

MYSTIC LIGHT

Light Seen From Afar

Although “trimming the tree” at Christmas time may have secular roots, the symbolism of both the tree and its festive decorations aptly lend themselves to expressing the true spirit of this holy time of the year.

At Mt. Ecclesia, as the Fellowship grounds is called, residents have resumed the practice of hanging long lines of lights on its tallest pine tree: *Araucaria heterophylla* (alternately, *excelsa*), commonly known as the Norfolk pine because Captain Cook first observed it when he discovered Norfolk Island in the South Pacific in 1774.

Pyramidal in shape, “tall and imposing,” it can attain a height of 200 feet. Its scale-like, awl-shaped, incurved, stiff leaves, 1/3-1/2 inches long, uniformly clothe the smaller branches, which whorl out from the main shaft, often five branches at a level, thus occasioning its nickname, star pine, the upper branches particularly creating the appearance of a star. While small the tree is



Fellowship Archway and Star Pine, 1995

popular as a house and glasshouse pot plant and it has been cultivated in the Mediterranean area as an ornamental.

Planted in Mt. Ecclesia’s early days, as near as we can gather around 1915, photographs indicate that from the outset the tree seemed “a natural” for bearing Christmas lights. In grand view, it stands forty yards inside the Fellowship archway, each of whose two piers is flanked by a regal sejant lion—a fitting tribute to the Fellowship’s founder, who was a triple Leo! The tree rises to a height of one hundred and twenty feet.

The species has remarkable symmetry, its branches extending widely with a slight upward rise, spaced at regular intervals both ver-



Star Pine Framed by Main Entrance to Mount Ecclesia, circa 1923

tically and laterally, resembling rungs of spokes on a wheel. While redwoods are primarily columnar, and spruce, most varieties of pine, larch and hemlock are densely foliated, the star pine's branches are long but do not thickly ramify, nor are its "leaves" long. Consequently, it is permeated by space and its entire structure is graphically articulated against the sky.

Its well-ordered and open aspect makes it particularly suitable for hanging lights, since they are visible from all angles. This year the tree will carry eight strands of lights, seventy-five lights per strand, issuing from a common chain collar, placed about fifteen feet from the top, and descending outward in graceful arcs to the tips of the lower branches. Two intersecting pentagonal stars, whose borders are traced by tiny white lights, is mounted on a pole that extends above the tree so that, from a distance, the three-dimensional star seems to hover ethereally over it.

Since Mt. Ecclesia, as its name suggests, occupies a prominent site in the local geography, the tree is visible not only from the San Luis Rey Valley to the east, but also from northern, west-

ern and southern exposures.

We can see the beauty and elevation of this inspiring Christmas spectacle as an emblem of our purpose and influence. As the illuminated tree is visible for a considerable distance, we know that the spiritual enterprise of the combined membership is a source of light and inspiration that issues from the inner planes. Seen from another aspect, as the vine is to its branches, so is the tree to its branches. The spiritual tree is Christ and we are His branches, whose life is in Him.

When our lives are adorned by the gifts of good deeds, we become beacons of hope and comfort to those in our radius. And we best transmit the light and beauty of the teachings when we embody them. Year round and daily we orient ourselves to the Christmas Event. Guided from afar by the Star of Truth, we journey toward our individual Bethlehem, toward the birth of the Christ body or etheric tree of light. Keeping in mind this radiant prospect, we may more fully appreciate the Rosicrucian salutation and blessing: May the roses bloom upon your cross. □

—C.W.