

## Question: Who was St. Patrick?

**Answer:** St. Patrick was born sometime in the late 4<sup>th</sup> century and died in the mid fifth century AD. Exact dates are not known and those given are not consistent amongst scholars. Patrick is the patron saint of Ireland. His feast day is March 17. Patrick was the son of a town councilor of high social status who was also a deacon. His grandfather was a priest (Oxford Dictionary of the Saints). Patrick was captured and taken into slavery by Irish marauders at the age of sixteen. During his captivity, Patrick came to know God through prayer and learned the only thing he could count on was his faith in God (ODS). Patrick eventually escaped from the bonds of slavery and returned to his family in Britain where he received training in the priesthood (ODS). After his priestly formation had been completed, Patrick was sent to Ireland by the direction of Pope Celestine I to evangelize (New Advent). Patrick settled in Armagh, Ireland where he founded a school and later a monastery (New Advent). From there, Patrick launched his missionary journeys throughout the Irish countryside (ODS). He was never educated at a high level and in later retrospection on his life regretted not learning more (ODS). Patrick was eventually appointed bishop of Ireland. This was not done by default; many surviving works from Patrick's own pen indicate a high level of competency with deep concerns and involvement in pastoral care. Patrick also exhibited great insights to spirituality and powerful leadership abilities. Aside from his missionary journeys, Patrick was also very concerned with the Irish's interest in paganism, idolatry, and sun-worship widespread throughout the countryside (ODS). One of his primary goals was to rid the country of all idol worship. Probably the most powerful tool that Patrick possessed as an evangelizer was his keen ability to relate to the social status of the people he spoke with. Being a son of a town councilor from Roman heritage made him relatable to the upper classes. Being relatively uneducated and a freed slave also made him relatable to the peasant classes. The historical references (listed above) to Patrick's life primarily come from his own *Confessio* (or autobiography).

Aside from those events in Patrick's life with historical base, there are many legendary stories and happenings that surround his life. Two of the most famous stories involve Patrick's power to expel snakes from Ireland, and his explanation of the Trinity through the use of a shamrock (ODS). The reason for the snake expulsion is for the simple reason that there are no snakes on the Irish island. In regards to the shamrock, the legend probably arose out of Patrick's orthodox teaching and understanding of the Trinity as three equal yet separate divine persons. Patrick has also been attributed to be the sole evangelizer of all Ireland. Most experts on the saint agree that this is not true and Patrick had many people helping him and following in his footsteps after he died. While these legendary attributes are not necessarily historically verifiable, they affirm strong respect and admiration for Patrick and his work. Below is part of the prayer known as St. Patrick's Breastplate:

*I bind to myself today, The strong virtue of the Invocation of the Trinity: I believe the Trinity in the Unity, The Creator of the Universe. I bind to myself today, The virtue of the Incarnation of Christ with His Baptism, The virtue of His crucifixion with His burial, The virtue of His Resurrection with His Ascension, The virtue of His coming on the Judgment Day. I bind to myself today, The power of Heaven, The light of the sun, The brightness of the moon, The splendor of fire, The flashing of lightning, The swiftness of wind, The depth of sea, The stability of earth, The compactness of rocks. I bind to myself today, God's Power to guide me, God's Might to uphold me, God's Wisdom to teach me, God's Eye to watch over me, God's Ear to hear me, God's Word to give me speech, God's Hand to guide me, God's Way to lie before me, God's Shield to shelter me, God's Host to secure me, Against the snares of demons, Against the seductions of vices, Against the lusts of nature, Against everyone who meditates injury to me, Whether far or near, Whether few or with many. I invoke today all these virtues, Against every hostile merciless power, Which may assail my body and my soul, Against the incantations of false prophets, Against the black laws of heathenism, Against the false laws of heresy, Against the deceits of idolatry, Against every knowledge that binds the soul of man. Christ, protect me today, Against every poison, against burning, Against drowning, against death-wound, That I may receive abundant reward. Christ with me, Christ before me, Christ behind me, Christ within me, Christ beneath me, Christ above me, Christ at my right, Christ at my left, Christ in the fort, Christ in the chariot seat, Christ in the heart of everyone who thinks of me, Christ in the mouth of everyone who speaks to me, Christ in every eye that sees me, Christ in every ear that hears me. I bind to myself today, The strong virtue of an invocation of the Trinity, I believe the Trinity in the Unity, The Creator of the Universe. (New Advent)*

