While Christmas has been over for a few weeks now, I received a request from one of our fellow parishioners to reproduce in the bulletin the story of St. Boniface and the Christmas tree, which I told in my Christmas homily, for the benefit of folks who might not use the internet. With no further ado, then, here is the story. Enjoy!

The story of the Christmas tree should be near and dear to the heart of everyone here at St. Boniface because, at least according to one legend, our patron saint invented it. You often see images of St. Boniface, as you do here, carrying an ax. This comes from the story of one of Boniface's most daring and most successful efforts to convert the pagan peoples of Germany to Christianity. The pagan Germans of Boniface's time, in the early Middle Ages, considered certain trees to be sacred and would even offer human sacrifices, usually children, at the site of those trees to appease their gods. The story goes that on Christmas Eve one year, Boniface set out to stop one of those sacrifices.

Arriving just in time on Christmas Day, he risked his own life by challenging the pagans, telling them that their gods were false, and, to prove it, he chopped down their sacred tree. When the pagans saw that their warlike and vengeful gods didn't strike Boniface dead on the spot for such sacrilege, they immediately abandoned their old beliefs and sought to learn about the God that Boniface preached. Boniface taught them that our God did not require the sacrifice of children to win his favor; rather, he had sacrificed his own Son to give us the gift of eternal life. Turning to a nearby fir tree, Boniface noted how its arrowhead shape pointed to heaven. He urged the new Christians to abandon their pagan trees but to instead keep fir trees in their home on Christmas day to remind them of the birth of Christ, who died on the wood of the cross to give us eternal life, symbolized by the evergreen branches. The rest, as they say, is history, or at least one version of it.