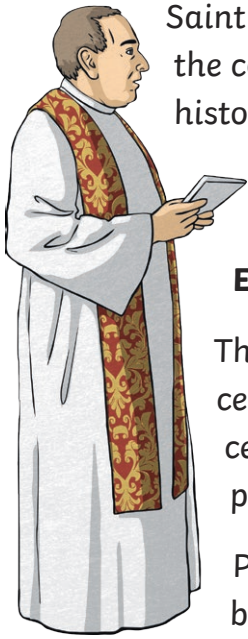# Saint Patrick

Saint Patrick is the patron saint of Ireland, known for introducing Christianity to the country during the latter half of the fifth century. Saint Patrick's significance in history does not come from the accuracy of the details of his life. It comes from the inspiration gained when listening to his experiences and his return to Ireland in order to spread the message of Jesus.

Early Life

There is not much about Saint Patrick's childhood which can be said with any certainty. 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 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**, while Patrick's grandfather, Potitus, was a Catholic priest. Despite the religious links within his family, Patrick himself was not a religious man, stating in his book 'Confessio', that he 'did not, indeed, know the true God'.
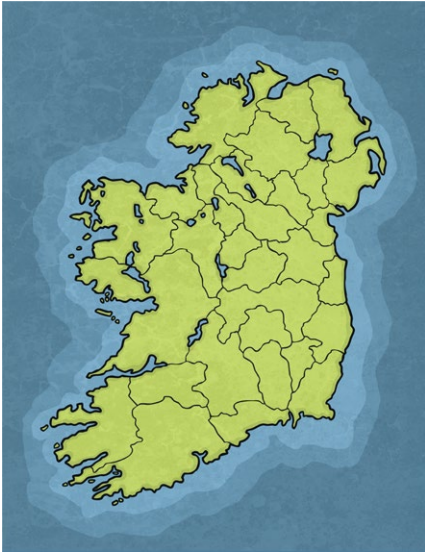
Enslaved and Captive

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. Patrick believed that he had been taken as punishment for his lack of belief in God. Therefore, while enslaved, Patrick began to pray to God for the first time – believing that God had mercy on his ignorance 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 soon be able to go home and that his 'ship was ready'. That night, Patrick fled his captors and travelled 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 disembarking, they are said to have walked for 28 days through the wilderness, beginning to feel faint from the lack of nourishment. 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 happened upon a herd of wild boar roaming in the

undergrowth. Patrick knew that his prayers had been answered and became stronger in his faith.
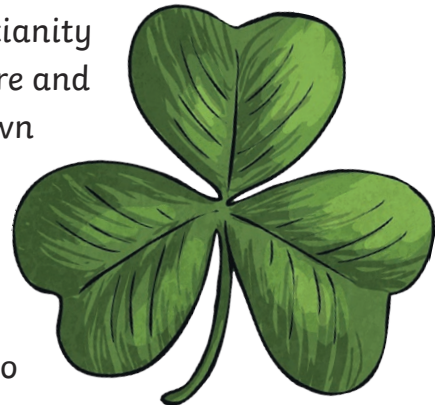
Patrick's Courageous Return

After many studious years, Patrick became a Christian priest and, almost a decade after returning home, he heard a voice urging him to return to Ireland. The voice said, "We beg you, holy boy, to come and walk again among us." Patrick was deeply touched and felt compelled to return to the land which had held him captive for so long.

From his years in captivity, Patrick was aware that many of the Irish people were not Christians. Known as pagans, they worshipped numerous gods and fiercely opposed Christianity. To return as a Christian **missionary** would be incredibly dangerous yet, despite this, Patrick felt that it was his duty to spread God's word and bravely chose to return to Ireland.

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. During his time in Ireland, Patrick had converted thousands of Irish people to Christianity and built churches across the land. Using his knowledge of 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. The people of Ireland have never forgotten how special Patrick was to their country and continue to commemorate his memory with fondness to this day.

Glossary

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

Decurion – A powerful political figure in Ancient Rome.

Missionary – A person sent on a religious mission, usually in a foreign country.