

*First Sunday in the Season of Creation
(Australian Version 1)*

Forest Sunday

We worship with creation in a forest



*'All the trees of the forest sing for joy'.
Psalm 96:12*

FOREST SUNDAY

Welcome!

This Sunday we worship in the forest. We celebrate among the living trees, ferns and forest life in our sanctuary. We also celebrate the tree of life at the centre of our sanctuary, a tree that symbolises Christ!

Gathering

Leader In the name of the Creator, the fountain of life,
the name of Christ, the pulse of life,
and the name of the Spirit, the breath of life. Amen.

People **Holy! Holy! Holy!**
Earth is filled with God's presence.

L Christ, we come into your presence today
to worship in this sanctuary called Earth,

P **A planet filled with your presence,**
quivering in the forests,
vibrating in the land,
pulsating in the wilderness,
shimmering in the rivers.

L God, reveal yourself to us in this place
and show us your face in all creation.

P **Holy! Holy! Holy!**
Earth is filled with God's presence.

Procession and Song

*We join in song with the children as they enter the church
holding ferns and trees and banners celebrating forest life.
We celebrate with them as they hold their symbols aloft and place
them in the forest sanctuary.*

Call to Worship

We celebrate with creation as worship leaders, from different points in the church, call creatures of the forest to worship with us.

L1 We invite the forests to worship with us:

**P Mountain ash and eucalypts,
quivering ferns and glistening moss!**

L2 We quiver with the trees as they shake before God:

**P when tempests and tornadoes hit,
and raging winds invade the forest.**

L1 We invite tall trees to celebrate life:

**P Huon pines and ironbark,
tall timber where lizards and lichen find their home!**

L2 We invite the forest night-life to sing:

**P Green tree frogs and timid moths,
ancient owls and swirling bats!**

L1 We join with the fauna of the forest in praising God:

**P Lyrebirds and black cockatoos,
platypuses, pythons and butterflies!**

L2 We celebrate the song of the forest!

P Sing, forest, sing!

L1 We invite you to name forest creatures
to join us in worship.

*We name, silently or aloud, other creatures or parts of the forest
and invite them to join us in worship.*

L2 We celebrate the song of the forest!

P Sing, forest, sing!

Remembering

We use rosemary, eucalyptus leaves or some other fragrant symbol to assist us to stir our memories.

L Take the fragrant symbol you received at the door, rub it between your fingers and share with the person next to you rich childhood memories of the forest, the bush or a special tree.

L We remember the first garden,
when God planted a forest of trees.

**P. We remember the gardens
and the forests of our childhood,
the places where we played in the past,
when we felt close to Earth and to trees.**

L We remember and rejoice.

**P Thank you, God, for trees,
for forests filled with mysteries!**

Confession

L As I hold this symbol aloft,
we remember and confess
that we have become alienated from Earth
and that we have violated the forests in our garden planet.

A symbol of our destruction of forests is held high above the flora in the sanctuary. This symbol may be a chainsaw or some other symbol meaningful to the community.

P **We are sorry.
We have been thoughtless and greedy.
We have ignored the destruction of our forests,
the death of old-growth giants
and species breathing their last.**

L We are sorry.

P **We are sorry. We are sorry.**

Absolution

L Christ hears your confession from the cross
and forgives your sins against the forest.

P **Christ, teach us to love Earth
and return to Earth as our home.**

L. I speak for Christ:
I invite you to come home to Earth
by rejoicing in the forest.

P **Shalom! Shalom!
We are coming home!**

Christ Have Mercy

L As we come home to Earth,

P **Christ, have mercy.**

L As we seek to love our home,

P **Christ, have mercy.**

L As we seek to care for our planet,

P **Christ, have mercy.**

Glory to God

L **Glory to God in the highest!**

P **And on Earth peace with all creation!**

Prayer for the Day

P. **God, our Creator, whose glory fills our planet, help us to discern your vibrant presence among us, especially in the mysteries of the forest. Help us empathise with your forest creatures who are suffering. Lift our spirits to rejoice with the forest and all the creatures of the forest. In the name of Christ, who reconciles and renews all things in creation. Amen.**

Readings for the First Sunday in Creation

Old Testament: Genesis 2:4b–22 ‘Born of Earth and the Spirit’

God creates humans from Earth and the Spirit and plants a forest garden to be a home for them with the rest of their kin in creation.

Psalm: Psalm 139:13–16 ‘Born from the womb of Earth’

The psalm writer confesses that he/she was created by God in a wondrous way (like Adam) deep in the womb of Earth.

Epistle: Acts 17:22–28 ‘Born to search for God’

In his famous sermon about the ‘Unknown God’ Paul claims that God created all humans with the same breath and inner impulse to search for God’s presence.

Gospel: John 3:1–16 ‘Born of water and the Spirit’

Jesus invites Nicodemus to go beyond being born of Earth and the Spirit (like Adam) to also be born of ‘water and the Spirit’ in Christ.

