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## St Fillan and the baby

by Jess Smith

In Killin, which is Gaelic for the cell of Fillan, the burial site of the **Fian** warrior, the great **Fian** warrior with his hounds of Killin, there is a story that St Fillan, Fillan himself, had been wandering through and he was looking to convert people in to Christianity which would have been an almost impossible task without a gigantic miracle. So this is a story that I heard from those times when he had to change people's way of thinking.

Now there was a woman lived in the wood just north of Killin and she was doing her washing and she had her wee baby tied on her back, a new baby, and accidentally as she leaned down to put her washing on the flat stone and take the river grit and wash her clothes with the river grit, she leaned again to dip the cloth, the tweed, in to the river to shake off all the dirt, the baby slipped off her back and fell in to the water and it was rushed away, taken away by the water and she ran all the way down the burn trying her hardest to get hold of her baby but the baby was taken away.

She was screaming and she was battering her chest and she was in such a terrible, terrible state that people heard her and said 'Come now, the baby's gone in to the water, let's ask the priests if they'll be able to help you find your baby or tell you if your baby's soul will be ok' (given that there was a belief in the spirit of the soul).

Well, she went in to the cave which is down beside the MacNab's burial ground, just off the River Dochart as it heads - as it meanders - in to the water of the Loch Tay - and she went in to the three priests - there were always three of them - and she begged them to tell her where her baby went. She was in a terrible state and each one told her that her baby was taken by the water and its soul would grow in the spirit of the earth and all that old Celtic beliefs. This woman was distraught.

She came out of the cave and she lay down on the ground and this man had been passing - Fillan himself - and he said 'Woman, what ails you?' and she told him 'I have lost my newborn baby and my life is over from this day onwards' and he said 'What did the priests tell you?'. She said 'They told me that the baby had went to the earth. The earth wanted my baby through the water and the air and the fire, and I will never see my child again'. 'Do you believe woman that there is a god that can give you back your child?' said St

Fillan. She said 'No, no'. She says 'The priests have spoken and I must take their word for it'. 'Come with me' he said and he took her in to the cave where the priests sat and he says to her 'Here is my knife. Cut off my index finger of my right hand' and she says 'You are no enemy of mine, I cannot strike you'. 'Do you want your child back?' he said. 'Of course I want my child' 'Well take the knife and cut off my finger' and she did this and he wrapped his finger up in a piece of muslin cloth and he says 'Woman take your child' and right there in front of the three priests and in front of the mother, his finger became the lost child and from that day onwards the name of Fillan spread throughout the whole of Perthshire, Highland Perthshire, and beyond. Everybody spoke of the power of the unseen god and Christianity walked in to that area from then on and the old religion dwindled away.

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