

The Story of Mary Slessor

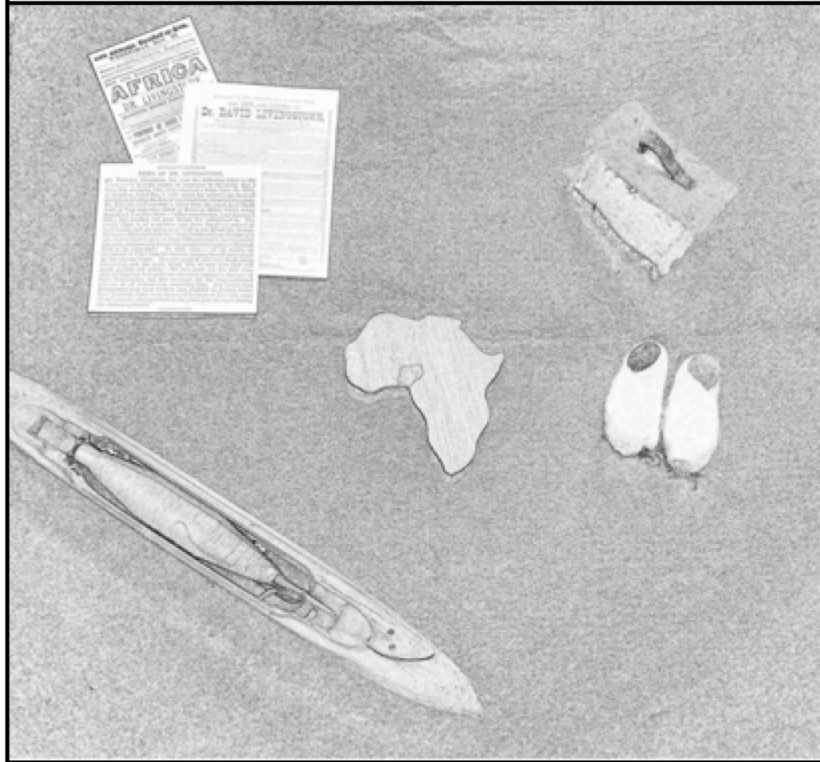
Mary Slessor was a 19th/20th Century, Scottish Missionary to Africa.
She was many things for God ... kind, brave, stood up to bullies, saved children.

Born 2 December 1948, died 13 January 1915

How to Use This Lesson

- Extension Lesson – *in the style of Godly Play*.
- Afterwards Lesson – stories about people and events that took place after the biblical era.

Story Layout



Final Layout – from the circle's perspective

The Material

- Location: The Mystery of Pentecost Shelf, Lower Shelves.
- Pieces:
 - Mary Slessor booklet,
 - Some newspaper images about David Livingstone;
 - two people of God from your basket of People of God – these represent Mary's brothers;
 - a weaving shuttle, with wool or jute – or a photograph of a shuttle or of the weaving mills;
 - a map of Africa, showing Nigeria;
 - twin babies
 - a small red handbag – this should be weighted, so that it makes a 'thunk' when you put it on the underlay.
- Underlay: A square piece of blue or white or green felt about 46cm square (18").

The tradition Mary came from does not usually use colours to represent the seasons.

Notes on the Material

The pieces should be about the same size – around 10 cm/4".

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The underlay should be an 46cm/18" square of green, white or blue felt, depending on your tradition. It is folded on top of the objects. This is slightly bigger than the other Saints underlays, as there are a couple of extra objects.

- Blue – for Scotland and to represent the ocean journeys she took between Scotland and West Africa
- Green – depending on your church, for ordinary time, or for Nigeria
- White – depending on your church, for Christmastide

The twin babies – we have been experimenting with people of God wrapped in white blankets or babies made by needle felting - it would be useful to have feedback on these objects;

The Godly Play circle at Cramond Kirk would like this to be told in a line, as with the book 6 stories, with a few extra objects.

Background

Mary Slessor is not a saint in the normal sense of the term. She is a Christian witness – someone who lived their life for God. She was many things in God's name – brave, kind, fair.

Born in Aberdeen in 1848, she was the second of seven children. Her father was a shoemaker. Her mother was deeply religious and would read stories from the Missionary Times to her children. After the oldest son died, the family moved to Dundee. They moved to find work and lived in the slums.

Mary became a 'half-timer' in one of the mills – she spent half her day at school and the other half working – when she was eleven. Over the next few years Mary's father, her younger brother and two of her sisters all died of pneumonia. By the age of fourteen, Mary had become a skilled jute worker. She was also teaching in her church.

When Mary heard that David Livingstone, the famous Scottish missionary and explorer, had died, she decided that she needed to follow in his footsteps. After training in Edinburgh, she set sail for West Africa in 1876. Mary was assigned to the Calabar region, in what is now Nigeria, to work with the Efik people.

