

Old Honzon and New Honzon

Honzon, the main hall of Jakko-in Temple, was originally built in 594 at the request of Prince Shotoku (574–622) to honor his late father, Emperor Yomei (d. 587). A statue of Jizo Bosatsu originally stood as the centerpiece of the main hall. Widely revered in Japan, Jizo can take the form of a monk who embodies compassion and salvation and listens to the prayers, however mundane, of all who are suffering. Now it is kept in the storage where it can be seen for short periods during the spring and autumn. It is an Important Cultural Property.

A suspected arson fire destroyed the entire main hall in 2000. The same fire destroyed or damaged several thousand carved Jizo figures that stood on shelves around the hall, and also caused damage to the central Jizo statue. Fortunately, some 3,000 more Jizo figures, each about 10 centimeters high, had been stored within the hollow main Jizo statue and these were largely unscathed.

A new hall on the same site was completed five years later, and a replica statue was placed at its center. The new Honzon also has two small wooden statues, one of Awano Naishi and one of the Empress Dowager Taira no Tokuko (1155–1214), whose family was defeated by a rival clan in the Genpei War (1180–1185). In September 1185, 29-year-old Taira no Tokuko took refuge at Jakko-in Temple, where she became a nun and was given the Buddhist name Kenreimon-in. She spent the rest of her life here, praying for the soul of her young son and other members of the Taira clan who died in the battle of Dan no Ura (1185). Kenreimon-in died at the age of 36 and was interred on the temple grounds.