

Hakusan Gongen Shrine

This shrine to the mountain deity Hakusan Gongen stands on a site that was revered for centuries prior to the establishment of Engyōji. According to the *Kojiki*, an eighth-century text that describes the creation of Japan, the deity Susanoo no Mikoto stopped to rest on this mountain while making his way to Izumo Province. Susanoo had been banished from the heavens for disrespecting his sister, Amaterasu, the Sun Goddess and ancestress of the imperial lineage. The mountain subsequently came to be worshipped as a dwelling place of Susanoo, and long before Engyōji was established the mountain was visited by ascetics and hermits. In fact, it is believed that its name “Mt. Shosha” (Shoshazan) may have developed from pronunciation shifts in the Japanese for “Susanoo’s Mountain” (*susazan*).

Shortly after arriving on Mt. Shosha in 966, Engyōji’s founding abbot, Shōkū (910–1007), is said to have engaged in ascetic practices and ultimately achieved enlightenment at this very site. It is also here that Shōkū is believed to have witnessed the miraculous appearance of a heavenly maiden that inspired him to carve a statue of Nyoirin Kannon and build the Maniden to protect it. Hakusan Gongen Shrine’s auspicious history and association with both Susanoo and Engyōji’s founder have inspired visits by generations of pilgrims.

Today, a ritual associated with Engyōji’s Festival of Peace and Bounty begins here each year on January 18. Masked performers representing Engyōji’s benefactor deities, Ototen and Wakaten, dance wildly around the shrine, flailing a pine torch and ringing a bell.