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Christmas Tree Lightings at St. John's

Peggy L. Roske

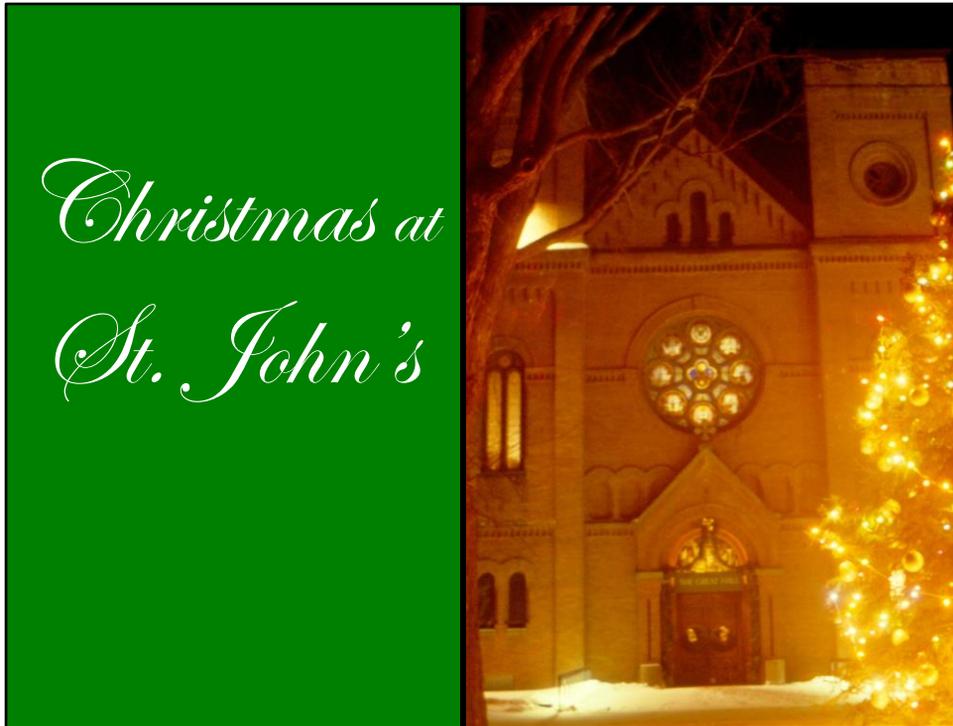
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Christmas at Saint John's: a bright tradition that has also had some darker moments, as we shall see. *I am the ghost of Christmas Past*, come to share your history!

Christmas at St. John's image 93.07.00 05-017 slide 1 Great Hall exterior with tree

THE RECORD

OFFICIAL NEWSPAPER OF ST. JOHN'S UNIVERSITY

VOLUME 75

COLLEGEVILLE, MINNESOTA, FRIDAY, DECEMBER 7, 1962

NUMBER 16



The St. John's University Men's chorus rehearses for their appearance in the annual Christmas Pageant for Peace ceremony to be televised nationally Dec. 17. The lighting of the national tree by President Kennedy will highlight the program in which the chorus will sing several songs.

Choristers Primed For White House

The St. John's University Men's chorus is soon to leave on a trip which will put it within hand-shaking distance of the President of the United States. It has been invited to sing at the Christmas Pageant of Peace which is held annually in the President's park immediately behind the White House.

The United States Marine band is also on the program for the Pageant of Peace. In past years, such groups as the Little Singers of Paris and the Columbus Boys' choir have been featured at the event.

Greatest Honor

In recent years the chorus has gone on numerous tours in America and Europe and has become internationally known, but this trip is probably the greatest honor the group has received to date.

Also, this is the best opportunity the chorus has ever received for international publicity. The Tree Lighting ceremony will be broadcast by all major American radio and television networks and there is a good chance that it will also be transmitted to Europe via the Telstar satellite.

The chorus has been in America as become a part of the latest honored to date. opportunity received for The Tree to be broadcast on American radio and there it will also be transmitted via the Telstar satellite.

One of the first tree lightings of significance to St. John's wasn't actually at St. John's – it was at the White House, in 1962, when the Men's Chorus was invited by President John F. Kennedy to sing for the "Christmas Pageant of Peace" tree lighting ceremony.

Dec. 7, 1962 p. 1 *The Record*

<https://cdm.csbsju.edu/digital/collection/CSBArchNews/id/33364/rec/40>

See also Nov. 28, 1962 p. 1

<https://cdm.csbsju.edu/digital/collection/CSBArchNews/id/33374/rec/42>



“All major American radio and TV networks broadcast it, giving St. John’s a lot of publicity.” (This was 7 years before Axel Theimer became the Men’s Chorus Director.)

[1963-01-16, The Record](https://cdm.csbsju.edu/digital/collection/CSBArchNews/id/33392/rec/1322) p. 4

<https://cdm.csbsju.edu/digital/collection/CSBArchNews/id/33392/rec/1322>

Inset: 2021-01 Saint John's Magazine p. 45

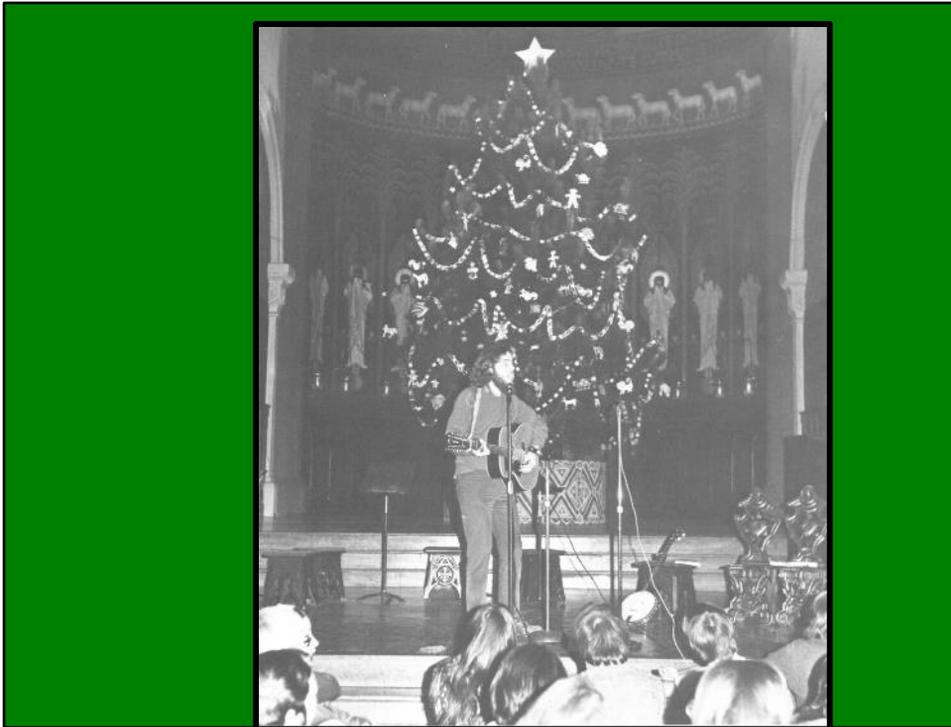
<https://cdm.csbsju.edu/digital/collection/SJUArchives/id/50006/rec/52>



Back on campus, no mention is made in *The Record* in 1971 about a Christmas tree lighting ceremony, but this photo appears in the Dec. 13 issue. It was a bit tricky to say where it was located, but the lambs painted on the Great Hall wall are just barely discernable to the left.

