



THREE CHRISTMAS TREES

An intergenerational worship service for Christmas time

This worship service is a celebration of the Good News of Jesus birth. It uses the Lectionary texts for Christmas Eve, Series A: Isaiah 9:2-7; Psalm 96; and Luke 2:1-20. It also incorporates the traditional tale: 'The Legend of the Three Trees'.

The Good News of Christmas that we celebrate is about

- why the baby was born — because God loved us and wanted to save us
- who the baby was — God in human flesh
- what the baby did — lived beside us and taught us, died, came back to life and lives forever with us.

NOTES

USING THIS RESOURCE

These notes have been prepared by the Resource Centre for Children's and Family Ministry of the Uniting Church (SA) to help congregations plan Christmas worship involving children and families. You may make as many copies of the notes as needed for your worship planners and leaders.

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Read through all the material. Discuss it as a planning team. You may use the entire sample service, or any of the ideas that are appropriate in your situation.

If you use the resource, we would appreciate your letting us know what you do. Send a brief email to rccfm@bigpond.com

Bible quotations are from the New International Readers Version.

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CHRISTMAS GUESTS

At Christmas time people who seldom take part in Christian worship are likely to join with your congregation. Some may come as guests of family or friends. Others may come in response to your advertising.

- Why do they come?
- What are they looking for?
- What do you have to offer them?
- How can you plan for these guests as well as for the congregation?

Consider these questions — and your answers — before you begin planning a special worship service for Christmas time.

ALL-AGE WORSHIP

The guests in your church at Christmas may be of any age. You want to plan a worship that does not exclude any age group.

All-age (intergenerational) worship is, first and foremost, worship — an encounter between God and God's people; a dialogue in which God speaks and people respond, both in the worship service and in their lives.

Intentionally *intergenerational* worship

- allows this dialogue to take place through several of the senses, movement and activity
- focuses on a single theme and connects that theme with the lives of the worshipers. It reinforces the theme by exploring it in several different ways
- provides worshipers (young and old) with an experience and thoughts they can remember and talk about in their homes. It may provide resources to support that conversation
- encourages interaction and dialogue among people of the various generations represented in the worshipping community
- differs from worship that is planned by adults for adults, and differs from worship for children alone — planned either by adults or by children
- takes seriously the understanding that people of all ages worship together in the body of Christ. People of all ages can also plan worship, invite people to worship, and lead worship
- recognises and values the children present in the worshipping congregation and 'the child within' each adult.

PLANNING

An all-age worship service is best planned by an intergenerational team, working with the pastor/minister/priest or lay ministry team. If possible the team should consist of at least three people: one representing the youngest, one the middle and one the oldest third of the congregation.

The team may also draw on people who have special abilities, eg in the areas of hospitality, music, drama, visual arts and technology.

Planning as an intergenerational team can be a valuable experience for all involved.

Suggested planning steps:

1. begin with prayer, and trust God's Spirit to guide your planning
2. consider the 'Christmas Guests' questions
3. look through these notes to see how they can help in planning the kind of service you want to hold
4. use these notes and other resources to develop a worship outline
5. flesh out the outline, consider your own people and facilities
6. work with worship leaders to work out details: who does what, when and how.

INVITATION AND ADVERTISING

The first people to notify about your service are the members of your congregation. Begin early to let them in on the excitement of what is being planned. Encourage them to catch the vision of presenting the Good News of Christmas to others in the community.

Your Christmas guests will come in response to personal invitations from people in your congregation, and in response to advertising done in your community.

Use a 'Three Christmas Trees' logo (or another logo) with all your promotion.

You might prepare printed invitations that members of the congregation can personalise and give to family and friends. Also consider

- a notice/invitation in your local newspaper
- printed notices/invitations in a shopping centre or other gathering places
- a sign board outside your church. You might display three trees with the sign.

Be sure to include the date, time and location of the service in all your promotional material.

