

THE JESSE TREE IS THE JESUS TREE

OVERVIEW OF THE BIBLE STUDIES

1. Advent 1—Jesus, the Seed of Jesse’s Tree (Genesis 1:27; 3:8–15; Romans 5:12–21)
2. Advent 2—Jesus, the Root of Jesse’s Tree (Genesis 22:1–18; Hebrews 11:17–22)
3. Advent 3—Jesus, the Life of Jesse’s Tree (Matthew 3:13–17; Romans 6:1–11)
4. Christmas—Jesus, the Firstfruit of Jesse’s Tree (John 1:1–14)

GENERAL INTRODUCTION TO THE THEME

It is Advent—a time to reflect, pray, and worship the Christ who came, who comes, and who will come again. Imagine the world some two thousand years ago in the weeks before the birth of the Babe of Bethlehem. People were busy doing whatever it was that defined their lives at that moment. For some, it was struggling against hunger, fear, and desperation. For others, it was enjoying their wealth and ease. For yet others, it was simply dealing with the pressures of their lives. But for all, the weeks we call “Advent” were just days and nights lived in darkness.

And indeed, it is a dark world. God had created the world to live in union with Him. He had breathed life into the father of our race, Adam, a creature of dust. He had formed Eve from the side of Adam and had joined the two together and to Himself. How bright the world must have been as Eden lived in harmony with the Creator.

But darkness came. Those created and loved by God rebelled against Him, bringing a darkness that permeated all creation. Death had entered through sin, and as the children of Adam filled the world, they took with them the darkness of that dreadful day in Eden when sin and death entered the world.

It was a world of darkness cut off from the source of all light, the Creator. Yet a light was breaking into the world. A young girl carried in her virgin womb a Son. This daughter of Eve was about to give birth to the One who would be the light of the world. This infant would reverse forever the horror of humanity’s fall into sin and death and darkness. This was the miracle of miracles: our human sister Mary became, by the power of the Holy Spirit, the mother of God, the bearer of the Savior of the world.

No human eye could perceive it that night. All that could be seen was a child. Yet this child would forever destroy the darkness for He brought life into death, and His light was to be the light of the world.

Every force of Satan would seek to put that light out. Herod would attempt to destroy Him by killing every male infant. Scribes and Pharisees would seek to silence Him as He spoke words of life. Failing to silence Him, they would seek to kill Him. Some thirty-three years after the first Christmas, the Babe of Bethlehem would be nailed to a cross. But this is what He had come to do. The Advent story, including the culminating Christmas story, is about a baby who had been born to die—yet not just to die but to be placed in the utter darkness of a tomb and on Easter morning to burst forth from the tomb. When the child of Mary rose from the grave, the light that began at Bethlehem shone so brightly that no one can put it out.

This Advent, we gather in the name of Jesus and consider His great story anew. The Jesse Tree is filled with symbols telling the story of Jesus from creation to His second coming. The story of the Bible, Old and New Testaments alike, is the story of Jesus. He is the Seed of Jesse’s

tree. He is the Root of Jesse's tree. He is the Life of Jesse's tree. And He is the Firstfruit of Jesse's tree. As the Church will sing with the angels on Christmas Day, "To God on high be glory and peace to all the earth" (*LSB* 383).

MIDWEEK OF ADVENT 1: LEADER

Jesus, the Seed of Jesse's Tree

Genesis 1:27; 3:8–15; Romans 5:12–21

OPENING

Pray: Stir up Your power, O Lord, and come, that by Your protection we may be rescued from the threatening perils of our sins and saved by Your mighty deliverance; for You live and reign with the Father and the Holy Spirit, one God, now and forever. Amen. (Collect for Advent 1, *LSB Altar Book*, p. 840)

INTRODUCTION

Along with Christmas trees and Advent calendars, many Christians today follow some form of Jesse Tree tradition to mark the season of Advent. For each day in Advent, a Bible story is read and an ornament with a symbol connected to that story is hung upon a tree. Not surprisingly, the creation and fall (Genesis 1–3) are usually the first stories read. Likewise, this lesson takes us back to the beginning to see where the story of the Jesse Tree (which is the Jesus Tree!) has its seed.

QUESTIONS AND ANSWERS

Q1. Jesse, the father of David, appears in the genealogies of Jesus given in both Matthew 1:1–17 and Luke 3:23–38. While he is a crucial link in the chain, he certainly is not the main character. Compare Matthew 1:1–2, 17 with Luke 3:23, 38. What emphases does each evangelist make in structuring Jesus' genealogy in different ways?

