

Saint Patrick

Saint Patrick, the patron saint of Ireland, is one of Christianity's most widely known figures, which is also a clear indication of the Irish influence throughout the world.

Is St. Patrick Irish? No, it is presumed that his birthplace is somewhere in Scotland, the son of a Roman family who had migrated to England. He was born around 390 A.D., and his real name was Succat Maewyn, however, he was baptized as Patricius, meaning "noble". His parents, Calpornius and Concess, were high ranking Romans.

Although, his family had significant involvement with the church, Maewyn was not particularly religious. In his mid-teens, his village was invaded by Irish raiders. Leading the raid was the great High King Niall of the nine hostages, during the raid and plunder, Maewyn's father was killed and many people were taken as slaves, including Maewyn himself and his two sisters, Lupida and Daererca.

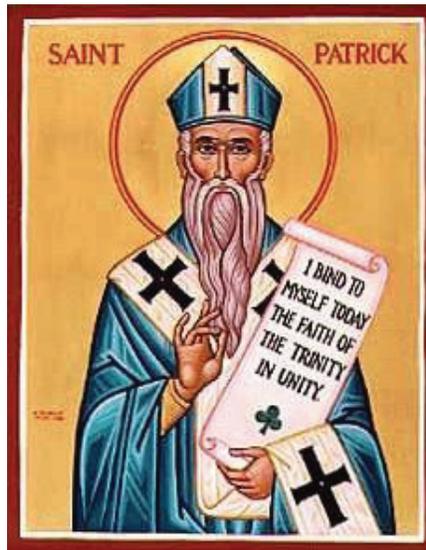
Upon the return of King Niall to Ireland with his hostages, Maewyn was sold to Milchu, who was either a king or a chief. It is not known what happened to his sisters.

Maewyn who had known a life of luxury and comfort spent six years in Ireland under severe conditions as a slave, attending to the livestock of his new master. During this period he became fluent in the Irish language.

During this time, Maewyn felt forgotten, lonely and desperate. He started to pray and found God. Later he wrote:

"Thus was I purged by the Lord; and He made me fit so that I might be now what was once far from me, that I should care and labor for the salvation of others, whereas then I did not even care about myself."

Later, Maewyn told about a dream which he had in his mid-twenties. A voice was saying: "Lo, your ship is



ready." He knew, the voice came from God telling him to leave Ireland.

Maewyn ran away from Milchu and went to the South Coast of Ireland to a town called Wexford, where he got a boat in which he escaped to Gaul in France. Maewyn pleaded to the captain to give him free passage, but the captain refused, Maewyn then prayed to God for guidance. As if a miracle, the crew called him to come on-board, as the captain had changed his mind.

He further endured hardship in France and decided to return to Britain.

Maewyn seemed destined not to have an easy life. During his travel in Britain, he was captured by a band of brigands, and again he was sold into slavery. The second time he heard a voice in his dream reassuring him that "Two month will you be with them." He escaped after sixty days.

Maewyn traveled throughout England and Europe for the next seven years, trying to determine what his purpose was. He came to the conclusion that he would study to become a priest. He studied at the Lerin Monastery, of the island of Cote d'Azur. At his ordination he took on the name of Patrick (Patrick Magonus Sucatus).

Now a priest, he returned to Britain and remained there until he heard a voice again begging him, "We beseech thee, holy youth, to come and walk once more amongst us." Patrick now seemed to know his purpose in life—to convert the Irish people to Christianity.

Patrick decided to further his education which was limited due to his slavery. He decided to return to France, to the monastery of Auxerre, where he was already known for his dedication and enthusiasm.

Later, the monks decided to send a missionary to Ireland. To his disappointment they chose Palladius and not him. But not long after, news reached the monastery that Palladius had died. The monks decided to send another mission to Ireland which Patrick would lead.

Patrick was called to Rome in 432 A.D., where Pope Celestine bequeathed the honor of bishop upon him before he was to go on his holy mission to Ireland.

