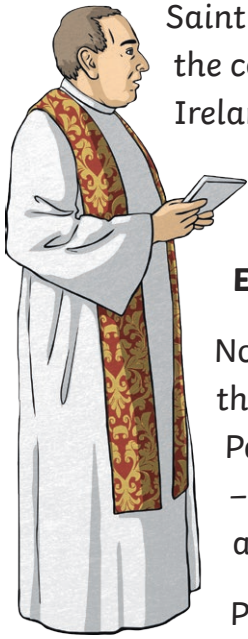# Saint Patrick

Saint Patrick is the patron saint of Ireland, known for introducing Christianity to the country during the second half of the fifth century. Saint Patrick's importance to Ireland does not come from the historical details of his life but from the inspiration of his experiences which led to his return to Ireland in order to spread the message of Jesus.

Early Life

Not much about Saint Patrick's childhood can be said with certainty due to the time that has passed since he was alive. However, it is broadly agreed that Patrick was born during the fifth century in the village of Bannavem Taburniae – which, although it cannot be placed on any modern map, was believed to be along the west coast of Britain.

Patrick's family were thought to be very wealthy. His father, Calpurnius, was both a **deacon** and a decurion – a member of the **Roman Senate** – while Patrick's grandfather, Potitus, was a Catholic priest. Despite the religious links within his family, Patrick himself was not a religious man.
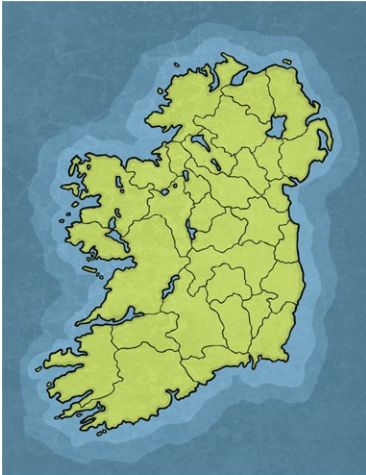
Enslaved

At the age of 16, Patrick was captured by a group of Irish pirates, who transported him to Ireland and forced him to work as a shepherd – herding sheep and pigs on Slemish Mountain in County Antrim. While he was a slave for the Irish raiders, Patrick began to pray to God for the first time, believing that God had mercy on his ignorance and would forgive his sins if he converted to Christianity. After six years of **servitude**, Patrick believed that he heard a voice telling him that he would be able to go home soon and that his 'ship was ready'. That night, Patrick fled from captivity and made his way to a port, over 200 miles away from where he had been kept. There he found a ship that was almost ready to set sail and, with difficulty, managed to persuade the ship's reluctant captain to take him away from Ireland.

The Wild Boar

Three days after setting sail, Patrick and the ship's crew reached the stormy shores of Britain. After leaving the boat, they are said to have walked for 28 days through the wilderness, beginning to feel faint from the lack of food. Patrick told the ship's crew to put their faith in God and prayed that they would find something to eat soon. Soon after Patrick had prayed, the crew found a group of wild pigs roaming in the forest. Patrick knew that his prayers had been answered and became stronger in his faith.

Patrick's Brave Return

After spending many years studying, Patrick became a Christian priest. One night, almost ten years after returning home, Patrick heard a voice urging him to return to Ireland and help the Irish people. From his years in captivity, Patrick was aware that many of the Irish people were not Christians. Known as pagans, many Irish people worshipped numerous gods and fiercely opposed Christianity. Despite this, Patrick felt that it was his duty to spread God's word and bravely chose to return to Ireland.

Conversions to Christianity

With help from God, Patrick converted thousands of Irish people to Christianity and began building churches across the country. Using knowledge about Irish culture and customs which he had gained while in slavery, Patrick used well-known Irish symbols to explain new Christian concepts to those he met. One example of this was that Patrick used the leaves of a shamrock – a leaf with 3 parts – to represent God, Jesus and the Holy Spirit when teaching about the Holy Trinity.

After spreading the word of Christianity for over 40 years, Patrick died on 17th March 461 – the date we now commemorate with a feast named in his honour. After his death, Patrick was declared a saint because of how holy and religious he had been throughout his life. The people of Ireland have never forgotten how special Patrick was to their country.

Glossary

Deacon – A member of the church. Holds a lower ranking than that of a priest.

Roman Senate – A place where laws were created and voted on in Ancient Rome.

Servitude – The state of being a slave.