Children's Address: 'A Secret in the Forest'
told by a storyteller or by means of a puppet

Children's Prayer: Thank you, God, for making forests that send out oxygen into the air so that we can breathe. Amen.

Children's Song

Affirmation of Faith

L Let us affirm our faith together.

Women We believe that God creates all things,
renews all things and celebrates all things.

Men We believe Earth is a sanctuary,
a sacred planet filled with God's presence,
a home for us to share with our kin.

Women We believe that God became flesh and blood,
became a piece of Earth,
a human being called Jesus Christ,
who lived and breathed and spoke among us,
suffered and died on a cross
for all human beings and for all creation.

Men We believe that the risen Jesus
is the Christ at the core of creation,
reconciling all things to God,
renewing all creation and filling the cosmos.

Women We believe the Holy Spirit renews life in creation,
groans in empathy with a suffering creation
and waits with us for the rebirth of creation.

Together We believe that with Christ we will rise
and with Christ we will celebrate a new creation.

Passing the Peace

L Let us share the peace of the Lord with one another.

P The peace of the Lord be with you.

Song

Sermon or Reflection

The Offering

L God, our Creator, through your love you have given us these gifts to share. Accept our offerings as an expression of our deep thanks and as signs of our concern for those in need, including our fellow creatures on planet Earth.

P With all creation we praise our Creator.

Prayers of the People

We thank God for a wondrous creation. We celebrate with all our kin. We pray for all those in need. We name them now. We close with the following prayer.

Creation Prayer

**Jesus Christ, teach us to empathise with Earth.
Make our spirits sensitive to the cries of creation,
cries for justice from the hills and the trees.
Jesus Christ, make our faith sensitive to the groans of the
Spirit, groans from the deserts, the salt plains, the winds.
Jesus Christ, make our souls sensitive to the songs of our kin,
songs of celebration from the sea, the land and the air.
Christ, teach us to care. Amen.**

Lord's Prayer

The Great Thanksgiving

L The Creator be with you and all creation.

P **And also with you.**

L Open your hearts.

P **We open them to our Creator.**

L Let us give thanks to the Maker of heaven and earth.

P **It is right to join creation in thanking God.**

L It is right to give you thanks, loving Creator.
Your word is the impulse for all things to be,
for space, stars and stardust to appear,
for Earth to emerge from the deep,
for life to be born of Earth and
for humans to be born of Earth and the Spirit.

Your Spirit is the life impulse in all things,
renewing the barren and healing the wounded,
groaning in anticipation of a new creation,
stirring a new life born of water and the Spirit.

You chose to be born a human being,
to become a part of Earth,
to suffer, die and rise from death
to redeem humankind, renew creation,
and affirm all born of Earth and the Spirit.

Your presence is the living impulse in all things,
the Christ deep among us,
filling Earth—land, sea and air—
filling every element and place,
filling the grain and the grape
we share with you this day.

Therefore with angels and archangels,
ancient voices in the forest,
high voices from the sky,
deep voices from the sea
and the whole company of creation,
we proclaim your presence among us.

**P Holy, holy, holy, God of all life,
Earth and sea and sky
are full of your presence
and glorify your name. Amen.**

Words of Institution

Invitation

C Come, for all things are now ready.
Come to the table with all your kin
and share with all in need:
the gift of healing for those in pain,
the gift of forgiveness for those in sin,
the gift of assurance for those in doubt,
and the gift of hope for those in tears.

**P May we who share these gifts
share Christ with one another
and all our kin.**

Lamb of God

**P Lamb of God, who takes away all sin against God,
have mercy on us.
Lamb of God, who takes away all sin against Earth,
have mercy on us.
Lamb of God, who takes away all sin from the world,
receive our prayer.**

Distribution

Distribution Songs

Dismissal Blessing

L Now may the penetrating power of Christ's body and blood reach deep into your heart, your mind and your body to heal your wounds and, through you, to bring healing to Earth, in Jesus' name. Amen.

Candles for our Kin

As we return from the Lord's table we light a candle and place it in the sand-filled candle-stand in memory of departed loved ones or one of our kin in the forests who has become extinct.

Thanksgiving

L Let us give thanks for this meal.

P We thank you, Christ, for the meal we have celebrated with you, and we pray that through your body and blood we may be healed and become agents of healing for Earth. Amen.

Sending Out

L Christ calls you to be his disciples, to serve him with love and compassion and to serve Earth by caring for creation. Hold again the fragrant symbol in your hands as you go forth to serve.

**P We will remember the forest!
We will groan with creation!
We will sing with the trees!**

L Will you care for creation?

**P We will care for creation!
We will nurture the forests!
We will celebrate life!**

Blessing

L May the Spirit of God,
who is above all and in all and through all,
fill you with the knowledge of God's presence in Earth
and the impulse of Christ within you.

Go in peace,
serving Christ and loving Earth!

**P We go in peace,
serving Christ
and tending Earth!**

Recession and Song

We join with the children in a song of joy as they process from the church with their plants and banners. We join with the psalm writer who says, 'All the trees of the forest sing for joy' Psalm 96:12.