

Patrick – Patron Saint of Ireland
(Rev. Dr. John Bartol)

Patrick (Patricius), was born to devout Christian parents in Britain around 389. As a young man he had no serious interest in anything spiritual. At age 16, his pampered life changed when he was kidnapped by a group of Raiders and carried to Ireland. Sold into slavery, and treated like an animal, he was compelled to be a pig and sheep herder. Yet through those six difficult years he often filled his days and nights in prayer and came to know God the Father as his protector and God the Son as his Saviour.

Dreams about his homeland led him to escape and travel 200 miles across Ireland to seek passage on a ship. He faced great trials but eventually made his way back to Britain and was greeted by his family with great joy. He became active in the Christian community near his home but then he had dreams beseeching him to return to Ireland. "Holy boy, return to us, we need you!" He wondered how he could return to those who had enslaved him and treated him so badly? Yet he knew in his heart he was called of God.

He returned to Ireland at a time when the tribal people worshiped multiple gods of sky, earth and water. The real showdown with the pagan priests came as they celebrated the coming of spring by lighting a fire on the Hill of Tara. This was to be the only fire in all of Ireland. Patrick, in direct defiance of the high King, lit a forbidden fire. He explained that he was not an enemy, but, was bringing the story of Easter to the people who had never heard the message of Jesus and His love. Through the good news of Christ's death and resurrection Patrick brought the hope of Easter to Ireland.

In his teaching he used a shamrock to explain the Trinity, one God in three persons – Father, Son and Holy Spirit. His ministry lasted 29 years and it is estimated that he baptized over 120,000 people and planted 300 churches.

One account tells that Patrick drove all the snakes out of Ireland. Scientists tell us that the snakes disappeared during the Ice Age. However, Ireland, like nations today, had spiritual serpents such as slavery, hatred, oppression and greed. The snakes symbolized the evils that needed to be driven out.

March 17, (the supposed date of his death), is now celebrated in his honour. Thanks to his faithful ministry Ireland was turned from paganism to Christ. It was all brought about peacefully without violence or death. Furthermore, Ireland became a spiritual centre from which Christianity spread.

Patrick left many prayers, but space only allows me to include one.

May Christ protect me today.
Christ with me, Christ before me,

Christ behind me, Christ within me,
Christ beneath me, Christ above me,
Christ on my right, Christ on my left,
Christ in my lying down, Christ in my rising.
Amen