

Psalm 96:11-13 Let the heavens rejoice, let the earth be glad; let the sea resound, and all that is in it. Let the fields be jubilant, and everything in them; let all the trees of the forest sing for joy. Let all creation rejoice before the Lord, for he comes, he comes to judge the earth. He will judge the world in righteousness and the peoples in his faithfulness.

"Let all the trees of the forest sing for joy."

Introduction:

We are thinking about **Creation**, with a particular focus on trees. Psalm 96 gives us a wonderful image: **"Let all the trees of the forest sing for joy."**

What a beautiful and powerful picture — trees praising their Creator, standing as signs of life, resilience and hope.

This speaks powerfully into our own time, reminding us of the vital role trees play in **climate resilience, biodiversity, human wellbeing and the hope of a flourishing future**.

These gentle giants are among the oldest and most important living things on our planet: astonishing living presences of quiet strength, rooted, patient, and essential to life.

Trees are amazing. My own sense of wonder. Growing up in the wooded county of Surrey, I spent many happy hours among forests and trees, enjoying the changing seasons, especially the arrival of blossom and the colours of autumn. Looking back, I realise that long before I knew anything about ecology, I was learning something essential: Wonder. Wonder is where stewardship begins.

Today we celebrate the Feast of Creation in Christ: a time to give thanks for the environment, see the world as God's sacred gift, and renew our commitment to caring for creation.

This message has been given fresh urgency today with the Church of England's new *Hope for All Creation* publication. This teaches that God has not abandoned the world and that caring for the planet is part of following Jesus. It reminds us: "We have been gifted a world of breath-taking beauty, astounding abundance, and intricate interconnection. It is a world God declared good and loves."

Let's go back to what I said earlier **Trees and Wonder**

Wonder is where stewardship begins

That sense of wonder is exactly what Psalm 96 invites us into.

"Let the heavens rejoice, let the earth be glad ... let all the trees of the forest sing for joy." What a **wonderful** image, and it speaks powerfully into our own time. Heaven, earth, sea, fields, and trees are part of creation's praise, inviting us to listen again to the world as God's sacred gift.

These gentle giants help us see our responsibility in practical and spiritual form. They are essential to life and, in Psalm 96, part of creation's praise. Ecologically, a mature tree is living infrastructure: providing shade, storing carbon, releasing oxygen, filtering pollutants, reducing storm-water runoff, stabilising soil, supporting pollinators and birds, and creating habitat. In towns and cities, trees reduce the urban heat island effect, shaded surfaces can be up to 20 degrees cooler than unshaded surfaces. Research also links green space and tree cover with improved mental wellbeing. Trees are not decorative extras, but part of the life-support systems through which creation sustains health, biodiversity, resilience, and community.

Ask questions

Tree-related language appears with striking frequency in Scripture.

In the New International Version;

1. How many times does the word “tree” appear? 281 times

2. How many times does the word forest appear? 46 times

“Fruit” appears 198 times, “branch” 60 times, “root” 56 times, “vine” 35 times, and “leaf” 15 times—so more than 800 occurrences altogether. **Trees are woven deeply into the biblical imagination.**

3. Has anyone a favourite tree?

Scripture gives trees profound theological meaning. The Bible in Genesis starts with the tree in the garden of Eden and ends with Revelation 22 speaks of the tree of life whose leaves are “for the healing of the nations.” Proverbs 3:18 says wisdom is “a tree of life to those who take hold of her.” And Psalm 1 gives one of the clearest examples.

Psalm 1:3 speaks of the faithful life as “a tree planted by streams of water.” It is a powerful image of rootedness: much of what sustains a tree is hidden beneath the soil. The same is true of faith. Prayer, worship, Scripture, community, and attentiveness to God are often unseen, yet they sustain us when difficulties come.

Trees also teach patience and hope. Many trees alive today were planted by people who never expected to benefit from their shade. To plant a tree is an act of hope, a gift to future generations.

Forests also teach connection: they flourish through living networks of roots, fungi, water, nutrients, and mutual dependence. That image challenges us to shape communities where trees, people, and the wider creation can thrive together.

If trees are teachers, then part of our task is to listen to what forests are showing us.

The nineteenth-century French artist Théodore Rousseau offers a useful example. Often seen as an early ecological activist, he loved the Forest of Fontainebleau not only as a subject for painting, but as a living place worthy of protection.

His association with the “voice of the trees” echoes Psalm 96’s vision of the forest singing. Forests speak without words: through flourishing or decline, biodiversity or loss, healthy ecosystems, or degraded ones. When forests thrive, they tell us something. When species disappear or drought weakens trees, they tell us something too. **The question is whether we are willing to listen.**

Listening and wonder must lead to action.

Here are some examples:

The Anglican Communion has a project called the Anglican Communion Forest which focuses on tree growing, forest protection, and ecosystem restoration. Its vision is direct and hopeful: ***“To plant is to hope, to protect is to love and to restore is to heal – to share in God’s reconciling work in all creation.”*** I can give more details later to anyone who is interested

Our Bronze Eco Church Award is recognition of our commitment to caring for creation, a first step on a deeper journey in practical action on caring for God’s earth

Our everyday choices matter. When we buy wood, paper, furniture, food, medicines, or other products connected with forests and wild plants, we are not making neutral choices. We are using purchasing power. Choosing sustainable wood and responsibly sourced products is one practical way to protect forests, support biodiversity, and care for communities who depend on them.

Through simple actions—from reducing waste to protecting and planting trees—we join God’s work of creation, healing, and restoration. Hope becomes visible in faithful acts repeated, shared, and gathered.

These are examples of what **Archbishop Desmond Tutu** meant when he said,

“Do your little bit of good wherever you are; it’s those little bits of good put together that overwhelm the world.”

So to conclude: Let the Trees Sing

Let us return to the words with which we began: “Let all the trees of the forest sing for joy.” The trees have always been singing; the question is whether we have learned to listen in wonder.

Today we pray that we may put down deep roots in Christ, rediscover wonder, and let wonder become love, love become responsibility, and responsibility become faithful action.

We **give thanks for** Our Bronze Eco Church Award for our commitment to caring for creation and the beginning of a deeper journey.

We give thanks for the **environment, seeing the world as God’s sacred gift** and we **renew our commitment to caring for creation.** In doing so, we stand with the vulnerable, speak and act prophetically, and show that faith and hope are stronger than indifference.

And when we stand quietly beneath the trees, may we hear again what Psalm 96 has been telling us all along: “Let all the trees of the forest sing for joy.” Let that song send us out with hope rooted in Christ, hope lived in action, and hope shared with all creation. **Amen**

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