

The Myths of Japan: The Blossom Princess

The creation myth is followed by the legend of how the sun goddess Amaterasu sends her grandson Ninigi down from heaven to govern the world. This series of stories, which establishes the divine lineage of the emperors, begins with Ninigi encountering Konohanasakuya, the Blossom Princess. The two fall in love, and Ninigi decides to ask Konohanasakuya's father Oyamatsumi, god of the mountains, for her hand in marriage.

Oyamatsumi agrees, but on one condition: Ninigi must marry both Konohanasakuya and her elder sister, the Rock Princess Iwanaga. Ninigi, however, takes only Konohanasakuya, rejecting the less beautiful Iwanaga. Furious, Oyamatsumi reveals that only marrying both of his daughters would have assured Ninigi eternal happiness. Blossoms are beautiful but fleeting, whereas rocks may be dull to look at but last forever. Ninigi's refusal of Iwanaga means that he has forfeited his immortality. For the ancient Japanese, this fateful choice explained why the emperors, who were considered living deities, had to die like ordinary mortals.

Konohanasakuya soon becomes pregnant with triplets, but Ninigi refuses to believe that the children are his. Konohanasakuya locks herself in a hut and sets fire to it, confident that the children of a deity would be born unharmed no matter what. Three baby boys emerge from the flames together with their mother.