

The Festival of the Christmas Child

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Evening came and everyone fell silent. They waited expectantly. Soon the sky darkened and filled with twinkling stars.

Jeremy Mouse looked out his window. "It's time," he said. "I'll fetch the candles."

"We'll get the flowers," said Pine Cone and Pepper Pot. In a moment they appeared with their arms full of roses.

Tiptoes led the way deep into the forest. Everything was quiet—even Mr. Owl wasn't hooting tonight. At last they came to a glade. Tall trees grew in a circle and the ground was covered with snow. In the center stood the Christmas Tree.

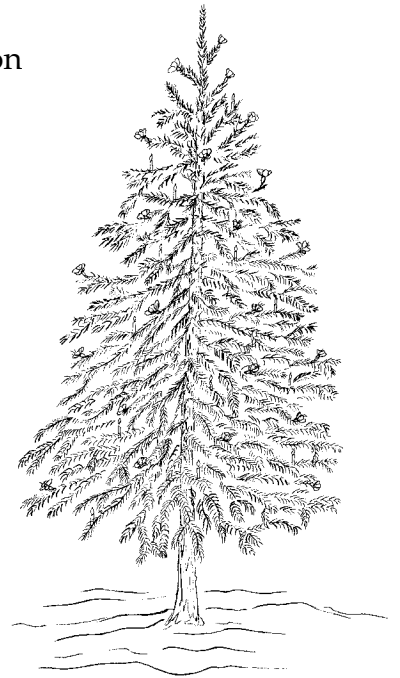
Pine Cone and Pepper Pot covered the Christmas Tree with red roses, while Tiptoes flitted up and tied three white roses near the top. Then everyone placed a candle onto the tree, and Tiptoes lit each one with her wand.

Jeremy Mouse looked around. The whole glade was bathed in candlelight. Forest animals had gathered at the edge of the clearing and were watching. There were deer with white tails, a family of raccoons, a fox and her kits, at least three possums, and many others. Jeremy Mouse looked up and saw Mr. Owl perched on a branch. Mr. Owl winked at him and Jeremy Mouse smiled back.

Suddenly a bright star appeared in the sky. It was the Christmas Star. At first it was small and far away, but it traveled quickly towards them. Then it floated down and settled on the top of the Christmas Tree. It glittered and shone like diamonds.

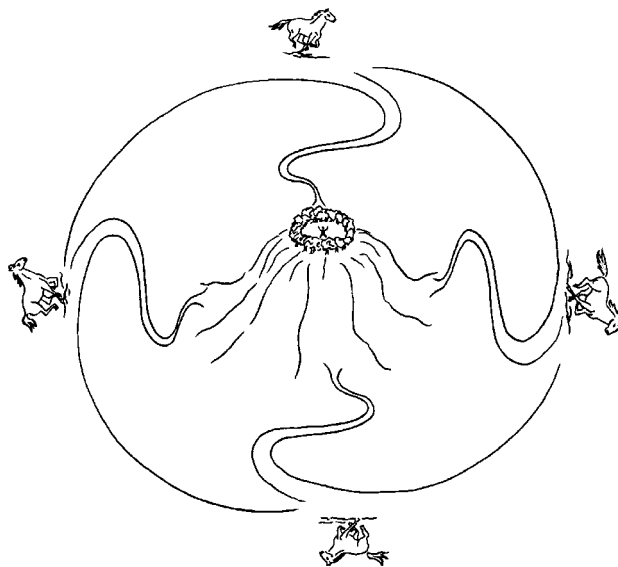
Tiptoes went and stood next to the Christmas Tree. Now was the time for her to tell the Christmas Story.

"Once, in a far away land," she said, "there lived a hill. This hill was the King of Hills, and a circle of trees stood on his brow like a crown. In winter, when storms blew, the trees swayed in the wind, but in springtime the birds flew in and out between the trees and sang songs in the branches.



One day, a blue horse came galloping from the North; a yellow horse came galloping from the South; a purple horse came galloping from the East, and a red horse came galloping from the West.

They stood in the center of the crown of trees, and said: "Twelve days have we traveled: from the North, the South, the East and the West, and a great sorrow hangs around our necks. O King, send forth the birds—for our Mother, the earth, is dying."



The trees, struck to the heart with sorrow, shed their leaves like tears, and their tears fell upon the earth and the earth shook with trembling.

Then the birds rose up in the air and like a spear they flew to the sun. There they gathered the Sun Child, and carrying Him on their wings brought Him down to the Mother Earth. They placed Him gently in the center of the crown of trees.

Then the earth stopped trembling. Leaves and blossoms came forth from the trees, and the red horse, the purple horse, the yellow horse, and the blue horse, galloped back to stand guardian over the four corners of the world."

"Now the Sun Child lives here on the earth," said Tiptoes. "On this night, a long time ago, the Sun Child was born, and tonight we celebrate his birthday."

Deep within the forest a light appeared. A young Child came walking amongst the trees, light streaming from his face and clothes. It was a warm light, shining from his heart and spreading out into the world.

The Child stood beside the Christmas Tree, and all the forest folk and fairy folk recited the Tree Verse:

*"Bless this Tree
And its light,
Bless its roses
Red and white.*

*Bless its candles
And its Star,
Bless the Christ Child
Wandering far."*

Then the Star rose into the air, and the Christ Child followed its path through the forest.

When he was gone they all looked back to the Christmas Tree. Where the Star had touched the tree they saw another star of pure, glimmering gold. It had five points, and looked like a little child dancing for joy, with arms and legs outstretched, and a shining, radiant head.

"Hurray!" cried all the animals.

"Hurray!" cried the fairy folk. "The Christmas Child has come! The Christmas Child has come!"

They were so happy they began to dance. Round and round the Christmas Tree they stepped, dancing star patterns in the snow.

