**National Christmas Tree Day**

This is a good day for putting up the Christmas tree. The president and first lady will light up the national tree in Washington DC tonight. Putting up the tree is a solemn ritual celebrated all around the world: selecting the tree and decorating it, with a star on top to remind us of the Star of Bethlehem. It is a spiritual moment for the family, where the Holy Spirit abides with us as we start to experience the spiritual joy of Christmas, getting us into the mood for the holy season which begins with Advent and continues into Epiphany.

Numerous countries celebrate by decorating their Christmas tree in the traditional style of that country. You can research this and find how individual countries decorate their trees with special kinds of ornaments. A nativity scene beneath the tree is a common addition. Most historians place the origin of the Christmas tree to fifteenth century Germany, largely based on the popular hymn *Oh Christmas Tree* (*O Tannenbaum*). Martin Luther is often credited with the introduction of the Christmas tree inside the home, and the placing of candles to represent the light of Christ. Traditionally, an evergreen tree is used as it stays green after being cut. The tree represents life and the light represents Christ. Thus, those claiming that the tree is akin to a graven image are mistaken; further, the suggestion that the Christmas tree was lifted from an ancient pagan practice is erroneous.

* HOS 14:4–9 ~ I will heal their lapsing, and love them freely; for my anger has been turned away from them. I will be as the dew to Israel; he will blossom like a lily and spread his roots like the cedars of Lebanon. His branches will reach out and his beauty will be as an olive tree with the aroma of cedar. Those who dwell under his shadow will return; they will revive as the corn, and grow as a vine with the scent of wine. Ephraim will say, “Why do we need idols?” For it is I who will answer and look after you. I am like a green fir tree; and you will receive your fruit from me. Who is wise that they can understand these things? Who is prudent to discern them? For the ways of the Lord are right, and the righteous will walk in them. But the transgressors will stumble over them.

Many scholars place the birth of Jesus during the Feast of Tabernacles which occurs in conjunction with the late harvest towards the end of October. During this observance, tree branches are cut to build temporary shelters or booths (e.g., tabernacles). [Note: The December date for Christmas was appointed by the Roman Church circa fourth century, possibly by emperor Constantine, to overlap pagan observances associated with the winter solstice.]

* LEV 23:34–36, 39–42 ~ On the fifteenth day of the seventh month is the Feast of Tabernacles lasting seven days; the first day will be a holy convocation so do not work. Present offerings by fire each day; the eighth day will be another holy convocation with an offering by fire to the Lord. On the first day take healthy boughs and branches from trees like palms and willows, and carry them rejoicing before the Lord. This will be an annual observance for all generations. The people of Israel will dwell in booths these seven days.

The Tree of Life represents everlasting life provided to all believers who place their trust in Christ. Again, we see this represented in the evergreen tree which does not lose its color and continues to bear fruit unless it dies and withers.

* GEN 3:22 ~ God said, “Humans are like the higher-order beings because they have the knowledge of right and wrong. They can eat from the Tree of Life and they can live forever.”
* REV 2:7; REV 22:14, 17 ~ Blessed be those who keep God’s commandments for they will be allowed to enter the gates of heaven and partake of the everlasting waters and of the Tree of Life. And they will never die again.

As we prepare to celebrate the birth of our Lord, many things come to mind. Not only is He both man and God, He is also the firstborn and only begotten of God. He was born into this world to give light and show us the love of the Father. Christ proved He was God by His birth, ministry, death, and resurrection from the dead. His entire life was a miracle, from the immaculate conception to His ascension into heaven. With His resurrection, Christ has become the firstborn of the dead, the first to be raised to remain with the Father for eternity; and because He lives, so will all who believe in Him be raised to live with the Father as the firstborn of Christ.

* JOH 14:18–21 ~ Jesus said, “I will not leave you without a comforter. In a little while the world will not see me anymore. But you will see me, and because I live, you will live also. On that day you will know that I am in the Father, and He is in me; and you are in me and I am in you. Those who know and keep my commandments are the ones who love me, and those who love me are loved by my Father; and I will love them and reveal myself to them.”
* 1 CO 15:20–26, 44 ~ Christ arose from the dead, becoming the first to rise. Just as death came by a man, by a man has come the resurrection of the dead. Like Adam, we die, and like Christ, we will rise from the dead, Christ being the first. Christ will reign, and all His enemies will be destroyed; the last enemy to be destroyed will be death. It is our natural body that dies, it is our spiritual body that lives on after death.
* COL 1:12–20 ~ Give thanks to the Father, who has allowed us to partake of His inheritance, given to the saints who abide in His light. He has ransomed us from the power of darkness and delivered us to the kingdom of His dear Son Jesus Christ, who has redeemed us and forgiven us through His own precious blood. Christ is the very image of the invisible God; He is the firstborn of all living creatures. Through Him, all things were created on earth and in heaven, whether visible or invisible, including all thrones, dominions, principalities, and powers. All things were created by Him and for Him. He is before all things, and because of Him all things exist. He is the head of the body, which is the church. He is the beginning, the firstborn of the dead, and the supreme being above all things. God was pleased to allow His fullness to live in Christ. Christ established an everlasting peace through His blood which was shed on the cross, thereby causing all things on earth and in heaven to exist together in harmony with God.
* COL 2:9–10 ~ In Jesus Christ the whole deity of God lives. And you are complete in Him who is the head of all governments and powers.
* 1 JO 5:4–6, 9–10 ~ Whoever is born of God overcomes the world; the victory that overcomes the world is found in faith. Jesus Christ overcame the world; anyone believing in Him will also overcome the world. Christ is He, who came by water and blood. The Holy Spirit is He who bears witness, because the Spirit is truth. If we believe a person witnessing for another, we should believe God’s witnessing even more; and God has given witness of His Son. Those who believe that Jesus is God’s Son have God’s witness in themselves; those who do not believe are calling God a liar, because they do not believe God’s testimony concerning His Son.

Thank you Father, for your Son, who fulfilled the Law on our behalf, died to pay the penalty of our sin, and rose from the dead to prove His power over death. And because He lives, we also will live. Thank you that we will partake of the Tree of Life in heaven where sin and death do not exist. Help us to remember today the noble and humble birth of Christ, and His miraculous and glorious resurrection, both of which demonstrate His humanity and His deity, without which nobody could be saved. Let the Christmas tree be a reminder that this life is fleeting, and though we will die because of sin, our light will never be extinguished, just as the light of life found in Christ Jesus will never fade and cannot be hidden or snuffed out. In the name of Jesus we pray, Amen.

Posted: Andrew Barber (12/03/2024)