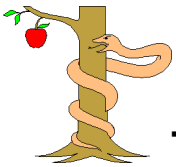




Celebrating the Light of Bethlehem

On the way out of church one Sunday morning we came upon a small Catholic Magazine with wonderful ideas for the family during Advent and Christmas. The magazine had a picture of a cute small child in pajamas standing before the family Christmas tree. Unfortunately, there was a serious problem with this cover; the tree had no garland (ribbons have replace them), no tinsel (since it makes such a mess, don't you think) and many ornaments with only a few that looked like bulbs. The rest of the ornaments included rocking horses, Santas, jack-in-the-boxes, clowns and elves. In the young boy's hand was a straight candy cane with a cookie, shaped like a horse's head. Under the tree is a gift and some loose wrappings. Is this the traditional Christmas tree? If so, why are there so few images of the "reason for the season"? Are the Evangelicals right when they say that the Christmas tree is a pagan idol? Did it come from the Yuletide celebrations by pagans? Is there any clues within Scripture to help us discern if this acceptable or an abomination to our L-rd and G-d? To answer this we need to go back in history to the Middle Ages to a tree and a play on which our modern tree is based:



The Paradise Play

Back in the Middle Ages there existed a play during Advent called the Paradise Play, which depicted the story found in Genesis 3. The scene took place on stage with numerous evergreens because evergreens were the only trees still green after the first snows. Also on the stage was a tree different from the rest, for it represented the Tree of the Knowledge of Good and Evil. It had fruit hanging on it to represent the fruit that Adam and Eve took hold of.

This play evolved in Germany and was very popular there for many years. However, Rome did not share Germany's fondness for the play, for when the Church heard of it they demanded it be stopped because they perceived that the fall into sin had no place during the season we remember Yeshua's birth. The people, however, had become very fond of this tradition, particularly that tree draped with apples and other fruits. So after the play was suppressed they took it upon themselves to bring in an evergreen tree into their homes during the season of Advent, and to decorate it with fruits of the recent harvest season and thus to remember the play.

Of course in time the Church also frowned on the practice of bringing in the symbol of "the fall" into the home during this season and by bringing this to the people's attention they thought the tradition would go the way of the extinct play. The people had other ideas, which only goes to show how hard traditions are to derail once they take root in our lives. The people reasoned that if the tree could be the Tree of the Knowledge of Good and Evil, then it could also be the Tree of Life. By now this tree was called Paradise Tree (after the Paradise Play) and it had upon it some hanging fruit to represent "the fall" and as well as

the Eucharist to represent “Life”. How did the good Church of G-d react? Legend has it that a good vicar entered one of these humble abodes and seeing the Eucharist hung upon the tree, cried out “YOUR CRUCIFYING HIM AGAIN! THAT’S BLASPHEMY!” Obviously another solution had to be found.



The red-faced people quickly removed the Eucharist, however this did not derail them from using the tree; they simply adapted to the new requirements and came up with a fresh idea. They reasoned that just as they were using a symbol of “the fall”, they could just as easily devise a simple symbol of the redemption. For this they once again chose the Eucharist, but this time an unconsecrated form made from rolled cookie dough, stamped with a holly and tied to the tree with lace (the holly branch represents the sacrifice). This the Church finally accepted and the Paradise Tree would remain with only these two items upon it throughout the remaining Middle Ages. The next great change was not to occur until recently that is in the late eighteenth century.



The Trinity Triangle

The Paradise tree wasn’t the only symbol of Christmas used during the Middle Ages. In Germany, a wooden triangle was also made with steps and decorated with the symbols of the season. Upon each step was placed gold and silver garland and tinsel for the kingship of Christ. With this one could find candles, which represented the light of Christ that had come into the world, and small pieces of homemade candy and cookies for “the sweetness of Salvation”. Above all there was a star and beneath it was the manger with child (the modern idea of the Nativity came later).

This second symbol often coexisted with the Paradise tree, which would be later covered with glass or wooden fruits (these were the precursor of our modern glass and wooden ornaments) and those round cookies stamped with the Christmas holly that represented Redemption (the Eucharist). By now one might see that this triangle carries many of the other symbolic items we find on our modern Christmas tree and if you have guessed this is where they came from you would be correct. According to the history we can find, this happened somewhere along the Rhine River around the late eighteenth century.

Precisely how these two items became one is not very clear, but it is believed that they were side-by-side in a home (these was common during these years in fact). The people of this particular home, while looking from one to the other, probably noticed similarities, including that the Paradise Tree looked a bit triangular. Maybe it was this alone or additionally because the same inspired individual hated putting up two different displays, but the items were moved from one to the other with exception to the wooden base, which may have become kindling. The tree had a star placed on top while the manger was below and everything else hung in between. This is at least what guessed but either way once this took root this

tradition spread rapidly, even to regions where the Trinity Triangle had never been heard of or to homes that did not have a faith in HaMoshiach (which may explain why the symbols quickly lost their significance over time). Unfortunately, the hazard of fires spread almost as quickly, but the soon to be invented electric light in America would inspire to replace the flammable candles. Once this “improvement” was made, our modern tree was essentially born.

Lastly, two legends also exist about the tree. The first is that Martin Luther created the first tree by cutting down what he thought was a gorgeous Douglas fir and taking it inside to decorate with candles to please his kids. Another credits Saint Boniface who created the symbol to wipe out a sacrificial rite based on the oak tree. The legend goes that he pointed to the fir saying that it pointed to heaven and G-d, thus they should take this into their homes and would remind them to turn to G-d. To us both legends seem suspiciously like both veins of the Christian faith were seeking to help ease peoples fears about accepting this icon into their homes. Undoubtedly neither church knew there was no need of this because this icon was Christian from the start.



What about the other stuff (popcorn, Hallmark Ornaments etc. . .)?

So far the whole discussion has been about the true Christmas tree, the Christian Christmas tree, the icon created to help us remember and observe: our sin (ornaments), His sacrifice (the cookies), His kingship (garland/tinsel), our salvation by faith (candies) His birth (star/crib) and the trinity (triangular shape of tree). What about that other tree we described at the beginning? Is this a Christmas tree and where did those other things come from? For this answer we have to once again return to Germany around the late eightieth Century and follow the trail from there to the rest of the world.

