

1,500 Years Later: St. Patrick's Amazing Story

If you engage people in conversation about Saint Patrick, you may find them having whiplash when you tell them the real story from the folklore. It's a great way to segway into possibly sharing your personal testimony and the gospel!

Did you know these factoids?

- Patrick was not Irish.
- As a young man he had no interest in God.
- He never drove out any snakes because there were none in Ireland.
- His use of a shamrock to teach the Trinity is cute for children, but it's just a myth.
- There is no such thing as a leprechaun.
- Patrick didn't drink Guinness beer, because it didn't exist.

Now, I'm not a party pooper. I enjoy a celebration, but I enjoy it even more when I understand what's legitimate and what's legend.

With St. Patrick's Day and all the green, the parades, parties with Irish stew and toasts to the "luck of the Irish," let's get behind the blarney to focus on an incredible man of God who transformed a nation through the proclamation of the gospel and the planting of churches.

The Real Story of St. Patrick

Years ago when I ministered in Ireland, I recall the descent of the plane and how absolutely awestruck I was as I beheld for the first time the Emerald Isle. This deep green countryside is the picture conjured up in the hearts and minds of tens of thousands of Irish celebrants who annually dye the Chicago River green for St. Patrick's Day. And in celebrations

throughout America, this special feast day is a sign of spring, bringing welcome relief after the cold of winter.

But what's really behind this day and the man we honor? After all, he died over 1,500 years ago on March 17, 461.

Patrick was born in Britain in A.D. 390. He was raised in a Christian family, but his interest in God was almost nonexistent. He also was illiterate.

Teens are often apt to wander, and Patrick sure did, reaping the consequences. At the age of 16, he was kidnapped by thugs and taken hostage on a ship to Ireland.



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Imagine the trauma and grief his parents experienced while praying for God's miraculous intervention and the return of their son.

For six agonizing years, he was trapped as a slave, working as a shepherd on hills where he tended the sheep. He was alone. He was scared. In desperation he began to cry out to God to rescue him from his plight.

Picture your teenage son or daughter on that hillside, trembling and fearful for their very life.

Yet God was at work in Patrick's soul (just as he is in your wayward son or daughter!). In his classic Confession, he painfully wrote, "I would pray constantly during the daylight hours" until finally God broke through and revealed Himself in a dream and specifically said the following to this young, lost soul: "Your hunger is rewarded. You are going home. Look, your ship is ready."

Patrick Departs

Risking his life but pierced to the core by the call of God on

his life, Patrick journeyed some 200 miles to the Irish coast! He bravely boarded a ship that was going to Britain, and he knew instinctively God was taking him back home.

This young man returned to his family, transformed by the grace of God (wouldn't it be great to see this homecoming captured on video?). In time, he even entered a Christian training center, a monastery, to pursue the calling to full-time vocational ministry as a Catholic priest.

Patrick excelled in his understanding of the Scriptures, and his character impacted his superiors and peers. Eventually, they affirmed him in becoming an overseer/bishop in the church.

Patrick Returns

Three decades after his initial abduction, Patrick sensed God stirring his heart. The Holy Spirit was directing him to go back to the pagan land of Ireland to evangelize the people mired in deception and darkness.

Patrick recorded his sentiments as he wrote, "I am ready to be murdered, betrayed, enslaved—whatever may come my way!" May his courage ignite something in our hearts to reject silence and cowardice in the face of our cultural attacks today. May this man's bravery inspire us to speak the truth in love regarding homosexuality, militant Islam, dishonesty, fornication (living together or casual sex), adultery, and compromising "Christians" yielding to pornography and a host of carnal indulgences in our day.

Incredible Spiritual Awakening

As Patrick crisscrossed the countryside, God blessed him mightily. Tens of thousands of Irish were converted and hundreds of churches were established! Thomas Cahill writes in his book *How the Irish Saved Civilization* that through Patrick's courageous leadership, this warrior populace "laid

down the swords of battle, flung away the knives of sacrifice, and cast away their chains of slavery.”

Here’s the deal: 1,500 years after Patrick lived, let’s follow this world-changer in lifestyle evangelism!

“When Irish eyes are smiling/ ’tis like a morn in spring/ In the lift of Irish laughter, you can hear the angels sing.”

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