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About the Cover and Artist

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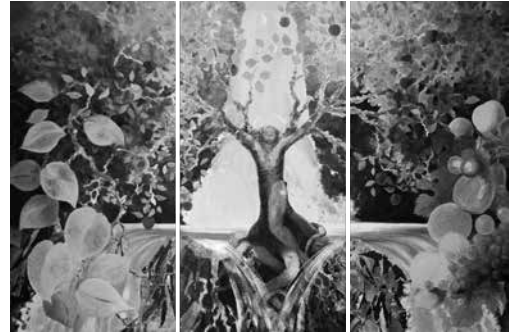
About the Cover and Artist

Kristen Gilje (www.kristengilje.com)

Tree of Life

Acrylic on Masonite panels, 8' x 12'

Theme painting for Holden Village Summer Program 1999



Kristen Gilje is a full-time artist who works in her Bellingham, Washington studio on art commissions for sacred spaces. She makes large colorful works on silk for seasonal use, which can be seen in churches from coast to coast. Kristen spent nine years as Artist in Residence at Holden Village, a Lutheran retreat center near Chelan, Washington, where she learned the value of making art for and with a worshiping community. A 1978 graduate from St. Olaf College, her senior concentration was entitled "Art as Expression of the Holy." Kristen has been combining ideas about art and theology in her work ever since. She says the following about *Tree of Life*:

I am fortunate to have worked as Artist in Residence for several years at Holden Village. Part of my work there was to create art to support each summer's theme. Revelation 22:1-2 was the theme chosen for Summer 1999:

Then the angel showed me the river of the water of life, bright as crystal, flowing from the throne of God and of the Lamb through the middle of the street of the city. On either side of the river is the tree of life with its twelve kinds of fruit, producing its fruit each month; and the leaves of the tree are for the healing of the nations. (NRSV)

It is a vision of God's reign of peace and justice, of abundance and beauty. My task was to illustrate this scripture to help us visually understand what this text might mean for us, and how it might guide our actions and thoughts as children of God.

The most beautiful interpretation of this painting I heard while working on it. My studio was set up on the stage in the gymnasium we used as our Village Center. The painting was about half done. Out of nowhere a voice rang out, "Oh Wow! That's Yggdrasol!!!" It was someone I knew only as Lapidary Fred.

"What?" said I.

"That's Yggdrasol," he said again.

"Who's that?" I queried.

"Yggdrasol is the Norse Tree of Life, the oldest and first tree," he said. "It's also Prometheus, who was tied to a tree so the ravens could pluck out his eyes! And it is the Druid Tree Spirit. And of course it is a crucifix."

With a crazed look in his eyes Fred noted the faint halo over the head of the figure, and continued, "And don't you ever think that a halo is simply a reflection of the glory of God upon the head. The saints used to gather up energy from the ground, given to the earth by God to make abundance for the good of all." He pointed to the waterfall, the "river of the water of life," then the roots of the tree-figure. Then he spread his arms, imitating the figure, pointed to the fruits and the leaves, and continued: "The saints glowed from this God-given life energy moving through them! The person has just said thank you to God for this wonderful system. God has just said, 'You're welcome,' and they are sharing a moment of love."

Fred helped me verbalized the great beauty I found in the biblical text. God's creation is indeed a sacred and loving gift from God, where God is present "even in the tiniest leaf" as Martin Luther put it. How does this perspective of nature change our actions? How can this vision change our societies to be more equitable, providing abundance and flourishing for all? I'll leave that to you to think about.