We know that all the history we have unearthed of the Christmas tree that it is righteous and came forth from Germany. Here are the remaining facts we have: We also know that most of the Christian symbols came to our tree fairly late in the trees history that is by the late eighth Century. By the nineteenth century all Germany had adopted the tree (thus suppressing the Trinity Triangle and forcing this into extinction). It then came to England, 1841 as a Christmas gift from Prince Albert to Queen Victoria then spread to English homes rapidly. America saw it first tree in 1832 according to official records and the tradition spread here as well. Thus it was somewhere between the late eighteen Centuries and today our tree took on a bit of baggage. So how? All we can do is put forth our best guess and this is what we suspect:

In the secluded nation of Germany were all your neighbors had the same traditions as you, and many were even related then the sharing of the same traditions is not so far fetched. Is it not then likely that the people would forget to tell their children, forget to pass things on (this happens today after all)? Also likely is the non-believer next door would like your tree (they are pretty after all) and adopted it for themselves (free of Christian posturing). This we draw from the fact that the “Christmas Tree” is very popular in Eretz Yisrael (the Land of Israel) among non-Messianic Jews who are most certainly not celebrating the Messiah’s birth. Also likely that a child that walked from the faith did not shirk from taking the trappings of the faith with them and like the pagans minus that Christian stuff. This we draw from the fact that Luther is credited with founding a Catholic icon, which he himself would have shunned as idolatry. Why did Protestants create this silly story? We feel the most obvious reason is because

German Protestants did not want to give up their tree. Now Protestants may have had a faith, we are not implying otherwise, but only if those who walked from Catholicism could not leave their trees despite the fact that they are Catholic icons (and with all other icons condemned), then how much more would the G-dless be emotional attached?

Thus we have three roots for the good tree falling into not so good homes. People assume knowledge and thus do not train up their kids; non-believers like the symbol minus Christian posturing, and fall away believers take the symbol with them and do likewise. This has to be true by the way because according to all authorities by the nineteenth century **all** Germany had adopted the tree and not all in Germany who were Catholic or even Christians.

So when Victoria told Albert, “Lets put some mistletoe on the tree and oh, wouldn’t popcorn look so grand”, and Albert wanting to make good impression on his new wife and land said, “Sure Luv, whatever you say Luv.” OK so the words might not be exactly the same or even the people, however we all get the idea. You see when Christian icons are given unto pagans or Cafeteria Christians it’s the same as throwing our pearls before swine. The Christmas tree, “Oh Tannenbaum” was trampled and spoiled even before it crossed the Atlantic or even the English Cannel (in fact the song itself condemns the use of the tree because it glorifies the tree not God well at least for three/complete of the four verses). It was these non-Christians who exported the tree to England where the Yule Tide was still god in some places and Christianity was struggling to survive. They sailed it to America were the melting pot included a multitude of heretics. The biggest tragedy though is that mainline Christianity brought this icon into their homes with these nations stained and the stain has been spreading into other areas of our faith ever since. Yeshua (Jesus) and His birth are relegated to an hour or two on the eve of the holiday or in the morning and then buried behind the tree god and millions of presents our children neither need nor are they good for them. So here lies the pine scented remains of a once powerful icon. Thus are the Evangelicals correct?



It’s an IDOL!

As a result of these changes some claim the Christmas tree is nothing more that the ancient Yule tree however these trees are in no way related. They evolved in different parts of the country and even when the Paradise tree made it into the regions of the Yule Tree, the Paradise Tree did not replace it but records show these two trees stood side by side in people’s houses during this season.


Many also point to Jer.10.3-4 claiming this is foretelling the coming of the idol of the Christmas tree. They quote this passage saying this references the Christmas tree: “A tree from the forest is cut down, and worked with an axe by the hands of a craftsman. Men deck it with silver and gold; they fasten it with hammer and nails so that it cannot move.” Read out of context this does appear to describe the Christmas tree except for “worked with an axe by craftsmen”, which doesn’t fit the job we do in the ice-cold snow to get that Charlie Brown tree (or even those who purchase theirs from tree farms). Also reading on, the meaning is clearly explained as an idol: “They are both stupid and foolish; the instruction of idols is but

wood! Beaten silver is brought from Tarshish (merchant), and gold from Uphaz (uncertain). They are worked are the work of the craftsmen and of the hands of the goldsmith; their clothing is violet and purple; they are all the work of skilled men.” Jer.10.8-9 This passage references clearly the idols of men forbidden by Torah. They are carved images ALL made by skilled craftsmen overlaid with beaten gold and silver not decked with rings of garland and thin strips of tinsel. Then again both tinsel and garland are copies of beaten gold and silver they are just not hammered to the wood of the tree. Hmmmmm. Still when was the last time you dressed your tree in purple and violet clothing? Take that back, the ribbon on the magazine was purple.

And here lays the strongest argument of all made only too clear on the cover of that Catholic Magazine we described at the onset. Inside this magazine they quoted scripture, gave good advice on becoming closer to G-d, returning to prayer and becoming closer as a family, all good ideas. Yet on their cover and in another place within their magazine, the false tree was shown. What does lace garlands, clowns, jack-in-the-boxes, Santas, stocking etc. have to do with the symbols describe above? Do they enhance or distract? Do they even, as some suggest turn our children away from G-d to idols of the flesh: materialism (jack-in-the-box, presents and clowns), false gods (Yes Santa- only the Great IAM “sees you when your sleeping and knows when your awake”) and worldliness (why flatten out the candy cane except to remove it from it history and wash it from all meaning). Thus might the Evangelicals be at least somewhat correct that the Christmas tree, however it’s past, has it become to too many, an idol and its meaning lost entirely not to be recovered?

Idol is a strong word but is there any truth to this? Is there any Biblical precedent in removing established good G-dly icons that have become idols in the eyes of the people? Actually there is. Another icon was once established though the guidance of G-d by the hand of Moshe (Moses) only to be later destroyed. To see the scriptures on this icon see Num.21 and what it prefigured see Jn.3.14. Back to it’s removal: in 2kgs.18.4 we are told that people began to burn incense to the brass serpent Moshe made just as they did for G-d soon after Moshe had taken it on as an icon. King Hezekiah seeing this had the icon destroyed. Clearly then there is a Biblical precedent on removing an established icon once it takes on too much baggage, that is when it draws the people to idolatry (this is also evidence that the doctrine on icons is Jewish not pagan). Does this judgment on icons spoken in Torah/Pentateuch then apply to our Christmas Trees?

There are two basic views that we ourselves can see:

-  1. The icon Hezekiah destroyed was exactly the same as the one Moshe lifted up where as the modern tree has changed greatly and that clouds whether it can be judged fairly or not. Most of our modern “Christmas trees” are little more than commercials for Hallmark ornaments and numerous Women’s Magazines ideas and not true Christmas trees at all. It seems sad that a perfectly good Christian symbol should be thrown out because satan and human sinfulness has produced a counterfeit without seeing whether the pure symbol properly taught would come to the same end. In the same light should Saint Nicholas be uncannonized because of Secular Clause? Should the egg be removed from Easter/Seder because of the Easter bunny? Put another way, if we use this logic then all satanist have to do to remove the fabric of our Christian culture is copy every Christian symbol we have and we’ll remove the culture for them. All our studies into the Yule tree show that this tree when seen beside the Paradise tree was unembellish for many years. Over time, however, this tree also took on ornaments. Why? They were copying the Paradise Tree not the other way around (this is how Saint Nicholas also was fouled by the way)!

