

## The Tale of the Three Trees

an American Folktale as told to Nicholas Oldziej by his mother [Vasiliki Oldziej is editor of *The Children's Magazine*]

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Long ago in the far away land of Palestine, three trees stood on a hillside overlooking a seaport town.

Each three had great hopes and dreams of what it would be when fully grown. The first tree boasted that its lumber would be used to make a great and beautiful treasure chest. The chest would be decorated with bright golden hinges and polished to a fine and shiny finish. Inside it would hold great riches, jewels which were the colors of the rainbow and gold and silver coins.

The second tree claimed that it would be fashioned into a fine sailing ship. The ship would sail the high seas and travel to far and exotic places. The passengers would be kings and soldiers and statesmen who would marvel at the beauty of such a wonderful ship and the smooth and safe voyages it gave them.

The third tree declared that it would not be cut down and used by man for any of his needs. This tree would be left standing because of its beauty and strength. People would look at the reach of this tree's branches and would think of God and all His glory as they gazed upward to the sky.

Then one day three men with axes came to the hill where the trees stood tall and full. As each tree stood in anticipation of their fate, the first man approached the first tree. He examined it and decided it was a good tree for his uses and so he cut it down. The second man looked at the second tree and assessing its sturdiness and good quality proceeded to chop it down. The third man stood looking at the third tree who reached its branches ever upward, hoping he would leave the tree alone to live its days on that hill. However, the third man judged the tree to be perfect for his needs, and cut it down.

Now the first tree that had dreamed of being a beautiful treasure chest was instead made into a manger. It was sold to a farmer who used it in his cave where he kept and fed his animals. From this manger the animals of the farm ate the hay that lay in it. Until one night a young woman and her husband came to the cave looking for shelter for themselves and their newborn baby. In that manger, they laid their infant son. It was at that moment that the tree knew that it held the greatest treasure in the world, God's gift to mankind. And as the child lay sleeping in the manger, the angels sang and the stars shown brightly in the sky.

Sometime later, the second tree was made into a small fishing boat. Its dreams of becoming a great sailing ship were gone. Now it carried fishermen and the quantities of fish that they caught each day from a small sea. Suddenly a great storm arose and waves rocked the boat back and forth as it tried to steady itself to keep from being wrecked. The man who led the others had no fear. He admonished His friends for being frightened and having so little faith. Then He stood in the boat and raised his hand saying, "Peace." As suddenly as the storm had come up, it went away and all was calm around them. At that moment the second tree knew that it carried a man greater than any worldly king, soldier or statesman and that it sailed a greater adventure than it could ever have dreamed of.

The third tree spent many years in a lumber yard until one Friday morning it was yanked out of the pile of lumber it had lain in. It was made into a crucifix and put on the shoulders of a tired man who had been badly beaten. The man was forced to carry the crucifix to a mountain top and there it was planted into the ground. The man was then put upon the cross and his hands and feet were nailed to it. The tree shuddered with fear and sorrow as it felt the man's pain. The tree was filled with shame at what it had become a part of. Then as the man died upon the cross a great storm descended from heaven and the earth shook. At that moment the tree felt the power of God radiating through it.

Two days later, on Sunday morning the sun rose and joy and warmth filled the air as God's love changed all that had gone before.

God's love made the first tree beautiful.

It made the second tree strong.

And each time people looked upon the third tree they thought of God.