**Migiwa no Ike, Jakko-in Temple**

The pond and cherry blossoms in front of the main hall of Jakko-in Temple are closely associated with the mid-thirteenth century literary work *The Tale of the Heike*.

*The Tale of the Heike* is based on historical events; it tells the story of the rise and fall of the Taira clan, an important political force at the end of the Heian period. The Taira were defeated by the Minamoto clan at the sea battle of Dan no Ura. While most of the Taira family members died during the conflict, the Empress Dowager Taira no Tokuko (1155–1214) lived on. She retired to Jakko-in Temple, where she took the name Kenreimon-in and spent the rest of her life as a Buddhist nun. In her new life she continued to pray for her family and the spirit of her son, Emperor Antoku (1178–1185), who died in the battle at the age of six.

The climax of *The Tale of the Heike* is a scene in which the former Emperor Go-Shirakawa (1127–1192), Taira no Tokuko’s adoptive father, pays her a visit in her new temple home. Late-spring flowers, such as wisteria and Japanese kerria (*yamabuki*), bloom during his visit. Cherry trees line the pond, blossoming later than usual. Deeply moved by the dramatic change in his adoptive daughter’s circumstances, the former emperor recites a *waka* poem:

When the cherry blossoms

that have scattered on the edges

spread out on waves

and cover the pond,

they reach their true full bloom.

 *(Ikemizu ni / migiwa no sakura / chiri shikite / nami no hana koso / sakari nari kere)*

The scattered cherry blossoms depicted in this poem suggest broader themes of *The Tale of the Heike*: the impermanence of all things and beauty in sadness. Even today, more than eight hundred years after the Taira clan was defeated, people still come to Jakko-in to view the cherry blossoms and recall the Taira legacy.