

Mudiad Addysg Gristnogol Cymru Christian Education Movement Wales

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R.E. Ideas

PILGRIMAGE

Frances Jenkins, Roch Community School, Pembrokeshire



*Stand at the crossroads and look.
Ask for the ancient paths
And where the best road is,
Walk on it,
and you will live in peace.*

Jeremiah 6:16

A pilgrim is traditionally someone who goes on a journey to a special religious place. When a pilgrim visits the special place s/he hopes to get closer to God, to experience God's presence in a special way. The journey itself is called a pilgrimage. It is a popular form of worship.

Many people went on pilgrimages in the Middle Ages because they thought the end of the world would happen soon. Before going on a pilgrimage the pilgrim would have to sort out his business affairs, making sure that his family was well provided for and that he had made his will.

Every year millions of pilgrims from many different religions still go on pilgrimages, whether they are rich or poor, male or female, young or old. Many pilgrims may be in good health, but for some the journey is a journey of hope. Those who are ill may travel to a holy site in the hope of getting better, (such as Lourdes), especially if they have an illness which doctors cannot cure. Long ago, if someone was too ill to go on a pilgrimage, they might have asked a friend to go on a pilgrimage instead of them. There were even people, called *Palmers*, who spent their life going on pilgrimages on behalf of sick people who could not travel themselves. Some people who have recovered from an illness may go on a pilgrimage to give thanks to God for their recovery.

This story inside introduces the character Rhidian, a priest who made a pilgrimage to St. Davids where he took some of the oil burning at the shrine of the saint. This unit of work could also be used as part of a topic celebrating the following:

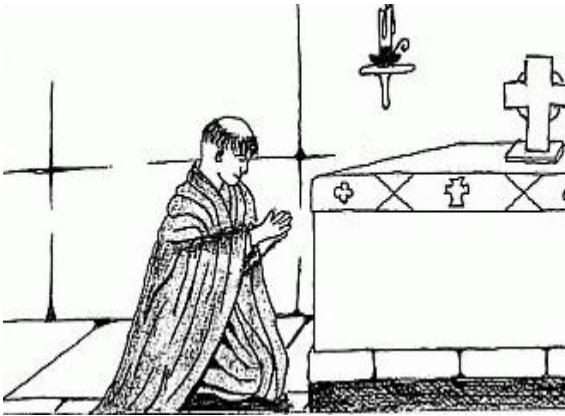
Advent or Christmas (making Christingles), showing the importance of light to Christians;

Diwali (the Hindu / Sikh festival of Lights) and Hanukkah (the Jewish festival of Lights).

Pupils could also explore the significance of the Olympic flame, looking at its journey to Greece, and also the flame kept burning at Kennedy's tomb in the Holocaust Museum in Washington.

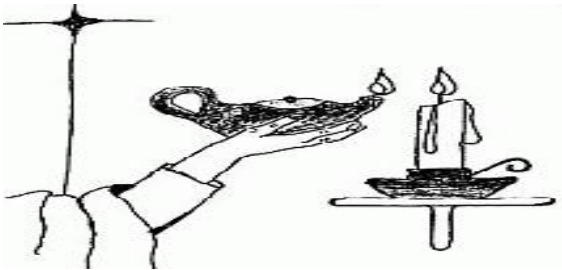
Rhidian and the Light

Part 1



Thirteen centuries ago there lived a priest called Rhidian, who looked after a small church in the Gower peninsula. He went on a special journey - a pilgrimage to St. Davids.

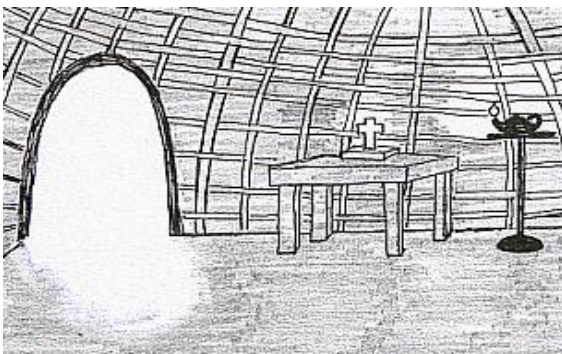
His journey was long and difficult. Since the Romans had left Britain the roads had become overgrown and so he had to travel on rough tracks. However, he was determined to visit the place where Saint David had built his monastery and where David was now buried. Like many other Christians he believed that if he went to this holy site, he would feel closer to God and receive a special blessing. When Rhidian arrived in St. Davids he prayed to God and made an offering (a gift) to the monastery.



Like all pilgrims, he wanted to take something back with him from St. Davids - something which would remind him of his pilgrimage and which would bring him closer to God. So before leaving, he took the small lamp he had brought with him and lit it with the flame which burnt at the altar of David's shrine. Carefully he guarded the flame on his way home, protecting it from the winds which whistled through the trees.



Weary and tired from his travels, Rhidian stopped to spend the night at the house of a friend called Gwynor. Gwynor welcomed Rhidian to his home. During the cold night they sat down to eat a simple meal together and talked about Rhidian's wonderful visit to St. Davids.

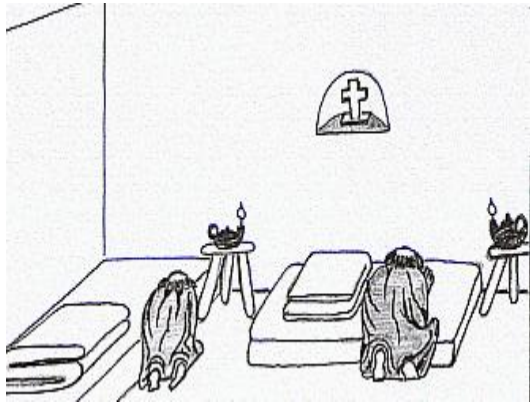


Part 2

As they talked, Gwynor noticed that Rhidian often glanced at his lamp. He wondered why Rhidian was wasting the precious oil; the house was already lit, so why was Rhidian keeping his lamp alight?

