



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.

-

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.



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Dame Jocelyn Bell Burnell: looking out across creation

This is Jocelyn Bell Burnell. She is still alive, and she sometimes visits Cambridge. You might see her walking down the street one day!

Jocelyn was born in Northern Ireland in 1943. Her father was an architect and he helped to build the Armagh Planetarium. Jocelyn was inspired by visits there, looking at the stars, and she decided that she wanted to study astronomy.

But it wasn't going to be easy. When she was a child, girls were made to study things like cooking and needlework. Jocelyn and her parents had to protest until she was allowed to study science at school. She went on to study physics at the University of Glasgow in Scotland, and when she was twenty-two she came to Cambridge to do research in her beloved astronomy.

Jocelyn said that she was very nervous when she first came to Cambridge. There weren't many women scientists, and life was very different to anything she had known before. She felt that she didn't really deserve to be here – there must have been a mistake. But she decided that she was going to work really hard and check all her experiment results thoroughly, so no one could turn around and tell her to go back home. She thinks that it is this thoroughness which helped her make one of the biggest discoveries in astronomy.

Her research work was to help her PhD supervisor Antony Hewish set up the Interplanetary Scintillation Array – a radio telescope that tracked across the sky with the stars – and produced about 30m of paper data per night. Jocelyn spent hours analysing the data carefully. In July 1967 she discovered a bit of “scruff” on one of her chart recorder papers. Most people would have overlooked it, and her supervisor told her to ignore it. But Jocelyn looked at it again and again. She eventually worked out that it was a signal which was pulsing with great regularity, at a rate of about one pulse every one and a third seconds. She had discovered pulsars - rapidly spinning neutron stars!

Her work was published under Hewish's name, with her name coming after. And it was Antony Hewish and one of his male colleagues, Martin Ryle, who won a Nobel Prize for Physics in 1974 for the discovery of pulsars. Many people have said that this wasn't fair as Jocelyn had made the discovery, but Jocelyn herself says that it is very rare for students themselves to be awarded a Nobel Prize for the work they are involved in with their supervisors.

Jocelyn went on to win lots of other awards and honours. She was even made Dame Commander of the British Empire in 2007. She has been project manager of the James Clark Maxwell Telescope in Hawaii, President of the Royal Astronomical Society, and is now Professor of Astrophysics at the University of Oxford.

As Jocelyn gazes into space, she enjoys exploring and learning more about God's creation. From her school days she has been an active Quaker, and her Christian faith has inspired her work. She has written a book called *A Quaker Astronomer Reflects: Can a Scientist Also Be Religious?*



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Just a few weeks ago she was awarded the Special Breakthrough Prize in Fundamental Physics. This was partly to make up for her not winning the Nobel Prize all those years ago! She won £2.3 million as prize money, but she thinks that she has enough money for herself. She remembers what it was like when she was the only woman working in a team of white men and is thankful for the opportunities she had. So, she has decided to give all the money away to help people who wouldn't usually have an opportunity to become physics researchers: women, ethnic minorities and refugees.

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

Listen to the sound of a neutron star: <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=uHEVo-LkDrQ>

The ancient philosophers talked about the music of the spheres: the idea that the celestial bodies (the sun and moon and planets) were all moving together in harmony.

I wonder if you would like to compose a piece of music to describe space and the created universe?

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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Misimi Isimi: caring for creation

This is Misimi Isimi. She lives in Nigeria and is the president of Eco-kids Green Club, a club she founded to help children to care for the environment for the rest of their lives. Club members learn about how to protect the world from pollution and think about how to make the best use of natural resources.

Misimi started out as an environmentalist when she was only eight years old and leads programmes in primary schools educating other children on protecting the environment and the importance of healthy-living habits.

Her biggest vision is for girls to have as many rights as boys, for poor children to have as many opportunities as rich children, and for every child to be able to go to school.

