

# EARLY CHRISTIAN IRELAND: ST. PATRICK



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## Description

Through the investigation of primary and secondary sources, students in this lesson will identify, understand and be able to explain the story of St. Patrick, the legends surrounding the patron saint of Ireland and what place he plays in the national identity of all people of Irish descent.

## Subjects

World History, European History

## Grade Level

11-12

## Duration

90 minutes

## Tour Links

- St. Patrick's Cathedral, Dublin
- Down Cathedral, Downpatrick
- Parish of St. Patrick, Belfast
- Trinity College Library, Dublin

## Essential Questions

- Who was St. Patrick?
- Why is he considered the patron saint of Ireland?
- What legends and stories are associated with St. Patrick?

## Academic Summary

... Therefore we ought to fish well and diligently; as the Lord taught and said: "Come ye after me, and I will make you fishers of men." And again: "Behold, saith the Lord, I send many fishers and many hunters," etc. Therefore we should, by all means, set our nets in such a manner that a great multitude and a crowd may be caught therein for God, and that everywhere there may be priests who shall baptize and exhort a people who so need it and desire it; as the Lord teaches and admonishes in the Gospel, saying: "Going, therefore, teach ye all nations, baptizing them in the name of the Father and of the Son and of the Holy Ghost, even to the consummation of the world." And again: "Go ye into the whole world, and preach the Gospel to every creature; he that believeth and is baptized shall be saved, but he that believeth not shall be condemned." The rest are examples. [And again: "This Gospel of the kingdom shall be preached in the whole world for a testimony to all nations, and then shall the consummation come." And again, the Lord, speaking by the prophet, says: "And it shall come to pass in the last days, saith the Lord, that I will pour out my spirit upon all flesh, and your sons and your daughters shall prophesy, your old men shall dream dreams, and your young men shall see visions. Moreover, upon my servants and handmaids in those days I will pour forth my spirit, and they shall prophesy." And Osee saith: "And I will say to that which was not my people: Thou art my people: and to her who hath not found mercy; and they shall say; Thou art my God. And in the place where I said to them, You are not my people, it shall be said to them, Ye are the sons of the living God."]

Wherefore behold how in Ireland they who never had the knowledge of God, and hitherto only worshipped unclean idols, have lately become the people of the Lord, and are called the sons of God. The sons of the Scoti and the daughters of princes are seen to be monks and virgins of Christ. [And there was one blessed Irish maiden, of adult age, noble and very beautiful, whom I baptized, and after a few days she came to us for a reason, and gave us to understand that she had received a command from God, and was informed that she was to become a virgin of Christ, and to draw near to God. Thanks be to God, six days after this she most excellently and eagerly entered on this state of life, which all the virgins of God now adopt, even against the will of their parents, even enduring reproaches and persecution from them, and notwithstanding they increase in number; and as for those who are born again in this way, we know not their number, except the widows and those who observe continency. But those who are in slavery are most severely persecuted, yet they persevere in spite of terrors and threats. But the Lord has given grace to many of my handmaids, for they zealously imitate him as far as they are able ...

But I entreat those who believe in and fear God, whoever deigns to examine or receive this document composed by the obviously unlearned sinner Patrick in Ireland, that nobody shall ever ascribe to my ignorance any trivial thing that I

achieved or may have expounded that was pleasing to God, but accept and truly believe that it would have been the gift of God. And this is my confession before I die.

*From The Confession of St. Patrick (approx. 450 CE) – translated by Joseph A. Dunney (1945)*

### Secondary summary

According to tradition, on 17 Mar 460 (or 461) CE, Patrick, a Romano-British Christian missionary, died in Saul, Ireland. He may have been born in England. He may have been a slave. He may have been a bishop. He may have been sent to Ireland by the Pope. He may have used a shamrock to explain the holy trinity to pagans. He may have banished the snakes from Ireland... or he may have not.

Little is known for certain about Patrick. Only two written sources have survived the ages, both supposedly written by Patrick himself. Both are dated to the 5th century CE, although neither of the works can be dated conclusively, as the oldest manuscripts containing the writings date from centuries later. We're not even sure when he lived, or when he died. Some historians believe he died around 460 CE, but there is evidence that he died in 493 BC. There is nothing about in Church records from the time period, and yet...

St. Patrick is the national patron saint of Ireland and one of the most recognized saints around the world. By the 7th century, writings about Patrick were mentioning him as the "primate" of Ireland. Around the same time, Christian churches all over the island were claiming ties to Patrick. Today, churches across the island claim to have relics such as St. Patrick's Bell, St. Patrick's Jawbone and even St. Patrick's arm (now encased in Silver). All anyone is sure of is that St. Patrick and his legends are permanently ingrained in the fabric of Irish culture, religious identity and history.

Through the investigation of primary and secondary sources, students in this lesson will identify, understand and be able to explain the story of St. Patrick, the legends surrounding the patron saint of Ireland and what place he plays in the national identity of all people of Irish descent.

### Objectives

1. Students will identify, understand and be able to explain the story of St. Patrick.
2. Students will identify, understand and be able to explain the legends surrounding St. Patrick.
3. Students will identify, understand and be able to explain how St. Patrick is seen by the Irish people today, especially in terms of their national sense of identity.

## **Procedure**

### **I. Anticipatory Set**

- Writing / Question: What are some American symbols of our national identity? (5 min)
- Handouts – Copies of documents and readings from the websites listed (5 min)

### **II. Body of Lesson**

- Lecture / PPT – St. Patrick (20 min)
- Video – True Story of St. Patrick (15 min)
- Independent Activity – Students read the articles and sources on St. Patrick and Irish national identity, taking notes as appropriate. (20 min)
- Suggestion: Have the students read some of these articles and sources for homework before class.
- Group Activity – Socratic Seminar: St. Patrick and Irish National Identity (15 min)

### **III. Closure**

- Assessment / DBQ: Explain in detail the story behind St. Patrick, the legends associated with the patron saint of Ireland, and how the Irish see St. Patrick as part of their national identity.

