

## REFLECTIONS ON OUR CHRISTMAS TREE

Ours is a strange Christmas tree.  
A crazy quilt of colored baubles  
    dangling from a Douglas fir.  
        a yellow Woodstock perched atop Snoopy's house.  
        a bright orange clownfish.  
        a star fashioned from exotic woods.  
        a crystal spider  
        and a pewter French horn.  
        turtle doves and turkeys  
        chile ristras made of glass  
        a ceramic singing nun.  
        satin Santas and angels  
        and handmade snowflakes of varied shapes and sizes.

There is neither rhyme nor reason to our Christmas tree.  
    Cheap tin foil dangles next to  
        one-of-a-kind treasures  
            gathered from exotic places;  
    all of it bathed in the glow of 800 or so tiny white lights  
        which only my bride has the dexterity and patience to string.

Our tree is neither "Christian enough" for the perpetually pious,  
    nor coordinated enough for designer tastes;  
        it puzzles visitors who look for meaning in the obvious.

On that tree my past and present are reflected  
    in sublime, chaotic splendor  
        family and friends, homecomings, adventures,  
        first kisses, love that grows through thick and thin,  
        great joys and sorrows,  
        broken promises and hearts  
        loved ones gone to greater glory,  
        friendships ended over what - we can't remember.  
It all hangs there on our tree, a reminder that  
    history cannot be erased, only redeemed.

This year's tree is hopelessly bent into a crooked curve  
    refusing to stand up straight  
        no matter how many times you spin it in its stand.  
Had it been allowed to achieve maturity,  
    it would have been fit only for the fire place.

That crooked, crazy Christmas tree preaches  
    a homily in our living room;  
        its tortured trunk reflects my own hell-bent nature,  
            hopelessly warped in Adam's sin,  
            helpless to stand up straight and true.

It tells of Jesus Christ, the righteous Branch  
    sprouted from the stump of Jesse's family tree.  
        "No beauty that we should be drawn to Him."  
        Insignificant, irrelevant,  
        useless to this world.  
            fit for nothing but to be cut down  
            and thrown into Calvary's fire  
            to save the world.

Our Christmas tree is dying  
slowly.  
We could buy a fake one,  
but death is not so easily negotiated.

For the next 12 days, I am reminded  
that I live by grace off the death of Another  
who died for all, one good, dark Friday;  
into whose death I am baptized,  
and from whose death I am forgiven and fed  
each and every Sunday.

God's righteous Branch is the little Child  
of whom the prophet spoke,  
who stuck His hand into the adder's hole  
and pulled the ancient serpent out by his head  
crushing him with a cross-pierced heel.

He is my peace with God and reconciles  
all my life's irreconcilables  
with His atoning blood,  
so that hanging on His branches  
everything becomes a lovely ornament.

There is a favorite,  
a crafted piece of New England pewter  
the lion with the lamb  
carnivore and herbivore  
at peace with one another,  
all thanks to Judah's Lion, God's Lamb  
Jesus.

I look with hope and longing for that dawning Day  
when peace will rise from the dregs of warfare,  
and even the hungry lion will munch on manger straw.

If there's room in this righteous Branch  
for heaven's birds to nest their young,  
then there's room aplenty  
for clownfish and spiders  
yellow Woodstock birds  
silly satin Santas  
angelic hosts and snowflakes  
and everything of my past  
and yours  
All redeemed,  
renewed,  
reconciled,  
raised up for good  
in the righteous Branch, God's Child named Jesus.