HOSPITALITY

When you invite guests to a worship service it is especially important to provide them with a warm welcome and a comfortable environment. This is the responsibility of all members of the congregation, but you may designate specific people to take on specific duties.

Your **HOSPITALITY TEAM** may include people of all ages, possibly family groups. Their responsibility will be planning for and ensuring the comfort of guests. This may involve:

- being aware of the safety features of the worship space, eg location of alternate exits, location of first aid equipment, identity of people with first aid training
- greeting people as they arrive (possibly at the entrance to the property to direct them to parking spaces, possibly outside the building to direct them to the entrance, possibly at the door)
- helping people to get settled (possibly showing them to seats, introducing them to someone sitting near them, telling them where to find toilets and other facilities, giving them a worship leaflet)

Pay special attention to the very young, the very old and people with handicaps. Seat them where they will be able to see/hear, but not feel conspicuous. You may provide a quiet activity bag or play item for very young children

- keeping alert to needs of people during the service, and assisting as required
- providing some fellowship food or activity after the service (with something special for children who may not want to stand around while adults have a cuppa).

If it is your intention to make follow-up contact with any guests, the hospitality team may be responsible for obtaining guests' names, contact details, special needs, requests or other information.

WORSHIP SPACE & VISUALS

A clean, tidy and attractive worship area can help guests and regular worshipers feel that this is an interesting and inviting place to be.

'Three Christmas Trees' worship can occur indoors (in a church or in a hall) or outdoors.

The 'trees' theme lends itself to a forest or bush setting. An informal, outdoor setting may

attract people who are uncomfortable coming into a church building.

Outdoor worship, particularly if there is a large crowd involved, requires specialised planning, experience and imagination. Issues include everything from permission to use the site, to amplification, to fire safety and a 'Plan B' for inclement weather.

Many logistical challenges are eliminated (or already solved) if you hold your service in a church or a hall with a stage and seating.

If you hold the service indoors, you may strive to bring some of the 'bushland' feel inside.

You might ask members to loan their undecorated Christmas trees to create an indoor 'forest' for the service. They can take home the trees after the service.

You might use pine or 'forest glade' type air fresheners or scented candles. But beware of triggering allergic reactions.

You might have three undecorated trees standing at the front; or a single decorated Christmas tree, if that is your usual practice.

At the beginning of the 'Three Christmas Trees' service, there is a wooden manger at the front. A lamp in the manger (rather than a doll) gives the idea of light coming from the manger. Mary and Joseph are seated beside the manger.

With the manger at the centre, you might have a wooden model sailing boat at one side and a wooden cross on the other side.

Or you might have three banners, each with a key word on it:



Visual arts can enhance various aspects of the service by illustrating what is presented and discussed. So involve people with artistic talent and your technology team (if you project images electronically) in creating memorable visual impact that will enhance your presentation of the Good News.

MUSIC

Some of your Christmas guests may hope to hear (and sing) the old, familiar Christmas carols. So be sure to include opportunities for some carol singing. Choose carols with words that reflect the message of the service.

Some of the guests may come from another culture/country. Consult with new Australians in your congregation to see if there is music from their tradition that can be incorporated into the service.

Most of the worship music will be congregational singing that invites the participation of all worshipers. Be aware, however, that some guests may not be familiar or comfortable with, the practice of congregational singing. Invite people to sing along when they are comfortable doing so, or to just listen.

Consider ways of involving children too young to read or sing the words, eg

- show visuals along with words if you use PowerPoint, or include some illustrations in worship bulletins
- teach actions for some key words in the song and ask everyone to do the actions as they sing, or use some Auslan signs, which you can find at the Auslan sign bank: www.auslan.org.au
- teach one or two lines that are repeated so everyone can sing these lines
- give children a percussion instrument to play or a flag to wave during a song.

Unless indicated otherwise, recommended songs are from *Together at Christmas*, Openbook Publishers, available from Australian Church Resources, 8177 2113 www.acresources.com.au

WORSHIP LEADERS

People of different ages can be part of the team that leads worship.

