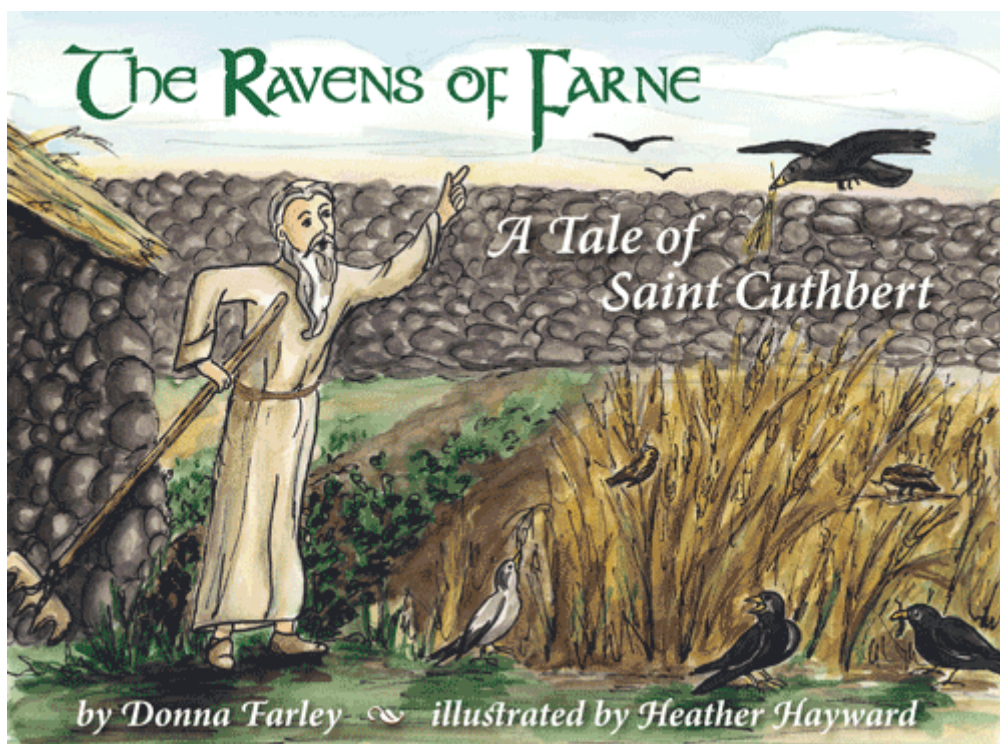
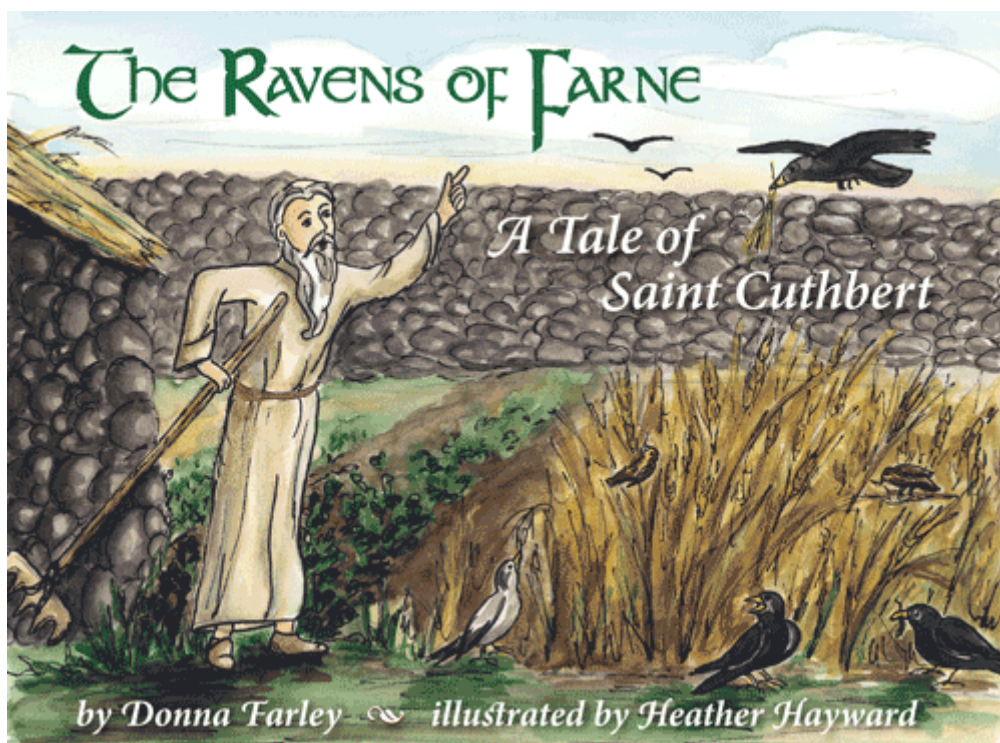