Yeshua said, “if salt loses its flavor it is no good except to be trampled beneath our feet”, what is true of our witness is also true for our traditions as well. This is why our modern trees are full of so many items that have no place on or under this tree: people have forgotten why we have this tree (which was the inspiration for this article). This tree is an icon just as is the Cross, the statues of the Saints, and the Nativity of Our Lord (a sign or symbol that represent something else). They are to remind us of our faith not our recent past or latest accomplishments! Would one place on Hallmark ornaments on the Cross? A statue of Miriam? In the Nativity of Our Lord? Put simply, if we do not want Evangelicals to claim our Icons are pagan we ourselves have to stop trivializing them by draping them in earthy images (that is paganizing them). Only when we return them to their past meaning and teach these meanings to our children as we place these symbols within our homes can we be justified at having any icon within our homes at all!

Is this logic legalism? We don't believe so. Legalism is when one looks only to the letter of the Law and not its Spirit. The Spirit behind Icon is to help us remember something important to our faith so that we remain on track. The symbols of the tree contain important points to remember:

1. Our sin; our fall from grace- fruit/ornament
2. Grace's great gift of the cross thus a symbol of salvation by grace- Eucharist cookies
3. The Blessed Trinity-the tree shape also eternal life
4. That living in The Messiah is positive (sweet)- candies
5. That we are called to follow the Great Shepherd and become fisher's of men- the candy cane
6. The rightful kingship of Our Messiah- garland and tinsel
7. His First coming and that He will come again- star and manger

It is **NOT** a decoration nor is it an idol but an icon, a symbol (group of symbols) that help us remember! Placing other things on icons is like telling your children to very listen carefully to what we're saying because this is necessary for their survival and then turning on a radio and the TV to full blast to compete with us! Keeping Icons pure is not legalism but simple good sense. We are called to teach this faith diligently to our children. This means drilling the faith into them (literally to hammer it in). Are there not enough “things” competing with both our and our children's attention already in media and at school/work? Is this not especially true during this commercialized season of “Christmas”? Where do we draw the line if not with the symbols of our faith which were set aside to teach them and us the meaning of the season? This symbol if properly display carries several powerful lessons that can help greatly in teaching our families the lessons they need to learn yet devoid of them it becomes the thing that adorned a Catholic Magazine in error! Thus if we are to keep this icon we feel there no escape from keeping it as a pure untainted icon.

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2. All this said, the other side has an equally persuasive argument. If we want to talk about distracting we might start with our modern trees with blinking lights and decorations, even Kosher (proper) decorations that glisten in the dark. Of course this in part is its draw of this tree and not all that glistens and glitters is evil, just some things. Yet looking again at the brass serpent, it did acquire over time some excess baggage- the incense. It's doesn't say, by the way, that the people bow down to it or paid it homage, they just burned incense, and this was enough. Then again the

song “O’ Tannenbaum” only mentions God in the forth verse and up until then glorifies the tree with no mention to it’s history or meaning. It was for this reason Yeshua warned us:

“No One can serve two masters; for either he will hate the one and love the other, or he will be devoted to the one and despise the other. You can not serve G-d and mammon.” Matt. 6.24

This passage is often used as a reason to condemn wealth due to the last word “mammon” which is often interpreted “wealth” or “riches”. Although these two words are valid definitions of this Chilean word, it is not it’s only meaning of the word. The word can also mean “self-confidence” or confidence/trust in self not G-d. Now fit this second meaning in above. We can’t serve two masters therefore we will serve either our own passions or G-d’s will, but not both. We’ll either hate our own passions or G-d’s will, or we’ll be devoted to our own passions or to G-d’s will. We can’t do one and the other. This is true of the light that shines out for all to see, they trust in G-d no matter what. This is also true of the Lily of faith, in G-d they trust and not themselves. The will of G-d is very clear: we are to have NOTHING before Him: not icons, not family. This is the same Messiah that said:

“He who loves father or mother more than Me is not worthy of Me; and he who loves son or daughter more than me is not worthy of Me; and he who does not take his cross and follow Me is not worthy of Me.” Matt.10.37-38

If we are not to place our own parents or children as an obstacle between ourselves and our L-rd, then neither should an icon be put in that position. This is precisely why this is a narrow path. After all, the icon of Hezekiah hadn’t changed but the attitude of the people had. The icon was getting their devotion in the place of G-d because if they were burning incense to the icon then they could not be burning this to the Altar at the same time (at least not the same people). Thus they were sharing their devotion with G-d with the icon, which Yeshua warned couldn’t happen if we have a true faith. For this reason, according to Ezekiel, the Glory of the L-rd left Solomon’s Temple (Ez.8.6) and if our body is the Temple of the Ruach HaKadosh (Holy Spirit) then we risk the same end.

True the other side can keep copying our icons to make them obsolete but that only means we need to create new icons so we don’t get outdated and too comfortable. Creativity is good after all. In fact long ago when our Church was the under dog and our Bishops and people were becoming meat for the Roman appetite two Romans had a conversation about them (they conveniently left their letters for us to ease drop on). The first one thought the Christians were very weird and asked his fellow official if he did not feel the same. He friend’s response was “Christians maybe wrong but at least they aren’t boring.” Two thousand years have past and now most of the world knows we are right and also feel we’re boring. This has to stop! This is why with Easter we toss out many of the old symbols and created our own symbols. With these new symbols our children are learning more about their faith and having far more fun in the process. This can be done with the symbols of Christmas as well!

Which argument do we agree with? We feel that both schools of thought have merit, but the answer is dependent upon the individual and their heart. You see, the original tree was G-dly and good, and can be again if the people who want the symbol also seek for righteousness and make the sacrifices necessary to get it there. So as you consider putting up your next tree we ask you to re-evaluate each piece before it goes up. Try asking yourself if this piece shows the “reason for the season”? How does it teach about our

L-rd and Savior? These questions are not meant to be a final judgment of whether to keep or remove, but rather guidelines to help you reflect upon the direction you are exhibiting for your family.

For those who are being called back to their Jewish roots or a simpler faith really have no reason to bring this icon into their lives if they haven't done so prior to now. However for those who plan to keep this icon, it is well recommended that you do not window-dress the changes, otherwise you'll be back at this spot in just a few years. You may wish to make changes to safeguard the icon from becoming an idol that way unbelievers can't adopt without joining our faith.



The Twenty First Century Catholic Tree

When we learned all the above history we also went through those two arguments with several people who also knew the history. Over time we did more study and through this study we came to the following conclusions:



1. **The Tree:** As explained above, the Christmas tree represents the Trinity because of its connection to the Trinity Triangle. Later it also took on the symbol of everlasting life because the evergreen does not "die" in the winter but stays green (alive) (this reference may have come from the Yule tree or even the orient where this view on the evergreen is also held, however it is equally likely Christians in Germany figured this out on their own).

Lastly it represents both The Tree of the Knowledge of Good and Evil and The Tree of Life which is the oldest meaning. Ironically it is this last meaning that the tree held for the longest time (over five hundred years) that is less well known and the most significant. This is because the Talmud also says these two trees coexisted in the same place in the Garden with the Tree of Life inside and above the Tree of the Knowledge of Good and Evil. Thus the rabbis reasoned we must all go through the knowledge of good and evil before we can reach for the Tree of Life, that is salvation. An interesting thought. It is these meanings, the Tree of the Knowledge of Good and Evil and the Tree of Life that are purest. It took almost five hundred years before the Paradise tree symbol was twisted and this only occurred when the other symbols were added to it. This alone says a ton. So the original limited Paradise tree by itself seems able to withstand idolatry if left pure (untainted) or at least this is what we ourselves draw from the evidence.



