

PRAYING WITH THE CELTIC SAINTS

SAINT PATRICK



Spirit of the Risen Christ,
as the lamps light up the evening,
shine into our hearts
and kindle in us the fire of your love.
The light of Christ has come into the world!

**We give you thanks that you led our forebears in the Faith through a cloud
by day and through fire by night.**

We give you thanks kindly Light, that the torch of faith
was carried fearlessly by Celtic saints such as St Patrick.

We give you thanks that you ever lead your people on.

Light up our dark hearts by the light of your Christ;
may his Word illumine our way.

**For you pour forth loving kindness, Source and Saviour and
radiant Spirit.**

Amen.

READINGS FROM SCRIPTURE

Jeremiah 1 : 4-9

The word of the Lord came to me, saying, ‘before I formed you in the womb I knew you, before you were born I set you apart; I appointed you as a prophet to the nations.’ ‘Alas, Sovereign Lord,’ I said, ‘I do not know how to speak; I am too young.’ But the Lord said to me, ‘Do not say, ‘I am too young.’ You must go to everyone I send you to and say whatever I command you. Do not be afraid of them, for I am with you and will rescue you,’ declares the Lord. Then the Lord reached out his hand and touched my mouth and said to me, ‘I have put my words in your mouth.’

Matthew 28 : 18-20

Then Jesus came to them and said, ‘All authority in heaven and on earth has been given to me. Therefore go and make disciples of all nations, baptising them in the name of the Father and of the Son and of the Holy Spirit, and teaching them to obey everything I have commanded you. And surely I am with you always, to the very end of the age.’

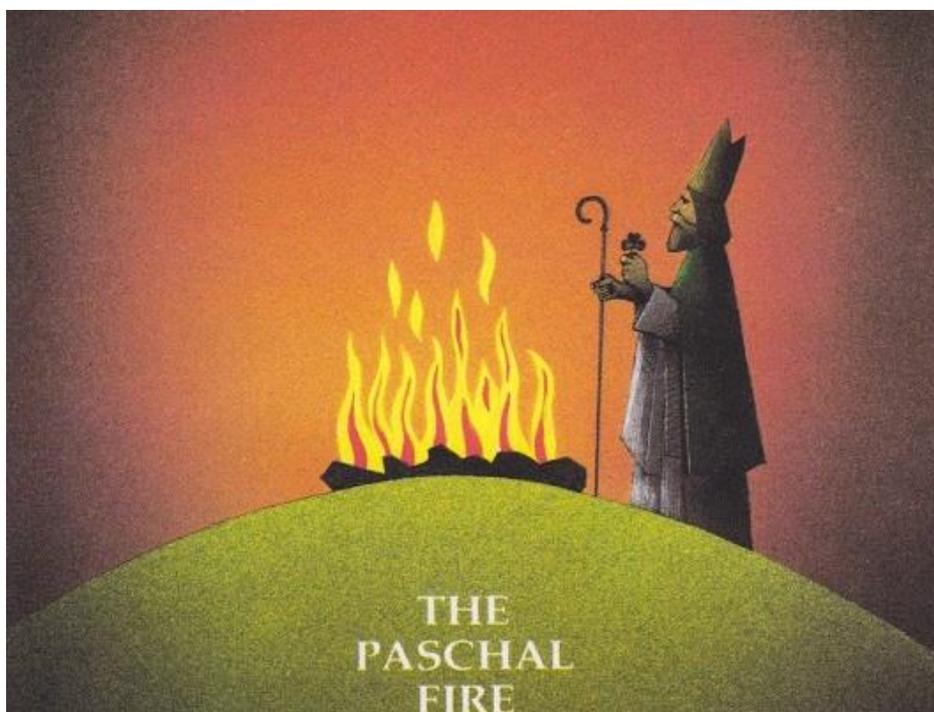
THE LIFE OF SAINT PATRICK

Several writings of St Patrick are still in existence, one of which is his ‘Confessions’, in which he tells of his life in his own words. Another is ‘The Breastplate’, which is the oldest Irish document in existence. These well-known words have been adapted for many Celtic blessings and are deeply Trinitarian.

For most Celts, the Trinity was central to belief and prayer, but especially so with Patrick. It is said that he used the shamrock to explain the Trinity and this has now become the symbol of Ireland.

