

Saint Patrick's Day

Saint Patrick's Day, also known as The Feast of Saint Patrick, is a traditional holiday celebrated every year on March 17th, the day the **patron saint** of Ireland, Saint Patrick, died.

Patrick, who **was born** in the fourth century, lived in the British Isles, a land that had been invaded and conquered first by the Romans and then by Germanic tribes. At the age of 16, Patrick was captured and **taken as a slave** from the British Isles to what is now Ireland. He lived there for several years **herding sheep**. He was a religious boy, and he prayed that he would someday **return to his homeland**.

Legend has it that one night while he was praying, a voice told him to escape from the farm, and find a ship that was **waiting for him in a harbor** two hundred miles away. Patrick got to the ship, sailed to Europe, and disembarked in what is now probably France. He led several of the **ship's crew** through a dangerous forest, praying all the time. Neither Patrick nor any member of his crew was captured. When some of the men were about to **die of starvation**, **wild animals** appeared to them to eat. Events such as these appeared to be miracles and **gave rise** to later legends surrounding Patrick.

Finally finding his way home, Patrick felt that he was called by God to perform an important mission. He believed it was his duty to go back to Ireland and convert the Celtic people to the Christian Religion.

Patrick arrived in England and became a missionary, traveling from village to village and talking about his faith. Once, several members of a tribe approached Patrick and told him that they found it difficult to understand and believe in the **Holy Trinity**. Patrick thought a moment, then **stooped down and picked** one of the plentiful **shamrocks** growing wild around Ireland. *"Here are three leaves", he said, "yet it is one plant. Imagine **the Father, Son and the Holy Spirit** as each of these leaves. Here they are, yet they are one plant."* The tribesmen understood, because Patrick had used a familiar object to explain. From that time on, the shamrock has been a revered symbol of Ireland.

There are lots of stories about Patrick. One of them is about him forcing snakes out of the entire country of Ireland. Even though there are many different stories about how he accomplished such a task, it is probably not true. Patrick died on March 17th, and the Irish people **set aside the day to mourn**. He became the patron saint of Ireland. Mourning turned to **commemorating** him and celebrating his life.

Because of Saint Patrick, lots of cities around the world with a large population of Irish have **parades**. Green is one of the national colors of Ireland. Green stripes are painted on the streets where the parade will travel. People wear green shirts, ties, hair ribbons, and hats. There are even pubs which serve green beer on that day.

Saint Patrick's Day was made an official Christian holiday in the early seventeenth century. It is now observed by the Catholic Church, the Anglican Communion, the Eastern Orthodox Church and Lutheran Church. The day **commemorates** Saint Patrick and the arrival of Christianity in Ireland. Not only that, but it also celebrates the heritage and culture of the Irish in general.