2. The ornaments: This said there are still some problems with our modern view of the Paradise Tree. The first problem is with the ornaments. Originally all these ornaments were fresh foods and even when replaced by “ornaments” (man made copies) they still looked like fruits and vegetables. Over time this too changed to round or elaborate abstract versions that we know of today. Unfortunately by replacing the fruit shaped bulbs with the abstract ones we have totally lost the origin for this symbol (which is why when they do copy real things they look like everything but fruits and vegetables). We have still found the traditional fruits ornaments although they are not as easy to find as the abstract or unGodly ones. They are glass fruit shaped ornaments (still made in mostly Germany) and though hard to find they are not impossible to find. One could also use fresh like our fathers did but we find most of these fruits are hard to hang. For this reason we can make homemade ornaments. We made simple paper mache ornaments by soaking tiny torn pieces of newspaper over night, then boiling them for one hour the next day. After the paper mess cooled, and was drained, we mix the paper until a pulp is formed before adding flour (5:1) to make a clay paste. We also learned that we needed to make the fruits small because they dry faster but we also found that they can be made bigger only if we first fill the insides with dry paper or they’ll mold before they dry. These ornaments are extremely light and easy to hang if we just remember to drill the holes (attach a string) while they are still damp.



3. Cookies: The next ornaments are even more uncommon and it’s those small Eucharist shaped cookies that represent His sacrifice. After all, when was the last time you saw those Eucharist shaped cookies on a tree? Traditionally all cookies were these small round cookies with a holly stamped in them (you can still find these stamps in some Christmas cookie cutters packages). Nowadays the cookies either don’t exist or are found atop candy canes and shaped as a horse. Clearly these modern cookies have nothing to do with Christmas. Thus to remove the pagan elements just replace them with the Christian symbol.

To make this cookie you can use any rolled formed cookie dough (or even a formed refrigerator dough), roll, cut and stamp or paint them, to make the decorative hollies (or leave them plain). The easiest way to make them is to first make the cookie dough and roll into a cookie-roll instead of cutting them (you can also roll the cookie-roll in sugar), then refrigerate the cookie-roll for at least one hour before cutting them to desired thickness and then let them warm slightly before stamping them with the mold (or paint them immediately if you’re painting them with the stain). To make the paint stain you’ll need two egg yolks and food coloring. Put each in a different bowl and add red food coloring to one and green to the other (you have to add extra food coloring because the yolk turns it orange/green). Then have the kids paint on hollies before baking and hang these colorful stain glass Eucharist’s on your tree. Lastly, make sure you drill a hole for the ribbon in each cookie before you place them into the oven, as drilling them after makes great tasting cookie crumbs but not Eucharist ornaments. Two additional notes on this topic:

1. If making cookies each year is too hard, permanent cookies can also be made. This recipe was adapted from *The Frugal Gourmet Celebrates Christmas* by Jeff Smith (William Morrow and Company, NY, © 1991)

You need 1 $\frac{3}{4}$ cups hot water

1-cup salt

4 cups all purpose flour

and an egg wash:

1 egg, beaten with 3 T water

Pour hot water into a bowl with salt and stir for one minute. The salt grains will reduce in size, but they will not completely dissolve. Add flour and blend until all water is absorbed. Turn dough onto floured surface and knead a few minutes until smooth and pliable. Cover dough in a plastic bag if you do not plan to use it after the 5 minute resting time.

Roll dough out $\frac{3}{8}$ inch thick on a floured surface and cut shapes with round cutter and press with holly design (flour the mold before each time you press). Place cookies on non-stick baking sheet and brush lightly with egg wash. Bake in a preheated 300° oven for 1 hour and 15 minutes, or until golden brown.

It's nice to have these permanent cookies in storage, just in case but the fresh made are nice for treating the kids with and we have never made the inedible kind yet.



2. The holly actually is a symbol of Easter where the berry represents Y'shua's blood and the thorny leaves the crown of thorns. They make a nice link to His sacrifice and this is why we describe how to decorate them in so many ways. Also these small cookies link Christmas to Easter and in the process make a direct connection to Y'shua's birth (conception) and later death. Still if you can't find this stamp and don't want to pant it a simple cross stamped in would carry the same effect.



Together these two make the original Paradise tree and the tree doesn't look too shabby this way (we also have added a star but we explain why just below). Lastly we have experimented with creating a play in the last week of this season (based on the Genesis account) to explain the tradition completely and added the Eucharist ornaments on Christmas Eve. We made a simple paper serpent and placed a salesman face on his face to show he was selling his sin and this idea the kids really loved. One child played Eve, another Adam, still another stood behind the serpent and played him and their Father took the voice of HaShem (G-d). And as the children acted these ideas out themselves, they learned a lot about both the fall and grace through this exercise so we can see an additional value in this so we thought to pass this on.

What of the later items that came from the Trinity Triangle?



4. The star: The original topper of the Trinity Triangle (and later the Christmas Tree) was a star not an angel. The star originally represented the “star of Bethlehem” which in turn represent the Messiah as Balaam foretold:

“I see Him now, but not now; I behold Him, but not nigh: a Star shall come forth out of Jacob, and a Scepter shall rise out of Israel.” Num.24.17

It represents Yeshua (Jesus) and His authority to rule Israel and the entire world. Does it also represent the star of Bethlehem? Clearly considering that the Hebrew Word Beyth lechem means the House of Bread. The house of Jacob represent Judah, The House of Israel represents E’phraim, therefore given that the Eucharist was given unto His Church, the House of Bread must be those of His Church. From this conclusion we draw that the star of all believers is the Morning Star, Moshiach Ben Dovid (Yeshua in His return). Thus when we look up to this star we are also looking up to His joyous return in Glory.

The angel came later after people placed their Nativity beneath the tree. Unfortunately in our eyes the angel actually often distracts more than it enhance the icon (note how many trees have an angel but no Nativity). Thus we feel strongly that the star fits far better and matches exactly the Churches assertions that we are waiting for His second coming as we remember His first. Because this signifies the day of Yeshua’s coming, the star, if added, should also be added on the first day of Christmas (although it can still instead top the Trinity Triangle if you resurface this tradition). It also connects the meaning of the fall and the first coming (the sacrifice/salvation) to His second coming in victory. This in turn creates a triune symbol as well: Fall, Redemption, and Judgment.



5. The Epiphany: This is a Greek word, which means “manifestation”, “appearance” or “revelation” and of the two seasons of Christmas celebration, the Epiphany is older going back to 194 CE/AD. In the East it was the day of Christmas and represented the day of total revelation that God is in HaMoshiach Yeshua (Christ Jesus). Later it took on the meaning of two additional events that occurred during Yeshua’s time, His baptism and the first miracle at the marriage of Cana (changing water to wine). This day was also a pagan holiday for the god Dionysus (wine god) in the Aegean (surprise, surprise). Later this day was adopted in the West, which also added to the feast the visitation of the magi.

