

# The Story of Saint Kentigern

*also known as Saint Mungo*

St Kentigern was a 6<sup>th</sup> Century Scottish saint. He is also widely known by his pet name – Mungo. He took Christianity to Strathclyde in the west of Scotland. He established a Christian community in what is now Glasgow and, is the city's joint patron saint, with his mother. All his life, Mungo stood up to bullies for God.

Born 518 or 528, died 13 January, 614

## 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:
  - St Kentigern booklet
  - a small coracle shaped boat
  - a small bird – preferably a robin
  - a stick about 4" long, of hazel if possible
  - a bell
  - a fish and two identical rings – the fish should open up along the middle, so that one of the rings can be hidden inside. The other ring should be in a ring box, if possible
- Underlay: A strip of cloth or felt, 30cm x 140cm (13" x 55"). This is the same size as the Book 6 story underlays. or a square of felt, 45cm (18"). This is slightly bigger than the Book 7 story underlays. The colour could be white, green or blue, depending on your tradition.

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## Background

We remember Saint Kentigern (Saint Mungo) on the day that he died, January 13 in either 603 or 614. 614 is the more likely date.

He was born at Culross (Coo-ross) in Fife. He is important as one of the first evangelists in Strathclyde, for founding Glasgow and the bishopric there.

His church became part of Glasgow Cathedral, and you can visit Mungo's tomb there.

The bird, the tree, the bell and the ring make up the coat of arms of the City of Glasgow and the University of Glasgow. Mungo's "let the people flourish by the preaching of God's word and the and praising of God's name" is the motto of Glasgow, although now shortened to "Let the people flourish" or "Let Glasgow flourish".

The rhyme used by Glaswegians to remember the symbols of their coat of arms is said after the wondering, when putting the objects away.

*Here is the bird that never flew  
Here is the tree that never grew  
Here is the bell that never rang  
Here is the fish that never swam  
Let the people flourish by the preaching of God's word  
and the praising of God's name.*

There is much of Mungo's story which is tied up with the legends of King Arthur. His father is said to have been King Owain of North Rheged, which is now part of Cumbria and Galloway.

Mungo was likely a cousin of Saint David, whom he may have met up with in Wales.

Mungo met St Columba at Kilmacolm, and they exchanged Bishop's staffs.

Mungo's mother – Teneu/Theneva/Denw – is a saint in her own right (St Enoch), and, with Mungo, is joint patron saint of Glasgow.

Legend has it that the Princess was thrown off Traprain Law, near Haddington, after her father, King Loth of the Lothians, discovered that she was pregnant. After a soft landing, she was set adrift on the River Forth in a coracle without oars.

In the 1960's graves of the Gododdin tribe (Loth of the Lothians family) were found at Cramond, in Edinburgh. Forensic analysis has dated these to the later half of the 6<sup>th</sup> century. Their diet suggested that they are royalty or, at least, important, high ranking people. Some of their faces have been reconstructed. It is possible that this was Mungo's mother's family. The Gododdin left a battle poem (*Y Gododdin*), some of the language of which suggests that they were Christian.

Finally, this story was written, as a little bit of fun, for the circle of children at Cramond Kirk, after the information on the remains of the Gododdin people was published.

## Notes on the Material

Along with the booklet, there are six objects to help us remember Mungo's life and miracles:

- a small coracle, to represent the journey his mother endured before he was born. These are difficult to find. I have experimented with covering a small, round basket with black felt and with knitting – you could also crochet – a small round container with felting wool, after felting, I painted this with PVA glue to stiffen the fabric.
- small bird, to represent the robin he brought back to life;
- a stick of hazel, to represent the stick he put in the fire to restart it;

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- the bell that he is said to have brought back from Rome. A brass evangelists bell is perfect, if you can find one (eBay usually has these)
- a fish and a ring, to represent the fish caught in the River Clyde with the Queen's ring. If you can find two identical rings this is better, as it enables you to 'throw-away' a ring and still have another hidden in the fish. I made my fish using felting wool, to make it easier to hide the second ring.

The pieces should be about the same size – around 4" – and the rings can still be ring sized!

