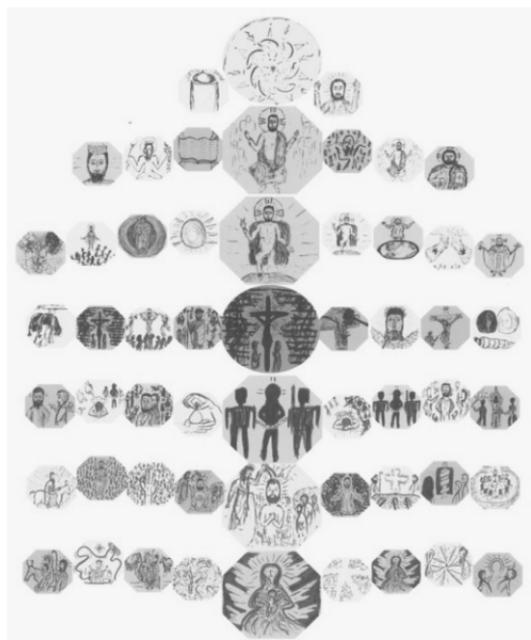


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# TREE of LIFE

INCARNATION, PASSION & GLORY

*Saint Bonaventure on the Christ Story*

edited by  
Stephen Joseph Wolf



idjc press

[www.idjc.org](http://www.idjc.org)

*Tree of Life*  
*Incarnation, Passion & Glory*  
*Saint Bonaventure on the Christ Story*  
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Stephen Joseph Wolf

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# TREE of LIFE

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## How to Use *Tree of Life*

These fifty meditation renderings have two kinds of users in mind.

### **1<sup>st</sup> - an Individual Seeker**

reflecting on the mystery and person of Jesus Christ:

Take the time to go slowly, and keep it simple.

Wherever you find yourself drawn, linger for pondering, perhaps breathing with a particular word or phrase.

Consider one meditation each day for fifty days:

Treat page 7 as the first meditation and ignore the six “weekly” beginnings.

Begin anytime or appropriately on:

December 21 (puts the Nativity on December 25),  
or the Second Sunday of Lent

(puts Easter on Easter Sunday),

or August 16 (puts the Crucifixion on September 14)

### **2<sup>nd</sup> – a Faith Sharing Group**

perhaps meeting over six weeks:

Use what is helpful and ignore the rest; keep it simple.

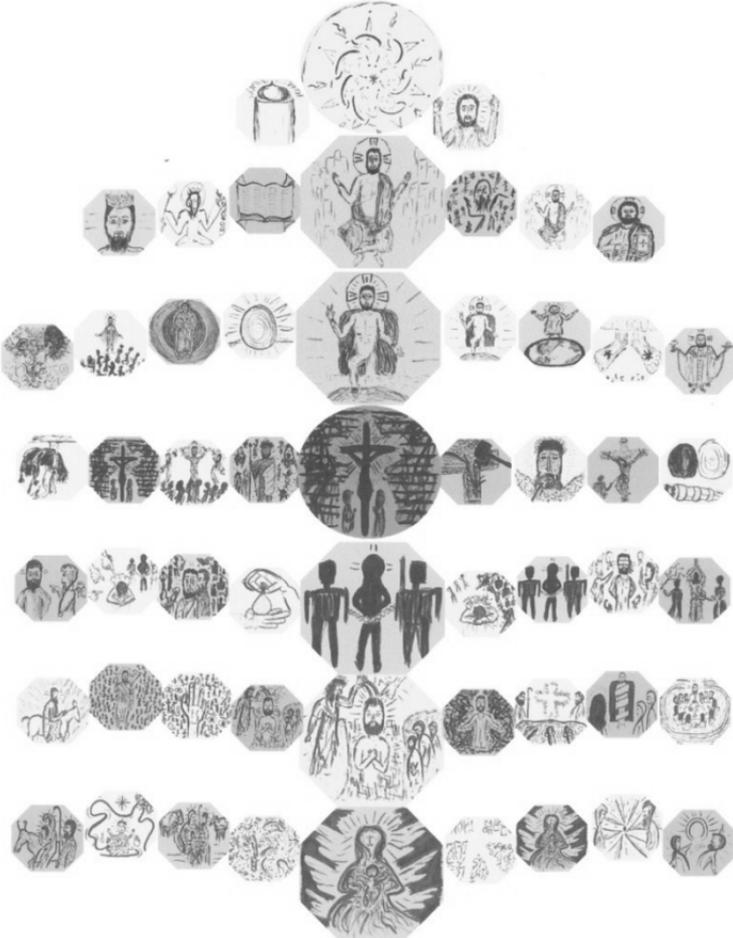
If someone in the group knows the song, you have a song leader. If one person leads the rest can follow, because the tunes are simple and from the Church tradition.

