

# The Life and Legacy of Saint Patrick

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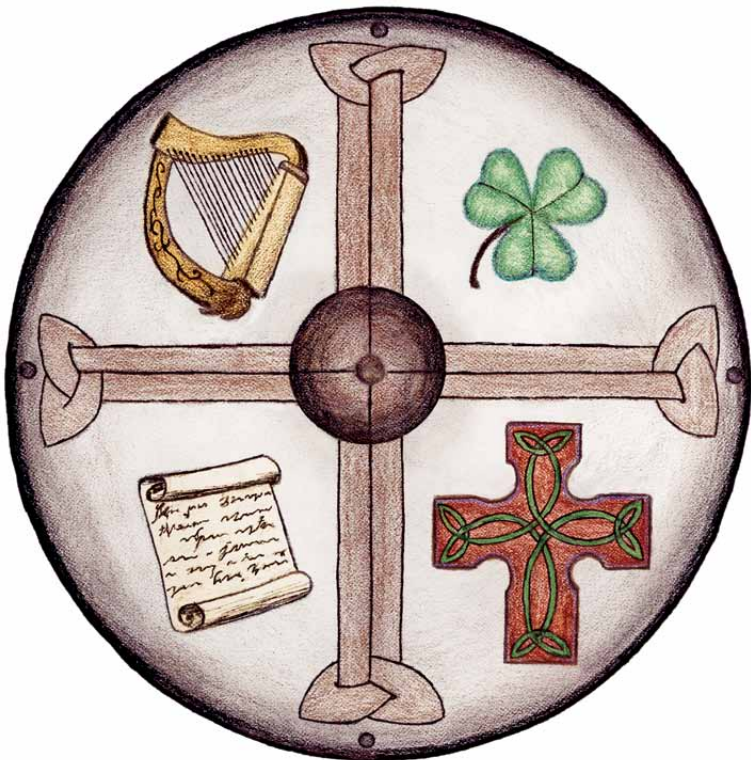
By  
**MICHAEL J. McHUGH**



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PALATINE, ILLINOIS

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## Pulling Down Strongholds

—by Michael J. McHugh—

The powers of darkness were very real,  
To those who sat in Druid fear.  
No song would spring from Irish tongue  
While pagan temples ruled the land.  
Who would stop the strife and blood  
From crushing human souls?  
Who would come and free the land  
From Satan's strongholds?

God gave the call to one bold man,  
To go and serve in Ireland.  
That man left family and comforts of home,  
To fight against the Druid throng.  
Who was the man God picked  
To topple the idols tall?  
His name was Patrick of Bannavem,  
A servant of the Lord.

With courage true Patrick did his task  
And set the captives free.  
He preached the simple Word of God,  
And bid the darkness flee.  
Now songs of praise to God above  
Are freely lifted up.  
A missionary came and freed a land,  
From Satan's strongholds!

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# Introduction

The great Christian missionary to Ireland, commonly known as Saint Patrick, was used by God to bring thousands of people to a saving knowledge of Jesus Christ. Although this brave and godly man died more than fifteen hundred years ago, his memory is still honored by millions of Christians throughout the world.

Patrick was born in southern Pictland (Scotland) in A.D. 389, near a small village called Bannavem Taberniae. This village was located very close to the border of northern Britain, and the ancient British city of Dumbarton.

Contrary to what you might think, this famous man of God did not always walk with God. In fact, Patrick himself once told of how little he followed the Lord when he was a young man working on his father's farm. The Lord, however, would not let Patrick continue on in a foolish path.

When Patrick was about fifteen years old, a group of Irish pirates sailed to Britain and kidnapped him. He was brought to the north of Ireland as a slave and forced to live a hard and lonely life. During the six-year period that Patrick spent as a slave in Ireland, the Holy Spirit saved his soul and guided his life in a new direction.

By God's grace, young Patrick was able to escape from his slavery and make his way back home to his parents.

Shortly after coming back home, however, he received what he believed was a clear call to return to Ireland as a missionary for Christ. Although his parents were not pleased to see him go so quickly, Patrick nevertheless returned to Ireland in obedience to God's call.

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In spite of many dangers and hardships, Saint Patrick spent the next thirty years of his life preaching and teaching the gospel of Jesus Christ throughout Ireland. During this time, this faithful missionary helped to set up about two hundred churches and baptized thousands of new Christians. Patrick also had the courage to speak out against the evils of slavery in Ireland, and the wicked practice of murdering infants to try to please false “harvest gods.”

