# Baucis and Philemon

http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Baucis\_and\_Philemon

### In [Ovid](http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Ovid)'s moralizing fable ([Metamorphoses](http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Metamorphoses_%28poem%29) VIII), which stands on the periphery of [Greek mythology](http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Greek_mythology) and [Roman mythology](http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Roman_mythology), Baucis and Philemon were an old married couple in the region of [Tyana](http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Tyana), which Ovid places in [Phrygia](http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Phrygia), and the only ones in their town to welcome disguised gods [Zeus](http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Zeus) and [Hermes](http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Hermes) (in Roman mythology, [Jupiter](http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Jupiter_%28mythology%29) and [Mercury](http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Mercury_%28mythology%29) respectively), thus embodying the pious exercise of [hospitality](http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Hospitality), the ritualized guest-friendship termed [xenia](http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Xenia_%28Greek%29).

[Zeus](http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Zeus) and [Hermes](http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Hermes) came disguised as ordinary peasants and began asking the people of the town for a place to sleep during that night. They were rejected by all before they came to Baucis and Philemon's rustic and simple cottage. Though the couple were poor, they showed more pity than their rich neighbors, where "all the doors bolted and no word of kindness given, so wicked were the people of that land." After serving the two guests food and wine, which Ovid depicts with pleasure in the details, Baucis noticed that although she had refilled her guest's beechwood cups many times, the wine pitcher was still full. Realizing that her guests were in fact gods, she and her husband "raised their hands in supplication and implored indulgence for their simple home and fare." Philemon thought of catching and killing the goose that guarded their house and making it into a meal for the guests. But when Philemon went to catch the goose, it ran onto Zeus's lap for safety. Zeus said that they did not need to slay the goose and that they should leave the town. Zeus said that he was going to destroy the town and all the people who had turned him away and not provided due hospitality. He said Baucis and Philemon should climb the mountain with him and not turn back until they reached the top.

After climbing the mountain to the summit ("as far as an arrow could shoot in one pull"), Baucis and Philemon looked back on the town and saw that it had been destroyed by a flood. However, Zeus had turned Baucis and Philemon's cottage into an ornate [temple](http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Temple). The couple was also granted a wish; they chose to stay together forever and to be guardians of the temple. They also requested that when it came time for one of them to die, the other would die as well. Upon their death, they were changed into an intertwining pair of trees, one [oak](http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Oak) and one [linden](http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Tilia), standing in the deserted boggy terrain.

Baucis and Philemon do not appear elsewhere in Greek myth, nor anywhere in [cult](http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Cult_%28religion%29), but the sacred nature of hospitality was widespread in the ancient world. After Abraham and Sarah had feasted them, two strangers were revealed as "two angels" (Genesis 19:1; the story is in the previous chapter). Hebrews 13:2, which may be aware of Ovid as well as of Genesis, converts hospitality stories into a virtue injunction: "Do not neglect to show hospitality to strangers, for by doing that some have entertained angels without knowing it." The possibility that unidentified strangers in need of hospitality were gods in disguise was ingrained in first century culture. [Acts](http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Acts_of_the_Apostles) 14:11-12 relates the ecstatic reception received less than two generations after Ovid's publication of the tale by [Paul of Tarsus](http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Paul_of_Tarsus) and [Barnabas](http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Barnabas): "The crowds shouted 'The gods have come down to us in human form!' Barnabas they called Zeus, and Paul they called Hermes".