Now a bishop, he arrived in Ireland in the winter of 432 A.D. with 25 followers. A local landowner, with the name of Dichiu, provided food and shelter for the band of religious crusaders. Dichiu was among the first who converted to Christianity.

The following year, in springtime, Patrick decided to address Laoghaire, the High King of Tara, who ruled Ireland and was the most powerful man. Patrick knew, if he wanted to crusade through Ireland and spread Christianity, he would need the King's support, he also knew, he needed to make a dramatic impression.

King Laoghaire had a tradition to start spring with a huge bonfire (the Irish were used to honor their Gods with fire). King Laoghaire personally would light the first fire before everybody else could. Patrick and his supporters lit a massive bonfire on March 25, 433 A.D., before King Laoghaire. When King Laoghaire saw the distant high flames in the air, he gathered the princes with their war chariots around him and raced towards the fire to see who had challenged his authority.

When King Laoghaire arrived at the fire, the contrast between those two groups was quite dramatic. King Laoghaire and his princes wore rich garments with jewelry in comparison to the plain cloth worn by Patrick and his followers.

Patrick spoke in a calm, concise and very confident voice, stating that he had no intention of defying his authority, but only to spread the Gospel among the Irish people. King Laoghaire was impressed by Patrick's composure and invited him to the Royal Court at Tara the next day. Patrick arrived with a massive cross, accompanied by his followers. They were singing hymns that are still known as the *Breastplate of St. Patrick*. Patrick approached King Laoghaire saying: "*Here I am.*" The king in response took Patrick's hands and kissed him on the cheek. Legend says, that the druids, worried that the king would accept Patrick's religion, asked Patrick if he could make it snow. Patrick sensing a trap replied, that it was only God who could determine the weather. Yet, at that moment, it began to snow in the middle of a sunny spring day. Patrick made the

sign of a cross and, miraculously, the snow disappeared and sunshine resumed. It is said that King Laoghaire, wanted to know more about the religion which St. Patrick intended to spread throughout Ireland. Patrick stated that unlike the Gaels, Christians only worshiped one God. And when St. Patrick desperately tried to explain the Trinity (the Father, the Son and the Holy Ghost), the druids started to laugh at his attempts, which they believed to be ridiculous. Patrick, in his desperation, took a shamrock and told the audience: "*There is one stem but there are three leaves on it. So it is with the Blessed Trinity. there is one God, but three persons stemming from the same divinity.*" King Laoghaire allowed St. Patrick to spread the Gospel throughout Ireland, but he said he would refuse to accept Christianity for himself,

as it would betray his ancestors, who entrusted him with the land and his tradition. St. Patrick was on his way and spread the gospel throughout Ireland.

St. Patrick is also known for driving the snakes out of Ireland. We know as a fact that there never were snakes in Ireland. The Church explains that it was meant as a symbol, and that St. Patrick was driving out paganism.

When St. Patrick reached the age of 50, he made a pilgrimage to Croagh Patrick. In his devotion, the devil tried to tempt him, but Patrick resisted. Patrick was rewarded by God, who send an angel to

grant him a wish. He asked that the Irish should keep the Christian faith for all time and that they should be spared the horrors of judgment day. When that time came, Patrick could judge his beloved Irish himself. It is from this time that the legend arose that Ireland would be drowned under a sea of water seven years before the Last Day originates.

In the year of 441 A.D., Patrick returned to Rome to pay homage to the new Pope, Leo I. He was given relics from Saints Peter and Paul which, on his return to Ireland, he placed in his new chapel at the Metropolitan See in Armagh.

St. Patrick died on March 17th, in the (assumed) year of 461 A.D., at the age of 76. The clans of Ireland began to bicker over who should receive the honor of providing the final resting place. To avoid this sacrilegious end to his life, his friends secreted his body away to bury it in a secret grave. Many believe this to be in Down Patrick, County Down. ✠