He was born Magonus Sucatos Patricius in Cumbria in 390AD (Shhh! Don't tell the Irish he was actually English!!). Born into a wealthy family, his faith was nominal and he led a wild life! At 16, he was captured by Irish pirates and sold as a slave and forced to work as a shepherd. The Christians in Ireland were heavily persecuted and it is thought that contact with them brought about his conversion by the age of 23. He had a dream about a boat waiting for him, escaped and walked 200 miles to the coast, where he saw the boat of his vision and sailed for France. When he returned to England, he couldn't settle and heard God's voice telling him to return to Ireland. He was eventually made a bishop and returned to a place where he knew Christians were being butchered. Once more in Ireland, there were many attempts on his life – and many miraculous escapes.

He experienced many conflicts with the pagan kings, the most famous of which was at the time of the Spring Equinox (which will occur this year on 20th March). This was the culmination of a great Druidic fire festival, which was focussed on the Hill of Tara, where the high kings were crowned. All other fires were banned, so that the full drama of the event could be appreciated. Patrick decided the time had come for the light of Christ to replace the pagan fires. As it was also Easter eve, he lit his own paschal fire on the nearby Hill of Slane. The king knew that if Patrick's fire was not extinguished, this new faith would flood Ireland. Soldiers were sent, but Patrick escaped – the fire had been lit and Ireland was to become a Christian stronghold.



Within 30 years, he had built 360 churches, ordained hundreds of clergy and even he was embarrassed at his success! He worked tirelessly, with only one story of a break when he spent forty days fasting and praying on the hill now known as Croagh Patrick. On that hill on the last Saturday of July, thousands still walk to the top, often barefoot, in memory of Patrick.

REFLECTION

This brief synopsis of the life of Saint Patrick highlights two important points for people of faith: that God speaks to the ‘least of these’ (our Jeremiah reading) and that we are *all* called and qualified to spread the word of God (our Gospel reading). Saint Patrick was born into a wealthy family and had no material wants in the world. Yet it was not during this time of luxury that God chose to speak to him, but rather in his time of lacking and emptiness. It was in the solitude of the Irish countryside that God spoke to Saint Patrick and gave him the opportunity to develop his faith. This is not to suggest that God only speaks to those on the margins of society, but suggests that when we are so cluttered with material worries we may not take the time to listen for God’s guidance.

Additionally, Saint Patrick did not believe that he was unique, or especially qualified to bring faith to people. The humble evangelist even referred to himself as an ‘unlearned sinner’ and tells us that anything good he achieved should not be seen as work of himself, but as a gift from God. St Patrick’s belief that he was not especially empowered to spread the Word of God should encourage us and underlines our individual and communal responsibility to build God’s Kingdom here on earth.

Using the shamrock, St Patrick explains the faith to the King’s daughters

‘Who is Your King?’



Our King is the King of all;
heaven and earth, sea and river.
He has his dwelling in heaven and earth and sea
and all that is therein.
He inspires all things,
he kindles the light of the sun and moon.
He has a Son, co-eternal with himself and like unto him
and the Holy Spirit breathes in them.
Father, Son and Holy Spirit are not divided
and I desire to unite you to the Son of the Heavenly King,
for you are daughters of a king of earth.

PRAYERS OF INTERCESSION

We offer to God those people, places and situations that we carry on our hearts today.

THE LORD'S PRAYER

CLOSING PRAYERS

In Patrick, there was nothing of fear – all was love.
Forgive us for the places in our lives where fear has driven out love.

Lord have mercy. **Lord have mercy.**

From Patrick, truth, holiness and passion for Christ shone forth.
Forgive us for the places in our lives that are false or frozen.

Christ have mercy. **Christ have mercy.**

Lord, Patrick was the tireless one. **Take from us all sloth.**
Patrick was the fearless one. **Take from us all cowardice.**
Patrick was the radiant one. **Take from us all that clouds the soul.**

Lord have mercy. **Lord have mercy.**



Thank you Lord for the faith that led St Patrick to witness to you in a land ignorant of your ways.

Thank you for his vision of Christian communities to be beacons throughout pagan Ireland.

Thank you for his courage to return to a hostile land and speak truth into power.

Give us such vision and faith to establish the light of the Gospel in the dark places of our communities.

In Jesus' name we pray.

Amen.

BLESSING

St Patrick's Breastplate

Christ with me
Christ before me
Christ behind me
Christ within me

Christ below me
Christ above me
Christ on my right hand
Christ on my left hand

Christ in my sleeping
Christ in my waking

Christ in the heart of all who think of me
Christ in the mouth of all who speak of me
Christ in every eye that looks at me
Christ in every ear that listens to me

And the blessing of God Almighty,
the Father, the Son and the Holy Spirit
be with you and those you love and pray for
today and forever more.

Amen.

'Before, I was humiliated - I was like a stone that lies in deep mud and he who is mighty came and in his compassion raised me up and exalted me very high and placed me on the top of the wall'

Saint Patrick