For the sample 'Three Christmas Trees' worship plan, the team of worship leaders consists of:

- a worship leader — This may be the minister/priest/pastor or a lay person or two people sharing the role. In a secular setting this person might be considered the compere. The **WORSHIP LEADER** is responsible for connecting with the worshipers and leading them through the worship.

- musicians, including song leader, singers, instrumentalists. The **MUSICIANS** lead the congregation in singing and may present one or more 'performance' items or musical background for quiet parts of the worship.
- a Bible reader — This person (or a group of people) reads the text that comes directly from the Bible. Although they may actually work from a printed script, it is a good idea for the **READER** to hold a large, open Bible or stand at a lectern with a large open Bible, to distinguish what they read from other spoken or read material.
- a storyteller — See the sample service for the various ways the **STORYTELLER** may present *The Legend of the Three Trees*.
- trees — **TREE 1, TREE 2 AND TREE 3** are older children or youth who can do some dancing and acting. They dress as trees. Keep the costumes simple, eg green, or camouflage print, t-shirts and trousers and a 'tunic' with a picture of a tree on it.
- searchers and helpers — Several people, including young children are **SEARCHERS** and **HELPERS** for an opening activity.
- Mary and Joseph — Costumed characters, **MARY** and **JOSEPH** remain seated in a tableau for the entire service and tell the story of the birth of Jesus.
- **PRAYER LEADER** — An individual or a group of people prepares and leads prayers at the end of the service.

SERMON

The most important thing you have to offer your Christmas guests is the Gospel: the Good News of Jesus Christ.

It's not simply the story of a baby who was born in unusual circumstances a long time ago. The Good News is

- **why** that baby was born — because God loves us
- **who** that baby was — God's Son
- and **what** that baby did — saved us and lives forever with us.

It's all summed up nicely in John 3:16.

The 'Three Christmas Trees' service presents this Good News in a variety of ways. The sermon is an opportunity to re-state these truths as clearly and simply as possible.

In an all-age worship service the sermon should be an all-age sermon. This means it's short and

simple — no more than three points. Stories, illustrations and dialogue can be helpful.

If the sermon is for 'adults only', provide a theme-related activity for children to do during the sermon, either sitting with their families in the worship area or in a special children's area.

If children do a separate activity, allow a time for them to share what they have done with the older worshippers.

TREES

Consider building on the tree motif of this worship service to extend the experience, eg

- decorate the worship area with trees (see page 3)
- make or distribute Three Trees table ornaments
- bless Christmas trees (page 13)
- distribute tree seedlings or seeds

Consult with a local supplier of drought-resistant native trees. Your local council may even have a policy of providing these trees free or at a small cost.

Give a seedling to each family/household at the service with instructions about where to plant the tree and how to get it established.

Alternatively contact your local Trees for Life group and see how people in your congregation could get involved in propagating tree seeds.

You may bless the seeds or seedlings during the service (see page 13).

- possibly even arrange to give Christmas trees to families in your community who are going through financial difficulties and can't afford their own tree.

THE LEGEND OF THE THREE TREES

The legend of the three trees is not Biblical. It is a made-up story that we can relate to aspects of the life of Jesus.

The legend tells of three trees each with a dream of greatness. The dreams are fulfilled in unexpected ways. One tree becomes a manger, another becomes a fishing boat and the third becomes a cross. Each then plays a role in the life of Jesus.

There is a script of the story on page 11.

There are a number of ways of presenting this story.

- It can be told (or read) by a storyteller.

In a small congregation, children can be invited to come and gather around the storyteller.

- It can be presented by a storyteller and three trees characters.

The presenters can read, rather than memorise the script. If they are reading, do not hide the fact. They stand at music-stands with the scripts before them. If the presenters have memorised the script, they can move around more informally.

Alternative sources:

The Legend of the Three Trees, by Catherine McCafferty (Publisher: Tommy Nelson) is available in picture book format.

