

The Legend of St. Patrick

He is probably the most misunderstood man in history.

- His name was not really “Patrick,”
- **He was not a “saint”** in the Catholic sense of the title since he was never canonized by the Roman Catholic Church.
- **He was not Irish**, he was born in Britain, the son of a Roman official.
- **He was not a “Roman Catholic,”** since during his lifetime, the Roman Catholic Church was only in embryo status. No one had yet claimed to be “The Pope.”
- **He did not drive the snakes out of Ireland**, since there never were snakes there. He did drive out the Druids out though.

The Life of St. Patrick

Most church historians agree that Patrick was born sometime between 360 and 387 A.D in Roman Britain. His family were Christians, his father served as a deacon and his grandfather as a pastor, but Patrick was a rebellious teen. At age 16, he was kidnapped by Irish raiders, taken to Ireland and sold into slavery.

He tells the story of his conversion and call to the ministry simply and beautifully in his *Confession*, translated into modern-day English from the original Latin:

"I, Patrick, a sinner, rude, unfaithful, and despicable. My father, Calpurnius, has a small farm near where I was captured. Although I was almost 16 at the time, I was ignorant of God. They brought me into captivity in Ireland with several thousand men. This we deserved because we had departed from God. We hadn't

kept His commandments, and we disobeyed our teachers, who had reproved us for our own good."

"The Lord was angry with us and dispersed us among many nations where strangers saw my depravity. It was there the Lord helped me sense my unbelief, remember my faults, and restore my whole heart to Him. God saw how mean I was and pitied me because I was so young and ignorant. He kept me before I even knew Him or could discern good from evil, and He strengthened me as a father would his son."

"I can't keep quiet about how God blessed me in my captivity. His reward was allowing me to exalt and confess His wonders before every nation under heaven."



"After I came into Ireland, I worked daily feeding sheep, and at night I prayed, and God's love and fear increased in me.

One night during a time of prayer and fasting, Patrick wrote: "I heard in my sleep a voice saying to me: 'It is well that you fast. Soon you will go to your own country.' And again, after a short while, I heard a voice saying to me: 'See, your ship is ready.' "

Patrick escaped and traveled 200 miles cross country to the west coast. He found a ship ready to sail but was refused passage. After a desperate prayer, he was allowed aboard.

Patrick eventually returned to his home and family. His experience of God's grace and provision solidified his faith. He began to study for the ministry. But then one night, like the Apostle Paul, he had a Macedonian Vision:

*"My parents in Britain wanted me to promise that after suffering so many afflictions, I would never leave home again. But in the middle of the night I saw a man named Victoricius coming from Ireland with numerous letters. While I read the one he gave me, I heard the voice of those who were near the western sea. They shouted, '**We beg you, holy youth, come and live among us.**' I couldn't read much more and so I awoke. Thanks be to God, that after very many years the Lord has granted to them according to their cry."*

At about forty years of age, Patrick began his ministry on the Emerald Isle which at the time was totally pagan. The people who inhabited its primeval forests were animists and they worshiped such things as trees and stones and wells. They believed that these spirits dwelt in these idols and they sacrificed their little children to appease the gods, and to secure, they thought, better harvests. So, his first challenge was to convince the Irish that there is only one God, and that his God really did love them.

About a year after Patrick began his work, King Leogaire and his princes, summoned him to celebrate a Druid festival at Tara. The Druid priests filled with rage against him and declared they would destroy him through enchantment and magical spells if he dared come. But nothing daunted Patrick.

A part of the festival was the lighting of a great bonfire. All fires were to be extinguished until the king's fire was lit. But in defiance of the order, Patrick lit a huge bonfire on a hill outside Tara.

The next morning (Easter Sunday) he marched into the king's presence with a company of young men whom he was training

for ministry, singing a hymn known as "The Breastplate of St. Patrick," which was a statement of his faith.

It is too lengthy to include all of it here. One verse says:

"I arise today, through

**God's strength to pilot me,
God's might to uphold me,
God's wisdom to guide me,
God's eye to look before me,
God's ear to hear me,
God's word to speak for me,
God's hand to guard me,
God's shield to protect me,
God's host to save me
From snares of devils,
From temptation of vices,
From everyone who shall wish me ill,
afar and near."**

God did protect him and he explained to the king and his chieftains that he was not a threat but came to Ireland to bring the light of the Gospel. He then shared his testimony.

Harry Ironside notes:

"Patrick's testimony resulted in the conversion of the king of Tara and many others. From there Patrick preached the gospel in Taitan while the heathen celebrated a pagan festival. He was ever engaged in preaching the gospel, baptizing and teaching the converts and gathering them into churches. Patrick's labors resemble Paul's missionary journeys. Often in danger of losing his life, he endured much physical suffering and thus evangelized the greater part of Ireland. -- <https://www.spiritwatch.org/patrick.htm>

Patrick won and baptized (by immersion) multiple thousands of converts (one Baptist history says approximately 120,000), established over 300 local churches, Bible

training centers, and consecrated 365 pastors. From the ranks of his converts, missionaries arose taking the Gospel to England, Wales, Scotland and Gaul (France).

The real Patrick was a Bible-believing evangelist and the Gospel he preached lifted the Irish out of the darkness of paganism into the glorious light of the Truth.

The Lessons of St. Patrick

First, Patrick experienced salvation by grace through faith and sought the salvation of others.

Second, Patrick was fully committed to the authority of the Word of God.

There are 113 references or quotations from the Bible in his two epistles and hymn. There is never a mention of saints, salvation by sacraments, relics, Eucharists or holy places. You will search in vain for any superstitious teaching about the Virgin Mary or purgatory.

Third, Patrick demonstrated the power of the Gospel in his life and preaching (Romans 1:16).

He brought the Gospel to Ireland, and thanks to his influence, the Irish Christians – known as the Celtic Church – led the way in evangelizing Europe for more than 100 years.

When Baptist William Carey launched the modern missions movement in the early 19th century by setting out for India, he cited Patrick's work in the British Isles as one of his inspirations, according to Haykin's book "Patrick of Ireland: His Life and Impact."

Patrick's Quotes are from Saint Patrick. (1853). The Confession of St. Patrick with an Introduction and Notes. Dublin; London: James McGlashan; James Nisbet and Co.

THE TRUTH ABOUT ST. PATRICK



"Who am I, O Lord, or what is my calling, that thou hast granted me so much of thy Divine presence? So that at this day I can constantly rejoice among the nations, and magnify thy name wherever I may be, not only in prosperity, but in adversity ... and always give thanks to God." - St. Patrick

By Tom Stiles