Image: Dec. 13, 1971 *The Record* p. 2

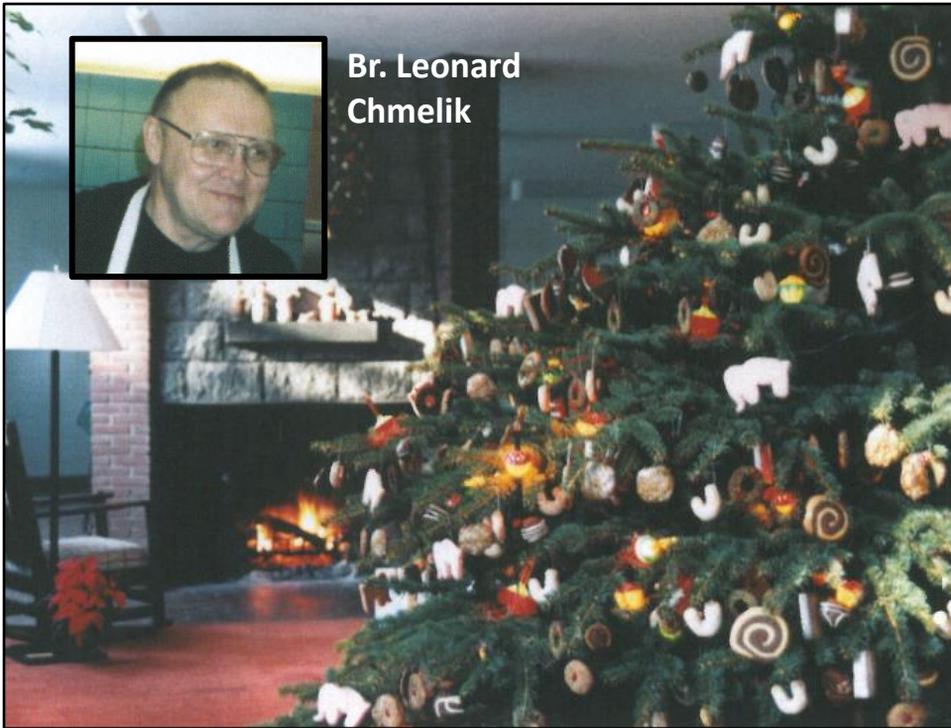
<https://cdm.csbsju.edu/digital/collection/CSBArchNews/id/34754/rec/1446>



The lambs are more visible in this Christmas photo from the 1972 yearbook, proof that there was indeed a Great Hall Christmas tree and some kind of concert in 1971.

1972 *Sagatagan* yearbook, p. 50

<https://cdm.csbsju.edu/digital/collection/SJUArchives/id/33181/rec/55>



**Br. Leonard
Chmelik**

Br. Leonard Chmelik was in charge of the Information Desk in the Great Hall in those days, and Christmas was a special time of year for him. He was known for his “Cookie Christmas Trees” in the monastery, and is credited with getting the Great Hall tree lighting ceremony started in 1971 – to expand upon a monastery tradition that always took place a couple of days before Christmas, after students had already left campus. Then-president Fr. Michael Blecker agreed to host a seasonal celebration near the start of Advent that would include students and everyone in the community.

Abbey Banner Winter 2001 p. 9

<https://cdm.csbsju.edu/digital/collection/SJUArchives/id/23738/rec/6>

Br. Leonard passed away in 2008.

(1976)

Christmas Tree Blessing/Lighting Ceremony
Schedule

- 8:00 P.M. Fanfare
Brass Group or Recorder Group (2 min.)
- 8:02 P.M. Opening Choral Piece
O Magnum Mysterium (2 min.)
(Men's Chorus)
- 8:04 P.M. Opening Remarks
Welcome Remarks-introduction of Fr. Abbot
(Br. Peter Stanger O.S.B.)
- ** Blessing of Tree
Remarks & Blessing
(Abbot John Eidenschink O.S.B.)

Light is a symbol of ~~light~~ Life
These dark days show how precious
Darkness of Death. As we light
this Christmas tree ~~on a tree~~

By the mid-1970s, as this 1976 schedule shows, the tree lighting had become a big deal, involving instrumental and choral performances and the presence of both the Abbot and SJU's president.

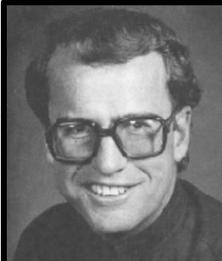
1976 Schedule with scribbled prayer

Box 594:5 (reportedly in Michael Blecker's handwriting)

8:00 P.M.	Fanfare Brass Group or Recorder Group (2 min.)
8:02 P.M.	Opening Choral Piece O Magnum Mysterium (2 min.) (Men's Chorus)
8:04 P.M.	Opening Remarks Welcome Remarks-introduction of Fr. Abbot (Br. Peter Stanger O.S.B.)
**	Blessing of Tree Remarks & Blessing (Abbot John Eidenschink O.S.B.)

Light is a symbol of ~~life~~ Life
 These dark days show how precious
 Darkness of Death. As we light
 this Christmas tree ~~may we~~
 ** Remaining time slots depend on the length of each
 presenters remarks.

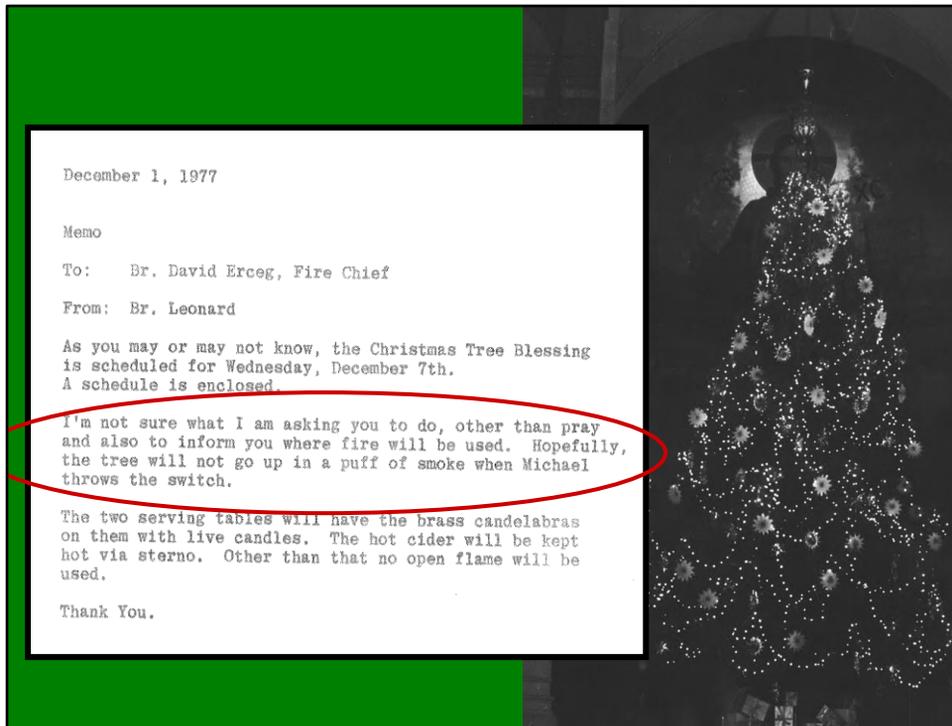
Let it be ~~a~~ a pledge ~~of~~ to
 working together to bring light and life to our world



