



On your marks

Finding ways to connect with the worldwide family of the Christian faith has been a growing area of interest both in churches and schools. Such windows into the multicultural and international practice of Christianity in today's world are a vital resource to give us a true picture of what it means to be a global Christian in the 21st century. For Christians this is of course also important evidence of the continuing truth and power of the story of Jesus to influence lives and transform societies.

In [A-cross the World](#) (BRF, 2011), this connection to the big picture was through the symbol of the cross. Differing Christian traditions and various Christian faith communities around the world are united by this one key and central sign of a shared faith. This universal cross has at the same time been interpreted, designed and adapted to express a unique, local expression of that same faith. With each cross comes a particular story of how each community experiences God's love and puts it into action.

Get set

Each of the crosses in this new series supplements the 40 crosses that can already be found in the book [A-cross the World](#). With each there is a Bible link with wondering questions, background information about the cross, stories to share and craft ideas to make a version of the cross - providing enough material for a session with children in a church group, in the classroom or at a mixed-age event. There is also a picture provided for each cross that could be printed or used in a PowerPoint presentation in order to provide a talking point for groups or as a focus for collective worship.

This cross belongs to a series of new crosses and, as with the first collection, the overall aim remains the same, namely:

- to enable children and adults to see the cross through the eyes of other cultures and traditions
- to prompt discussion and debate on why this single, historical event continues to exercise such an influence worldwide
- to explore how Christians in a wide variety of places, different times in history and in different circumstances, have lived purposeful lives because of their faith in a Christ, who died and who is risen - symbolised by the cross

For further cross ideas linked to the church's year, go to:

- [Easter - a resurrection cross](#)
- [Lent - an ongoing idea for exploring the cross through Lent](#)

Go!

To view associated pictures for this cross, go to:

- [A tree cross 1 - picture](#)
- [A tree cross 2 -picture](#)

Bible link

After the Israelites left the Red Sea, Moses led them through the Shur Desert for three days, before finding water. They did find water at Marah, but it was bitter, which is how that place got its name. The people complained and said, 'Moses, what are we going to drink?' Moses asked the Lord for help, and the Lord told him to throw a piece of wood into the water. Moses did so, and the water became fit to drink. At Marah the Lord tested his people and also gave them some laws and teachings.

Exodus 15:22-25 (CEV)

This is the first recorded miracle after the people of God had crossed the Red Sea. It was vital that the escaped Hebrews quickly found safe water to drink. Moses is instructed them to throw into the bitter water a tree that turns the water sweet. Moses goes on to tell them that this is going to be a sign that God will look after them on their journey into the unknown. If they follow God's ways, then he will protect them as a healer, even as the wood had healed the water of its dangerous bitterness.

Wondering about the Bible story

I wonder why the people of God seemed so quickly to have lost their faith in God's protection? (This incident happened very soon after the dramatic rescue at the Red Sea.)

I wonder why God used a tree to be the visible means of making the water safe?

I wonder why God's people so quickly forget even dramatic answers to prayers like this, along with the truths they were meant to teach (see Exodus 17:1-7, where they once again complain to Moses about the water supply)?

The story of the cross

'Tree' is often used in Christian imagery as a synonym for the cross on which Jesus died. This has its origin in the story of the two trees in the Garden of Eden. After Adam and Eve had chosen to go against God's warnings and had eaten from the tree with the power to know the difference between right and wrong, the second tree - the Tree of Life - was denied them, guarded by winged creatures and a flashing sword (Genesis 3:22-25).

When Jesus came, he offered people the eternal life that this second tree possessed (Genesis 2:9) and so this tree and Jesus became identified, and in particular the tree was linked with the cross,



where Christians believe Jesus obtained that eternal life for the world (John 3:16).

The two trees represent the opportunity to know God or turn away from God, an opportunity that Christians believe everyone is given. This following story explores this:

***There were two trees in the garden, both bearing fruit and both looking good.
One was for knowledge and one was for life.
One was for good and one was for good with bad.
It was suggested that the bad wouldn't really be all bad but more the wisdom to know the bad.
Put like that, an offer of two for the price of one was surely more tempting.***

***But the advice of the gardener was different.
It was not two but three for one and the name of the third was death.
The choice was really life or death.
However, the salesman's serpent-like voice sold the bargain in more seductive language.
With wisdom one could become equal to the gardener, so wasn't that a death worth accepting?***

***There were two trees in a garden presenting the world with a choice.
Both looked good and bore fruit.
The tree of life was available and was the gardener's recommendation.
The tree of knowledge was available and a delight to the eyes.
It seemed so reasonable to pick what offered more for the same price.
It seemed so strange to pass up a bargain.
It seemed impossible that something so beautiful could be dangerous or deadly.
But wasn't it even stranger that the gardener didn't know best?***

***There were two trees in a garden and the world made its choice.
Not life but knowledge.
Not life but death.
A cold shadow fell on the garden and the choosers.
The rejected tree was removed and with it went life.
They felt the difference and saw the change.
The place of the trees became a gardener's nightmare. Indeed the bargain had been true.
They had become gardeners, but of death, not life.
Was there to be no second chance?
Could not they or we choose life instead?
But the second tree was out of reach, guarded by the fiery swords of heaven's armies.
The second tree had been the true bargain of that day.***

***At another time and another place there were trees in a garden and a tree on a hill;
Trees that offered life and a tree of death.
There was a choice to be made.***

That was the day of the second chance and when another chooser came.

This time the chooser took the gardener at his word.

A choice on behalf of all

And the tree of death became the tree of life.

Now only the second tree is in a garden.

And the garden has become a glorious city

And the tree is at its centre.

From it flows a life-giving river and its leaves are for the healing of the nations.

Crafting the cross

Another popular association between a tree and the cross is the Jesse Tree. The prophet Isaiah had predicted that one day a rescuer would come for the world and that he would be part of the family tree of King David. David was the son of Jesse and so this Saviour would be from 'the stump of Jesse' (see Isaiah 11:1-3, NIV). In the opening verses of his gospel, Matthew traces Jesus' family back to David and beyond.

To make this family tree and link it to the cross, you will need a straight branch from a tree that has several smaller branches and twigs from which items can be hung. Set this on a firm foundation so that it can stand upright. On the tallest point of the branch attach a small wooden cross to represent Jesus. Next, on the branches below, hang the names of the ancestors of Jesus up to David and Jesse (Matthew 1:1-17). Alternatively, you could hang symbols that represent some of the key characters in the Old Testament story, who are mentioned in these verses as far as Abraham. For example:

- Abraham - a star
- Judah - a lion
- Salmon - the walls of Jericho
- David - a harp
- Solomon - a temple
- Jehoshaphat - a sword
- Josiah - a book
- Zerubbabel - praying hands
- Joseph - a carpenter's tool
- Mary - a manger

Below are some links to two more types of tree cross, where the cross outline has been cut into a section of the tree, to show that the story of Jesus goes right back into history, as it bisects its growth rings.

- [Cross in wood 1 - picture](#)
- [Cross in wood 2 - picture](#)

A cross reflection



There is an actual tree - the cross of crucifixion, connecting us with God and God with us, once and for all, in the figure of Christ - Christ the axis of history.

Esther De Waal, *The Celtic Way of Prayer* (Hodder and Stoughton, 2003), p. 149.