It's also a 30-minute DVD narrated by Hal Holbrook with songs performed by Marilyn McCoo and Andy Christman.

You can download other versions of the story from several web sites, including:

- detourstodestiny.tripod.com/id60.html
- freepages.genealogy.rootsweb.ancestry.com/~thstiger/TREES.htm
- www.ircbeginner.com.justfun/h-threetrees.html

THREE TREES TABLE ORNAMENT



The Three Trees table ornament can add two valuable elements to intergenerational worship:

- It provides a hands-on activity that generations can do together
- It gives worshippers something to take home to remind them of the worship experience and to spark discussion of the theme.

There's a pattern for a Three Trees table ornament on page 14.

You need

Several made up ornaments as samples.

- a pattern sheet printed on green light-weight card
- craft glue and glitter (optional)
- scissors
- invisible sticky tape
- staplers and staples
- shiny ribbon (optional)

To make up the ornament:

- put small dots of glue on the pattern sheet, without covering the writing.
- Shake on glitter. After a few minutes shake off un-needed glitter onto a tray.
- Cut away triangular portions of the pattern sheet as shown.
- Fold the pattern sheet as shown to form a triangular base. Secure the straight edges with sticky tape
- Bend the slanted sides together. Secure the three tips together with staples. This requires a bit of 'finessing'.
- You may make a bow (star) topper for the tree from shiny ribbon and staple it on.

REHEARSAL

God, whom you worship, your Christmas guests and the regular congregation deserve a Christmas worship experience that is the best you can make it.

This requires careful planning. It also requires rehearsal. A complete walk-through will pinpoint any logistical problems, allow the worship leader/s to fine-tune instructions for the worshipers and ensure that the service itself runs smoothly.

Use rehearsal time as an opportunity to pray together and to remind participants of the awesome privilege and task they have in leading worship.

Discuss these two statements with the team who are leading worship:

- Worship leaders are the lead worshipers.
- You have to walk the same road as the people you lead.

THREE CHRISTMAS TREES

SAMPLE WORSHIP PLAN

The format of this service is similar to the traditional carols and readings: with a song between each item of the service. You may omit some of the songs and/or limit the number of verses.

Suggested wording for some parts of the service are in *italic print*.

1. ARRIVAL, BEFORE WORSHIP

Beginning about 15 minutes before the advertised start of service, **MUSIC TEAM** leads the singing of a medley of favourite/familiar Christmas songs.

A tableau of **MARY, JOSEPH** and a manger is in place as people begin to arrive (see notes about a light in the manger, page 3).

HOSPITALITY TEAM greets people as they arrive, helps them settle in the worship area and invites them to join in the carol singing.

2. INTRODUCE THEME

MUSIC TEAM plays a few attention-getting chords and then modulates into improvised quiet, background music for this activity.

Use a game-like activity to introduce the Old Testament theme: 'the people who walked in darkness have seen a great light'.

SEARCHERS enter from the back of the worship area. They are blindfolded and act as if they are blind and searching with arms stretched out in front of them. Make sure that the blindfolds used actually allow them to see reasonably well.

As they stumble up the aisle/s they touch people, saying things like:

- I'm looking for something that makes sense of my life.
- I'm trying to find out why Christmas is such a big thing.
- I'm looking for a leader I can trust.
- I can't find what I'm looking for.
- Do you know where it is?
- Where can I find him?
- Are you the one?

A few **HELPERS**, who are in on the plan, are seated strategically in aisle seats near the front. When helpers are touched and questioned, they reply:

'Here, I'll take you.'

They lead the searchers to the manger. There they remove their blindfolds, and respond:

'He's here.'

'This is it.'

'We've found it.'

The searchers sit beside the manger, looking towards the light. Helper/s return to their seats.

3. WELCOME /INVOCATION

WORSHIP LEADER: *He's here!*

*The one who gives meaning to life;
the one who makes Christmas a special time,
the great leader we can confidently follow —
Jesus is here with us today/tonight!*

Let's worship him.