**These scribbled notes are reportedly in President Michael Blecker's handwriting:
 "Light is a symbol of life, darkness of death. As we light this Christmas tree, let it be
 a pledge to work together to bring light and life to our world."**

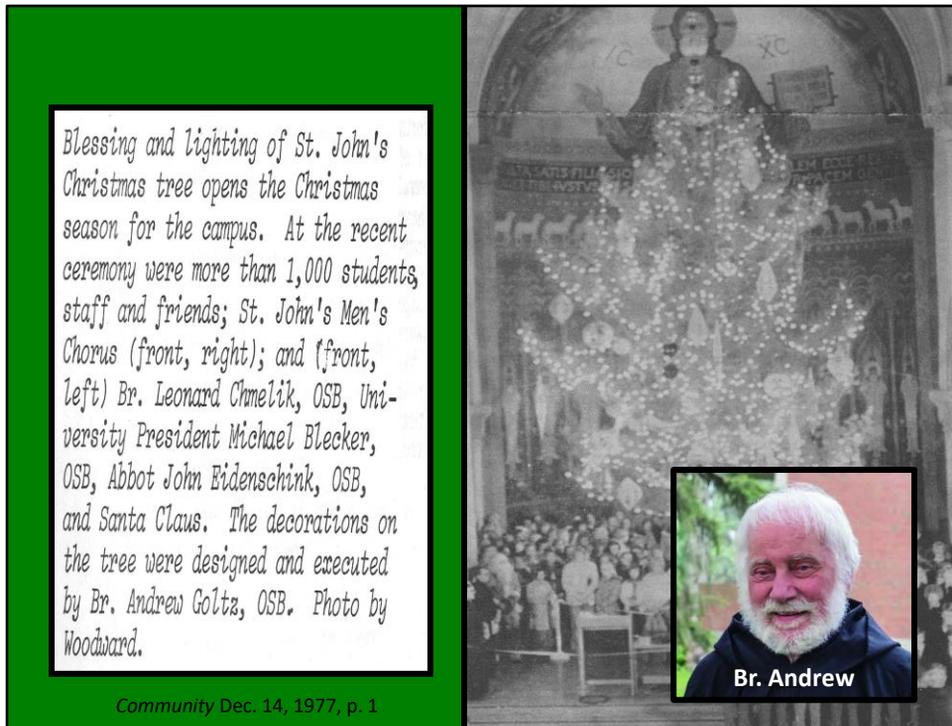
1976 Schedule with scribbled prayer

Box 594:5 (reportedly in Michael Blecker's handwriting); Blecker photo from SJU
 Archives



In 1977, Br. Leonard sent this memo to Br. David Erceg, the St. John's Fire Chief. It's the schedule for the tree lighting, and he asks for prayers that "the tree will not go up in a puff of smoke when Michael [Blecker] throws the switch"!

1977: Memo to Fire Chief, 594:6

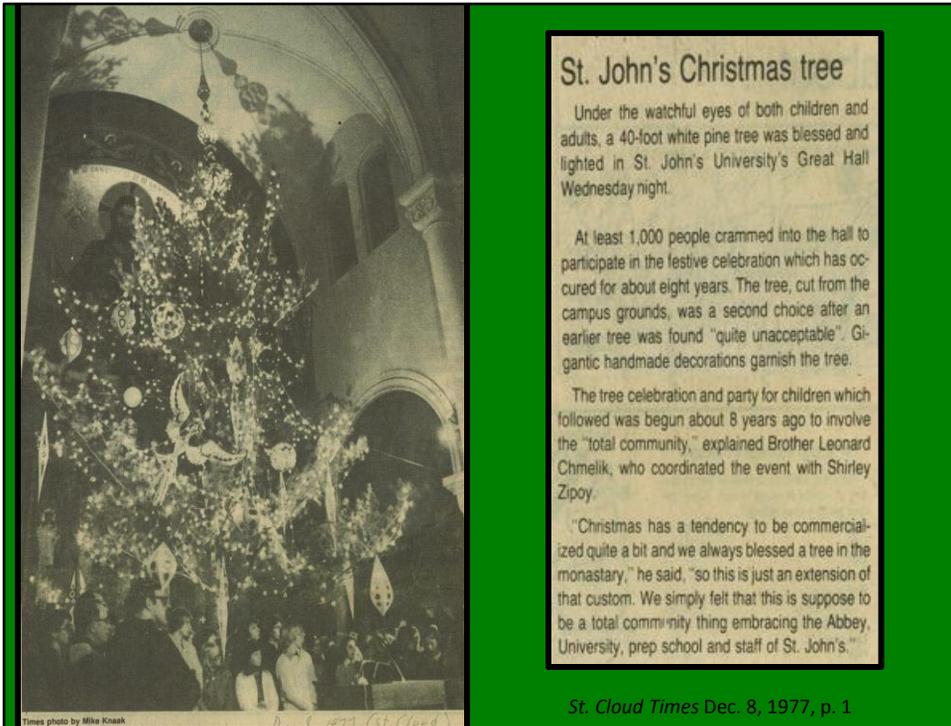


That 1977 tree didn't go up in smoke, and is pictured here as published in the *Community* newsletter (the "Daily Bulletin" of its time). The big decorations, which graced the Great Hall tree for many years – and still do! – were created by Br. Andrew Goltz, who passed away last month [November 2021]. Br. Andrew had been the last living contributor to the stained-glass window of the Abbey Church.

Tree photo and caption 2017:1 *Community* Dec. 14, 1977, p. 1

Goltz photo from Fall 2018 *Abbey Banner* p. 8

<https://cdm.csbsju.edu/digital/collection/SJUArchives/id/48224/rec/4>



St. John's Christmas tree

Under the watchful eyes of both children and adults, a 40-foot white pine tree was blessed and lighted in St. John's University's Great Hall Wednesday night.

At least 1,000 people crammed into the hall to participate in the festive celebration which has occurred for about eight years. The tree, cut from the campus grounds, was a second choice after an earlier tree was found "quite unacceptable". Gigantic handmade decorations garnish the tree.

The tree celebration and party for children which followed was begun about 8 years ago to involve the "total community," explained Brother Leonard Chmelik, who coordinated the event with Shirley Zipoy.

"Christmas has a tendency to be commercialized quite a bit and we always blessed a tree in the monastery," he said, "so this is just an extension of that custom. We simply felt that this is suppose to be a total community thing embracing the Abbey, University, prep school and staff of St. John's."

St. Cloud Times Dec. 8, 1977, p. 1

That 1977 tree made the front page of the *St. Cloud Times*, too.
1977: *St. Cloud Times* article

Collegeville, Minne

DATE: 4 December 1978

MEMO TO: Father J.P. Earls, O.S.B.
Judy Karasch
Father Roman Paur, O.S.B.

FROM: Father Daniel J. Ward, O.S.B.