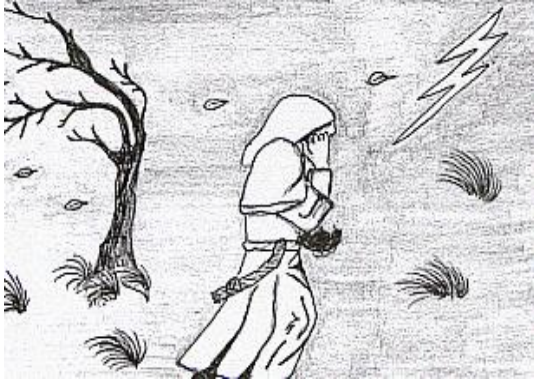
Gwynor was curious and asked his friend about this. Rhidian replied that he was keeping the light burning because the flame was sacred; it had come from the shrine of St. David and he wanted to take it back to his own church, where it's light could be seen by all.

Gwynor thought this was such a wonderful idea that he asked Rhidian if he could share the flame as well, so that he too could light his church with the sacred flame from David's monastery. Rhidian hesitated for a moment . . .



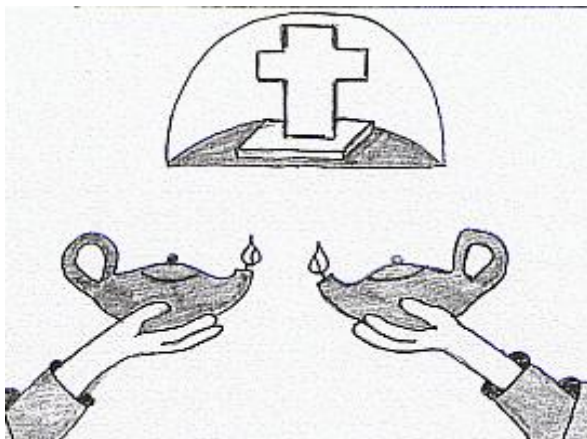
Should he give away some of the light? He had walked many miles through valleys and across rivers to travel to St. Davids and back. The flame was precious to him.

However, he was a Christian. He knew that the flame would be cherished by Gwynor and the people in his church, so he kindly agreed to share the sacred flame with his friend. The feeling of warmth he had from sharing the light made him feel good inside. The two priests finished the evening by praying to God before going to sleep.



The next morning Rhidian set off on the last lap of his journey home. He did not have far to travel, but the weather was changing for the worse. Suddenly he found himself enveloped in a cloak of white as a blizzard of snow and wind swept in from the sea. As his lamp swung in the sudden gust of wind, it blew out the flickering flame. Rhidian felt despair; his precious light from David's shrine had gone.

Part 3



As Rhidian stood in despair, with the wind whistling and the snow swirling around him, he remembered that he had shared his light with his friend Gwynor. A look of joy spread across his face - all was not lost.

Quickly he turned back towards Gwynor's house. As he walked through the thickening blanket of snow he remembered how he had almost kept the light to himself. He was so pleased that he had shared the flame.

When he reached Gwynor's house his friend was only too willing to let him share the flame from his lamp. Because Rhidian had shared the light, Gwynor was now able to repay his kindness by sharing the light with him. Rhidian said to himself, "I would never have had this light unless I had given it away."

Many thanks to Cathy Morton for these illustrations.

Lessons Ideas for the story of Rhidian and the Light:

Learning Objectives:

To appreciate that some people's actions and behaviour are influenced by their religious beliefs.

To enable pupils to become aware that how they behave affects the way others treat them.
To explore the ideas of the importance of symbolism (including different faiths).

This work is in the form of three lessons (but of course, you may adapt them to suit your own needs).

Lesson 1

Create a storytelling atmosphere. Discuss with the children the importance of light. Why do we need light? Read and discuss part 1 of the story. Ideas to focus on:

Rhidian has a dilemma - his friend wants to share the sacred flame. Should he do this or not?

What do you think Rhidian will do? Explain your answer.

Discuss dilemmas which pupils have faced. How did they deal with this? Who helped them?

Lesson 2

Recap the story so far. Read and discuss the next part of the story.

Rhidian decided to share the sacred flame with his friend. Is sharing important? Why?

Give pupils the opportunity to discuss what is precious to them.

How would they feel if they lost something which was precious to them?

The two priests prayed to God. Ask pupils to write a prayer which each priest might have said to God, or a dialogue between the two priests. (This idea could be adapted as role play for younger pupils).

Lesson 3

Recap the story so far. Read and discuss the final part of the story.

Why was he so keen to take the flame back to his church and keep it burning?

Jesus once described himself as the "*Light of the world*" (Matthew 5:14-16) Why do you think he chose to describe himself in this way? How would you describe yourself?

Explore Holman Hunt's painting of "The Light of the World."

Design a card reflecting the light from St. David's shrine which Rhidian shared with his friend.

Imagine you are Rhidian. Write a letter to a friend describing your journey. Remember to include your feelings of joy when receiving the light, the despair when you lose it, the hope when you realise you might be able to share the light you have given to Gwynor and the peace of the church with the light burning brightly.