When she was only nine, Misimi started a martial arts campaign on the International Day of the Girl Child. She wants to celebrate the strength and resilience of girls and aims to stop the violence and discrimination girls face on a daily basis.

She was honoured as the first child environmentalist in Nigeria at the Africa Clean-up Awards in 2017 and given thanks for her tireless efforts.

But Misimi doesn't show any signs of slowing down. She then began working on her very own environmental documentary and a magazine called Ade and the Wheelie Bin.

Misimi aims to create a sense of hope for the future and is part of the Clean-up Nigeria Project.

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 will happen next?

I wonder where you are in this story?

Response Activity

Isimi is starting a magazine about the environment. I wonder if you would like to design a page, article or cover for an environmental magazine for children in Cambridge? What will you call it?

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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William Blake: being inspired by creation

This is William Blake, who was born in London in 1757.

When he grew up he became an artist and a writer, but he always saw himself as “a child of God, whose playthings were the sun, moon and stars, the earth and heavens”. He was full of wonder at creation.

When he was a child William enjoyed wandering the streets of London and escaping into the countryside. Once he was startled to “see a tree filled with angels, bright angelic wings bespangling every bough like stars.” When he went home and told his parents they were not amused, and his mother threatened to beat him because she thought he was lying.

Much to his parents’ dismay, William continued to see visions. But they did encourage his artistic talents and sent him to drawing school. They didn’t have enough money to send him to art college, so they got him a job working for an engraver, carving pictures in wood and metal and printing them in ink. William went on to paint and write poems, many of which were inspired by his visions of God, angels and creation.

William was also interested in social action. It was the time of the French and American Revolutions, and people were thinking about how the rich treated the poor, and whether it was right to own slaves. William saw the beauty of creation in the world around him, and the wonderful harmony in the visions God gave him, so he felt called to join in campaigns to make things fair for everyone. He wrote poems and painted pictures to help the cause. He wrote two poems called *The Chimney Sweeper* in his *Songs of Innocence and Experience*. They expose the terrible lives of the boys who were sent up chimneys, and one shows a chimney boy dreaming of an angel coming to set them all free.

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 will happen next?

I wonder where you are in this story?

Response Activity

I wonder if you would like to write and illustrate a poem or slogan to campaign about caring for creation or people?

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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Songs of Innocence:

The Chimney Sweeper

When my mother died I was very young,
And my father sold me while yet my tongue
Could scarcely cry 'weep! 'weep! 'weep! 'weep! [a]
So your chimneys I sweep, and in soot I sleep.

There's little Tom Dacre, who cried when his head,
That curled like a lamb's back, was shaved: so I said,
"Hush, Tom! never mind it, for when your head's bare,
You know that the soot cannot spoil your white hair."

And so he was quiet; and that very night,
As Tom was a-sleeping, he had such a sight, -
That thousands of sweepers, Dick, Joe, Ned, and Jack,
Were all of them locked up in coffins of black.

And by came an angel who had a bright key,
And he opened the coffins and set them all free;
Then down a green plain leaping, laughing, they run,
And wash in a river, and shine in the sun.

Then naked and white, all their bags left behind,
They rise upon clouds and sport in the wind;
And the angel told Tom, if he'd be a good boy,
He'd have God for his father, and never want joy.

And so Tom awoke; and we rose in the dark,
And got with our bags and our brushes to work.
Though the morning was cold, Tom was happy and warm;
So if all do their duty they need not fear harm.

Songs of Experience:

The Chimney Sweeper

A little black thing among the snow,
Crying "'weep! 'weep!" in notes of woe!
"Where are thy father and mother? Say!"--
"They are both gone up to the church to pray.

Because I was happy upon the heath,
And smiled among the winter's snow,
They clothed me in the clothes of death,
And taught me to sing the notes of woe.

And because I am happy and dance and sing,
They think they have done me no injury,
And are gone to praise God and his priest and king,
Who make up a heaven of our misery."