RE: Christmas Trees, Fire Regulations

The State of Minnesota fire regulation regarding Christmas is as follows:

- A. Natural trees are prohibited in hospitals and nursing homes.
- B. Natural trees without open flames and without any lights are permissible in schools, churches, etc. (i.e., public buildings). They may not, however, be near heating units or electrical units. They may not block exit ways.
- C. Artificial trees with approved UL lights are always permitted.

But Br. Leonard and others received bad news the next year, 1978, when Fr. Dan Ward, the Abbey's lawyer, informed the community that Minnesota fire regulations prohibit having electric lights *indoors* on *real trees* in public places. The size of the crowd – the Great Hall was generally packed with people – was also considered a danger.

1978: Fire Regulations mean no lights on an indoor tree. 594:7

5 December 1978

MEMO TO ALL ADMINISTRATIVE DEPARTMENT HEADS:

State of Minnesota fire regulations for schools prohibit lights on natural Christmas trees and allow only approved UL lights on artificial trees. Primarily because of the potential for fire (a potential attested to by the tragedies reported from other campuses in the past), but also because of the expense involved in purchasing and decorating individual office trees and the additional energy and housekeeping which accompany them, Father Michael has judged that it is in the best interests of Saint John's that the University seek to comply with the State fire regulations.

Father John Patrick Earls will be attempting to enforce appropriate regulations in the residency buildings on campus and you are asked to do the same in those areas for which you are responsible.

Rather than allow our compliance to proliferate the use of artificial trees perhaps we should all consider allowing the Great Hall Christmas tree to suffice as one of the symbols of our community's celebration of the birth of Christ. The Great Hall Christmas tree has been in the planning stage for some time now and will, therefore, be lit again this year. Those responsible for the decorating of that tree will be asked for recommended alternatives to electric lights in the future.

Best Wishes!

Sincerely,


Linus Ascheman, O.S.B.
Assistant to the President

However, the next day, a directive is issued from the President's Office by Br. Linus, then the Assistant to the President. While stating that it is in St. John's best interest to comply with the state regulations, and to discourage the proliferation of artificial trees in offices and dorms, he declares that "the Great Hall Christmas tree has been in the planning stage for some time and will, therefore, be lit again this year." Recommendations for future alternatives to electric lights are requested.

1978: Br. Linus notes change won't happen this year: a one-year reprieve. Dec. 5 1978 memo 594:7



The 1978 tree in the Great Hall was thus the last real tree to feature electric lights.
PC07 16-31

December 29, 1978

Memo

To: Br. Leonard, Br. Andrew, Br. Erceg, Br. Sean, Fr. Jim Tingerthal, Fr. Roman Paur, Fr. Dan Ward, Br. Linus, Fr. Roger Klassen and Ms. Ida Johnson.

From: Shirley Zipoy

Re: Great Hall Christmas Tree

A proposal has been made that initiative be taken by some of the people that are familiar with the Tree Lighting Ceremony Event to discuss the future of the Event.

It is felt that it is important that this discussion take place before the current tree is taken down. We should review the topic while it is still fresh in our minds.

The purpose would be to discuss other options of lighting, location, etc. It would be a benefit to have varied opinions that are strong in nature so that many ideas may be discussed.

With tree lights outlawed, a committee formed after Christmas to discuss other lighting or location options. Shirley Zipoy in Special Events (the Jeff Wubbels of those days!), solicited the help of Br. Leonard, Br. Andrew, fire chief Br. David, Br. Linus and others to discuss it while the Great Hall tree was still up.

818:17

January 8, 1979

Minutes of the "Christmas Tree Committee" held on January 4th, 1979. Those in attendance were Br. Leonard Chmelik, Br. Andrew Goltz, Br. David Erceg, Br. Sean Sullivan, Fr. Jim Tingerthal, Fr. Roman Paur, Br. Linus Ascheman, Fr. Roger Klassen, Mr. Marlin Boeckmann and Ms. Ida Johnson.

We all thank Br. Andrew and Br. Leonard for the beautiful result of all their work this year.

There were many comments and various alternatives discussed for the future arrangements of the Event.

Br. Erceg said that fire code laws prohibit lights on an indoor tree that is chemically fire resistant and that the same is true for all of the decorations used on the tree. The subject of an artificial tree was discussed but not generally agreed as acceptable. The question of cost of such a large artificial tree is a deterrent. There was a general feeling that future discussion approach having a large tree outside. Location places mentioned were outside the Great Hall on the left side of the doors, the Quad Courtyard or the center of the Mall.

The possibility of having the lighting ceremony outside, perhaps with Mr. Theimer's Choir, was one suggestion. Another suggestion was to have either a smaller tree or a crib scene in the Great Hall along with the large tree outside. It was stressed that the Great Hall speaks for the Community for the entire Christmas Season and not just the night of the Tree Blessing Ceremony. It is because of this that the Great Hall should in some manner continue to tell the Christmas Story even if a large tree is used outside as part of the Event.

The January 1979 "Christmas Tree Committee" minutes reflect appreciation to Brothers Andrew and Leonard, notes the cost of an artificial tree large enough for the Great Hall space to be a deterrent, and puts forth options that include using a large tree outside and using a small tree or crib scene inside the Great Hall. "It was stressed that the Great Hall speaks for the Community for the entire Christmas Season, not just on the night of the tree lighting," so the Great Hall "should in some manner continue to tell the Christmas story even if a large tree is used outside."

818:17

Events Coordinator

September 21, 1979

To the Christmas Tree ad hoc Committee:

There is a meeting scheduled at 10:00 AM, in the President's Conference Room on Wednesday, Sept. 26th.

Time is slipping by and we must again address ourselves to the issue of forming a new format for the Christmas Tree Blessing and Lighting.

The date of the event is December 3rd, 1979.

Br. Leonard Chmelik, Br. Andrew Goltz and ~~myself~~^I have a proposal to present to the rest of the committee. This will be a beginning point and hopefully save time for all of us.

Your attendance will be appreciated.

Shirley Zipoy

**Come September, the committee reconstituted to get serious about what to do.
Shirley, Andrew and Leonard had a proposal...**

818:17

Christmas Tree 1979
Exhibit #1
Decoration Proposal

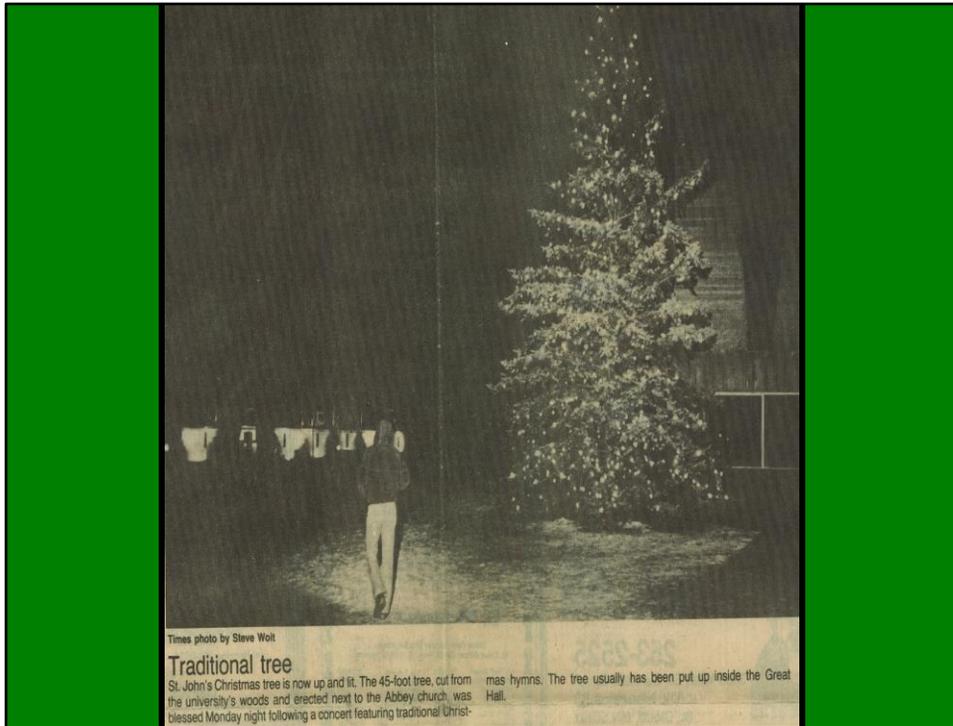
To bring our Christmas decorations into compliance with the State Fire Code the following proposal is made. The concept is to provide for a lighted tree on the Church Mall, with a decorated tree in the Great Hall. The Great Hall tree would be lighted with exterior flood lights.