Group members can take turns being the *Leader* week to week, but it works best if there is only one *Leader* of each session.

Within each session, group members can take turns being the *Reader*, though no one should be compelled to be a *Reader*.

The *Leader* is encouraged to allow, by timing it, one full minute of silence before announcing the next meditation.

But keep it simple.



## OPENING MEDITATION

Leader: **Imagine a tree.**

Reader:

Its roots draw water from a perpetual fountain that becomes a great river alive with four streams giving water to the whole Church. From the trunk of this tree see the twelve branches, each full of leaves and flowers and fruit. The leaves are the medicine that prevents and heals every kind of sickness. The flowers radiate each beautiful color and every perfume aroma, waking up worried hearts, attracting human desire. The twelve fruits, with every delight and pleasing taste, offered for servants of God to eat and be satisfied to always with their taste, are one undivided fruit with a variety of consolations. This fruit of the Virgin womb reaches its savory maturity on the tree of the cross under the mid-day heat of the Eternal Sun that is the love of Christ.

*one full minute of silence, then:*

Leader: Please turn to page ( ) for Week ( ).



**The an-gel Ga-bri-el from heav-en came,**

With wings as drift-ed snow and eyes as flame;  
 "All hail," the an-gel said, "O low-ly place,  
 Most high-ly fa-vored maid-en, full of grace."  
 Of her would come the Christ Em-man-u-el;  
 With all the an-gels, "Glo-ri-a!" we tell.

"**F**or know a bless-ed Moth-er you shall be,  
 All gen-er-a-tions' praise e-ter-nal-ly;  
 Your Son shall be Em-man-u-el, fore-told,  
 Most high-ly fa-vored la-dy, from of old."  
 Of her would come the Christ Em-man-u-el;  
 With all the an-gels, "Glo-ri-a!" we tell.

**T**hen gen-tle Ma-ry meek-ly bowed her head;  
 "To me be as it pleas-es God!" she said.  
 "My soul shall laud and mag-ni-fy the Name."  
 Most high-ly fa-vored la-dy, liv-ing flame.  
 Of her would come the Christ Em-man-u-el;  
 With all the an-gels, "Glo-ri-a!" we tell.

Text: from *Birjina gaztettobat zegoen*, traditional Basque Carol; translated by  
 Sabine Baring-Gould, d.1924, altered significantly for a different melody

Music: 10 10 10 10 10 10 UNDE ET MEMORES, William H. Monk, d.1899

Popular melody for:

*Lord Who At The First Eucharist Did Pray*

## WEEK ONE

### 1<sup>st</sup> Fruit: His Distinguished Origin

Begotten of God, Prefigured,  
Sent from Heaven, Born of Mary

### 2<sup>nd</sup> Fruit: The Humility of his Way of Life

Conformed to his Ancestors, Shown to the Magi,  
Submissive to the Law, Exiled from his Kingdom

*Opening Meditation from page 7.*

*Song from page 8.*

Leader: God has a plan.

Each of us is a part of that plan.

Just in case  
no one has ever said this to you,  
God loves you.

Sooner or later, each of us will be called  
to deal with the truth  
of God's complete love of you and me.

If not yet, why not now?

Our process is simple. We will take turns reading one paragraph at a time. If reading in public is not your thing, just say "pass, please." We will spend one full minute of silence after each meditation.



*Leader:*

## **Begotten of God**

*Reader:*

With eyes of a dove or an eagle, gaze on what you see: that Eternal Light, so simple as to be unmeasureable, so brilliant as to seem hidden, from which emerges a splendor, coeternal and coequal and consubstantial, the power and wisdom of the Father. In him the Father gives from eternity order to all things, created and governed and guided to the glory of God, by nature and grace and justice and mercy, so that nothing is left without its place in the world.

*one full minute of silence after each meditation*

## Prefigured

In the creation beginning a nature paradise is given the parents of humanity, who after the eating from the tree forbidden are driven out. Since that day unceasing mercy calls straying humans to a good penance way by (a) hope of being forgiven and (b) the promise of a Savior. Knowing our ungrateful ignorance, the Son's coming is announced and promised and prefigured by God through the five ages of patriarchs and matriarchs, judges, priests, kings, and prophets, from Abel the Just to John the Baptist. Human minds are stirred to faith and human hearts inflame with living desire.





