

You can get a lot more
out of trimming your
tree than pine needles
in the carpet.

OH, CHRISTMAS TREE!

by Karen Hartigan Whiting



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Walking toward the living room, I stopped in my tracks and listened to my children's voices:

"It's ruined now. Dad chopped off the best part!"

"The top is still on, and it's still tall ..."

"But look at it! He chopped off the bottom, and the branches are too bushy. How can anything big fit under the tree now?"



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"Maybe we won't get much this Christmas anyway."

My family and I had spent this cold, blustery Saturday looking for the perfect Christmas tree. We had trudged through freezing Connecticut temperatures and bit-

ing winds searching for a tall, perfectly shaped blue spruce, and we had finally found it. But what we thought would be the main ingredient for a picture perfect family Christmas was now reeking havoc in my living room.

As my husband, Jim, and I listened to the discord among our children about the tree, we decided to pray, trusting the Creator of trees to direct us in the use of our Christmas tree. Searching the Scriptures we discovered God's word about an evergreen tree in Hosea 14:8b (TLB), "I am like an evergreen tree, yielding my fruit to you throughout the year. My mercies never fail."

The evergreen tree is a symbol of God the Father's caring for and blessing His children throughout the year. The words inspired us to come up with creative ways to teach our children about love and unity and the true meaning of Christmas. We wanted the chil-

dren to delight in opening gifts, but we also wanted them to focus on Jesus. So we brainstormed ways to make decorating the Christmas tree a time for recognizing God's blessings, establishing what we affectionately call "tree-ditions."

"I am like an evergreen tree, yielding my fruit to you throughout the year. My mercies never fail."



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Our Christmas tree serves as a reminder of the ever-growing family of God. He made everyone as unique and individual as the needles and branches of the tree. To show we are members of God's family, we hang photo ornaments on the tree. We cut red and silver foil paper stars and glue our photos in the center to remind us that we are shining lights for Christ.

Each year we place a container filled with paper ornaments near the tree. The children invite guests in our home to write their names on the paper decorations and hang them on the tree. This provides a wonderful opportunity for us to tell our children's young friends about Jesus and invite them to become members of God's family.



Tree-dition 2: Jolly Genealogy

The analogy of the Christmas tree to our family tree leads to another tradition. We hang a photo-genealogy tree on the wall to remember relatives who live far away. We celebrate new additions to the family by adding new photos. We talk about how each new person has changed our lives. As we reflect on births in our family, a discussion about Jesus usually starts, centering on how His birth changed the world and the lives of many people.

Tree-dition 3: The Greatest Gift

Another tradition we started is placing a nativity scene at the foot of the tree. After placing Jesus in the manger at the bottom of the tree near the roots, we read Isaiah 11, where Jesus is described as the root of Jesse. We discuss how, through Him, the Giver of living water, we receive eternal life — He gave God's family eternal roots.

While gazing at the wrapped packages, our children also spot the figures of Mary, Joseph and Jesus under the tree. This serves as a reminder that Christmas is the birthday of Jesus.

Tree-dition 4: Decorating Delight

Decorating our tree is a special occasion, celebrated with cookies and music. Friends are invited to join the event. We hang the lights on the tree, reminding us to share the light of Christ with others. As we decorate the tree with ornaments symbolizing spiritual fruits, gifts and blessings from God, we read Scriptures about each type of ornament (see sidebar).

As a reminder of the wise men, a star is placed on top of the tree. This also reminds us of the wisdom we have gained from our unique way of decorating the tree, fulfilling our vision of keeping Christ in Christmas. ❄️

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Deck the Tree with Scriptures

As you deck the tree, read Scriptures matching the types of ornaments.

Ornament	Scripture	Reason
Angels	Luke 2:9-10	God's messengers
Animals	Romans 1:20	Creation witnesses to God
Birds	Matthew 6:26	God cares for birds and us
Candles	Luke 24:32	Hearts burning for God
Candy canes	John 10:11	Staff of Jesus, our Shepherd
Doves	Matthew 3:16	Symbol of Holy Spirit
Flowers	Matthew 6:28-30	God provides our beauty
Fruits	Galatians 5:22	Fruits of the Holy Spirit
Gingerbread/cookies	2 Corinthians 2:15	We are a fragrance for Christ
Hearts	Matthew 22:37	Love God
Houses	Matthew 22:39	Love your neighbors
Musical ornaments	Psalms 150	Praise God
Nativity figures/manger	Luke 2:7	Humility/family
People	2 Peter 3:9	Salvation is for all people
Ribbons/garlands	Isaiah 61:1	Tied/bound with love
Sheep	Luke 2:20; Psalm 23	We are His sheep
Snowflakes	Isaiah 1:18	Purity/forgiveness
Soldiers	2 Timothy 2:3	Soldiers of the Lord
Star	Matthew 2:2,9-10	Star that guided wise men
Stockings	Acts 13:52	Be filled with joy/Holy Spirit
Strings of lights	Matthew 5:14-16	We are lights shining for God
Tiny gifts	John 3:16	The gift of eternal life
Tree top light	John 8:12	Jesus is the Light of the world
Vehicles	Matthew 28:19	Great Commission
Wreaths	1 John 4:7-8	Circle of God's eternal love
Wise men	Matthew 2:1,11	Wise people follow God