She challenged and changed the way Christian missionaries worked with the peoples of Africa – by living and working in their communities. She abandoned her cumbersome Victorian clothing, for petticoats and boots and cut her long, red hair. She lived in huts in the villages where she worked, rather than in a Missionary compound. As well as needing to be close to the people she was working with, Mary wanted to send as much of her Missionary salary home to Scotland, to support her mother and sisters. She lived as simply as she could.

Mary taught the people practical skills, to help them trade. She worked alongside them. She learned their languages. She challenged their superstitions and showed them God's love. Maybe the thing that she is most well known for is rescuing and adopting twins who had been abandoned in the bush to die.

Mary gained the friendship and confidence of the people. Their confidence in her led to people asking her to settle disputes, and Mary became the first woman judge in the British Empire. In 1892 she became vice-consul of Okoyoung, and in 1905 the vice-president of Ikot Obong court. In 1913 she was awarded the Order of St John.

During her time in West Africa, Mary suffered intermittently from Malaria. She downplayed this, and although she did return to Scotland to recover, she never gave up her mission work. During her third mission to Calabar, her mother and sisters died. Mary never returned to Scotland, writing that "*Heaven was now closer to her than Britain*".

Mary's malarial fevers got to the point she could no longer walk, and she had to be carried around on a hand-cart. She died near Use Ikot Oku on 13 January 1915. Her body was transported to Duke Town and she was given the colonial equivalent of a state funeral.

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There are memorials to Mary in Nigeria. Schools, halls and churches have been named after her. She is called 'the mother of all nations'.

In Scotland, there is a bust of Mary in the Hall of Heroes of the National Wallace Monument in Stirling, a statue in Aberdeen, a park in Dundee, as well as streets named after her in Glasgow, Dundee and Old Meldrum.

Mary Slessor is remembered in the Church of England on the 11 January. She was honoured on the 1997 £10 Clydesdale Bank Note – this is no longer in circulation.

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Godly Play®

This story is part of a collection of stories of Scottish 'saints', written to supplement the collection of stories about the saints in *The Complete Guide to Godly Play, Volume 7*. These stories of Scottish 'saints' are written in the style of *Godly Play*.

In the collection of lessons on the saints found in *The Complete Guide to Godly Play, Volume 7*, there is a lesson called 'The Child's Own Saint'. The lesson invites children and Godly Play mentors to add to the lessons on the saints by writing the story of one of their own heroes. This story, and the others in this collection, serve as examples of this – a Christian person who inspires us all to honour God and respect the dignity of every human being.

These stories are mainly for children, so they try to minimise the distance between the child and the adult we are talking about. Some of the ways this is done is to keep the relationship informal, such as calling the person by their first name and emphasising things about the person's childhood. This means that the stories are somewhat open and very personal, to engage the child's intimacy and wonder with these amazing people.

We are intentionally spare with the details of these stories so as not to obscure the core reality. However, we encourage Godly Play mentors to include children's books on the shelves nearby, just as we do with the other heroes of the church.

Godly Play® is an interpretation of Montessori religious education developed by Jerome W. Berryman. It is an imaginative approach for working with children that supports, challenges, nourishes, and guides their own spiritual quest. It is more akin to spiritual guidance than what we generally think of as children's education.

It involves children and adults, as mentors, moving together toward fluency in the art of knowing how to use Christian language to nourish their spiritual lives.

Godly Play assumes that children have some experience of the mystery of the presence of God or the spiritual in their lives, but that they lack the language, permission and understanding to express and fully enjoy those in our culture. In Godly Play, we show how to enter into parables, silence, sacred stories and liturgical action in order to discover the depths of God, ourselves, one another, and the world around us.

Godly Play for Schools

Godly Play offers religious and moral education sessions, using an experiential discovery method, which engages the child's hands, heart, mind, senses, and intuition. Whilst these stories are shared from the Christian perspective, some of the stories shared are also known in other religious traditions.

During a Godly Play session a child's verbal and nonverbal learning will be stimulated through the use of sensorial and kinaesthetic materials.

Godly Play sessions can be used as a one off experience or offered as a series of classes throughout the school year across all ages, with a maximum of 30 children in each session. A typical Godly Play session lasts between 45 minutes and an hour. It can be tailored to meet the needs of the school, teachers and students with the parts of a full session adapted to fit the space and time available.

Using Godly Play

If you are not an experienced Godly Play mentor, we strongly encourage you to download and read *How to Lead Godly Play Lessons*, available at www.churchpublishing.org/godlyplaydigital. This will explain the background of Godly Play, its methodology, and clear guidelines for its use. You will need this grounding before attempting to lead a Godly Play presentation, such as this one.

Alternatively, you could invite an experienced Godly Play mentor to lead the session for you. You can find a mentor by contacting admin@godlyplayscotland.co.uk.

If you are interested in becoming a Godly Play mentor you can find training courses on the Godly Play Scotland website – www.godlyplayscotland.co.uk.

Enjoy the wonder of this story.

Other stories in this collection:

The Story of Saint Mungo

The Story of Eric Liddell

Bibliography

Berryman, Jerome. *The Complete Guide to Godly Play, Volumes 1 to 8*

The Story of Mary Slessor

Movements

Get the material for Mary Slessor's story.