Blessing/Lighting Proposal

The following program is a composite of the ideas generated at the committee's initial meeting. It is hoped that it will solve the problem of overcrowding the Great Hall, while still providing for a convivial Community evening opening the Christmas season.

1. 8:00 p.m. Musical Program in Abbey Church
 - a. program would be 45 minutes of music.
 - b. program composition by Mr. Theimer.
2. 8:45 p.m. Blessing/Lighting segment.
 - a. comments by Abbot Jerome and Fr. Michael in Abbey Church.
 - b. guests go out on Mall.
 - c. Abbot Jerome blesses tree (brief comment).
 - d. Fr. Michael lights tree (brief comment).
3. 9:00 p.m.
 - a. refreshments served on Mall Ring Road (hot chocolate, hot cider, christmas cookies).

...to have an outdoor tree on the church mall, and a decorated tree, lit with flood lights, in the Great Hall. A musical program would take place in the Abbey Church, followed by a tree blessing and lighting outside, with refreshments afterwards.
818:17



The event was noted in the *St. Cloud Times*. One thing had changed from the proposal: the outside tree was erected between the church and the Great Hall, not on the mall between the church and the library.

1979: A tree is lit outside; the music moves to the Abbey Church. 1979 Dec. 4 *St. Cloud Times*, p. 21 106:14



Fr. Donald Tavis, Abbey Prior, blessed the huge tree during a brief ceremony Monday night.



The fully-lit forty-five foot Christmas tree was decorated by employees of MacRobertson Hall.



After the tree lighting, hot cider and cookies were served as spectators huddled around bonfires in the parking lot.

Monday night the annual Christmas tree blessing and lighting took place. The above photos show the large tree as well as the activities surrounding the blessing and lighting.



More photos continued from page 247

More photos appeared in an issue of the *Community* newsletter...

Dec. 5, 1979 *Community* p. 3

<https://cdm.csbsju.edu/digital/collection/SJUArchives/id/47471/rec/7>



...and in the 1980 CSB/SJU yearbook.

1979 tree, in 1980 *Saints* yearbook, p. 62

<https://cdm.csbsju.edu/digital/collection/SJUArchives/id/39124/rec/9>



The 1979 tree *inside* the Great Hall was pictured on the cover of the Winter 1979 issue of *Saint John's* magazine.

<https://cdm.csbsju.edu/digital/collection/SJUArchives/id/5507/rec/7>

DATE: 26 November 1980

MEMO TO: ABBOT JEROME THEISEN, O.S.B., FR ALBERIC CULHANE, O.S.B.,
BR. LINUS ASCHEMAN, O.S.B., AXEL THEIMER, MICHAEL PAPESH,
BR. PAUL RICHARDS, O.S.B., BR. LEONARD CHMELIK, O.S.B.

FROM: MICHAEL NAUGHTON, O.S.B.

RE: CHRISTMAS TREE BLESSING, DECEMBER 8, 1980

This is a final draft, to be revised as needed.

This is the general outline of the service:

1. 7:50 pm - Carols by the assembling congregation
2. Circa 8:10-10:00 pm - The monastic schola will sing a motet, marking the entrance of Abbot, President, Headmaster, and Chaplain, vested in cucullas.

11. Chaplain invites all to follow the ministers outside
12. Once people are assembled outside, President makes brief remarks
13. Abbot blesses tree; tree is lighted
14. A prearranged group breaks into a spontaneous carol

Plans for the next lighting, issued by Chaplain Fr. Michal Naughton, called for what became the established schedule of Christmas carols, choral performances, brief remarks from the President, a blessing by the Abbot, and an outdoor tree lighting. A *pre-arranged* group was assigned to break into a “spontaneous” carol.

1980: 819:1

DATE: 26 November 1980

MEMO TO: ABBOT JEROME THEISEN, O.S.B., FR ALBERIC CULHANE, O.S.B.,
BR. LINUS ASCHEMAN, O.S.B., AXEL THEIMER, MICHAEL PAPESH,
BR. PAUL RICHARDS, O.S.B., BR. LEONARD CHMELIK, O.S.B.

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k. An invitation to go out to the tree. Abbot, President and Chaplain would lead the way out, hopefully, not being swept away by the marauding hoards as they fight to get out.

11. Chaplain invites all to follow the ministers outside
12. Once people are assembled outside, President makes brief remarks
13. Abbot blesses tree; tree is lighted
14. A prearranged group breaks into a spontaneous carol

Fr. Michael notes that the Abbot, President and Chaplain would hopefully not be “swept away by the marauding hoards” fighting to get outside.

1980: 819:1

Blessing of the Tree, December 8, 1981, 8:00 p.m. *Bro. Jernaud — for your info.*

In Upper Church

Organ Music from 7:50 -- medley of themes of Christmas music (Bro Bob Koopman) *Roger Botz*

Carol about 8:00p.m., led by All-College Choir, joined by audience
"Oh Come, All Ye Faithful"

Welcome and Introduction (Fr. Roger Botz)

At the Tree (east of St. Mary's Hall)

Student Choir (under Tom Kanies) will be down at the site of the Tree, singing a carol as people come down from the Church. The group will continue to lead in the singing of carols until Frs. Hilary, Michael Blecker, and Roger are at the podium.

Introduction of Prior Hilary (Fr. Roger Botz)

Blessing of the Tree by Prior Hilary.

V. The Lord be with you.

R. And also with you.

Let us Pray.

Introduction of Fr. Michael Blecker, President (Fr. Roger Botz)

President speaks briefly, then lights the tree. (There will be a switch near the podium.)

The switch has a delay of a few seconds -- don't panic.)

The schedule for the 1981 ceremony adds a student choir to sing around the tree, to be located this time just east of Mary Hall, as people come out of the church. The plan also cautions the president that “the switch has a delay of a few seconds – don’t panic”! But that year, those seconds turned out to be more than a brief delay, because...

1981 Tree Blessing Schedule, 751A:29

Blessing of the Tree, December 8, 1981, 8:00 p.m.

