

St. Kevin

St. Kevin is associated with the lovely Glendalough valley in the Wicklow hills where he lived a contemplative life, and which became the burial place of the kings of Leinster. A community gathered round this man of prayer, and the monastery associated with him, had a high reputation. He was both poet and musician and his influence was strong for many centuries. He was born in 498 C.E., and died in 618 C.E., at the age of 120 years. His feast day is celebrated on June 3 (hence, he is this month's featured saint).

"Of gentle birth", as his Irish name declares, he was born in the Irish province of Leinster to noble parents, perhaps even descendant of the Kings of Leinster. Tradition holds that when he was born, his mother felt no labor pains, and the snow that fell on the day of his birth melted as it fell around the house. An angel is said to have appeared during the child's baptism, telling his parents that the child should be named "Kevin." St. Cronan, the officiating priest, said, "This was surely an angel of the Lord, and as he named the child so shall he be called." So the babe was baptized Kevin, *Coemgen* in the Irish tongue, which means "He of Blessed Birth."

After being ordained to the priesthood, Kevin spent seven years as a hermit in the mountains surrounding Glendalough, which comes from the Gaelic words *glen* (meaning "valley") and *lough* (meaning "lake"), meaning "Valley of the Two Lakes." He lived in a small, five-by-seven-by-three-foot cave, now known as St. Kevin's Bed, which was, legend holds, shown to him by an angel. His life was spent in prayer and self denial, and he lived off herbs and fish.

Seeing the need of a central place from which to teach, Kevin decided to establish a monastery at Glendalough. The monastery grew to such fame and renown that it was considered equal to a pilgrimage to Rome for a penitent to travel seven times to Glendalough monastery. It is said of Kevin that he was the fulfillment of the prophecy of St. Patrick—that he was the one to come who would evangelize the region of Ireland just south of Dublin.

On a peaceful June night in 618, Kevin died and his soul sped heavenward to join the angels and saints around God's throne. The precise location of Kevin's grave is lost, although it is said that at dusk, when no-one is about, blackbirds will flock to an unmarked cross above a forgotten grave, the grave of a wild boy who held a blackbird's nest in his unwavering, outstretched hand for the forty days of Lent.

So, tonight, we remember all who minister in isolated places; and those called today to a life of prayer. We give thanks for all who use their skills in poetry and music in the service of the Gospel, as we pray:

God of the quiet hills and the busy city:
we thank you for places of beauty which draw people close to you
and for those like Kevin of Glendalough who inspire us
as they communicate their love of you in music and poetry.
May we respond with deeper devotion to our Lord
and in loving service of our neighbors.
Hear our prayer in the name of Jesus. Amen.