4. SONG

MUSIC TEAM leads the congregation in singing an opening song, eg

- Christ, be our Light, Bernadette Farrell
or
- All poor men and humble (TAC #6)
- O come all ye faithful (TAC #60)

5. OLD TESTAMENT

READER reads **Isaiah 9:2:** *The old part of the Bible promised:*

The people who are now living in darkness
will see a great light.
They are now living in a very dark land.
But a light will shine on them.

WORSHIP LEADER: *Jesus came into the world at the very first Christmas.*

But people then, and even today, may not recognise why Jesus came, who he is, or what he does. It's as if they are still living in darkness.

For some people — like those people (indicate the searchers) — Jesus is like a bright light in a dark world.

6. CONFESSION OF FAITH

This confession of faith based on **Isaiah 9:6,7** can be

- read by a **READER**
- done as a 'recitation' with a number of children/people each reciting one line
- or read by the whole congregation.

We have seen a great light.
A child was born to us.
God's Son was given to us.
He rules over us.
And he is our wonderful Adviser
and mighty God.
He is our Father who lives forever.
He is the Prince who brings peace.
The authority of his rule continues to grow.
The peace he brings will never end.
His rule will be based on what is fair and
right. It will last forever.
The Lord's great love will make sure
this happens.
He rules over all.

7. SONG

MUSIC TEAM leads the congregation in singing a celebration song:

- Joy to the world, v 1&2 (TAC #44)
- Jesus put this song, Graham Kendrick (*All Together Everybody* #258)

8. RESPONSE TO THE GOOD NEWS

READER reads **Isaiah 9:11–13**: *People who have seen Jesus' light are happy — really, really happy. But it's not just people who are happy. The Bible says*

[Consider showing slides with photos of sky, earth, ocean, fields, and trees as the reader reads the Bible text slowly.]

Let the heavens be full of joy.
Let the earth be glad.
Let the ocean and everything in it roar.
Let the fields and everything in them be glad.
Then all of the trees in the forest
will dance with joy.
They will sing to the Lord,
because he is coming to judge the earth.
He will judge the people of the world
in keeping with what is right and true.

9. SONG AND DANCE

WORSHIP LEADER: *Let the trees in the forest dance with joy.*

MUSIC TEAM Instrumentalists repeat the celebration song sung in #7 above.

THREE TREES dance to the tune. They can invite the searchers to dance with them.

If you wish, you might encourage everyone present who wishes to do so to join in the dance.

After the dance, the searchers return to their place by the manger or move to seats with the congregation.

10. LEGEND OF THE THREE TREES

WORSHIP LEADER: Introduces the *Legend of the Three Trees*. Note that these trees will help us discover why Jesus was born, who Jesus is, and what he did.

THREE TREES and a **STORYTELLER** perform the script on page 11.

11. SONG

MUSIC TEAM leads the congregation in singing — or a group of children may sing — a children's Christmas song, eg

- Away in a manger (TAC #9)
- I know God loves me (TAC #37)
- In a little stable (TAC #39)

12. BIBLE READING: NEW TESTAMENT

WORSHIP LEADER: *You may already know the story of how that baby came to be in the animal's feed box. But nobody knows the story as well as Mary and Joseph.*

MARY and **JOSEPH** tell the story of Jesus birth from **Luke 2** as conversationally as possible.

See script on page 12.

13. SONG

MUSIC TEAM performs

- Mary did you know, Lowry and Green or leads the congregation in singing a Christmas song, eg
- A virgin most pure (TAC #2)
- Infant holy, infant lowly (TAC #40)

14. TEACHING/SERMON

MINISTER/PASTOR/PRIEST or another leader presents a brief message based on **John 3:16**. This verse is in the context of Jesus conversation with Nicodemus. See also verses 14–17.

John 3:16 points to the same truths as the trees:

WHY? God loved the world so much that he gave. . .

God's love is displayed by God's gift to the world, the Christmas baby who lay in a FEED BOX.

