



*What is the story of the Christmas tree?*

The tree as a symbol of Christmas comes to us from Germany, in much the same way that we use and decorate it today. Martin Luther is said to have cut a fir tree from his garden one wintry Christmas Eve and placed it in the nursery of his home for his wife and children. He wanted to show them the great beauty of the snowy, dark night of the celebration of Jesus' birth, and he decorated the little tree with lighted candles, to represent the stars. From almost that time on, there are records of Christmas trees, and as long ago as the beginning of the seventeenth century other decorations, such as apples and colored paper, began to be added.

But the association of trees with Christmas is much, much older. In the tenth century a beautiful story spread through Europe. It is supposed to have been told by an Arabian named Georg Jacob, and it was so beautiful it was not forgotten, and became legend. On the night that Christ was born, so the story goes, all the trees in all the forests — even those in frozen countries — blossomed for one night, and bore fruit.

A thirteenth-century French legend tells of a gigantic tree lit with candles, in the forest. Some of the candles were straight and some upside down, and at the top of the tree there was an infant with a halo around his head. The tree represented humanity, the candles were people, good and bad, and the child was the Savior, Jesus.

And still longer ago there are stories that connect the tree with the season of Christmas. To pagan people the evergreen trees were a sign that winter would end and warmth again return to the earth, and in the feasts of the winter equinox, trees were hung with trinkets and masks. Some of our traditional Christmas-tree ornaments, such as a sun, stars and moon, and animals, are thought to descend, through the centuries, from these ancient symbols of nature. The goodness of the Creator as demonstrated in the return of spring may have been absorbed into the larger, greater celebration of the birth of His Son, Jesus.