A1. A close reading of the two genealogies of Jesus seems to reveal contradictions, but these can be explained. Most interesting is how Matthew and Luke structure the genealogies for theological emphases. As we shall see, the Holy Spirit inspired the evangelists to highlight different aspects of the person and work of Jesus Christ.

Matthew seems to be writing primarily to a Hebrew audience, so he emphasizes that Jesus is the offspring of Abraham and David's legal heir, the long-expected Messiah of Israel who would return His people from exile and establish a permanent, heavenly promised land. So Matthew structures the genealogy in fourteen generations, with three distinct sections: Abraham to David, David to the deportation to Babylon, and the deportation to Christ. Matthew highlights the most prominent names in Jesus' lineage and emphasizes that Jesus is the Christ who would reign over the throne of David forever.

Luke seems to be writing to a primarily Gentile audience, and he traces Jesus' genealogy all the way back to Adam, the first "son of God" and father of all humans, Jew and Gentile alike. But in Luke's Gospel, when Jesus is presented as the "Son of God" and Savior, it is according to both His divine and human natures as the God-man. As St. Paul will show in Romans 5, in Adam all die, but in Christ, all who believe will be made alive!

Transition: In order to appreciate what Christ has done for us, we need to understand our original state in the Garden of Eden and the consequences of the fall into sin.

Q2. What does Genesis 1:27 teach about humanity? How is the situation altered after the fall, according to Genesis 5:1–5?

A2. It is remarkable how much God can tell us about humans through a single Bible passage. Genesis 1:27 identifies God as the creator of mankind, which means that mankind is not a god but a creature wholly dependent upon—and accountable to—Him. Man’s creation is in God’s “own image,” which means that man was a perfect reflection of God’s character: righteous, holy, delighted to serve God with uncorrupted will, and not destined for death. And God created them “male and female” so that they could procreate and fill the earth, delight in one another in holy matrimony, and bring up children in the fear and knowledge of God.

Genesis 5 demonstrates some continuity with Genesis 1 (mankind remains male and female and procreates), but a dramatic change has occurred: humanity has lost the image of God (original righteousness) and now is infected with original sin, which leads to each generation being born in the likeness of a sinful father, not in the image of God. This in turn leads to death.

Transition: The familiar story of the fall shows us how Adam and Eve ended up in this state as well as what God promised to do about it.

Q3. According to Genesis 3:7–15, what does the introduction of sin into the world do to Adam and Eve? How do they try to deal with their sin, and does this pattern continue still today? How does God deal with sin?

A3. Before the fall, Adam and Eve enjoyed having “the image of God” and being in perfect communion with Him. After the fall, the Lord’s presence in the garden brought them terror rather than peace due to their guilt and shame over sin. Instead of confessing their sin and repenting, Adam and Eve try to cover their guilt and shame. They cover their nakedness with fig leaves (3:7), try to hide from God (3:8–11), and transfer blame for their sin (3:12–13). Adam indirectly blames God (“the woman *You* gave to be with me” [emphasis added]), and Eve blames Satan.

To this day, sinners follow their first parents’ pattern for dealing with sins: some think leading an outwardly righteous life covers sin (salvation by works); some try to hide from God (rejection of God’s Word); others blame their sin on external factors or other people (trying to excuse or justify sin).

Man-made methods for disposing of sin never work. Only God can take away sin and its effects, guilt and shame. He shows this in the first Gospel promise in the Bible (3:15). God would crush Satan and save the world through the Offspring (Seed) of the woman, the new Adam, Jesus Christ.

Transition: Genesis 3:16–19 goes on to list the many consequences of sin on mankind: pain in childbearing for the woman, conflict between husband and wife, frustrating toil for the man, and death for all. In Romans 5, St. Paul contrasts the death-delivering sin of Adam with the life-giving work of Christ.

Q4. In Romans 5:15–19, how does Paul make use of Adam’s sin in service of the Gospel? Do these verses mean that eternal life is a gift *received* by all human beings? Why or why not? Compare with Romans 3:22–25.

A4. St. Paul uses Adam’s sin to illustrate the universal nature of Christ’s death and resurrection. As Adam’s sin spread death to all humanity, now Christ’s saving work has won forgiveness of sins and justification for all sinners. The effects of Adam’s sin and Christ’s work are similar in scope but opposite in content: death versus life.