This story can fit the pattern of the Saint's stories found in *The Complete Guide to Godly Play Volume 7* or the 'long-form' of *The Complete Guide to Godly Play Volume 6* stories. The story stays the same, but the underlay changes to a 45cm (18") square – if you find that this is too small, you can increase the size to 50cm (20") - of white, pale blue or green felt, depending on your tradition. The objects you use are still the coracle, bird, stick, bell, fish and rings.

The circle at Cramond requested that this be told in a line, as *The Complete Guide to Godly Play, Volume 6*, old Testament people of God are, which is why both options are included. The underlay is between 28cm and 33cm (11" and 13") wide and up to 140cm (55") long.

### Notes on the Kentigern vs Mungo

It may be important with this story that you use both Kentigern and Mungo, but lean more towards the name you use in your own tradition or context.

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## Notes on the Etymology of “Glasgow”

There are a few different thoughts as to the origin of the name Glasgow. From the story of the donkey, loaded with precious glass, being swept away while crossing the ford (let the ‘glass go’), to the more serious and, probably, more accurate origins.

In modern Gaelic, literally it is “green hollow”. Also from Gaelic, Cleschu is “beloved green spot”.

In the biography of Mungo, by Jocelin of Furness (1175-1214), it is written as Clas-gu, which translates to “dear family”, and that is the interpretation I have chosen to use in this story.

Given that Kentigern is also spelt Cantigernus or Cyndeyrn Garthwys, it is fair to say that we don’t really know ... except that the donkey story probably didn’t happen.

## Disclaimer!

Saint Mungo is precious to the people of Glasgow, and I know that it can bump people if the *Godly Play* story of a person they have heard about their entire lives is misinterpreted. If I have done that in this story, I am truly sorry, and please let me know. It is part of the journey of these saints stories that they are as true to the tradition as they can be.

*Alex Mackenzie, February 2025*

## 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.

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## 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](http://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](mailto: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](http://www.godlyplayscotland.co.uk).

Enjoy the wonder of this story.

## Other stories in this collection:

The Story of Eric Liddell  
The Story of Mary Slessor

## Bibliography

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

# The Story of Saint Kentigern

## Movements

*Look around the circle and, if they are ready, then get up and move slowly to the shelves to collect the materials for Mungo's story.*

*Sit down, with the story at your side, breathe and relax. There is a lot in this story.*

*Unfold the underlay in front of you as you say:*

*Add the colour and tradition if this is what you would normally say when introducing the story of a saint. If you are using this in a school setting, you would probably not use this.*

*Take the saint booklet from the tray and place it at the beginning or centre of the underlay with Mungo's image facing up and towards the children.*

*You could make a movement with your hand of someone falling.*

*Put the coracle onto the underlay and push it a little.*

*Culross is pronounced "Coo-ross"*

*If you are Scots, then you could say that 'dear one' is 'Mungo' in our language.*

## Words

I wonder if you are ready for a story?

Watch where I go to get the lesson for today, so you can find it if you want to work with it.

This is the story of Saint Kentigern. Sometimes we call him Saint Mungo.

[The church remembers him in the white weeks after Christmas/the green and growing time between Christmas and Lent.]

I wonder why we remember Kentigern? Let's see.

There are many stories about Saint Kentigern, all of them true and some may even have happened.

The story begins even before Kentigern was born.

When the King of the Lothians found out his daughter was expecting a baby, he was so angry he had her thrown off a high cliff.

When the Princess lived, she was put in a coracle and pushed out into the River Forth.

The little boat floated up the river and washed up on the shore in Fife, near Culross.

Saint Serf found the Princess and took her to the monastery.

That's where the baby was born.  
The Princess named him Kentigern.

Saint Serf helped to bring the baby up.

Saint Serf called him 'dear one', which is 'Mungo' in their language.

Mungo grew and became a boy.

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## Movements

*Pick up the little bird, then place it on the underlay upside down.*

*Pick the bird up again and hold it gently in your hands as if praying.*

*Then blow gently on it and lay it on the underlay right side up ... as if it has come back to life.*

*Take the stick out of the basket, and poke the underlay gently with it, as if poking ashes, and then place it on the underlay.*

*Place the bell on the underlay. Feel free to give it a playful little ring!*

## Words

When he was about eight years old, the other boys who lived in the monastery were jealous of him.