## Sent from Heaven

The fullness of time has come. As on the sixth day the *'adam* was formed from earth in the divine hand, so the sixth age begins with the sending of arch-messenger Gabriel to the Virgin, who says her "yes!" Upon her comes divine fire, her soul inflamed, her flesh made holy, shadowed in protection by the power of the Most High. And so comes the Person of the Son, human and divine, not created but of both God and Mary begotten-generated, the same Person God and human, the properties of each maintaining. You too would sing that hymn,

*My soul is stretched and stretches full  
with the glory of God!*



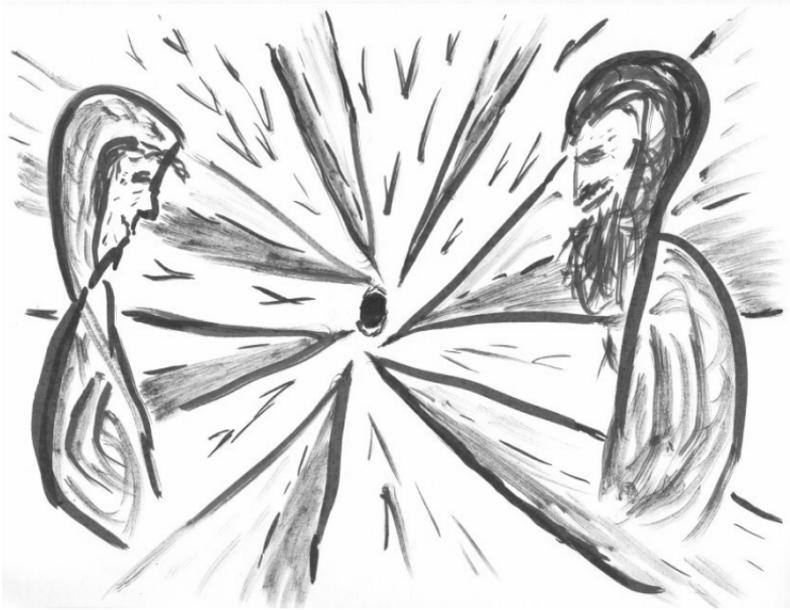
### **Born of Mary**

The reign of Caesar Augustus, a quiet silence of universal peace, makes possible a census of the world. So divine providence guides the husband Joseph with the pregnant young girl of royal descent to Bethlehem, the *house of bread*. Nine months having passed, the King of Peace comes forth from the virgin womb like a bridegroom from his bridal chamber. Great and rich, for us he becomes small and poor, born in an unfamiliar stable, wrapped in swaddling clothes, nourished by virginal milk, to lie in a feeding box between an ox and an ass. Let your soul embrace the divine manger, press your lips to kiss the boy's feet, and sing

*Glory to God in the highest!*

*And on earth peace*

*to people of good will.*



### **Conformed to his Ancestors**

It is the tradition: On the eighth day the boy is circumcised and named Jesus (*God saves*). Without delay he shows himself the true Savior promised by word and sign, one like us in all things but ignorance and sin, in humility, the guard and root of all virtues.

What, dust and ash, is your reason for pride?  
Why flee from the remedy of eternal salvation?  
Be willing to follow the humble Savior.

## Shown to the Magi

In Judah the Bethlehem birth, while far off in the east a star shows to the Magi the way to the home of the humble King.

Join the company of the holy kings,  
accept the testimony of the Hebrew Scriptures,  
venerate Christ the King  
with gold and incense and myrrh,  
avert the evil of the fearing king,  
return to your own country,  
and be your part  
of the first fruits of the Gentiles.





### Submissive to the Law

The teacher of perfect humility, equal to the Father in all things, submits himself to the Law in the humility of the most pure Virgin who nevertheless observes the law of purification. The redeemer of all sons and daughters was redeemed as a firstborn son and presented to God in the temple in the presence of the just. Rejoice with blessed old Simeon and aged Anna. Be not bashful. Have no fear. Take your turn with aged Anna, the Infant in your arms. Dance with blessed old Simeon and sing his song:

*Now dismiss your free-slave, Lord,  
according to your word in peace.*

## Exiled from his Kingdom

Humility is dressed in the company of poverty knowing better than riches, patience in bearing insults with dignity, and obedience in following the bidding of others. By God's protective design the tiny King is taken to Egypt as a pilgrim and pauper. Killed, as it were, in the slaughter of children his own age, these instead of him, and after the death of the mind-sick "great" king, brought back to Judah for growing in wisdom-age-grace, subject to parents, but true to the nature of a twelve-year-old, allows the sorrow of the searching mother of so tender and handsome a boy.





## Pondering Week One

*His Distinguished Origin & The Humility of his Way of Life*

Ponder in silence whether in these meditations something like one of these surfaced:

**a seed planted,**

something I anticipate taking root and growing within me, and growing me...

**a memory provoked,**

part of my story or our journey, whether pleasant or sad...

**a question raised,**

something unknown to study, research, discuss with others, or further ponder...

**an action prompted**

or a way to let God grow me into the human person God created me to be...

*Allow at least three minutes for silent pondering,  
and then the group may either discuss the ponderings  
(restraining the urge to "fix" anybody)  
or stay in silence until time is up.*

*When time is up:* Are there any intercessions from the group?