If one were to read Romans 5:18 out of context (“one act of righteousness leads to justification and life for all men”), it might seem that all humans actually *receive* the benefits of His work. However, Scripture must interpret Scripture, and Paul had already emphatically stated in Romans 3:22–25 that, while God has justified all sinners for the sake of Christ, the only way to receive the free gift of salvation is by *faith*.

Therefore, Paul excludes both works-righteousness (salvation by doing works of the Law) *and* universalism (salvation by God’s grace without the need for faith). As sinners, we are naturally inclined to want to believe in either works-righteousness or universalism, but neither is true.

Transition: Satan’s area of expertise is falsehood. He had appeared to Adam and Eve in the form of a serpent in order to deceive them and lead them to disobey God’s Word.

Q5. How does God’s Word characterize Satan? See Matthew 4:1–4, John 8:42–44, and 1 John 5:19–21. According to 2 Corinthians 11:2–3, what is the serpent’s primary goal today?

A5. Satan, also called “the devil” (which means “adversary” or “slanderer”), is identified as “the tempter” as he attempts to seduce Jesus into forsaking His Father and throwing in His lot with the enemy (Matthew 4:1–4). Jesus calls the devil “a murderer” and “a liar and the father of lies,” which is his character (John 8:42–44). Satan also is known as “the evil one” who has the whole world in his power. But through God’s Son, “the true God and eternal life,” we are set free from Satan’s power and, by the power of the Holy Spirit, can resist idolatry (1 John 5:19–21). Nonetheless, Satan is constantly seeking to deceive us and lead us away from being devoted to our Bridegroom, Jesus Christ (2 Corinthians 11:2–3).

Transition: The theme of this Advent series identifies Jesus as the Seed, the Root, the Life, and the Firstfruit of Jesse’s tree. Those are a lot of hats to wear, but Jesus can do it all!

Q6. In the Old Testament, the first offspring of the Jesse Tree is King David, and the Messiah (Christ) would be called “Son of David.” In Matthew 22:41–46, how does David himself demonstrate Jesus’ ability to fulfill so many different roles for us as Savior?

A6. When Jesus asked the Pharisees whose son (or descendant) the Christ would be, they rightly answered, “The son of David.” But Jesus complicates matters for them by pointing out that David, inspired by the Holy Spirit, had written in Psalm 110:1, “The Lord said to my Lord, ‘Sit at my right hand, until I put your enemies under your feet’” (Matthew 22:44), which shows that the Messiah is both David’s Son and David’s Lord, referring to both His human and divine natures. None of the Pharisees were willing to accept Jesus’ teaching, but neither were they willing to challenge Him, waiting instead to eliminate Him by force.

Transition: The God-man, Jesus Christ, would voluntarily go to Calvary to lay down His life for the sins of the world and would rise on Easter to declare the world justified, a message to be received by faith alone.

CONCLUSION

“So let no one boast in men. For all things are yours . . . all are yours, and you are Christ’s, and Christ is God’s” (1 Corinthians 3:21–23). As sinners, we are constantly selling ourselves short. We want to have it all, but we fail to find the “all” by looking for it in the creation rather than in the Creator, by trying to save our lives in this world rather than looking to the Savior. If, by faith, we embrace the fact that we really do have it all in Christ—forgiveness of sins without measure, life and salvation now and forever—we will be able to drive out that seed of doubt that suggests God is holding out on us, and we can enjoy being grafted into the tree of the Seed of Jesse’s tree, Jesus.

Close with prayer.

CLOSING

Pray: Lord Jesus Christ, You were the blessed Seed promised to Adam and Eve in the Garden of Eden, and You preserved Your line through Jesse so that You could be both David's Son and David's Lord in Your incarnation. May we who lost the gift of righteousness through the fall of Adam rejoice that we have been more gloriously restored through Your saving work on our behalf; for You live and reign with the Father and the Holy Spirit, one God, now and forever. Amen.

MIDWEEK OF ADVENT 1: STUDENT

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Genesis 1:27; 3:8–15; Romans 5:12–21

OPENING

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4. In Romans 5:15–19, how does Paul make use of Adam's sin in service of the Gospel? Do these verses mean that eternal life is a gift *received* by all human beings? Why or why not? Compare with Romans 3:22–25.
5. How does God's Word characterize Satan? See Matthew 4:1–4, John 8:42–44, and 1 John 5:19–21. According to 2 Corinthians 11:2–3, what is the serpent's primary goal today?

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