*Bro. Jernard —
for your info.*

In Upper Church

Organ Music from 7:50 -- medley of themes of Christmas music (Bro Bob Koopman)

Roger Botz

Carol about 8:00p.m., led by All-College Choir, joined by audience
"Oh Come, All Ye Faithful"

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Introduction of Prior Hilary (Fr. Roger Botz)

Blessing of the Tree by Prior Hilary.

V. The Lord be with you.

R. And also with you.

Let us Pray.

*TREE DID NOT
LIGHT*

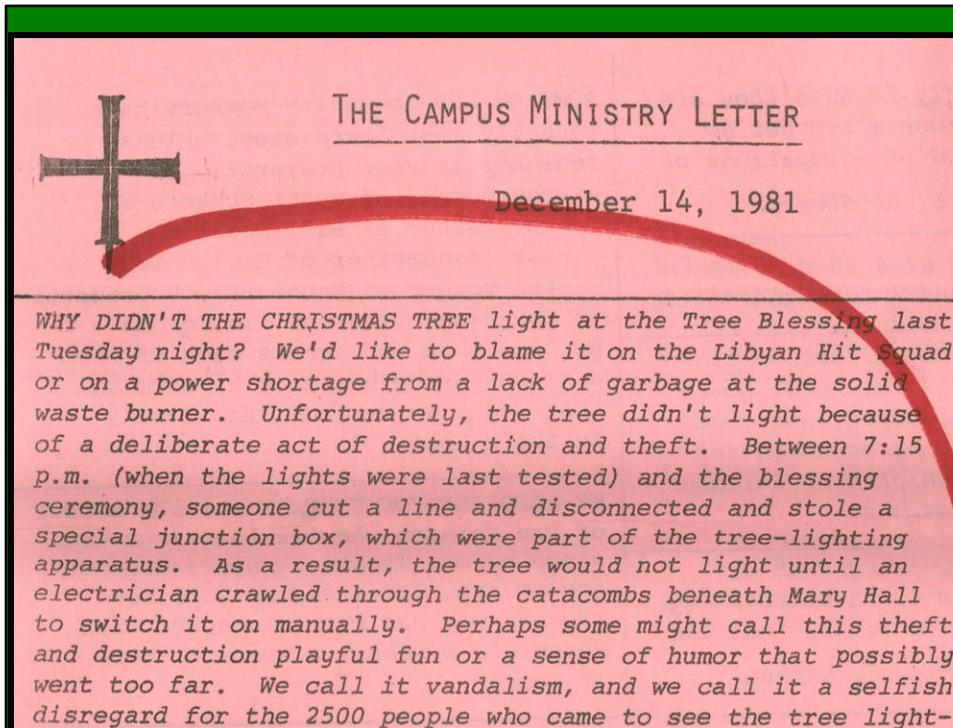
Introduction of Fr. Michael Blecker, President (Fr. Roger Botz)

President speaks briefly, then lights the tree. (There will be a switch near the podium.

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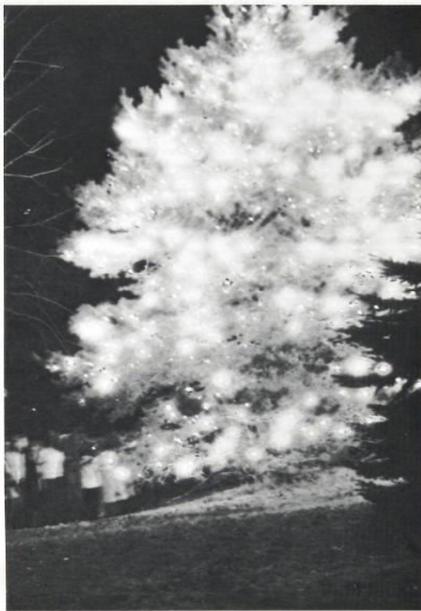
...the 1981 TREE DID NOT LIGHT.

751A:29



The next Chaplain's Letter sadly documents what had happened: someone cut a line and stole a junction box, so the tree could not light up until an electrician (my father-in-law, in fact) crawled through the Mary Hall "catacombs" to manually switch on the lights.

1981 Chaplain's Letter, 751A:29



Although the Christmas tree lighting ceremony had ended nearly an hour earlier, these students lingered on to sing Christmas carols together. (Photo by Sue Quinlan)



Photo by Bob Tran

O Christmas tree

The location of the outdoor tree used over the next several years varied from a live tree growing by Mary Hall, to one harvested from the St. John's woods and placed in front of the Great Hall, or in front of Sexton Commons, or off the northeast corner of Tommy Hall.

[see 2016-17 Winter *Abbey Banner* p. 6-7

<https://cdm.csbsju.edu/digital/collection/SJUArchives/id/47685/rec/51>

1982 Tree <http://cdm.csbsju.edu/u/?CSBArchNews,36264> *The Record* Dec. 10, 1982, p.1

On right: Dec. 13, 1984 *The Record* p.1

<https://cdm.csbsju.edu/digital/collection/CSBArchNews/id/36088/rec/4>

'Tis the season...

By Christopher Veech

Celebrating the Christmas season at SJU will be exciting! A beautiful Abbey Church on beautiful snowland creates a "Perry Como Christmas special" type atmosphere. Among the holiday activities, SJU will have its own Christmas program, an exciting hour and a half extravaganza. On December 7, following the ever popular christmas tree lighting on December 6, a choral performance will take place in the SJU Great Hall.

Organized by Dr. Axel Theimer of the Music Department, the performance will involve five choirs and seven ensembles. The long hard work will soon pay off in an intimate choral celebration. The 140 performers, focusing on music from the Renaissance and Baroque periods pay special tribute to Bach, Handel, Scarlatti, and Shuetz.

Until now the Christmas festivities at SJU centered around the tree lighting and group caroling. Yet amidst all this hub-bub Theimer felt the celebration grew to lose its intimacy. This year, through the concert, Theimer attempts to revive an old tradition. By making particular restrictions, he feels that he can restore meaning.

sion, seating will be reserved and limited, thus creating what Theimer calls "an ideal setting"

Tickets are on sale now but must be reserved by December 5.

Reservations can be made by calling the Music Department of CSB at 363-5684. At four dollars a piece, the proceeds go to fund choral programs.

Theimer expects a large turnout, but at the same time feels a responsibility for preserving the ideal concert atmosphere.

Therefore, he will not enlarge the seating capacity. But the concert is open to the public, so a popular response could warrant a second performance. Naturally, the success of the show will determine its longevity in the Christmas seasons to come.

Theimer is extremely positive about the concert and believes there is a desire and a need for programs of this type.

Typing Service

Carol E. ...

361

The Record Nov. 29, 1984 p. 9

In 1984, Axel Theimer moved the music back into the Great Hall, with a concert there the evening after the tree lighting, and ticketed seating to limit the crowd size. The *Record* writer noted that "the success of the show will determine its longevity in the Christmas seasons to come."

<http://cdm.csbsju.edu/u/?CSBArchNews,36022> *The Record* Nov. 29, 1984 p. 9



This concert evolved into the very successful “Christmas at Saint John’s” event that came to be held both on campus to a packed audience...

1990: Great Hall concert, 76/4 binder 10/57



...and in the Minneapolis Basilica, as “Celebrating the Seasons” – with musicians from both CSB and SJU. That tradition began in 1987.