This visitation did in fact happen but certain traditional facts are a bit off. As said in our section on the star, a Gentile prophet prophesied the coming of a Jewish Messiah. His proper name we learned through research was Zoroaster and he was a Persian prophet of the God of Israel. He lived during the time of Moshe (Moses) and His prophecies include prophecies of Jewish Messiahs (plural because three such prophecies are believed to have existed although scholars do not know the true content of these prophecies because Arabs burned all of the words of Zoroaster and tried to wipe out the priesthood. The children of Zoroaster are our modern Kurds). So why if we have no written record of any of Zoroaster prophecies, just evidences that he existed, do we believe it was he that is in fact the foreigner, Balaam, of Numbers? We draw this from the fact that he coexisted with Moshe, he had a religion of the Light that taught social justice and faith in One

God, he foretold a Jewish Messiah (all three prophecies where of Jewish Messiahs and never Persian Messiahs) and his priest were called magi; see Matt.2.1-12 (and this isn't all but if we tell everything this write-up will be a book). Yes, these are the very same Magi, that brought the gifts not an oriental man, white man, and black man (they were all Arabs) although there is no harm in them being so depicted. After all how could people from those parts of the world know to seek a Jewish Messiah by following a star anyway?

Thus the magi not only came, they also left a forwarding address of their former nation by their name. And their former prophet even explains how these "Gentiles" knew to follow a star to find a Jewish Messiah in the first place, see above quote or go to Num.24.15-19 (and also why they did not know where to look in Israel, because they did not have the Tanakh (Hebrew Scriptures) at their disposal). Therefore their coming has a purpose and celebration of this event is perfectly Christian. As for the day of celebration, so long as it does not degenerate to it's root of drunken bedlam, we ourselves see no problems in celebrating this day, in fact, making Christmas a twelve-day celebration has its own positive effect (that the world cannot share) which we'll explain further down.



6. **Lights:** The original candles were white for victory and these were directly replaced by the white electric lights. Later colored lights were added but there was no spiritual reason for this that we could find although some have later suggests they can represent the covenant given to Noah. Yet the lights are clearly one of the symbols from the Trinity Triangle that the pagans most desired from their Yule tree.

Still, Christmas is called the Christian Chanukah for a reason, more so than these lights from what we have figured out. It is because we feel we have found a direct connection to Chanukah and the first day of Christmas and this is that, in the year Miriam (Mary) conceived Yeshua (Jesus), Chanukah may very well have fallen on Christmas Day (that is the first day of Chanukah, 25th of Kislev might have come as the sunlight of the day lengthened that year), see our write up "Can We Know When Yeshua is Born" for the significance of this day. Thus if we are correct The Light of the world did in fact come into our world on Christmas albeit not in quite the way the Church figured. Thus lights fit the "Reason for the Season" extremely well.

Thus if any lights are added we feel white ourselves because this is closer to the true spiritual meaning, the historical meaning (on the Trinity Triangle) and also keeps our decorations more distinct from the commercial ones. Also adding them on the day of Christmas would help because this was when the light came into the world not during Advent. Still, it was after the lights were added to the Paradise tree the tree was compromised and perhaps this is because by moving the lights, we weakened the symbol. The original tree looked nice but when lights came into the picture they glowed brightly and glistened greatly from many directions not one. Thus they serve to alight the tree more than remind us that His Light has come. Yet in another symbol the Trinity Triangle, the lights could be lit one a day for twelve days thus the light would grow in our homes as the child grew in Miriam womb and as faith grows in our hearts. This is why when we have put up a tree we leave off these lights from our tree and why we are seeking to resurfaced the Trinity Triangle with a few modification:



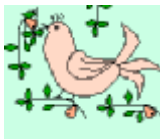
The Trinity Triangle: What if we resurrected that old tradition that was so popular in Germany (it is at least as old as the Paradise tree and maybe older) its symbols survive even today? Yes we know that probably that full sized display is too cumbersome for most homes but what if we in the Catholic faith created a menorah like Judah's Chanukiah which was a table top version and we lit the light, one day and said a simple prayer:

“Blessed are You, O Lord Our God, King of the Universe, who calls us to kindle the lights of Christmas.”

And also on the first and last days we might add:

“Thank you for sending The Light of the Messiah into the world during this seasonal time. ”

Then we might even teach each day a special activity and tie this to a Catholic song of faith under persecution:



7. The Catholic Draydel:

We call the “Twelve Days of Christmas” the Catholic Draydel because both icons are covert methods our fathers used to teach their children their faith in God during times of extreme persecution. Between the years 1558-1829, Catholics in England were not allowed to teach the Catechism and in fact they were prohibited from any practice of faith at all, both private and public (just as Antiochus prohibited Judah from teaching or keeping Torah) least many suffer a violent death for our faith. Like the draydel, the song “The Twelve Days of Christmas” taught the faith secretly. In the case of the draydel the children pretended to gamble when the soldiers found them hiding because this would distract the soldiers for searching them for their study scrolls. The Twelve Days of Christmas was like the draydel in that if interrupted in studies, the Catholic children would break forth in this catchy tune and the authorities would think they were singing anything but their Catechism thus being thrown off the scent and sometimes joining in their festivities. Both these lessons from history teach our children about how we are to respond to persecution yet unlike the draydel the song about the Twelve Days of Christmas were also a lesson within a distraction.

The lesson: each “gift” in the twelve days represents a gift God gave us in our faith and the true love of the song is God Himself. Here is a brief description of the other lessons found within the song:

1. “A partridge in a pear tree” is Yeshua HaMoshiach (Jesus the Messiah). Here He is represented by a mother partridge that feigns injury to decoy predators to save her nestlings from death. Thus He gave Himself for us to save God’s children from our sins by hanging on a tree. Hence the lesson on this first day is His sacrifice upon the cross. This may seem a strange lesson to give on the day when most of Christianity is remembering His birth however it may better fit the season that most realize. After all the “swaddling clothes” mentioned in the Christmas narrative were indeed rags but not any rags. The cloth they came from was the old priestly garments, which when replaced with a fresh ones; these old garments were cut up and used to make the cloth that “swaddled” the dead. Yeshua then was wrapped in the garments of both priests and the dead. Therefore it’s not just the holly that connects one season to another.

2. “Two turtle doves” is the two main books of the Bible- the Tanakh (Hebrew Scriptures) and the Brith HaDoshah (New Testament). Thus even in the sixteenth century our Church recognized the blessing not only of the New Words given after the Messiah came but also those Words that preceded His coming. After all, Yeshua said:

“Think not that I have come to abolish the Law and the prophets; I have come not to abolish them but to fulfill them.” Matt.5.17

The Law is the Torah and the prophets are the remaining sections of the Hebrew Scriptures. Thus these Words were never abolished but fulfilled and carry as much weight the Brith HaDoshah (although seen through the sacrifice they take on a different light). This was also something Pope Pius tried to get all to understand in Germany but these words often fell on deaf ears. He felt if we valued the Words in both books and place them equal footing then the Jewish persecution would be less likely to happen. Perhaps he was naive or perhaps in Germany, German children were not taught the value of both books once a year so they would also value the Jewish culture and thoughts that inspired them.