WHO? . . . his one and only Son . . .

The Christmas baby grew up to be a person like you and me. He got tired and went to sleep one day in a BOAT. He was also God's Son, who, like God wanted to save people. He demonstrated God's power when he calmed the winds that threatened the people in the boat with him.

WHAT? . . . Anyone who believes in him will not die but will have eternal life.

The Christmas baby saved people from death by dying for us on a CROSS. He came back to life so that we can live with him forever.

This is the Good News of Christmas; this is the light for our lives.

15. SONG

MUSIC TEAM leads the congregation in singing or performs a Christmas song, eg

- The light of Christ has come into this world, v 2,3 (*All Together Again* #126)
- From heaven above (TAC # 25)
- Walking in the light of God, African (*All Together Everybody* #307)

16. ANNOUNCEMENTS

WORSHIP LEADER makes any necessary brief announcements. Include

- explanation of the Three Trees take-home (see page 5) and how it is intended to help people remember and talk about the Good News celebrated in this worship service.
- invitation to after-service activities or refreshments
- invitation to further activities and services of the congregation, including prayers for individuals after the service
- explanation of the way the offering will be used to spread the light of Christ.

17. OFFERING

The offering is collected in your usual manner.

18. SONG

During the offering the **MUSIC TEAM** may lead the congregation in singing or may perform a Christmas song, eg

- Once in royal David's city (TAC #70) or an offering song, eg
- Take us now, we are yours, Chris Jaensch (*All Together Everybody* #265)

19. BLESSING OF THE TREES (OPTIONAL)

At this point you may have a brief ceremony of blessing trees:

- the congregation's Christmas tree
- trees that members of the congregation have brought for the service and will take home
- seedlings that people will plant
- or seeds that people will plant.

See notes for the ceremony on page 13.

20. SONG

MUSIC TEAM leads the congregation in singing or performs a 'tree' song, eg

- O Christmas Tree (TAC #59) See alternative words for this worship service, page 13.
- The trees are whispering a secret (TAC #87)

21. PRAYER

PRAYER LEADER/S leads the congregation in a Christmas prayer. Include:

thanks and praise

- for why the baby was born
- for who the baby is and
- for what the baby does for us
- that we have been able to come to the light this Christmas.

petitions

- for people who are walking in darkness of any kind this Christmas
- for those of us who have come to the light to live in the light and reflect it to others
- for other concerns of the congregation, community, nation and world.

Conclude with the Lord's Prayer.

22. BENEDICTION

WORSHIP LEADER: *God loved you so much that he sent his only Son that you may believe in him and have eternal life.*

May the light, joy and peace of Christmas be with you — in your hearts, your homes and your world, now and always. Amen.

23. SONG

MUSIC TEAM leads the congregation in singing a closing song, eg

- Go tell it on the mountain (TAC # 30)
 - Christmas blessing: may the feet (TAC #54)
- or
- Reflector (from Planet Shakers)

- Shine, Jesus, shine, by Graham Kendrick
(*All Together Everybody* #217)

THREE TREE DANCERS lead a procession out of the church as the instrumentalist repeat the tune of the closing song.

24. AFTER WORSHIP

Worshipers are invited to the hall where tea, coffee and fruit cordial are available along with Christmas tree-shaped biscuits, eg honey biscuits, shortbreads and sugar cookies.

Have tables where families can make the Three-tree Christmas Table ornament.

LEGEND OF THE THREE TREES — SCRIPT

STORYTELLER: Once upon a time three trees grew on a hill in the woods. Each of those trees had a special dream.

TREE 1: I used to dream that I would be made into a beautiful treasure chest and be filled with a great treasure.

TREE 2: I used to dream that I would be made into a mighty ship and take kings and queens safely across the waters.

TREE 3: I didn't dream about being made into anything. I wanted to grow to be the tallest and straightest tree in the forest. People would see me on top of the hill pointing to God.

