



Introduction

The following story is written as a way into the story of St Aidan for a Key Stage 2 class. It needs to be used in conjunction with the lesson follow-up ideas in [The Present - an RE lesson outline on the life of St Aidan](#).

Lesson Aim

To consider what it means to give

To consider the difficulties that come with possessions (materialism)

Curriculum Links

QCA RE unit 5, the difference that faith makes

Preparation

Read through the notes and ideas in the RE lesson outline (see the link above). There are also a number of factfile sections listed at the end of the story.

1. **Aidan and the kings**
2. **Aidan and the Anglians**
3. **Aidan and Anglo-Saxon proverbs**
4. **Aidan and the Lindisfarne gospels**
5. **Aidan and Sutton Hoo**
6. **Aidan and Lindisfarne**
7. **Aidan and his prayer of dedication**
8. **Aidan and Bede**

Development

The story

'Here! She's all yours! What do you think?' King Oswin's face lit up as he was talking. 'She's three years old, can do 30 miles in a day without stopping, and her father's one of my best. She's all yours. What do you think, Aidan?'

Aidan didn't know what to think. To hide his confusion, the monk walked over to inspect his present. The horse was a magnificent chestnut mare with a bushy blond mane, 15 hands high, the colour of gingerbread. He stared into the large dark eyes and stroked her forehead. The horse neighed in appreciation. Yes, she was a beautiful creature.

'I... I'm amazed, my lord.' He turned to face the king. 'I don't deserve it. She's... she's wonderful.'



'She's yours. I thought you'd make good use of her on your travels. I hear you've been all over my kingdom in the last year, and it's always on foot. I know you see it as your duty to visit every little village, and I'm glad you're doing it, but you're putting yourself in danger.'

'That goes with the territory, my lord. God called me to be a messenger to your people, so I have to go there.'

'But you don't need to do it on foot. A man of your learning and leadership needs to go places quickly. You need to be safe from bandits - and you're not getting any younger, either. I know you like the simple life, but there must be limits. You need a horse and you need a saddle to help you ride it. Would you accept them as a gift, from one friend to another?'

Aidan sighed, smiled, then nodded. The king had given him so much help already. It would be the height of bad manners to refuse the horse - and Aidan knew that Oswin had enemies. They would love to hear it if the royal generosity was insulted by a mere priest.

Later that morning, the monk set out from King Oswin's fortress to head for the new monastery being constructed on the island of Lindisfarne. Had the school been built yet? He was hoping to start taking in new students before Christmas. They would be learning how to read and write, and instructed in this new Christian faith that the King wanted the whole kingdom to hear about. This Christianity was something new and special. It had a God who knew what it was like to suffer as a human being. He wasn't something distant and cruel, like the old gods who feasted on the blood of their victims. This God cared. People mattered to him.

Aidan's eyes drifted from the road ahead down to the saddle he was sitting on. It was a wonderful piece of work, with tiny stitches sewn in intricate patterns around strong brass studs. Wait a minute - they *were* made of brass weren't they? They weren't something else, like silver or gold? Aidan wasn't sure, but he knew that the saddle was probably worth more than the horse, if that were possible. It was all quite a gift. He trotted past some peasants who were heading towards the fortress. Beggars? Their clothes showed a great deal of wear and tear and filth. One or two looked up at him as he passed, the rest kept their eyes to the ground. It doesn't do to stare the rich and powerful in the face. They might think you're being cheeky, and you don't do that to people with guards and horses and swords. Aidan trotted on, feeling a little odd. Normally, he'd have said hallo to those people and stopped to chat, but today, he hadn't. He wondered why.

Was it the horse? He was high off the ground, and they weren't. Yes. It didn't feel right. Then he thought of the faces of the two men who did look up and how they hadn't been smiling, either. They'd been looking at the saddle. Aidan wondered if they were thinking of trying to get their hands on it. He glanced over his shoulder, nervously. No, they were gone. That nervousness was new, and it felt odd as well.

As a monk, Aidan normally didn't have any personal possessions. Everything he had was owned by the Church. Years ago, he'd dedicated his life to God, trusting him to meet his needs in this life and the next. Any money Aidan had was given to the monastery, to help with the construction. It left him

free to get on with the real business of meeting people and spreading the Word.

But this horse was starting to worry him. He felt trapped. What if he met someone who fancied taking it? Aidan wasn't a weakling, but the idea of fighting someone for a horse felt wrong. What would happen when he made camp for the night? Someone could just creep up and steal it while he was asleep! He glanced up. There, up ahead, was a crossroads – and a large man standing, just standing there, facing this way. He seemed to be waiting. For the first time in years, Aidan wondered if he ought to have some kind of weapon on him.

Up ahead, Cedd saw the horseman coming. He felt desperate. There was no pride left in him – he couldn't afford it any more. Perhaps this one would help. As the sound of trotting came closer, Cedd fell to his knees, head bowed to say the words he'd been crying out to every traveller on that road all day.

'Please, sir, my family is starving, my wife is dead and there are five children to feed. Bandits took everything. Can you help me?'

Most travellers hadn't even looked. A few had thrown coins. Cedd bowed lower. This horseman had to be rich. Surely he could help?

He heard the horse stop. There was a jingling of stirrups, and the sound of someone dismounting. Cedd kept his head bowed. What was going on? Then he heard a voice.

'Could you please tell me why you are begging?'