3. “Three French Hens” represent faith, hope and love, the three Theological Virtues. These virtues are drawn from 1Cor.13 a text often called the Love Scripture because it’s whole emphasis is on what represents true love (something we all need to learn, ourselves strongly included). It is a good scripture to teach and learn by heart.

4. “Four calling birds” represent the four Gospels- Matthew, Mark, Luke and John. These are the first four books of the New Testament and they are eyewitness or near eyewitness accounts of what Yeshua said and He did over the three years of His ministry. All other writings in the New Testament grow forth from these four books. They are also the easiest books to understand and an excellent place to start teaching children about their faith.

5. “Five Golden Rings” represent the first five books of the Hebrew Scriptures or Torah/ Pentateuch. As stated above Yeshua did not abolish the Law or Torah but fulfilled it in His coming, dying and resurrection. He also states that we are to teach Torah this includes even “the least of these Commandments”, Matt.5.19 and those who do so are called “great in the Kingdom of heaven”. Besides, the Torah/Pentateuch is full of beautiful stories that teach us about God and His children. Just as the Gospels are open to children because of the stories

found within, so is the Torah open to younger minds. This is why it is called a song, because even the youngest gets things from it along side the scholar. Thus on these last two days we teach our children to value both sets of foundational books that not only rich with wonderful insights to the aged but wonderful exciting tales to ignite our children's faith and love for God.

6. "Six geese a-laying" represents the six days of creation and that all was created by Him and through Him as Paul says "He is the Image of the invisible God, the first-born of all creation; for in Him all things were created, in heaven and earth, visible and invisible, whether thrones or dominions or principalities or authorities- all things were created through Him, and for Him" Col.1.15-17. In our evolution crazy society, stopping a day to remember the Artist Who was the foundation of all things theorized is perhaps not a bad idea!

7. "Seven swans a swimming" represent the seven gifts of the Ruach HaKadosh (Holy Spirit): the seven sacraments- Baptism, Reconciliation, First Eucharist, Confirmation, Marriage, Holy Orders and Anointing of the Sick. This is a great day to explain what a sacrament is (an outward sign of an inward change) and why they are so important to our faith. You could also choose a sacrament per year to study/teach so you understand them better or at least teach the ones our kids know so little of like Holy Orders and Anointing of the Sick.

Protestants might have a bit of trouble using these (they often do not accept as many sacraments as Catholics do for some reason) so if they wish to use our Catholic hymn they could supplement this with the seventh day of creation and the Sabbath rest and teach about the Sabbath instead. Of course they might also teach the true meaning of this song but by explaining their difference in understanding when they get here and how such a trivial disagreement should not divide us as believers. After all those Catholics who inspired and used this song were being persecuted and killed in a Protestant nation and not in a G-dless one. Catholics however are not immune to this same sin thus teaching this lesson here makes sense for all the faithful.

8. "Eight maids a-milking" represent the eight Beatitudes, see Matt.5.3-12 and for the explanation see The Sermon on the Mount as Yeshua explained these blessing implications Himself.

9. "Nine ladies dancing" represent the nine fruits of the Ruach HaKadosh (Holy Spirit)- we suspect these are the ones found in Galatians 5 verses 22-23: charity (love), joy, peace, patience, kindness, goodness, faith, modesty, and self-restraint. This day is much like an reinstatement of the day three (if you teach all of 1Cor.13) but it isn't as if these lessons do not need frequent reiteration to take root in our children's hearts. Then again, if the whole lesson isn't found in day three it well be taught here instead.

10. "Ten lords a-leaping" represent the Ten Commandments, see Ex.20.1-17, the "Thou shalt not"s. It is wise to mention both the blessing of faith and the curses of faithlessness close together so our children get a clear vision of both choices they must someday make. Paul does this himself a chapter before he mentions the fruits of the Spirit, verses 19-21 saying "those who do such things shall not inherit the kingdom of God." Adding "those

who belong to Christ Jesus have crucified the flesh with its passions and desires”(24). That is He has “set before us life and death a blessing and a curse” let us teach this to our children that they should always choose life.

11. “Eleven pipers piping” represent the eleven faithful apostles, this is a good day to teach discipleship. Matt.13 is a good parable for the younger set. Older children and adult might ponder, Lk.12.4-12 or Matt.10.24-42, which are two passages where Yeshua discusses with His disciples both the costs and the promises of discipleship. This lesson also does very well following the two above.

12. “Twelve drummers drumming” represents the twelve points of doctrine in the Apostles Creeds. We are not exactly sure how the Apostles Creed is divided up into twelve points but the Creed goes:

We believe in God, The Father Almighty, Creator of heaven and earth.
We believe in Jesus Christ, His only Son, our Lord.
He was conceived by the power of the Holy Spirit and born of the Virgin Mary.
He suffered under Pontius Pilate, was crucified, died and was buried.
He descended to the dead.
On the third day He rose again.
He ascended into heaven, and is seated at the right hand of the Father.
He will come again to judge the living and the dead.
We believe in the Holy Spirit,
The holy catholic Church,
The communion of saints,
The forgiveness of sins,
The resurrection of the body,
And everlasting life.

We take one of each of these concepts and develop it further, such as discussing why Yeshua called the Omnipresent One, Our Father and what this means to us. However, we also teach our children why the Church has creeds. It is to help the young and uneducated to learn the tenets of our faith so that no one is left from the kingdom, educated or not. In fact all prayers are created for much the same reason. Thus creeds and formal prayers are but a beginning and not the end in our worship.

On each day of the twelve days of Christmas one lesson was given. This was the true gift, a gift of the spirit. Thus as Catholics (or Protestants using the slight modification) teaching these lessons during Christmas can help deepen our children’s understanding of their faith and as the lessons are taught, the children can suck on their candy canes or eat Eucharist cookies. However also in this lesson we also teach our children why these lessons are encoded in a song and what this teaches all of us about persecution and/or the need for tolerance of others beliefs (after all those that murdered Catholics in England were professed “Christians” and not pagans). Thus this lesson of Christmas that our people created in great persecution is a highly important one. This is because the false theology of the end times will bear great similarity to our own which is why Yeshua warned that even the elect might be turned astray if this were possible. So it will be (as it was in Nazi Germany) “professed” Christians who bring about the great apostasy and not witches or wizards (though these will be found acceptable on the call for “tolerance” very different than our own

faiths version of this word). Thus only those who take the very narrow path will suffer and if one stands in this group great creativity maybe required to survive long enough to save others (might this be why these true facts are coming out right now?). Thus this too is the message of Christmas.

