

Why the Cross Is the Perfect Christmas Tree

The perfect tree: Every Christmas season begins with a search for it. Why? Because a fragrant tree trimmed with lights, ornaments and shiny garlands is the focal point of so many holiday celebrations. How often during the years, in countless homes throughout the world, have friends and families come together, gathering in unity around a lighted tree and finding a moment of peace and goodwill.

The Christmas tree has become a tradition, taking such a place of significance during the holiday season that most of us spend precious time and effort creatively decorating at least one.

I can remember the first tree my husband, Terry, and I beautified, now affectionately referred to as the “newlywed tree.” This sparse timber was finely decorated with the tinfoil I took off the TV dinners I made for him the first year we were married. Admittedly, the tree wasn’t much to look at, but we did get great TV reception that first inaugural season!

As time progressed, we advanced to the homespun “preschool tree.” You know the one, adorned with all the choice artwork of a 4-year-old and topped off with those tedious but fun-to-make popcorn strings. During this season, our short, fluffy pine was decorated only at the bottom (4-year-olds can’t reach very high). The top remained empty ... except for the candy canes.

We soon graduated to the “garage sale tree.” How can I ever forget those money-saving years when we adorned our lackluster artificial tree, the entire backside of which was missing its branches, with treasures found at someone’s yard sale?

Then there was the country-charm tree, so pungent because of the countless cinnamon sticks on it that we lived with the windows open all season; the Victorian tree (country-charm tree gets a makeover); and the “risky partisan” tree, which leaned to the right the whole holiday. This year we will have a “grandparents tree,” with all the yummy candy canes on the bottom for little ones!

As I recall these different decorations, I realize that my life’s most significant events are associated with memories of a tree. For in truth, it was the presence of a simple tree that led to the greatest celebration of my life. The intrigue of this tree did not come from its elaborate beauty, shining lights or sparkling garland; indeed it had none of these things.

Yet mysteriously it drew me. So powerful was its attraction that I found myself wanting to possess it for myself. This tree, although adorned with the boughs of brokenness and the scent of suffering, became the source of life and joy for me. Embracing it, I found wholeness.

Life flowed from the branches of this tree—the salvation tree—in spite of its rugged form. For hanging from its limbs was the finest and most exquisite ornament there has ever been, the body of Jesus Christ, the Son of the living God.

There He gave his life for mine, as His tears and blood stained the tree with the colors of Christmas, filling the air with the fragrance of the season, the eternal aroma of life.

At last I had found the perfect tree, the flawless symbol of Christmas. Shouldn’t *this* tree be the centerpiece of all our holiday celebrations? For where else can all the people of the earth be drawn together in unity? It’s only the cross of Jesus—the life-giving tree—that can bring every age, gender, social class, race and nationality together as one, with one purpose: to reach a dying world for Jesus.

If you are as convinced as I am that others are still searching for the perfect tree, then help me point the way. For when others find it, they will find Jesus, arms open wide, ready to give them the ultimate gift of Christmas ... Himself.

PRAYER POWER FOR THE WEEK OF 12/09/2013

Remember the “salvation tree” during your prayers this Christmas season and thank God for His “unspeakable gift.” Ask Him to use you to point others to this special tree. Thank Him for opportunities to share His love and message of redemption during this season. Ask Him to show you how you can bless those who are suffering from the effects of bad weather and economic conditions. Pray that God will use this time to draw all men to Himself. Remember Israel and the persecuted church when you pray for the nations of the world. Continue to pray for our president, those working with him, and those sacrificing themselves to preserve our freedoms. Pray that righteousness will exalt the nation. Phil. 4:6, John 3:14, 15; John 12:32.