They took a robin, which was St Serf's pet, and killed the bird. They hoped that Mungo would be blamed.

When Mungo found the bird he prayed to God. God came so close to Mungo and Mungo came so close to God, that Mungo knew what to do.

He took the bird in his hands and gently blew on it and it came back to life.

Mungo continued to grow and, when he was about fourteen, he was left to look after the fire in the monastery ... but he fell asleep.

The other boys put the fire out. They knew Mungo would be in trouble.

When Mungo woke and saw the ashes, he prayed to God. God came so close to Mungo and Mungo came so close to God, that Mungo knew what to do.

He took a hazel branch and put it into the ashes. The fire began to burn.

When Mungo was about twenty-five years old, he went from the Kingdom of Fife to the Kingdom of Strathclyde to minister to the people there.

He built a little church. People came to live around the church because they liked the way Mungo lived.

But the King of Strathclyde hated Christians and sent Mungo away.

Mungo travelled to Cumbria and Wales, where he built a monastery.

Some people say that he even went as far as Rome and brought a bell back with him.

By that time there was a new King in Strathclyde. He asked Mungo to come back to minister to the people.



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## Movements

*If you have two rings, show one of them to the circle now.*

*The, as you speak about the King throwing the ring into the river, 'throw' the ring away.*

*Place the fish, with the ring hidden inside, on the underlay. Don't show the ring yet.*

*Open the fish to show the ring, take it out and show it round the circle.*

*Then put both it and the fish on the underlay.*

*Again, if you are Scots, you could say in **our** language.*

## Words

As Mungo travelled, he built churches along the way. The journey took a long time.

When Mungo arrived, he found that the King was very angry.

The King had given his wife a ring and she had given it to a young man.

While the young man was asleep the King had taken the ring and thrown it into the River Clyde.

Now he was asking the Queen where it was.

The Queen was sorry and worried about what would happen. She asked Mungo to help.

Mungo prayed to God. God came so close to Mungo and Mungo came so close to God, that Mungo knew what to do.

Mungo sent one of the King's servants to the river to catch a fish.

When the servant brought the fish back, Mungo cut it open.

And there was the Queen's ring.

The King forgave the Queen.

Mungo ministered to the people of Strathclyde. The King built him a bigger church. The people came and the community around Mungo began to grow. His mother, the Princess, came to help him.

Mungo said "Lord, let the people flourish by the preaching of God's word."

And they did.

The community grew and grew, and it became known as the 'dear family', which is 'Clas-gu' in their language.

Mungo lived to be very old and very full of years. He died in his church, still baptising people.

Mungo's little church continued to grow, and the people flourished. You can still visit his church today. Now it is a great cathedral.

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## Movements

*Guide the wondering about Mungo's life by using these wondering questions.*

*As you put the story away, you can add the rhyme that goes with this, which people in Glasgow use to remember their coat of arms.*

*There is no rhyme for the coracle, as that is really St Enoch's story, so maybe put it back first, before you begin the rhyme.*

*As you say each of the statements, lift the object and put it back into the basket.*

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

*Once the story has been tidied away, help the circle choose what they need to do during their response time.*

## Words

I wonder what parts of Mungo's story you like best?

I wonder what part of Mungo's story is the most important?

I wonder what 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?

Here is the bird that never flew

Here is the tree that never grew

Here is the bell that never rang

Here is the fish that never swam

Let the people flourish by the preaching of God's word and the praising of God's name.

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

Now, I wonder what work you need to do today to think a bit more about this story.

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Change	Suggested by	Date
Added the Glasgow rhyme at the end of the story, to make the connection with now.	Alex Mackenzie	January 2017
Added the movements for the coracle. Tidied up some of the information on the front page about the story. Added information about making the story fit the other Saints stories.	Alex Mackenzie	March 2018
Tidied up some of the grammar, added the copyright statements, changed the parts about the underlays and colours.	AM	May 2021
Tidied this up for addition to the website and added some instructions on the materials. Added the information about Godly Play, in line with the People of Colour stories	AM	October 2024 to February 2025
Updated the layout picture, so it was easier to see the objects	AM	February 2025