

## GLIMPSE

### O Christmas Tree!

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I read recently that a certain state-university declared that no university-sponsored Christmas party could be called "Christmas party", but only a "Holiday Party". Lots to think about with that one. The "Holiday Tree" season is surrounding us these days. The tree is a wonderful symbol of remembering just what the "holiday" is all about. If the officials knew what I am going to write, they would remove the decorated tree in the public areas as they have done with the Nativity scenes. "We must respect the strict separation between God and people".

The symbols of Christmas are mainly of the northern hemisphere. It is the darkest, coldest and less agricultural time of the year here in the north. In the southern climates it is just the opposite so the Christmas symbols limp a little bit. Here in the north not much is growing-on. Dead brown, leafless, flat fields await white snow to cover nature's nakedness. At this colorless time, we bring into our houses, green and alive needle trees. My father's idea of a Christmas tree in our house was that it had to be as broad near the top as it was at the bottom. This was achieved by getting a quite tall one and cutting off the top which afforded my mother the opportunity to find room somewhere in the house for another more traditionally-shaped tree to decorate. We have these quite alive, green and aromatic trees taken from outside and brought into where we live!

We decorate the branches with colored lights and bright dangly bobbles, orbs and other little reminders of life and fruitfulness. What does all this mean!

The Divine belongs to the Divine and the Infinite is not to be limited or confined. As the tree belongs outside, so the Divine by Its nature is outside. Ah, but like the tree which is given Its place inside, so the Divine has "pitched Its tent" among us. So the tree is the dramatic symbol of God's becoming one of and with us right where we live. The Beyond has become, "Infinity dwindled to infancy". The lights, ornaments and the danglies, what do they say about Christmas?

There rightly rest on the branches memorables. There can shine forth little reminders of persons, events, markers of life past. There can be others which are hopes of living to come. The Tree is Jesus and the ornaments we attach to the limbs are so many promises of our being personally, the fruits of this Tree of Life. The tree extends its branches and invites our participation in its life. The Tree of Life holds out His branches inviting our reception of His Life through the fruitful gestures of our lives. We are the decorations, the sacraments, the displays of what exactly His birth and His Life, in our lives, are meant to be. The whole sacred story stands in silence. The decorations and lights are a statement of promise that there will be fruits to come and are also present. The northern earth is dull, lightless, lifeless, but not quite. The Christmas Tree, right in the middle and midst of the church/state separation are not separated, but united by the "Holiday" or "Christmas" tree and for those who have eyes to see Bethlehem, with its promise, is not just history, but real-time. It is only a glimpse, welcome Holy-Day Tree!