The story that follows will give readers a better understanding of the life and times of the fearless missionary known as Saint Patrick. In light of the fact that many of the minor aspects of Patrick’s life have been obscured by folklore and legend, I have endeavored, as much as possible, to present only those details which rest upon solid historical records. No matter what the legends may say about him, the truth is that Patrick acknowledged himself to be a sinner and found salvation in the finished work of the Lord Jesus Christ alone. His commitment to the Christian faith and to the teachings of the Word of God remained constant until his earthly pilgrimage ended at a ripe old age. Patrick’s legacy, therefore, is an excellent reminder of what God can do with one man who is dedicated to His purposes.

May God use the story of Patrick’s missionary exploits to inspire each reader to serve the Lord with all of his heart, soul, and mind.

*Michael J. McHugh*  
*Palatine, Illinois*  
*2010*

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# CHAPTER ONE

## A Meeting in Down

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“The meeting should be somewhere near this region,” thought the seasoned missionary as he continued to follow a crude path through the Irish countryside. On and on he pulled his tired donkey, as he stroked his graying hair in an effort to clear his head. This weary traveler had already managed to get lost on three separate occasions during the earlier portion of the day, and by this point, he was beginning to wonder if he was ever going to make it to his final destination.

“Perhaps one of the local shepherds or farmers might know how to direct me to the place called Down,” mumbled the perplexed missionary, as though there were someone else around to hear him but his donkey. A short time later, this plain looking man determined to lead his animal in the direction of a tiny thatched cottage that sat in the distance in order to obtain needed direction.

“Lord,” prayed the aged servant of Christ, “may you grant me the opportunity to speak of your dear Son to those souls who dwell at this spot, and to gain the hospitality and guidance that I need at this hour.”

Minutes later, the sound of a faint voice could be heard as a middle aged woman with ruffled hair slowly walked out of a small stone shed to greet the unfamiliar visitor who was rapidly approaching her humble dwelling.

“Now if it is a work ye will be needin, we have none; and we don’t have money to buy nothing either,” declared the woman in a blunt fashion. “I don’t want to be rude to peddlers, but

we don't take kindly to strangers in these parts. What's your business?"

"I mean no harm dear lady, and I can assure you that I come in peace," began the robed visitor. "I am a wee bit turned around, however, and need help to find my way to Down."

"Stranger," responded the woman, "now that I think on it, you do not have the look of a peddler. I am, in point of fact, inclined to believe that you are a man of the cloth. Tell me, are ye one of the preachers who was lately sent here by the Church in Rome, or are you one of the sons of the Irish church?"

"Why do you ask?" inquired the curious minister.

"Because I see that you stand in need of more than some good directions," added the lady as she straightened her shawl. "You could also use some hospitality. Every now and then, I will get one of you holy men to pay me a visit, and I have noticed that the Irish men care more about their own comforts and food, while the visitors from Rome are more concerned about the feed and care of their donkeys."

"Very well then, since you asked," replied the man of God. "I am a son of Pictland (Scotland) by birth; but at heart am a son of the Irish Church in very truth. My donkey, on the other hand, is from Rome."

Something like a smile quickly appeared on the woman's face as she slowly began to lower the spear that she had been carrying in a position of readiness.

"I must say, dear woman, that I am more than grateful to see that weapon pointed in a safer direction. Now, can you help me find a proper road that would take me to the place called Down. It would be a sad day if I missed my meeting with the people of God."

"I can't say for sure what road would be best," replied the woman. "As I am sure you know, there are few roads in this country to begin with, except those for the sheep and cows. I will, however, guide you to a well-traveled neighbor of mine who should be able to guide you in the right direction."

"A thousand thanks for your kindness," responded the grateful visitor. "Might I be so bold, then, as to ask the way to this neighbor's dwelling? As you surely know, the weather is

growing rather hard, and the light of day is far spent, so if I am to leave at all it best be soon."

"Don't hurry on just now," replied the woman of the house. "Pull that sad excuse for a beast into my barn here, and let us talk about the route over a bowl of hot porridge."

"Would the man of the house also be carrying one of those spears, or perhaps a sword?" asked the slender Irish missionary as he hesitated for a moment.