## **Extension**

### **On tour: Downpatrick – St Patrick Centre**

While on tour in Ireland, students traveling from Dublin to Belfast will pass through Downpatrick, home to the St. Patrick Centre, the only exhibition in the world dedicated to Ireland's patron saint. According to tradition, St. Patrick is buried in Downpatrick (hence the name). Information on trips to the Center can be found on their website (found also in the Links section below).

## Web Links

### Lesson Plan Websites

- [www.gutenberg.org/files/18482/18482-h/18482-h.htm](http://www.gutenberg.org/files/18482/18482-h/18482-h.htm)  
The Confession of St. Patrick (primary source – full text). E-book edition from the Gutenberg Project.
- [www.confessio.ie/more/article\\_moss#](http://www.confessio.ie/more/article_moss#)  
“The Staff, the Snake and the Shamrock: St. Patrick in Art” (article)
- [www.bbc.co.uk/blogs/ni/2008/03/saint\\_patrick\\_irelands\\_most\\_fa.html](http://www.bbc.co.uk/blogs/ni/2008/03/saint_patrick_irelands_most_fa.html)  
“Saint Patrick: Ireland’s most famous immigrant” – article by William Crawley on the BBC website
- [www.cbn.com/spirituallife/churchandministry/churchhistory/patricius\\_the\\_true\\_story\\_of\\_st\\_patrick.aspx](http://www.cbn.com/spirituallife/churchandministry/churchhistory/patricius_the_true_story_of_st_patrick.aspx)  
“Patricius: The True Story of St. Patrick” – web article
- [www.confessio.ie/manuscripts/dublinindex#1](http://www.confessio.ie/manuscripts/dublinindex#1)  
The Book of Armagh (approx. 807 CE) from the Trinity College Library in Dublin – contains the oldest known copy of St. Patrick’s Confession
- [www.history.com/topics/who-was-saint-patrick](http://www.history.com/topics/who-was-saint-patrick)  
“Who was St. Patrick?” – History Channel article
- [www.saintpatrickcentre.com/index.php](http://www.saintpatrickcentre.com/index.php)  
The Saint Patrick Centre (website) in Downpatrick, Ireland – good resources online and a great description of the museum.
- [www.slideshare.net/teacher.loccko/st-patrick-334699](http://www.slideshare.net/teacher.loccko/st-patrick-334699)  
St. Patrick PowerPoint presentation
- [www.youtube.com/watch?v=ndUfgHopiPI](http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=ndUfgHopiPI)  
St. Patrick, the Irish Legend (Full Movie) – This movie, at 1:30, is too long for most classes, but is highly recommended for teachers and students looking to gain more information on St. Patrick. Produced by the Fox Family Channel, the movie tells the story of St. Patrick through the retelling of all available legends and sources.
- [www.youtube.com/watch?v=GKhVnAUU2IY](http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=GKhVnAUU2IY)  
True Story of St Patrick (video)
- [www.teachingchannel.org/videos/choosing-primary-source-documents?fd=1](http://www.teachingchannel.org/videos/choosing-primary-source-documents?fd=1)  
Reading Like a Historian: Primary Source Documents (video) – great 2 minute video on how to incorporate primary sources into the Common Core and history classes. From Shilpa Duvoor of Summit Preparatory Charter High School in Redwood City, CA – highly recommended for teachers.

### Background Information

- [en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Saint\\_Patrick](http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Saint_Patrick)  
“Saint Patrick” – Wikipedia article
- [en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Downpatrick](http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Downpatrick)  
“Downpatrick – Wikipedia article
- [www.passports.com/group\\_leaders/on\\_the\\_road/ireland/dublin](http://www.passports.com/group_leaders/on_the_road/ireland/dublin)  
On the Road: Dublin – from Passports Educational Travel
- [www.passports.com/group\\_leaders/on\\_the\\_road/ireland/country\\_profile](http://www.passports.com/group_leaders/on_the_road/ireland/country_profile)

## On the Road: Country Profile of Ireland – from Passports Educational Travel

### **Other Relevant Passports Lesson Plans**

- [www.passports.com/lesson\\_plans/ireland/st-patrick](http://www.passports.com/lesson_plans/ireland/st-patrick)  
Early Christian Ireland – St. Patrick
- [www.passports.com/lesson\\_plans/ireland/irish-potato-famine](http://www.passports.com/lesson_plans/ireland/irish-potato-famine)  
Great Potato Famine in Ireland 1845-1849
- [www.passports.com/lesson\\_plans/ireland/irish-rebellion-of-1798](http://www.passports.com/lesson_plans/ireland/irish-rebellion-of-1798)  
Irish Rebellion of 1798
- [www.passports.com/lesson\\_plans/ireland/medieval-ireland-st-brendan-voyage-to-america](http://www.passports.com/lesson_plans/ireland/medieval-ireland-st-brendan-voyage-to-america)  
Medieval Ireland – Voyage of St. Brendan
- [www.passports.com/lesson\\_plans/ireland/easter-rising-of-1916](http://www.passports.com/lesson_plans/ireland/easter-rising-of-1916)  
Modern Ireland (1916 - Present) – Easter Rising 1916
- [www.passports.com/lesson\\_plans/ireland/good-friday-agreement-of-1998](http://www.passports.com/lesson_plans/ireland/good-friday-agreement-of-1998)  
Modern Ireland (1916 – Present) – Good Friday Agreement 1998

### **Key Terms**

- Christianity
- Conversion
- Irish national identity
- Shamrock
- St. Patrick

