



On your marks

There is often a lot of ceremony and family tradition that surrounds the putting up of the Christmas tree at this time of year. This is especially true in the home but may also be the case for the tree at your church. However, what about the undressing of the tree? The following idea explores the potential for telling a story about the tree as the decorations are removed and links through to the truth of Christmas that will outlast the tree for all of us.

Get set

The following story is in six sections and should be spoken by six different narrators. Each section links to the Christmas tree that will be at the heart of this presentation. Read through the piece carefully first so that you can check there are appropriate decorations on the tree you are using that match with what is being described in the text. As each paragraph is read, have a different group of children come to remove the various parts that are referred to. At the end of each paragraph everyone could join in with the words in italics. During the first paragraph the Christmas tree could be carefully manoeuvred into the centre of the church or special area where this is being presented.

Go!

The Christmas Tree's Tale

It was a sad day for the Christmas tree. Its moment of glory was coming to an end. In early December it had been plucked from obscurity in an out-of-town plantation. It had been cut, trimmed, shaped and wrapped; then priced, put on display and within hours bought. It had been transported, manoeuvred, man-handled, potted and given pride of place at the heart of the celebrations; finally it was sprayed, adorned, festooned and all lit up. Yes, that had been its moment of glory; but now, sadly, it is time for all that to end.

If only it could have lasted a bit longer than this.

Piece by piece the decorations are removed from its branches. First the tinsel with its sparkle and shimmer. Great trails of silver light that danced in and out amid the green needles, transforming the ordinary into something special. Now it is time to roll up the magic for another year and already the tree is becoming... just a tree again.

If only it could have lasted a bit longer than this.

Next the hangings are unhooked, silver ball after tinkling bell. No longer would bright splashes of colour with their festive shapes weigh down this tree's spiky arms. Christmas bows and pretend presents; santas, snowmen and saintly angels, are all to be packed away again carefully for their year-long hibernation. As they disappear, so, too, does the tree's uniqueness, leaving it undressed and commonplace once more.



If only it could have lasted a bit longer than this.

Now the way is clear for the lights to be unwound from their helter-skelter evergreen course. Lights that had so faithfully advertised the season to those outside—a cheerful electric coat of many colours that shone out into the winter gloom and set off the tree's other festal garments. What are they now? Just a lifeless string of wire and glass and plastic, which is also packed away for next year's celebrations. It's as if the very life of the tree has drained away; its power to transform darkness switched off for ever.

If only it could have lasted a bit longer than this.

And so, finally, all that remains is the star; proud upon the topmost twig. It points heavenward and to the earth alike, embracing all points of the compass and yet beckoning beyond this world's dimensions too. This has served as sign and symbol of the season; both its mystery and its message; the very reason why the tree has stood, bearing it as a focus for all the rest. Now from its summit it, too, must be removed, leaving the tree with neither meaning nor message to proclaim.

If only it could have lasted a bit longer than this.

It is a sad day for the Christmas tree. How fine it once had been. Now it is simply a tree again. So where did the Christmas go? Can all that really be packed up and put in storage for another time? What were they all about... the tinsel, the ornaments, the lights and the star? On the tree they had their meaning. They stood for specialness, transformation, for life and hope. Are such things simply an annual wonder... a passing moment of glory? **And yet**, all these very things were themselves all wrapped up once, long ago, in strips of cloth and laid in a manger. To unwrap that bundle remains an open invitation to discover Christmas in every time and every place. A reason for that tree, along with all the trees of the wood, to clap their hands for joy and join a chorus that declares to all that, yes...

It can all last a lot longer than this!