"My poor husband, holy man, is carrying nothing but a load of dirt over him about now, so you can breath easy. He died round about two years ago. Too much strong drink and too much hard labor, and little in the way of good food, sent him to an early grave," added the widow in a sorrowful voice. "I only wish my story were a rare one, but widows are as common in this land as stones."

"May the Almighty grant you His comfort," replied the visitor. "The Lord knows that I have both seen and experienced my share of sorrow in this land over the last thirty years. I must say, however, that it has been my joy as a servant of Christ to scatter some of the darkness and sorrow of the Irish people by the grace of God."

"My name is Unis, friend, and you can leave your donkey right where it stands. Come then," said the woman in a more cheerful tone, "let us get out of this cold and misty air. I have a young son, and he will take your beast to the spelt and water. Oh," added the host, "By what name are you called?"

"My given name is Patricius; but among the Irish I am called Patrick."

The spear toting woman and her guest soon entered the tiny thatched cottage, and sat themselves before a blazing turf fire. It was not long before a kettle could be heard bubbling over the fire, punctuated by small talk between the two inhabitants.

"I think I hear some noise outside," said Unis, "it is likely my son bringing some water back from the well."

"What is your son's name?" asked Patrick.

"Thomas," replied the woman, "but I call him 'Tommy' after his grandfather. A grand lad in many respects, but dumb as any beast of the field in regards to most kind of learning, including religion. The truth be told, both his father and I have not talked about spiritual things with our boy, what with our duties around the farm pressing us for time."

"I understand," responded the guest. "Do you want me to speak with your son about the way to God?"

"I do not see why not, only it may be well if you take it slow and easy. My son is a bit of a lost soul, holy man, and rather excitable."

As Patrick prepared to respond, the cabin door swung quickly open and the figure of a young boy soon appeared before the startled guest.

"Tommy," said the mother in an agitated tone, "can you not open a door slowly? This is not a barn, and we have a guest in the house."

"Yes, ma'am," said the young teenager as he slowly wiped his dirty hands on the front of his clothes in preparation for shaking the stranger's hand. "A welcome to you, stranger. It is good to meet you."

"I am glad to make your acquaintance, lad," replied Patrick, as he stood to receive the filthy but sincere hand that was stretched out before him.

An awkward silence soon followed, as each person in the cabin began to rearrange their seats and stare into the turf fire. Unis was relieved, therefore, when she could announce that her boiled cabbage was almost ready, for this gave her a fit reason to excuse herself in order to finish her final meal preparations.

During the next few minutes, Patrick began to talk with the young boy about life on the farm, and the surrounding area. Before long, the woman of the house provided them both with a mug of hot cider and a slice of brown bread.

"Delightful, Madam," insisted the grateful visitor before he began to speak once more with the farm boy.



“So, tell me lad,” resumed Patrick, “what do you know about Jesus Christ?”

“Well I can’t say for sure, but I do not think that I have ever met him,” said the confused teenager. “Is he from this region?”

“The man called Jesus Christ came down from Heaven above many long years ago; and He was and is the very Son of God. It is He that created the world, and it is He alone that has the power to save lost sinners such as us.”

“Tell me lad,” continued the missionary, “do you want to learn about the way of salvation that God has made through His Son, Jesus?”

“I am not sure if I have the time,” replied the farm boy, “what with all of my chores and things to do.”

“Now lad,” questioned Patrick in reply, “you do find time to breath, eat, and sleep each day, do you not?”

“I surely do,” said the boy, “but what is your point, sir?”

“My question is really quite simple, Tommy,” added the man of God. “The Holy Scriptures teach us that each breath that we breathe is a gift from our Maker, Jesus Christ. This is no less true of the gifts of food and rest that we receive each day from His hand. How is it then that you never fail to take these free gifts, but seldom, if ever, thank or worship the One who gives them to you?”

“I can’t say right off, holy man,” replied the boy as he scratched his head and squirmed slowly in his chair. “You have given me some deep things to think on, sir.”

“Well, dear lad, you go right ahead and think on these things. The only other thing I must tell you is that you will not get anywhere with the Lord unless you get on your knees in prayer and ask Him for His help. The Lord clearly teaches in His sacred Word that sinners such as us must turn from our wicked ways and seek the Lord while He may be found.”

After several moments of silence, the farm boy responded, “I’ll try to keep your thoughts in mind, stranger. Tell me now, will ye be staying the night, holy man?” asked Tommy in an effort to change the subject.

