

# Birth of Christ shows God's desire for union with us

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JOURNEY TOWARD HOLINESS

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When I was a little girl, our family had great parents and lots of kids but not much money. And so my creative parents, who could not afford to buy us a Christmas tree, invented the story of the orphan tree. It went like this:

Every year many beautiful live Christmas trees are sold everywhere. People choose their trees, leaving behind trees that are not so perfect. So by Christmas Eve there are all these fairly ugly orphan Christmas trees that no one chose to bring home. Around 4 p.m. on Christmas Eve, my dad and a couple of my brothers would set out and make the rounds of Christmas tree lots in our town. Many vendors had already closed, leaving their derelict trees behind, or sometimes vendors were willing at this point just to give us an ugly tree. Dad and brothers would tie the tree to the roof of the car and bring it home. My mom, God bless her, would be horrified at the sight of the chosen tree, but we children thought it was "cool" that we had again rescued an orphan tree! Dad would set to work with his hand drill. He would cut limbs off at the bottom of the tree and insert them into holes in the bare spaces on the trunk. We would put the worst side of the tree against the wall, decorate it, and soon there would be a beautiful live orphan Christmas tree dressed to greet the Lord on Christmas morn.

The feast of Christmas is not only about Jesus and Mary and Joseph and angels and shepherds. This feast is also about us. It is because God wants us to be in love with God, and in union with God,

that God became incarnate in Jesus. The incarnation, God's union with humanity, is God's way of saving orphan trees and giving them a purpose and a role. God works with us, bringing us to perfection, helping us straighten our crooked trunks and fill in our bare spots, making us beautiful and decorating us with grace. Then we can fulfill our destiny of reflecting the Glory of God in our humanity.

We have heard, you and I, that the doctrine of the Resurrection is the most important religious belief. But there is another tradition attached to Franciscan theologians like Duns Scotus. It says the First Doctrine is the Incarnation because God would have become human even if mankind had never sinned! Why? Because God wants with singleness of purpose to be one with what God has created. The Gospel of John tells us of that divine burning desire for union with us especially in those famous lines: God so loved the world that He sent His only begotten son ...

Take a quiet moment to gaze on a beautiful Christmas tree this year and meditate on how God wants union with you! Can you see how you have grown more spiritually beautiful through the years, even if a few needles have fallen off? God has chosen you! And me, and us, his Church. And so each weekend at Eucharist we sing again the original Christmas carol, the words of the Christmas angels: Glory to God in the highest!

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