1988-01 SJU Alumni Magazine Volume 27 Number 02 Winter cover,

<https://cdm.csbsju.edu/digital/collection/SJUArchives/id/9433/rec/28>

Right image from IA O drive: basilica-139.jpg



Tis the season

Crowds gathered around the SJU Christmas tree for the annual lighting ceremony last Thursday evening. President Hillary Thimmesh, OSB, gave the blessing, then lit the tree. Afterwards the crowd sang carols and ate cookies.

1985 Lighting <http://cdm.csbsju.edu/u/?CSBArchNews,36511> Dec. 12, 1985, p. 1



...with lights *shone onto* the tree *inside* the Great Hall, and lights *on* the tree *outside*.

<http://cdm.csbsju.edu/u/?CSBArchNews,36788> *The Record* Dec. 4, 1986. p. 1

On right: 1986 Dec. 5 *St. Cloud Times* p. 1



Notices in *The Record's* "Briefs" column alerted everyone to the date of the tree lightings. The crowds were "standing room only."

Dec. 3, 1987 *The Record* p. 2

<https://cdm.csbsju.edu/digital/collection/CSBArchNews/id/36979/rec/18>

Dec. 1, 1988 *The Record* p. 2

<https://cdm.csbsju.edu/digital/collection/CSBArchNews/id/37440/rec/25>

Image from IA O drive: Christmas tree.jpg (no date)



Image: Tree outside Sexton, ca. early 1990s, 76/4 8-029

Inset from Dec. 7, 1994

<https://cdm.csbsju.edu/digital/collection/CSBArchNews/id/3839/rec/2>

Lights twinkle at SJU

Annual Christmas decorations bring culture to campus

By MARK T. NEUVILLE
STAFF WRITER

Students tredge back from Thanksgiving break to the inevitable stress of the final days of the semester. Sparkling white lights, scented trees and tiny snow villages greet their eyes; these signs of Christmas help much to brighten the spirits.

Most likely, the Christmas season at Saint John's would not be the same without the decorations on campus. And so much can be learned by just walking through Sexton Commons and other places around campus.

The theme for this year's Christmas at Saint John's is part three in a series of four: "Winter Holiday Celebrations." The theme displays the different cultures and celebrations that include Hanukah, Japanese New Year, Kwanzaa, Christmas in Mexico, and an Italian Christmas. Past years' themes out of the four part series have included "Christmas Trees Around the World" and "International Creches."

The main event that starts off every year is the Christmas tree lighting ceremony, which usually takes

place on the first Thursday of December, but because Thanksgiving came so late this year, the lighting of the main tree took place last night, on December 2nd.

This main attraction, which is usually considered the "kickoff" to Christmas at Saint John's, is attended by many people both from the general public and from the CSB/SJU community.

The tree, hand picked off the grounds of Saint John's by Brother Paul Schwietz, is always placed in the Great Hall. This tree gets so much attention because of its sheer size and the ornaments that are placed on it. The planning for this event also includes decorating the Alumni Lounge, the Great Hall, Quad 264, the Refectory, fireside lounge, and Brother Willie's Pub.

Something that is always included in the display is the candy cane Christmas tree, which like other things was made here on campus in the wood shop. In addition, many other things that are on display are made by the members of the monastery.



Brother Dietrich Reinhart offers a blessing over all gathered at the tree-lighting ceremony held last night. The lighting ceremony is an annual event, attended by many from both the surrounding area and the campus community. Caroling by the St. John's Boys Choir was entertainment for the evening.

PHOTO BY DUNCAN SHANNON

...but by 1998, the ceremonial tree lighting took place on an *artificial tree, inside Sexton Commons.*

<http://cdm.csbsju.edu/u/?CSBArchNews,39513> Dec. 3, 1998, *The Record*, p. 11 (Noteworthy? Shirley Zipoy, SJU's Events Coordinator, left SJU in 1997.)

Colleges to present annual Christmas concerts at Saint John's

The College of Saint Benedict and Saint John's University will welcome and celebrate the holiday season at 8 p.m. on Friday, Dec. 3, and 2 p.m. on Saturday, Dec. 4 with their traditional "Christmas at Saint John's" concerts in the Great Hall on the campus of SJU.

The annual event, now in its 21st season, will feature over 200 musicians in concert in the beautifully decorated Great Hall. The program traditionally includes a diverse selection of seasonal music, from classical works to Gregorian chant. This year the program will include W.A. Mozart's *Te Deum*, many movements of G.F. Handel's *Messiah* and music for the seasons of Advent and Christmas from many centuries. There will also be the premiere performance of *Tota pulchra es*, a Christmas motet dedicated to and written for the SJU Men's Chorus by Minnesota composer Anne Kilstofte. Christmas carols, sung by the choirs and the audience, are part of the tradition.



And that was the last tree lighting ceremony. There would still be a tree in the Great Hall every Christmas...

<http://cdm.csbsju.edu/u/?CSBArchNews,39918> Dec. 12, 1999 *The Record* p. 2

Image: 2011 Great Hall tree photo Dec. 14, 2011 by PLRoske

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...and it would still be the backdrop for the holiday concerts and "Santa Day," but the tradition of a tree *lighting ceremony* at St. John's came to a halt after 1998.

<http://cdm.csbsju.edu/u/?CSBArchNews,39918> Dec. 12, 1999 *The Record* p. 2

Image: 1990s 76/4 07-011 (right)

Nov. 27, 2012:

St. Ben's to begin a Christmas tradition

By Lindsey Graske
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CSB/SJU students have grown accustomed to Christmas at St. John's, but this year a new tradition is beginning.

The Joint Events Council teamed up with staff to create a new Christmas tradition for the St. Ben's campus after Thanksgiving break.

"It is really memory making; it will never again be the 'first time,'" SALD Director Maribeth Overland said.

On the evening of Nov. 27, bells will chime at 5 p.m. and the women of St. Ben's will process from their residences, led by a representative from their year carrying a torch. They will meet in the mall, and standing on the platform between Adolf Science Center and Clemens Library will be a 25-foot tall pine tree.

The CSB Women's Choir will sing selections of Christmas music as President MaryAnn Baenninger flips the switch and turns on thousands of lights.

"It will be Bennies celebrating the joy and mystery of Christmas together," Overland said.

"It will be Bennies celebrating the joy and mystery of Christmas together."

-Maribeth Overland,
SALD Director

"It sounds like a great tradition, and I'm excited to be a part of it," CSB senior Rachel Heying said.

After the ceremony, students can gather in the Glass Lobby of the BAC where there will be

Christmas treats like sugar cookies, apple cider and a hot chocolate bar. There will also be a scene set up where students can take group pictures to be picked up later, after being turned into greeting card holders.

"This is an opportunity for students to capture a moment of friendship and joy with their friends and to create memories that they will have for years," Overland said.

"This is a wonderful idea, I wouldn't miss it," senior Marie Meyer said.

The theme of the ceremony is the school's motto: "Luceat Lux Vestra" or "So Let Your Light Shine." This will be shown by the torches that lead students to the gathering place and the

► See TREE Page 3
Details of Christmas celebration



But, 14 years later, in 2012, as CSB was approaching its centennial, St. Ben's started its own tree lighting tradition. A donated tree was placed on the plaza in front of the library, and, with the Women's Choir providing the music, CSB president MaryAnn Baenninger flipped the switch to turn on the lights. Carols and refreshments followed.