People normally didn't ask, so Cedd just blurted it all out at once to the stranger. 'I'm a farmer. Our crops failed. Then, last week, bandits came and took all our stores. They left us nothing. I was away at market with the children. When I came back, I found...' Tears were welling up in the big man's eyes as he remembered the scene. 'The house was burning, everything burning... and my wife... dead... Everything's gone...' His shoulders heaved as he fought back the tears.

'Where are your children now?'

'With a neighbour. I'm trying to find work, but there's nothing. I'm trying! I really am trying...'

Aidan sat down beside Cedd. 'Listen, I want you to do something for me.'

The big man looked up, suspiciously. 'What?'

'See that saddle?' He pointed to the horse. 'What do you think it's worth?'

Cedd shook his head in confusion. 'A hundred, two hundred gold pieces, perhaps... a lot. Why?'

'It's yours. I want you to have it.' There was an embarrassed silence. This didn't make sense.

'The saddle? What would I do with a saddle? I haven't got a donkey now, let alone a horse!'



'I want you to have the horse as well.'

There was a shocked silence. 'This is a rich man's joke, isn't it?'

Aidan shook his head. Cedd stared at him, wild eyed.

'You're offering me the horse and the saddle. For what?'

'For you. And your children. Sell the horse and saddle, and that'll buy your family a fresh start - and it sounds like you all need it, don't you?'

Cedd didn't know whether to shake his head or nod. Things like this just didn't happen. 'But... don't you want them?'

Aidan shrugged. 'They're more trouble than they're worth, believe me. Tell you what - I'll accompany you to the next town, and introduce you to a man who'll give you a decent price. Is that all right? And on the way, you tell me more about your children. Tell me, are any of them bright?'

They walked together down the road, talking, with Aidan showing Cedd how to lead the horse. There were some things that were so much easier to do on foot.

Factfile 1

At this time, England was a patchwork of small kingdoms constantly at war with each other. To tell the story of King Oswin, you first need to find out about Oswald, the man who came before him.

Oswald was born into a royal family who ruled the kingdom of Northumbria, but he was driven into exile when his father was killed. As a youngster, he was raised at one point on the island of Iona, where he was educated by the monks and decided to become a Christian. Despite having to live as a warrior, he believed that the best way ahead for his people was for them to be led by a man of peace who encouraged education. In AD 634, just before the decisive battle of Heavenfield, (near Hexham) Oswald showed his intentions by praying in front of his men, holding a makeshift cross that had been thrust in the ground. 'Almighty God,' he prayed. 'Protect us as we fight to save our own people from a proud and cruel enemy.' His little army beat a much larger enemy, and so he became king of Northumbria. In grateful thanks, in AD 635, he sent to Iona for teachers of the Christian faith who could inspire his own leadership and unite the warring tribes under his control. Eight years later, he was killed in battle.

He was replaced by King Oswin, who appears in this story. Oswin was a generous man, who shared Oswald's big ideas about education. As a result, Christianity became strongly established in the north of England for hundreds of years.

Factfile 2

Oswald, Oswin and their court were members of the Anglian tribe - many of whom lived in an area



now called 'East Anglia' - and it's also where we get the words 'English' and 'England'.

Factfile 3

The Anglo-Saxons were fond of riddles, proverbs and wordplay. One proverb says a lot about their worldview: 'Life is like a bird that flies into your hall on a dark night. You don't know where it's been or where it's going. For a few moments, there is light and colour - but before that, nothing, and after that - nothing.' As Christians, Oswin and Aidan believed in something much more interesting - life after death in the Kingdom of Heaven as guests of the King!

Factfile 4

The best archaeological site from this time (to date) has been the finding of a burial ship at Sutton Hoo, in Suffolk. You can visit the British Museum to see more of the finds, including a stunning full-face reconstruction of a helmet. The website has a browser called COMPASS which allows you to roam online through the museum collections and find out more about each exhibit. You can even email in your questions, and enter competitions! Go to www.britishmuseum.org.

Factfile 5

Aidan and his team of monks were invited to work in Northumbria by King Oswald in the year AD 635. (There was a previous team with another leader, but they gave up and went home in disgust at these nasty Northerners who wouldn't listen!) It was only when Aidan came with a new team that changes started to happen. For a start, Aidan didn't make his base in the royal palace in Bamburgh but on the island of Lindisfarne, which could be reached on foot at low tide. Aidan didn't think he would meet the common people if he stayed too close to the royal court!

When they were given the island of Lindisfarne, Aidan decided that there was something special that had to be done before starting any building. They had to cast out any evil that might live there by first dedicating this island to God. Aidan and his monks set up a large wooden cross, then prayed and fasted by it for 40 days. It was like a gardener having to take out all the weeds before putting in a fresh crop.

The Holy Island of Lindisfarne is well worth a visit for its museum and nature reserves, but make sure of the tides before you go - they still flood the road each day, and they can still be treacherous...

Factfile 6

Aidan's prayer of dedication



*God is within
God in my head and in my thinking
God in my eyes and in my seeing
God in my mouth and in my speaking
God in my heart and in my loving
God in my hands and in each action
God in my feet and on each journey
God within me and without me
God in the heart of friend and stranger
God in the other who comes to me.*

Factfile 7

One classic source for all this is the *Ecclesiastical History of the English Nation* written by Bede, a monk living at Jarrow. He made the first real attempt to write a factual history of life on these islands. Bede was interested in all sorts of things (including astronomy), and his books were copied out by hand and circulated across Europe. You can visit a museum dedicated to his memory at Jarrow, in Tyne and Wear.