

St. Kentigern

St. Kentigern, was born c. 518. According to the *Life of Saint Mungo* written by the monk, Jocelin of Furness, in about 1185, Mungo's mother was Princess Theneva, the daughter of King Loth (Lleuddun), who ruled in the area of, what is today, East Lothian. Theneva became pregnant - accounts vary as to whether she was raped by, or had an illicit relationship with, Owain mab Urien, her cousin, who was King of North Rheged (now part of Galloway). Her father, who was furious at his daughter's pregnancy outside of marriage, had her thrown from the heights of Traprain Law. Tradition has it that, believing her to be a witch, local people cast her adrift on the River Forth in a coracle without oars, where she drifted upstream before coming ashore at Culross in Fife. It was here that her son, Kentigern, was born.

Kentigern was given the name Mungo, meaning something similar to 'dear one', by St. Serf, who ran a monastery at Culross, and who took both Theneva and her son into his care. St. Serf went on to supervise Mungo's upbringing. At the age of 25, Mungo began his missionary work on the banks of the River Clyde, where he built a church close to the Molendinar Burn. The site of his early church formed part of Glasgow Cathedral. Mungo worked on the banks of the River Clyde for 13 years, living an austere monastic life and making many converts by his holy example and preaching. However, a strong anti-Christian movement headed by King Morken of Strathclyde drove him out. Travelling to Wales via Cumbria, St. Kentigern spent time with St. David, may have founded a cathedral at Llanelwy (St. Asaph) and undertook a pilgrimage to Rome. Morken was subsequently overthrown and the new King of Strathclyde, Riderch Hael, invited Mungo to return to his kingdom to become Archbishop of Strathclyde.

Mungo initially based his Episcopal seat in Dumfriesshire returning to Glasgow some eight years later where a large community grew up around him. He died c.603 and was buried close to his church. Today his tomb lies in the centre of the Lower Choir of Glasgow Cathedral, probably on the actual site of his grave. His Feast Day is celebrated on 13 January.

St Mungo is said to have performed four miracles, referred to in this poem:

*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*

The individual lines of the poem refer to:

- *The bird*: he restored life to a robin, which had been killed by some of his classmates in Culross.
- *The tree*: he had been left in charge of a fire in St. Serf's monastery; he fell asleep and the fire went out. He used a branch of a tree (possibly hazel) to restart the fire.
- *The bell*: it is thought that he brought the bell back with him from Rome; it no longer exists and the exact reason for its 'miraculous' description is unclear.
- *The fish*: Queen Languoreth of Strathclyde was suspected of infidelity by her husband, King Riderch. He demanded to see her wedding ring, claiming that she had given it to her lover, whereas in fact the King himself had thrown it into the river. Faced with execution, the Queen appealed to St. Mungo, who ordered a servant to catch a fish in the river. The ring was miraculously found within the fish, when it was cut open, demonstrating the Queen's innocence and allowing her to escape punishment.



Today the bird, tree, bell and fish form the four elements of the crest of Glasgow City Council. St Mungo is also responsible for the motto of his city based on his original prayer: *'Lord Let Glasgow flourish through the preaching of thy word and praising thy name'* subsequently shortened to *'Let Glasgow flourish'*.