

## WHAT IS THE ORIGIN AND PURPOSE OF A CHRISTMAS TREE?



The Christmas tree today is a common custom to most of us.

There are many interesting connections to ancient traditions such as Egyptian and Roman customs, early Christian practices, and Victorian nostalgia. However, most scholars point to Germany as being the origin of the Christmas tree.

One of the earliest stories relating back to Germany is of Saint Boniface. In 722 CE, he encountered some pagans who were about to sacrifice a child at the base of a huge oak tree. He cut down the tree to prevent the sacrifice and a Fir tree grew up at the base of the oak. He then told everyone that this lovely evergreen, with its branches pointing to heaven, was a holy tree - the tree of the Christ child, and a symbol of His promise of eternal life.

In the 1840s and 50s, Queen Victoria and Prince Albert popularized the Christmas tree in England. Prince Albert decorated a tree and ever since that time, the English, because of their love for their Queen, copied her Christmas customs including the Christmas tree and ornaments. An engraving of the Royal Family celebrating Christmas at Windsor was published in 1848 and their German traditions were copied and adapted.

Research into customs of various cultures shows that greenery was often brought into homes at the time of the winter solstice. It symbolized life in the midst of death in many cultures. The Romans were known to deck their homes with evergreens during of Kalends of January 15. Living trees were also brought into homes during the old Germany feast of Yule, which originally was a two month feast beginning in November. The Yule tree was planted in a tub and brought into the home. But there is no evidence that the Christmas tree is a direct descendent of the Yule tree. Evidence does point to the Paradise tree however. This story goes back to the 11th century religious plays. One of the most popular was the Paradise Play. The play depicted the recollection of the creation of Adam and Eve, their sin, and their banishment from Paradise. The only prop on the stage was the Paradise tree, a fir tree adorned with apples. The play would end with the promise of the coming Savior and His Incarnation. The people had grown so accustomed to the Paradise tree, that they began putting their own Paradise tree up in their homes on December 24.

Whatever legend you wish to pass on, remember that Christmas is the time to celebrate the birth of Jesus.

(SR: <https://www.allaboutjesuschrist.org/origin-of-the-christmas-tree-faq.htm>)