeds and sacrifices, the "gifts" we will give to Jesus at Christmas.

To take advantage of the tradition: Decorate the Christmas tree little by little throughout the Advent season, explaining to the children the symbolism as each light, bulb, or figure when it is placed on the tree. Children can make their own balls/bulbs (24 to 28, depending on the number of days in Advent) with a prayer for each day. As the days go by, the children hang more & more bulbs (prayers) on the Christmas tree until Christmas Eve. These are not petitions for toys!

Something you should not forget:

Traditions and customs are a way to make present stories of our own faith that happened in times past. They are the facts or works that are transmitted from one generation to another orally or in writing. It is important



that the parents incorporate the history of salvation into the personal, particular story of the family. Thereby making the history of salvation a more personal, real experience integrating the each family's own history into the history of salvation. The word tradition comes from the Latin *traditio* that comes from the verb *tradere*, which means to **DELIVER**. You could say that tradition is what our ancestors have delivered to us, given us. So, it is important to transmit the true meaning behind the symbol of the Christmas tree and all its decorations. One of the great problems we have now, as Christians, is that we have many traditions that we repeat without the transmission of their meanings or the faith that is behind the tradition or symbol.

peace & all that is good, friar Chris

864-202-8740

edunn@stfrancis.org

MORE INFO SEE:

-<https://www.history.com/topics/christmas/history-of-christmas-trees>

-JUAN PABLO II, ÁNGELUS , Sunday, 19 DEC 2004.

-Árbol de Navidad o belén, falso dilema según «Radio Vaticano», Origen de las dos representaciones del nacimiento de Jesús, CIUDAD DEL VATICANO, 21 diciembre 2001 (ZENIT.org).

- <https://www.stjosephfontana.com/post/el-sentido-cristiano-del-%C3%A1rbol-de-navidad-articulo-en-espa%C3%B1ol>