The Jesse Tree by Geraldine McCaughrean

As Mr. Butterfield carves a Jesse Tree in an old dusty church, a curious young boy distracts him, asking about the various symbols on the tree. Against his better judgment, the old man finds himself retelling the familiar Biblical tales that trace the lineage of Christ, from the Garden of Eden to Jesus' birth. Under the carpenter's skilled hands, the Jesse tree grows — and an unlikely friendship begins to take root as well. Geraldine McCaughrean's fresh retellings of familiar Bible events and Bee Willey's whimsical and striking illustrations create a rich and contemporary tale, perfect for reading during Advent or anytime. The Jesse Tree will captivate readers who know and love the Bible stories as well as those who are reading them for the first time.

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My Personal Review:
The Jesse Tree, written by Geraldine McCaughrean and illustrated by Bee Willey, is a collection of Bible stories, starting with the Creation story and ending with the story of the Three Wise Men.

But it is much more than just that. In the Introduction of the book, the author explains what a Jesse Tree is. For those who don't know (and I didn't know until I read the book), a Jesse Tree is a term given to a depiction of Jesus' family tree, a piece of art fashioned from wood, stone or stained glass. Pictures of fish, angels, clothes, etc., were used in the art, to remind viewers of the stories of the Bible. The Jesse Trees were most often found in churches. The name came from this Bible verse [Isaiah 11:1]: "And there shall come forth a shoot out of the stock of Jesse, and a branch out of his roots shall be fruitful," which foretold of the birth of Jesus. The stories of the Jesse Tree were often retold during the Advent season.
As mentioned, The Jesse Tree is a collection of Bible stories. But, the stories are told in a unique way. The first story isn't from the Bible, it's the story of a young man watching an old carpenter carve a Jesse Tree in a church. The carpenter wants to be alone to work in peace and quiet. Of course, the young boy is a distraction for him. After the carpenter explains to the boy, in the first story, what a Jesse Tree is, the rest of the stories, all of them Bible stories (except for the last one), are told by the carpenter as he works and the young boy listens - and frequently interrupts with questions and comments. It makes for entertaining, as well as thought-provoking, reading.

The illustrations are bright, bold and charming. They depict the many scenes from the Bible stories in the book. There are also several illustrations of both the carpenter and the young boy. A finished Jesse Tree is added at both the beginning and the end of the book.

What I Like: Everything. I especially like the way the book is set up, with an explanation of a Jesse Tree at the beginning of the book, followed by stories from the Bible. I also like the characters of the carpenter and the young boy. They develop a unique relationship as the book progresses.

What I Dislike: Nothing.

Overall Rating: Excellent.

Christine M. Irvin - Christian Children's Book Review

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