STORYTELLER: After a few years a woodsman found our three trees growing on the hill.

When he came to the first tree, he said: 'This looks like a strong tree. I should be able to sell the wood to a carpenter'. So he cut it down.

TREE 1: I was happy, then. I was sure that the carpenter really would make me into a treasure chest.

STORYTELLER: When the woodsman came to the second tree, he said: 'This looks like a strong tree. I should be able to sell it to the shipyard'. So he cut it down.

TREE 2: I was happy then, I was on my way to becoming a mighty ship.

STORYTELLER: Then the woodsman saw the third tree.

TREE 3: I was afraid then. I knew that if he cut me down my dream of pointing people to God would not come true.

STORYTELLER: The woodsmen said, 'I don't need this tree for anything special. I'll just cut it down and store it'. And he did.

STORYTELLER: A carpenter made the first tree into a rough feed box for animals. It was put in a barn and filled with hay.

TREE 1: But I wanted to be a treasure chest. This wasn't what I had hoped for.

STORYTELLER: Boat makers made the second tree into a rough little fishing boat.

TREE 2: OK. I got to be a boat, but I really hoped to be a mighty ship, not a poor little fishing boat.

STORYTELLER: The woodsman had cut the third tree into large pieces and left it in storage.

Years went by. The trees forgot about their dreams.

STORYTELLER: Then one day, a man and woman came to a barn. She gave birth and they placed the baby in the hay in the feed box that was made from the first tree.

TREE 1 (move to, or point to, the manger): Somehow I knew that I *was* a treasure box. I held the greatest treasure of all time.

STORYTELLER: Years later, some men got in the fishing boat made from the second tree. One man was tired and went to sleep. While they were out on the water, a great storm arose and the tree didn't think it was strong enough to keep the men safe. The men woke the sleeping man. He stood and said, 'Peace' and the storm stopped.

TREE 2: It was then that I 'saw the light'. I *was* the boat that carried someone greater than any King. I couldn't keep my sailors safe, but he did.

STORYTELLER: Finally, someone came and got the third tree. It was carried through the streets to the top of a hill. A man was nailed to the tree and raised in the air to die.

TREE 3 (move to, or point to, a cross): That man died. But he was no ordinary man.

TREE 1: He was the baby who slept in an animal's feed box and showed the world how much God loves.

TREE 2: He was the Son of God, the man with the power of God to control natural forces that God created.

TREE 3: He came to be with people. He died on a cross and came back to life so that people would believe in him and live forever.

And forever I will be a sign, pointing to God who loved people so much that he sent his only Son to save them.

MARY AND JOSEPH'S STORY SCRIPT

Based on Luke 2:1–20

If people can see and hear them, Mary and Joseph remain seated beside the manger as they tell/read the story. Otherwise they can stand and read from scripts on music stands.

JOSEPH: The Roman Emperor Augustus made a law. It required that a list be made of everyone in the whole Roman world. We all went to our own towns to be listed.

I went from the town of Nazareth in Galilee to Bethlehem, the town of David. I went there because I belonged to the family line of David.

MARY: I went with him to be listed. We were engaged and I was expecting a baby.

While we were there, the time came for the child to be born. I gave birth to my first baby. It was a boy. I wrapped him in large strips of cloth.

Then I placed him in a feed box. There was no room for us in the inn.

JOSEPH: That night some shepherds came to where we were staying. They said that an angel had told them to come to Bethlehem and see our baby.

They were out in the fields nearby. It was night, and they were looking after their sheep. The angel of the Lord appeared to them. And the glory of the Lord shone around them. They were terrified.

MARY: But the angel said to them, 'Do not be afraid. I bring you good news of great joy. It is for all the people. Today in the town of David a Saviour has been born to you. He is Christ the Lord. You will find the baby wrapped in strips of cloth and lying in a manger.'

JOSEPH: Suddenly a large group of angels from heaven also appeared to the shepherds. They were praising God. They said, 'May glory be given to God in the highest heaven! And may peace be given to those he is pleased with on earth!'

