

Today's worship is a traditional folk tale about three trees that had plans and dreams about their future.

The Story of the Three Trees

Once upon a time, there were three trees growing side by side in the forest. They were friends and they used to spend their time chatting together. Even though they were more or less the same height and they were all growing in the same place, they were very different.

The first tree loved beauty.

The second tree loved adventure.

The third tree loved God.



One day, the trees were talking about what they wanted to be when they grew up. 'When I grow up, I want to be a carved treasure chest, filled with sparkling jewels,' said the first tree.



‘When I grow up, I want to be a strong ship and my captain will be a great explorer who will discover new lands,’ said the second tree.



'I don't want to be made into anything. I want to stay right here, growing taller every year until I am the tallest tree in the forest. Then, when people look at me, they will see that I'm pointing them to God,' said the third tree.



The years went by and, one day, three woodcutters arrived in the forest and cut the three trees down.

‘At last! My dream of becoming a treasure chest is about to come true!’ shouted the first tree.

‘Brilliant! My dream of becoming a sailing boat is about to come true!’ yelled the second tree.

‘Oh no! Now I won’t be able to point people to God,’ whispered the third tree.

The woodcutters carried the three trees away and, for two of them, the future looked bright. However, before long, all three had to say goodbye to their earlier plans.

Instead of being made into a beautiful treasure chest, the first tree was made into an ugly animal-feeding box.



Rather than being made into a fine sailing ship, the second tree was made into a simple fishing boat.



The third tree wasn't made into anything at all. It was just cut up into planks and left stacked in the builders' yard.



The years went by and gradually, the three trees learned to live with their broken dreams.

Then, one cold winter's night, everything changed for the first tree. A baby was born, and it was clearly no ordinary child. Angels sang. Shepherds and kings came to visit him. Guess which animal-feeding box his mother used as a cradle?



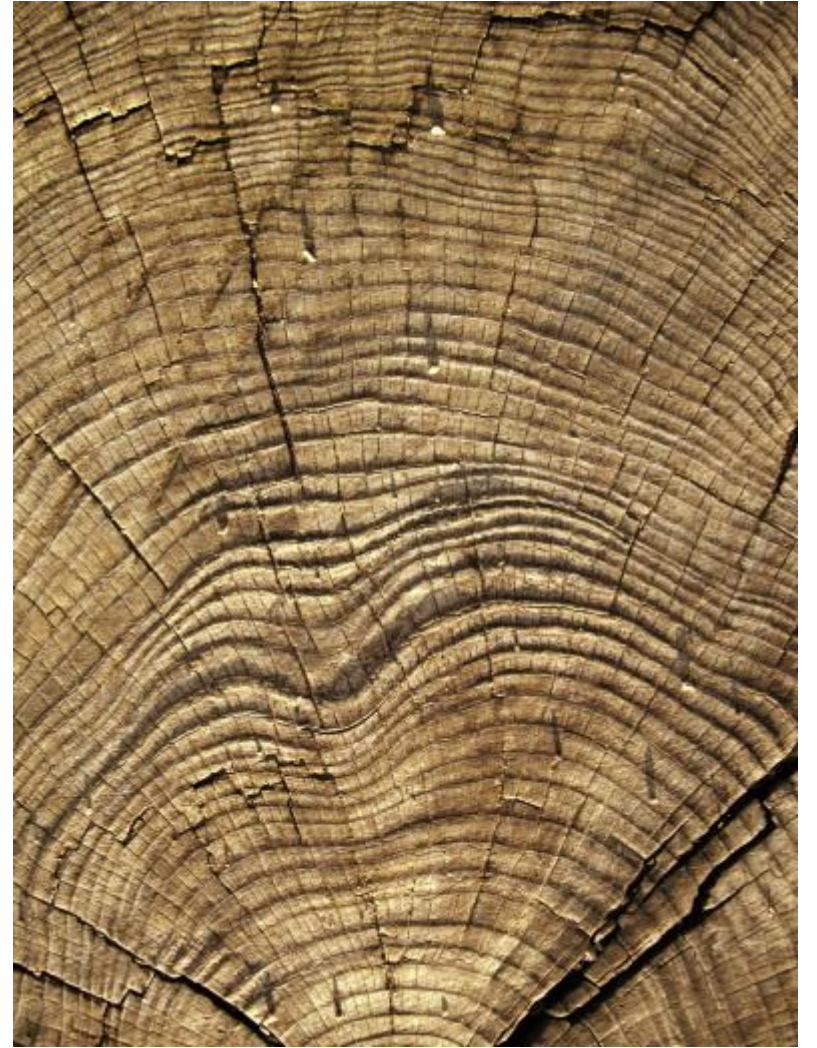
When the first tree realized what had happened, its heart filled with joy. 'My dreams have come true after all. I may not have been filled with gold and jewels, but I have held the greatest treasure on earth.'

About 30 more years passed before everything changed for the second tree. Then, one day, when it was out in the middle of a lake, a terrible storm blew up and the little tree was sure that it was going to sink. Suddenly, something incredible happened. One of the men on board stood up and called to the wind and the waves, 'Peace! Be still!' and they obeyed him.



When the second tree realized what had happened, its heart filled with joy. 'My dreams have come true after all. I may not have carried a great explorer, but I have carried the maker of heaven and earth.'

Not long after that, things changed for the third tree too. A carpenter came and took it away, but, to the tree's dismay, he did not make it into anything beautiful or even useful. Instead, he made it into a coarse wooden cross



‘Oh no! This is the sort of cross soldiers use to put criminals to death!’ thought the third tree. It should have been the worst day of the tree’s life – except for one thing. The man hanging there in agony was no ordinary criminal paying for his crime. He was Jesus – the man Christians now believe to be the Son of God – and he was dying.

When the third tree realized what was happening, its heart thrilled with joy.

‘My dreams have come true after all. I may not be the tallest tree in the forest, but, from this day on, as the cross of Christ, I shall always point people towards God.’



In the story, each tree had a plan for its future, but it seemed that God had a different plan for them. Initially, God's plan did not seem as exciting as their original plans, but eventually, God used each one of them to play an important part in the life of Jesus, from his birth to his death. We all have hopes and dreams for our futures and that is a good thing.

Prayer – listen carefully and join in with the amen if you agree.

*In your journeys to and fro,
God direct you;
In your happiness and pleasure,
God bless you;
In care, anxiety or trouble,
God sustain you;
In peril and danger,
God protect you.
Amen.*