Combined with the lights of the Trinity Triangle, these two can form a powerful symbol not only of Christmas but also of our faith and they have within them the potential of lots of fun as well. We are right now working on securing a Patent on a more modern version of the Trinity Triangle and once we have it we will offer what anyone interested needs to keep this holiday for as little as a self addressed and stamped envelope to us if they want to make their own and have the means but we are also looking into different ways we might try to manufacture this idea cheaply and when these details get worked out we hope we can get something working for those lacking the materials to make there own or the time.










8. Candy: The candy cane is made in the shape of a shepherd staff because we are all to become like the Good Shepherd, when it is turn up side down it resembles a fishing hook because we are all called to be “fisher of men” (and spells the first letter in the English version of the Greek name Jesus). It also looks forward to Yeshua’s (Jesus’) ministry and the theme of discipleship. Only problem is does this belong on the Paradise Tree?

We can find one way to place this on our tree and this is to play upon our own need for good discipleship by following the good Shepherd. One way is to place them on the tree on the day of Christmas and have them signify specific stories from the Word you’ll read during the season or to help supplement the “Twelve Days of Christmas” activities you may do. When the stories come out the children can withdrawal a candy cane and taste the sweetness of salvation as they learn about the mercy and love of G-d. If doing “The Twelve Days” you can also explain the meaning of this Christmas sweet the day you teach discipleship (day 11). Of course the cookies can serve the same function and being a symbol of the Eucharist (the Bread of Life thus they fit the first day of Christmas well) and they connect the Word to the Thanksgiving Sacrifice and the candy can go elsewhere than on the tree.

9. The Garland and Tinsel: The symbols of the king: silver and gold. Beryl Ives sings the famous song “Silver and gold, silver and gold, everyone loves silver and gold.” And so on but where in this song is there any mention of the King of kings? Put simply these symbols do not really teach us that HaMoshiach is King, at least not very well. Far better are other icons Latin letters, and statues that show him as King. Even small crowns do better because they do not wrap about the tree like a stole. Two other symbols that would work and not create this confusion is the Lion of



Judah:  or the Alpha “A” and the Omega “Ω”:
     . These could be ornaments added after the season of Christmas has begun to the tree or fashioned onto the Catholic Menorah (Trinity Triangle) if this idea ever catches (re-catches) on as the Paradise tree already has a star to signify His return in Glory. Actually we tend to move this symbol to the fall and hang the above symbols from our succah but this like some other details belong to another site.



10. The loot: What is Christmas without gifts? Far less distracting to begin with. This is the day the Light came into the world and not a day self-gratification. Add to this that the Magi came to bring Him gifts and not us gifts it's clear that the gifts were not given in response to either the Messiah birth or the Magi coming. If neither of these two sources are the root of gift giving then where did the tradition of giving gifts on Christmas (Saint Nicholas Day, and the Epiphany) start? Our research has found that they come from several sources among these is an ancient Roman god (Saturn) whose birthday was on the 25th of December (some other sources say the 23rd was the date). This day was called "the Feast For the Invisible Son" or Saturnalia (he was the invisible son because according to legend Saturn one day vanished from the earth). Traditionally rich or poor on that day shared the same table (foods) with the wealthy because this day represented "the golden age" when there would be no more class distinctions. Later Boxing Day evolved (really it was the same tradition, the name was changed to protect it from its history) and fell/falls on Saint Stevens's day (the day after Christmas). On this day the king/rich gave boxes of gold to the poor, those that served the public needs and/or individual servants of the castle/house and all were given a day off from work in the kingdom. The holiday lasted and work ceased until the Yule log was consumed. Later this tradition was carried to the American south as thus gave a day of rest and celebration for the poor and slaves.

However we found an interesting connection to another Yule god of the northern tribes called Thor (see if he resembles anyone we know). Thor: gave gifts during the winter solstice to the poor (only one legend of St. Nicholas is of gift giving and these were gifts of freedom), lived in the northern region (St. Nicholas was from Turkey, definitely south), had fire as his element thus he traveled down the chimney and dropped the gifts in stocking (in the one story Nicholas threw the money through a window but they landed on the floor, not in stockings), wore red and white (Bishop's wear red and gold), had a full beard and was very big on the fat side (early pictures have Nicholas's as thin with a balding head), and, of course, Crasher and Nasher his white goats that pulled his chariot (tradition has it Nicholas rode a white horse).



Saint Nicholas is a Catholic Saint and his feast day falls in December 6th. Many legends surround the Saint but only one mentions a "gift" and this gift was to save the girls from prostitution and death and not to line anyone pockets. He is credited with saving a ship from sinking, stopping a hanging of three innocent men, saving three soldiers from a false charge, returning a stolen child to his parents and in two of our favorite legends, saving two sinners from the sin of materialism (ironic or what?). Note that none of these legends have to do with chimneys or even what we would consider "traditional" gift giving (nor are any other of the legends we left out which are credited to the Saint in the first ten centuries).

Like "The Twelve Days of Christmas" the gifts Saint Nicholas is credited in giving are gifts of faith alone. Each and every legendary gift was given to strengthen someone's faith not in the reputation of the Bishop of Myra but in the Father who provided him with these miracles through God's grace. After the Bishop of Myra died Nicholas was the most popular name for three centuries for both boys and girls (girls were named Nichol). So great a believer this man was that another child three years later who bore his name sought to emulate the good Bishop as well and would go on to become a saint in his own right. Despite this, years later Pope Gregory the Great

removed Saint Nicholas's feast day from the public celebrations. Why would a righteous pope do this given that Saint Nicholas was clearly a righteous man?

Briefly, in the Middle ages people dressed as Saint Nicholas and gave gifts on this day, which were simple rewards after the children showed they knew some facts about their faith (nuts, fresh fruits, and linzer or St. Nicholas cookies were the gifts given). True fresh fruit and nuts have changed in meaning over the years (they were once great treasures) but still not to the level that gifts have gotten to on Christmas in our modern era. Also as time wore on Saint Nicholas was followed by a "demon" that whipped (or abducted) bad children (he was called old Nick or later Old Peter for an anti-papacy slant). Thus over time this seemingly harmless tradition began to get out of hand (people forgot to tell their kids . . .) so the Church sought to suppress the Saint in hopes of stopping the gluttony and materialism that had inadvertently grown up surrounded this day. Problem is, as we already seen before, traditions once entrenched are hard to derail. What has been true of our Christmas tree is true also of the Godly saint. As the Church suppressed the holiday because of the impropriety that grew from it, the old gods and the traditions of the past started to make a come back (this by the way is another good reason in not official prohibiting an established tradition but instead to teaching the masses of the root or gradually turning them into another direction).

So in honor of this G-dly man might we serious consider returning him to his feast day on the 6th of December (Protestants moved the day to Christmas because they didn't want to celebrate a Catholic Saint) and learn about the real Saint Nicholas and teach this on this day. The stories are not only teach the faith they also are exciting and sometimes adventurous and child love to hear them. We tell a different story each year and the stories are so numerous and the children are young enough that we have yet to repeat any so far. We make Saint Nicolas cookies (also called Linzer cookies or thumb prints) filled with the gold (apricot) and red (raspberry) jams to remind our kids of the colors of the bishop's robes and staff. These are only traditions of Saint Nicolas we maintain and our kids are enthralled by them and do not even known they are "missing anything". Then again they get our time and truth is, for kids, a parents time is far more precious as a multitude of gifts.