MARY: The angels left and went into heaven. Then the shepherds said to one another, 'Let's go to Bethlehem. Let's see this thing that has happened, which the Lord has told us about.'

JOSEPH: So they hurried here and found us. The baby was lying in the feed box. The shepherds praised God because everything was just as they had been told.

After the shepherds had seen him, they went and told everyone. They reported what the angel had said about this child. All who heard it were amazed at what the shepherds said to them.

MARY: I kept all these things like a secret treasure in my heart. I think about them over and over.

BLESSING OF A CHRISTMAS TREE

This blessing can be used to bless a Christmas tree in your church or adapted to bless trees, seedlings or seeds that people take home.

The words of the blessing may be shared among a number of people.

Leaders stand near the tree/s.

1. DISCUSSION

When God created the world, God made trees.

Trees come in many sizes and shapes. They are beautiful to look at. Trees also help us in many ways.

Invite people to tell some things trees do for us and provide for us.

When we look at a Christmas tree we will think particularly of three things that were made from trees:

- a manger: where baby Jesus slept, showing the world how much God loves us.
- a boat: in which Jesus sailed and showed that he was God's son, with God's power to control the forces of nature that God created.
- a cross: where Jesus died to save us and give us new life.

A Christmas tree points upward. It can point our thoughts upward to Jesus who was born at Christmas.

When we place a star at the top of a Christmas tree or lights on a Christmas tree, we remember that Jesus came to the world as a light to people who lived in darkness.

2. PRAYER

Let us ask God to send his blessing upon us and upon this tree as a sign of our faith in Jesus.

Lord, give light to our hearts.

May we always reflect the joy of Christmas,

May the joy of Christmas always be in our homes,

May the peace of Christmas live in our hearts and in the world,

God bless this tree and all who gather around it this Christmas time.

Amen.

3. CELEBRATION

Turn on the lights of a decorated tree.

Or, if you are blessing lots of trees, invite people to throw handfuls of tinsel onto the trees.

CHRISTMAS TREE SONG

for tune, see Together at Christmas #59

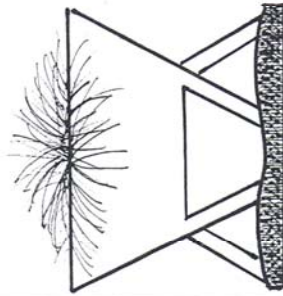
1. O Christmas trees, O Christmas trees, what light and joy you show us —
The happy news of Jesus birth: God comes in flesh to us on earth.
O Christmas trees, O Christmas trees, what light and joy you show us.

2. O Christmas trees, O Christmas trees, what light and hope you show us —
The wooden cross and box and boat are symbols of our Christmas hope
O Christmas trees, O Christmas trees, what light and hope you show us.

3. O Christmas trees, O Christmas trees, what light and peace you show us —
God loved the world so much he gave his only Son our lives to save.
O Christmas trees, O Christmas trees, what light and peace you show us.

WHY

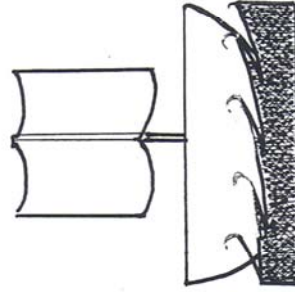
did the
Christmas Baby
come?



Because . . .
God loves us and wants us
to live with him forever.

WHO

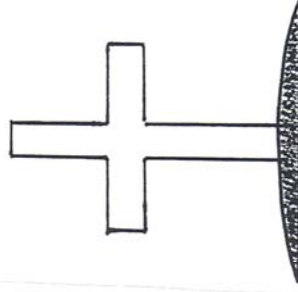
was the
Christmas Baby?



He is . . .
God's one and only Son —
Jesus.

WHAT

did the
Christmas Baby
do?



For us . . .
He lived and died. He came
back to life and lives forever
so that we will live forever
with God.