

Christmas 1982

HERBS OF CHRISTMAS

Herbs are valued for many reasons--charm, aroma, flavor and, long ago, for medicinal purposes. The Bible is full of references to herbs many of which are native to the Holy Land. For example, coriander is an herb that grows wild in the Holy Land. Exodus 16:31 and Numbers 11:7 refer to the children of Israel wandering in the desert and receiving manna to eat. They described manna as "coriander seed."

Other examples of Biblical references to herbs may be cited:

Matthew 23:23, "Ye pay tithe of mint and anise and cummin."
I Kings 21:2, "Give me thy vineyard that I may have it for a garden of herbs."

Among the Biblical herbs included in Duke Memorial's Advent wreath this year are BASIL, an herb native to the Holy Land; BOXWOOD; DILL, a symbol of tithing; HOREHOUND, one of the bitter herbs of Passover, was thought also to have been mixed with the sweet herbs and grasses of the manger; LAVENDER, an herb native to the Holy Land; MARJORAM; MINT; PENNYROYAL, native to the Holy Land; ROSEMARY, the principal herb of Christmas and a symbol of remembrance; RUE, called by Shakespeare "the herb of grace," also considered a symbol of virtue; and THYME, considered a manger herb and a symbol of courage, activity and bravery.

Legend has it that ROSEMARY blossoms were once white. During the flight to Egypt, the Holy Family took shelter near the fragrant shrub. After washing Baby Jesus' swaddling clothes and her own blue cloak in a nearby brook, Mary spread the garments on the branches of the flowering rosemary to dry. When she removed the garments, they had taken on the fragrance of the herb and the white flowers had turned blue. During the Middle Ages, sprigs of rosemary were placed in babies' cradles to insure safe, peaceful sleep.

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