The Record Nov. 11, 2012 p. 1

<https://cdm.csbsju.edu/digital/collection/CSBArchNews/id/42058/rec/195>

Image from Dec. 4, 2015 *The Record* p. 1

<https://cdm.csbsju.edu/digital/collection/CSBArchNews/id/42930/rec/35>

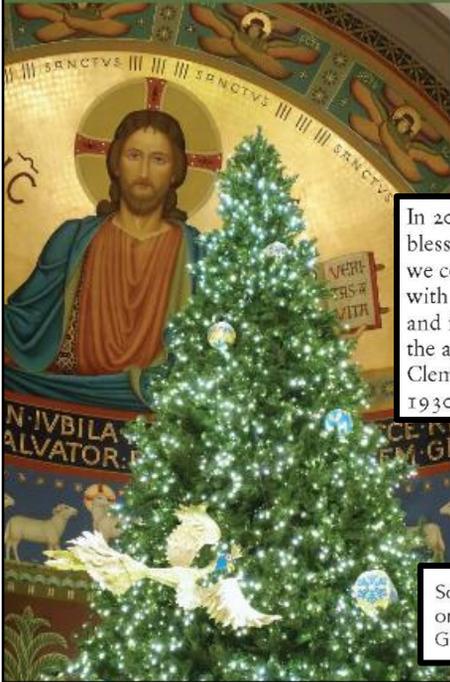
St. Ben's and St. John's let their lights shine



Then, in 2015, the Saint John's tradition was re-established, thanks to the advent of environmentally-friendly LED lighting, and a decision to forgo cutting a live tree.

Dec. 4, 2015 *The Record* p. 5

<https://cdm.csbsju.edu/digital/collection/CSBArchNews/id/42934/rec/35>



David Paul Lange, O.S.B. and Peggy Roske

The custom of decorating trees in honor of the birth of Jesus Christ is actually a German tradition dating back to the sixteenth century. It is fitting that we recall the German roots of Saint John's during the Abbey

knowledge in the Garden of Eden (Genesis 2:9, 3). The Christmas Light (*Weihnachtspyramide*), a small, pyramid-like frame, usually decorated with glass balls, tinsel, and a candle on top, was a symbol of the birth of Christ as the light of the world. Creating a hybrid of these two trees by changing the apples to tinsel balls and cookies, and combining this with the light placed on top, the Germans fashioned the kind of star-topped Christmas tree that many of us recognize today.

In 2015 the tree-lighting and blessing event was revived, when we combined new technology with a love for the Great Hall and for the artwork that graces the apse, painted by Brother Clement Frischauf, O.S.B., in the 1930s.

The first record of a community Christmas tree on display in this country dates back to the 1840s and to a group of German settlers in Pennsylvania. Though the Pennsylvania German settlements had community trees as early as 1747, as late as the 1840s Christmas trees were viewed as pagan symbols by the rest of America and were not yet accepted.

ing to his name (many with his family, he cut down a fir tree and took it home. Once inside, he placed small, lighted candles on the branches to represent the beautiful Christmas story sky. And thus, the first lighted Christmas tree appeared!

What changed? In 1846, in the illustrated *London News*, the popular English royals, Queen Victoria and her German husband Prince Albert, were standing with their children around a Christmas tree. Queen Victoria was joined by her subjects, and she set the example. The tree became fashionable—

Some 18,000 LED lights complement the ornaments crafted by Brother Andrew Goltz on the Saint John's Christmas tree.

decorated with apples—was

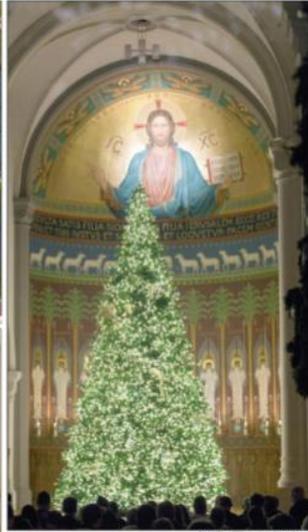
ately became fashionable—not

An investment was made in this huge artificial tree – sustainably re-useable – which now graces the Great Hall.

2016-17 Winter *Abbey Banner* p. 6-7

<https://cdm.csbsju.edu/digital/collection/SJUArchives/id/47685/rec/51>

Tree lighting tradition continues



RACHEL HOLTZ • rachelholtz@csbsju.edu
 On Monday, Nov. 21 and Sunday, Nov. 28, St. John's and St. Bern's communities both celebrated individual tree-lighting ceremonies at Sullist Hall (SH) and the outdoor mall (CSB). At both events, music was played and treats were offered to gathering Barnes and Johnsons to celebrate the beginning of the holiday season.

Thus the tree lighting tradition resumed at St. John's, and now continues on both campus.

Dec. 2, 2016 p. 7 *The Record*

<https://cdm.csbsju.edu/digital/collection/CSBArchNews/id/43214/rec/28>

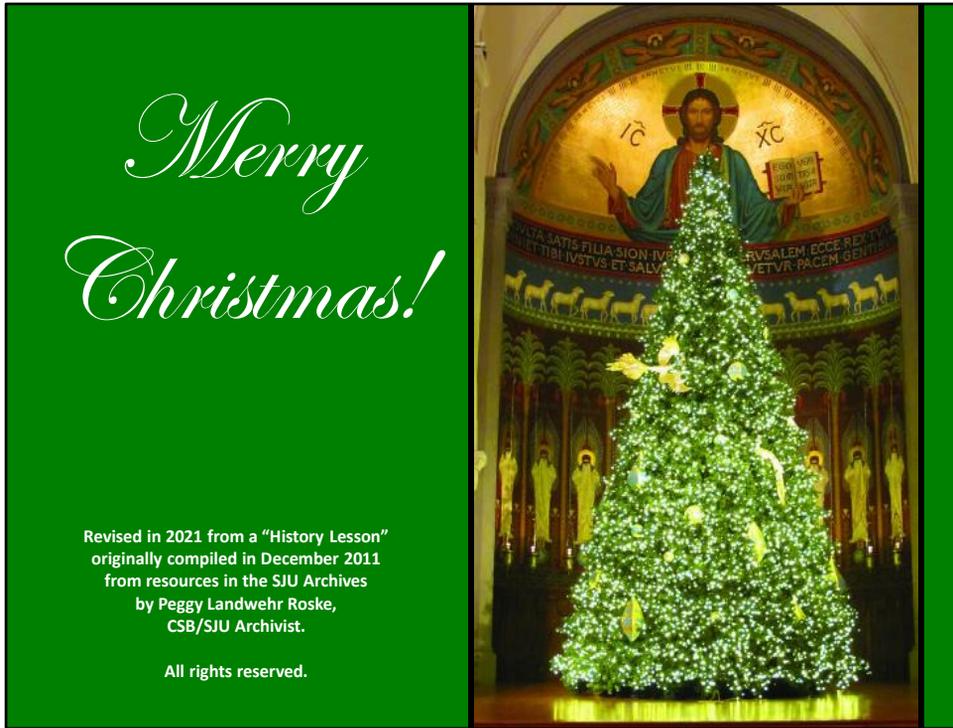


Photo by Robin Pierzina, 2015-16 Winter *Abbey Banner*, p. 31.