

The Gospel in a Shamrock

It was during the latter part of Rome's occupation of Britain that a certain sixteen-year-old boy who lived in northern Britain was kidnapped by a raiding party from Ireland. The Irish were still a pagan people and made a habit of pirating the coastal lands nearby whenever they felt like it. The boy's name was Patrick. His captors took him back to Ireland where they sold him as a slave to a farmer. He endured long, hard months of labor under a harsh owner who didn't understand a word of Patrick's language.

Though Patrick's parents were Christians, Patrick himself had never thought too much about religion and had not committed his life to Christ. Now, he had plenty of time to think about God while he slept out in the cold watching the farmer's sheep, and, with his situation both desperate and miserable, it wasn't long before he sought to be reconciled to the only One who could help. He surrendered his life to God. As Patrick wrote later in his *Confessio*, "[God] guarded me, and comforted me, as would a Father his son." Then one night he heard a voice saying to him, "See, your ship is ready." Patrick believed it was God telling him to escape. So, he risked the harsh punishment that awaited him if he were re-captured and headed for the coast. A ship bound for France "just happened" to be docked right where Patrick ended up, and the captain was willing to take him aboard if he helped with the work. He arrived in France and made his way to a monastery. He stayed and studied under the monks for a while but eventually was able to travel back home to Britain. He would have liked nothing better than to just stay there, but God had other plans.

Patrick began to sense that the Lord was calling him to take the news of the gospel to the very folk who had so brutally enslaved him. Returning to Ireland, he spent the rest of his life in a missionary effort to win the Irish tribes to Christianity. Because of the great success of his work there, we know him today as St. Patrick, and St. Patrick's Day is celebrated each year in his honor.



Irish tradition says that Patrick used the common three-leaf clover, or shamrock, to explain the concept of the Trinity to his new converts. The shamrock remains the most recognized symbol for Ireland to this day, and in the hearts of Christians everywhere it stands for God's miraculous work in and through the man named Patrick.

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