



Creation: our place, our space

St Kevin of Glendalough: Enjoying Creation

This is a medieval manuscript which tells the story of St Kevin, who lived in Glendalough in Ireland, just outside Dublin. St Kevin lived in the sixth century - about 600 years before this manuscript was made - but people remembered him even then as someone who really enjoyed the world God created.

St Kevin lived alone in a little hut in a remote valley. He enjoyed looking at the mountains and the lakes, the plants and the trees, and especially watching the animals. He loved nature and respected all living things. He spent his life praying and coming close to God in the peace and quietness. He gave thanks and praise to God for the beauty of creation.

The writer, Gerald of Wales, tells of him stretching out his arms wide to pray, so wide that one of his hands stretched right out of the window of his hut. St Kevin stood so still praying for such a long time, that a blackbird landed in his hand and laid its eggs. The story goes that when St Kevin realised what had happened he took care not to disturb the 'nest'. He stayed with his arm stretched out for days and weeks, praying to God. The blackbird fed him nuts and berries, sustaining him until the eggs hatched and the chicks flew away. Another story tells of otters catching salmon in the lake and bringing them for St Kevin to eat.

Wondering Questions

I wonder which was your favourite part of this story?

I wonder which was the most important part?

I wonder if there is anything you would change?

I wonder what happened next?

I wonder where you are in this story?

Response Activity

The famous Irish poet Seamus Heaney wrote a poem about St Kevin and the Blackbird. I wonder if you would like to write a story or poem about enjoying creation?

or

The modern artist Clive Jenkins Hicks has done a whole series of paintings and engravings of St Kevin and the blackbird (see *PowerPoint*). I wonder which one you like best? How would you paint St Kevin?

Creative response

I wonder how you can show what this story has meant to you, or what it has made you think about?

Resources: selection of art and craft materials to choose from.



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St Kevin and the Blackbird by Seamus Heaney

(from The Spirit Level, 1996)

And then there was St Kevin and the blackbird.
The saint is kneeling, arms stretched out, inside
His cell, but the cell is narrow, so

One turned-up palm is out the window, stiff
As a crossbeam, when a blackbird lands
And lays in it and settles down to nest.

Kevin feels the warm eggs, the small breast, the tucked
Neat head and claws and, finding himself linked
Into the network of eternal life,

Is moved to pity: now he must hold his hand
Like a branch out in the sun and rain for weeks
Until the young are hatched and fledged and flown.

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And since the whole thing's imagined anyhow,
Imagine being Kevin. Which is he?
Self-forgetful or in agony all the time

From the neck on out down through his hurting forearms?
Are his fingers sleeping? Does he still feel his knees?
Or has the shut-eyed blank of underearth

Crept up through him? Is there distance in his head?
Alone and mirrored clear in love's deep river,
'To labour and not to seek reward,' he prays,

A prayer his body makes entirely
For he has forgotten self, forgotten bird
And on the riverbank forgotten the river's name.