Unfold the underlay in front of you and say:

Take the booklet from the tray and place it in the centre of the underlay with Mary Slessor's image facing up and towards the children.

Put the David Livingstone newspaper pages on the underlay at the bottom right, from where you are sitting.

Pick up one of the people of God, gently cup it in your hand and show it to the group.

As you say that Mary's brother died, cover it with your other hand, and place it back in the basket.

Pick up the other person of God, gently cup it in your hand and show it to the group.

As you say that Mary's brother died, cover it with your other hand, and place it back in the basket.

Put the shuttle with wool onto the underlay, at the right hand side.

Words

Watch where I go to get the lesson for today.

This is the story of Mary Slessor.
I wonder why we remember Mary? Let's see.

Mary Slessor was born in Aberdeen, and she was the second oldest of seven children.

When Mary was a little girl her mother would read to Mary and her older brother news from the *Missionary Times*. Mary's favourite stories were about the Scottish missionary, David Livingstone, and his travels in Africa.

Mary hoped that when her brother grew up he would become a missionary, so she could go with him to Africa as his assistant.

But her brother died. Soon after, the family moved to Dundee, so her father could find work.

Dundee was full of factories, smoke and dirt. The family was very poor. Mary's mother started working as a weaver. Mary was left to look after her younger brother and sisters.

Mary's mother still read stories from the *Missionary Times*. Now Mary hoped that her younger brother would become a missionary, then she could go with him to Africa as his assistant.

But Mary's younger brother and two of her sisters died. It was a terrible time.

Mary had to go to work in one of the factories. She worked on a weaving loom.

The mill owners had a school for the young people who worked in the mills. Mary had never been able to go to school before and now she could. This made Mary happy.

Once Mary could read and write, she began to help at her church. She helped to run a youth club.

One night, Mary went out to try and get people to come to the church. She met a gang of boys. They made fun of her and made a circle round her.

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Movements

Cup your hand together over the booklet, to show that Mary was with God and God was with Mary.

Put the map of Africa onto the underlay, in the middle of the bottom.

If you want, you can add in a bit about dressing more simply!

Pick up the twin babies, cup them in your hand and show them to the circle, then as you say that they are left to die, cover them gently with your other hand.

Uncover the twins and put them down on the underlay, at your left, opposite the shuttle.

Words

Then the gang leader swung a piece of lead on a string towards Mary's head. He swung it closer and closer until it hit Mary.

Mary knew that God was with her. She didn't move. Even with blood running down her face.

The gang thought Mary was really brave and they agreed to go to her church youth club.

Eventually, Mary realised that she needed to become a missionary.

Mary travelled to Africa by ship, she got off at a place called Calabar, in a country that we call Nigeria.

At first, Mary lived with all the other missionaries, but she knew that God really wanted her to work with the people of Calabar.

Mary got onto another boat and went up the river to the villages where the Efik and Ibibio people lived.

Mary lived in a hut, like the people, she ate the food they ate, she learned their language and their ways.

[She began to dress simply, leaving off her cumbersome Victorian dress and just wearing petticoats and boots].

She showed them how to weave, to work wood, she helped them learn to trade.

All the time she told them of God's love.

As Mary knew more about the people, she discovered that they had many superstitions. They believed that when twins were born, one was a good spirit, but the other was evil.

They didn't know which was good, so they left both babies in the bush to die.

When Mary discovered this, she went out looking for the babies. She brought them back to her hut and took care of them. Soon people began to leave twins on her doorstep. And her home was alive with babies and children.

The tribal leaders saw how kind, fair and wise Mary was. She was so wise that they asked Mary to settle their disputes. Mary became a judge and was the only woman judge in the whole of the British Empire.

Even when Mary was frightened, she knew that God was with her.

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Movements

Put the red handbag onto the underlay, at the left, nearest to you – opposite the David Livingstone papers.

Take a minute to wonder internally about this amazing woman and all the things she did. When you are ready, begin to guide the wondering about Mary Slessor's life by using the wondering questions.

Show the children the booklet. Point out the map of the UK showing where Mary Slessor lived and the story printed in the booklet to help the children know Mary Slessor better.

Words

Once, when she was travelling on the river, a hippopotamus attacked her boat. They can be very fierce, and people are often scared – instead, Mary hit it with her handbag.

Even though Mary did all this, she was often sick. Sometimes she came home to Scotland to get better. She would bring her children with her, and they would tell people about Nigeria, Africa and Mary's work for God.

Eventually Mary became too sick to come back to Scotland and she died in Nigeria.

The people loved Mary so much that they gave her a state funeral.

And they still call her “the mother of all nations”.

I wonder which parts of Mary Slessor's story you like best?

I wonder which part of the story you think is most important?

I wonder which part of the story is about you, or where you might be in the story?

I wonder if we could leave any part of the story out and still have all the story we need?

I wonder what you are wondering about this story?

Let me show you what is inside this booklet and how you can use it to find out more about Mary Slessor.