Thus all traditions on gift giving that we researched had pagan (and no we did not discuss them all due to space) not Christian roots to them (even those credited to the Saint). Considering that the Christian "reason for the season" is the humble birth of the Christ child who couldn't even get a room in an Inn, so He was born in a stable (open barn called a succah) where animals were kept and wrapped in the same rags the dead are wrapped in, the extreme acts of materialism that are the focus of the day are a "bit" out of place. For this reason, if you feel you must give gifts, consider moving the gifts away from Christmas, because if the secular tree is distracting to the meaning of the season how much more a pagan god of colossal materialism? The meaning of the season after all, is that when the savior came He homeless and without decent clothes to wear and what do our kids get on Christmas?



Besides, the real gift all our children need from us in our busy world today is not more “stuff” but more time. Kids know they are important to their parents by their parents spending time with them because time has always been the one thing all parent have so little of. This is why the Father of all gave us, as His first gift of all gifts, a gift of time- the Sabbath. Sabbath is nothing short of twenty-four hours of our time that we give to God and our families. The giving of this time is important (He exiled Judah to Babylon over not setting this time aside). It is important to us not for Him for “the Sabbath was made for the man not the man for the Sabbath”. Thus by giving us the Sabbath God sought to show us the great gift of giving time to ourselves and those we love. Thus, what we are recommending in this section is not to get rid of all gifts, just the commercial ones, the quick and easy ones, and replace them with gifts of time which making ornaments, putting on plays, making traditional cookies, and telling them stories are.



After Christmas is over we might glean one more symbol from the Paradise Tree. Just as the holly connects Easter to Christmas, so too can Christmas be linked to Easter through this tree. We do this by cutting a section of the trunk off the tree before the tree is taken out to compost. This trunk is cut in half along its diameter (you’ll have two long pieces with a flat edge) and then cut one of the pieces in half-length wise. These two pieces are hammered to the long piece to form a cross but we’ve also saved dividing one section and just hammer the cross piece and hammer two dowel under these to keep the cross from tilting. Then holes are drilled into the trunk to mark the weeks of Lent (six holes). In the center we have also drilled another hole for our Easter Candle, if we have one. If you do this then the first candle should be lit on Ash Wednesday and then after this a candle is lit ever Sunday until Easter.



So here is an example how the humble Christian icon can look come Christmas morn (actually since all the lights are lit on the menorah so it must be His epiphany). One might put up the Paradise tree with only the fruited ornaments on the last week of Advent. Soon after one might resurfaced the ancient traditions and we also recreated the paradise play (based on Gen.2-3) complete with a homemade serpent, which stayed on the tree until Christmas, and also told the story of the play how it is connected to the season of Yeshua's coming one year with great success. On the Eve of Christmas the first candle was lit on our homemade Trinity Triangle (Catholic menorah) after we had return from 8:00 mass and we sang the first verse of the Twelve Days of Christmas. Early the next morning the Eucharist cookies were placed on the tree as we discussed the sacrifice and how this sacrifice connects to The Tree of Life ("On the first day of Christmas") and while children munched on these same Eucharist cookies that we did not hang. In that evening we lit an additional candle and continue this each day for twelve days. We also had a new activity daily with lessons, stories, and sweets and songs of praise.

Why do we say the above always in the past tense? It is because we believe firmly that we are Israel and are returning back to ways of our ancestors and we therefore we celebrate both holidays of Chanukah to Christmas however our Christmas celebration is simpler for this reason (we employ the Trinity Triangle and the "Twelve days..." but no tree though we admit we are still struggling with this here and so we do not force these beliefs on all our brethren or even our children). However before we began this return the Ruach (Spirit) led us to our Catholic heritage first. And then when He led to our Jewish heritage He exposed to us how the two traditions overlap (when presented in their pure forms) and we feel all this was no coincidence. Thus although we often quote Lk.5.39 "the old is better than the new" in reference to the Spiritual understanding of Torah the same can be said of the "old" traditions of the Holy Roman Catholic Church. The above reforms are Catholic traditions that existed long before the Reformation and long before the New World presented their "newer" versions, which were thrust upon us by the wiles of hasatan and the jealousy of others. Both the Trinity Triangle and the Paradise Tree have existed since the Middle Ages (and the Trinity Triangle maybe older as we never found it true origins but evidence of existence goes back this far at least) and traditions of Saint Nicholas we recommend go back to the first few years after he died (telling stories while offering sweets) that is the seventh century (albeit no doubt with fewer stories)!

So although we no longer keep many of these traditions (or we modified them) but the older ones we can vouch for those who do not feel called to the ways of Torah but are seeking a faith like that of old and ways to really teach "the reason for the season" by purging from their modern "traditions" the dross that has migrated into them however to merciful with those who cannot yet see as you see.

Thus your Catholic Chanukiah the Trinity Triangles light will grow within your homes as the promise of Emmanuel grew within the heart of the young virgin of Galilee after the angelic visitation, as it grew in the faith of shepherds who watched the sky ignite with glorious songs of heavenly joy, and as it grew in the eyes of the Magi, priest of Persia, who set out to find Him in the nation Israel even though they knew not that He was born in David's city. It is this last reason why the lights shine brightest on the last of the twelve days because these Persia priests represent all the Gentiles AND JEWS of the earth (royal

priesthood). We are called to seek Him and teach our children to seek him and through lessons of being creative in the face of persecution we also learn to have faith no matter what circumstances come before us, even if an angle comes to say we are called for a mission that might lead to persecution or even end with our lives.

After all what really is the lesson of Christmas/Chanukah? Is it not that simple faith of a Nazarene virgin who could have taken the easy way out and but who said instead “Behold, I am a handmaiden of the L-rd; let it be to me according to your will” Lk.1.38. It would have been far easier to have said “no” and there is no evidence the Father would have condemned her if she was too fearful but fear never entered her mind only the mechanics of the request puzzled her. This is why she will always in every generation be called blessed! And in the same way when faced with imprisonment and death those Catholics in Protestant England could have just converted to be Anglicans and forsaken their heritage. However they felt in their hearts the Catholic faith was not false and they were willing to die for this faith. Yet they were not willing to sacrifice the faith of their children so they created by the same Ruach (Spirit) a song that would hold back their death long enough for the children to learn the roots of their Catholic faith so that these children remained steadfast long after their parents were dead.

Therefore Christians, Catholics can be right and they need NOT be boring. Let's be willing to prove that Roman wrong on only the first account and not weary of strengthening our children's (and our own) faith as we do this.

Have a good and peaceful Christmas and a blessed Epiphany of our L-rd and Savior Yeshua (Jesus) the Messiah and (for those like us) and Happy Chanukah.

Shalom,
Corey and Carol Foegen

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