

Seated Statue of Nyoirin Kannon

According to temple legend, shortly after arriving at Mt. Shosha, Engyōji's founding abbot, Shōkū (910–1007), witnessed a heavenly maiden dancing around a solitary cherry tree while chanting holy poetry. Her verse described Nyoirin Kannon (Sanskrit: Cintamanicakra), a six-armed manifestation of the Bodhisattva of Compassion, in the form of a living tree.

According to the poem, Nyoirin Kannon would grant long life and prosperity and guarantee rebirth in paradise to all living beings for all time. Inspired by this vision, Shōkū carved the cherry tree into a representation of Nyoirin Kannon. Although this statue was destroyed by fire in 1492, the current statue kept within the central tabernacle of the Maniden is said to closely resemble the original. Carved by the abbot Myōkaku in 1239, the replacement statue is considered a particularly fine example of art produced during the early Kamakura period (1185–1333).

Nyoirin Kannon is depicted with six arms, one for each of the six realms of Hindu-Buddhist cosmology (*rokudō*). The name *nyoirin* can be literally translated as “wish wheel” and refers to the two objects that Nyoirin Kannon is depicted holding: one of the left hands holds a small platform that originally supported a dharma wheel, and one of the right hands holds a spherical “wish-fulfilling jewel” (*hōju*). These jewels can also signify Kannon's original vow to liberate all sentient beings from suffering. Another hand holds a lotus, which symbolizes the capacity of all sentient beings to transcend their own existence through spiritual practice, like a lotus growing from a muddy, stagnant pond. A hand on the statue's right side rests gently upon the chin in a contemplative posture.

The statue wears a conical crown that bears a slender image of Amida, the Buddha of Infinite Light and Life. The body and crown are finished in black lacquer, and the robes are decorated with dharma wheels and elaborate geometric shapes. The statue is seated upon an angular dais carved into the shape of a rocky outcropping that represents Mt. Potalaka, where Kannon is said to dwell. In a posture unique to Nyoirin Kannon, the right knee is raised, with the right foot resting on top of the left.