The Ravens of Farne (Jane G. Meyer)

Ξένες γλώσσες / In English



The Ravens of Farne: A Tale of Saint Cuthbert

by Donna Farley

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Two years before this story about the ravens of Farne was released, my family went on a pilgrimage to Europe. One of the stops along the way was the small tidal island of Lindisfarne, a stony piece of land in Northern England. We had to venture out of our way to visit there, traveling first by train, then taxi, and timing our adventure just right so that the tide was low when we crossed from mainland to island. It was undoubtedly worth all the effort. Even hundreds of years later there remains an aura of holiness, a lasting beauty that is not just due to the rugged beauty of the place, but that speaks of the many prayers that were offered faithfully for man by Saint Cuthbert and his fellow Christians. I flipped back through my journal after my first reading of *The Ravens of Farne* and want to share this entry with you:

My time in the priory was my favorite. There was a peaceful feeling all about the ruins and there was a special quiet and serenity in the look of the sky and the feel of the wind coming right into the midst of the exposed columns and walls. Hard to explain, but obvious that the prayers of those long ago saints didn't just evaporate, but still linger.

Lindisfarne continues today to be a place of spiritual revival in England, a community where many have made the island their permanent home, and where together they seek Christ's peace, and spread and share His light. I would urge you, as Orthodox, that if you're ever in that part of the world, to take the time and effort to visit that holy place.

So, with fond memories of Lindisfarne, of our walks through the ruins of the ancient priory, of our quiet time in the chapel where we were able to pray and then, because the building had emptied out, even sing aloud our favorite version of Christ is Risen, and of our hike over the rocky coastline that was bursting with wildflowers, I was pleased to finally hold in my hand a copy of *The Ravens of Farne: A Tale of Saint Cuthbert* by Matushka Donna Farley. A story set on this same exact island that we had visited, and which we remember so well...

Matushka Donna, who lives in Canada with her husband Father Lawrence Farley,

himself a gifted writer, brings to this book a real interest and knowledge of Saint Cuthbert and his world. The story recounts the early days of Saint Cuthbert on the island, showing the construction of his first dwelling, and the tall stone wall that he erected to help protect him from the wind and sea. Lindisfarne is a bird sanctuary today, just as it was an important nesting ground for many bird species over the centuries and, of course, during the 800's when Saint Cuthbert arrived to pray. And the tale focuses on a specific encounter Cuthbert had with a tribe of bold and boisterous ravens who were continually raiding his garden and stealing straw from his roofs. As so many saints have done, in the story, Cuthbert entreats these ravens in the name of Jesus Christ to live in peace with him, and after some deliberating that is just what they do. The subtle moral is one of repentance, reconciliation, and humility—a lesson that is appropriate to hear time and again as we all travel on this road toward *theosis*.

I am excited about this book. It contains all the elements a picture book needs in order for it to be requested often by a child. The prose is lovely, happily brief and song-like, with the full reading taking about ten to twelve minutes. The language of the story is filled with vivid imagery, focusing on the rustic natural beauty, Saint Cuthbert's trials and work and prayers, and of the many birds that share the island with him. Here's an example of the text. It comes just after the opening page:

Oh the birds that fed and nested on Farne! Puffins and fulmars, terns and gulls, cormorants and eider ducks—linnets and pipits, warblers and sparrows... and a tribe of cheeky ravens.

And to accompany the text, the illustrations by Heather Hayward, a young and talented Orthodox artist, are well painted, revealing many historical details: from the type of shoes the monks wore; to the interior of Saint Cuthbert's hut; to the shape of the buildings and boats and tools that were found during that time. But one of my favorite aspects of this book is the slight touch of humor. Both the text and the illustrations reveal moments of levity, and this is something not typically found in many Orthodox children's books. I love it.

So, if you have little ones in your life—or god children, nieces, nephews, grandchildren—or even if you don't (for I believe children's books are fun even for grown ups to read when the kids aren't around), I think you'll enjoy this new tale of Saint Cuthbert and the cheeky, yet repenting ravens.

Enjoy.

By Jane Meyer