Our Father ... *and a stanza from the song on page 8?*

## Sources

Bonaventure, *The Soul's Journey Into God, The Tree of Life, The Life of St. Francis*, translation and introduction by Ewert Cousins, preface by Ignatius Brady, O.F.M., part of the 60 volume *The Classics of Western Spirituality: A Library of the Great Spiritual Masters*, New York: Paulist Press, 1978, 353 pages.

Ewert Cousins was one of the many excellent seminary teachers from my five years at Mundelein Seminary north of Chicago. His teaching has proven an inspiration in spiritual direction and in preaching. According to Dr. Cousins,

Bonaventure's Latin...is highly complex, composed of long stately sentences, with rhythmically balanced phrases and clusters of symbols whose meaning is enhanced by the subtle relations suggested by their position in the rhetorical structure. *pg. 47*

He shot for a more literal translation, but using sense lines to help the reader meditate. Though I honestly love it, it also has the kind of weight medieval works tend to have. One hope for this paraphrase is that it can serve as a first-read introduction that will send readers to Dr. Ewert Cousins' real translation. Ewert went to glory in 2009.

### Who is Saint Bonaventure?

Born around 1218 at Bagnorea in Tuscany, Bonaventure (the name means "good luck") studied in Paris and taught his fellow members of the Order of Friars Minor. While the Franciscans Minister General he continued to be a prolific writer. *The Soul's Journey into God* is generally considered his masterpiece. An advisor to King St. Louis, he begged his way out of being Archbishop of York, but was serving as Cardinal-Archbishop of Albano when he died at the Council of Lyons in 1274. His memorial is celebrated on July 14.

### Opening Meditation

Pg 7, *Imagine a tree...*, from paragraph #3 of Cousins *The Tree of Life*,  
See Revelation 22:1-2, Esther 10:6, Genesis 2:9-10

### Mystery of the Incarnation

Pg. 13, *Sent from Heaven*, see Matthew 1:18-23 and Luke 1:26-38

fullness of time - Galatians 4:4

power of the Most High - Luke 1:35

my soul is stretched... - Luke 1:46

Pg. 15, *Born of Mary*, see Luke 2:1-18

quiet silence - Wisdom 18:14

like a bridegroom - Psalm 19:6

Glory to God in the highest... - Luke 2:14

Pg. 16, *Conformed to his Ancestors*

circumcised - Luke 2:21

what, dust and ash... - Sirach 10:9

Pg. 17, *Shown to the Magi*, see Matthew 2:1-12

Pg. 18, *Submissive to the Law*, see Luke 2:27, Gal. 4:5, Romans 8:21

now dismiss your servant... - Luke 2:29

Pg. 19, *Exiled from his Kingdom*, see Matthew 2:13-23

causes sorrow... - Luke 2:48

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**Stephen Joseph Wolf** is a parish priest, spiritual director and retreat leader in the Diocese of Nashville, where he grew up the second of eight sons of a parish secretary and Nashville's best television repairman, and has worked as a paper boy, janitor, laundry worker, desk clerk, landscaper, accountant and priest. He writes for faith sharing groups and retreats and spiritual direction on weekly "monk days" of silence and solitude.

**Faith-Sharing Books** (arranged for six weeks):

1. **Tree of Life**            Incarnation, Passion & Glory  
   Saint Bonaventure on the Christ Story
  
  2. **Pondering Our Faith, Revised with the New Creed**  

The New Evangelization	Vocation
The Church	Moral Formation in Christ
Sacraments	The Sacred
  
  3. **Twelve-Step Spirituality for Christians**  

When I Am Weak	Progress, Not Perfection
Let Go and Let God	Let It Begin With Me
Sick As Our Secrets	One Day at a Time
  
  4. **God's Money**  

Micah's Vine & Fig Tree	Parables of Stewards
Daily Bread This Day	When Life Is Changed
Building a Bigger Barn	Community of Believers
  
  5. **Anger-Grief the Jesus Way** (*based on Mark 3:1-6*)  

A Sabbath Assembly	Riddle Silence
Being Watched	Anger-Grief
Invited by Jesus	Turning to Freedom
  
  6. **Planning My Own Funeral?** (*Four Weeks*)  

Vigil	Readings	Eucharist	Left Behind
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  7. **\*Forty Penances for Spiritual Exercise**  

God's Complete Love: A Reality	Vocation "Yes"
Reality of Sin and Reconciliation	Perfect Act of Love
Universal Call to Holiness	Whole New Way
  
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As Jesus Christ Was Anointed	Footwisher Royal
Lifegiver Priest	Beloved Lover
Soldier Prophet	Seeker/Disciple/ Minister/Apostle
- \*Coming soon.**