"If your dear mother is willing, then I suspect that I will rest here with my donkey till daybreak. It is still my hope, however, to arrive at the meeting place by late afternoon on the morrow," responded the grateful guest.

"We have a humble dwelling to be sure," remarked Unis as she overheard the conversation, "but you and your Roman donkey are welcome to stay the night. Tommy, get the blankets from the back room and give them to our guest so he can have a decent night's sleep."

"Yes, mother," replied the energetic young man.

Before long, darkness began to set upon the tiny farm, and soon each member of the household was fast asleep. In what seemed to the gray haired preacher to be merely a few winks of the eye, the night gave way to the dawn with its strange sights and sounds.

A light mist had rolled in during the night, and the view from the cottage windows into the distant fields was slightly surreal. As Patrick began to awake, he could hear the sounds of an agitated rooster crowing loudly in his window.

"The top of the morning to you as well," thought Patrick to himself, as he began to stumble around the cottage in search of something to drink.

The woman named Unis had already been at work milking her goats, long before Patrick had begun to pry himself away from his blankets. For this reason, as soon as the seasoned missionary managed to open his eyes more fully, he noticed that the breakfast table was already set with bowls of hot porridge and bread.

"I was rather certain you would want an early breakfast," remarked the woman of the house as she walked through the front door into Patrick's presence. "Even holy men need a solid breakfast, so I rose up a little before my time to put something on the table."

"May God reward you for your kindness, dear woman," responded Patrick.

As the sun slowly began to rise, the three former strangers sat together at the kitchen table and began to eat from the wooden bowls that were sitting before them. After the meal

was finished, Unis remarked; "Well, I hope your belly is full, and that you remember how I told you to get to my neighbor's lands. He can surely guide you to the right road, so you can gather with your people."

"My belly is full, and my mind is clear in regard to how best to find my way to where I am bound. Before I go, however, I would like to ask a special blessing upon this house. Your kindness and hospitality should be rewarded, and I intend on asking the King of Heaven to shower you with His richest blessings."

And so, true to his word, the veteran preacher went right ahead and poured out his heart to the God of the whole earth while mother and son sat and listened.

When the man of God was done praying, Tommy said; "It sounds like this one you are praying to is more of a friend than a God."

"He is my Maker and Master, as well as my Friend, Tommy," replied Patrick. "I will send some of my brothers in Christ to pay you and your mother a visit after several days, so that you can come to know and love the true and living God who is the friend of sinners."

It did not take long for Patrick to load his donkey and say goodbye to his two new friends. The heart of the old preacher was heavy as he prepared to leave, however, for he desired to spend more time with these spiritually needy people but could not delay his departure. As he prodded his donkey forward, Patrick paused for a moment to hear the parting words of his hostess Unis.

"Fare thee well, preacher," said the woman, "you are welcome under our roof any time."

Patrick then smiled and began to walk, while he raised his hand and waved it in the direction of the two sad figures that were slowly fading from his view. These two had also wished that the time they had to visit with this kind stranger could have lasted longer.

The mist in the air soon began to clear, as Patrick walked as quickly as his legs would carry him in an effort to make up for lost time. One country mile soon turned into several, as the



wearily approached the vicinity of the neighbor whom Unis had recommended. A brief visit with this local farmer gave Patrick all of the directions he needed to make it to his final destination in Down.

After two more hours of walking over hills and through verdant valleys, Patrick finally began to see the town of Down come slowly into view. Oh, how he longed to be re-united at that spot with his old friend and fellow missionary, Kent, as well as to meet with a small number of new ministers who had recently been sent to this region for training and orientation.



As Patrick walked slowly down the path that led to the tiny stone church situated on the outskirts of town, a group of two dogs were the first to greet him and to signal his arrival. The loud barking of the dogs did not alarm the aged bishop, for he recognized the noise of these beasts to be but friendly chatter. Patrick had consistently enjoyed a wonderful relationship with animals of every sort over the years, but particularly so with dogs. His very presence seemed to bring out the best in such beasts.

Bishop Patrick tied up his donkey to a post that sat next to the courtyard of the church grounds, and proceeded to the door of the meeting hall, which was close at hand. Before he could open the door, however, a friendly face appeared in the doorway and smiled in his direction.

“Well, greetings to you old friend, in the year of our Lord 460. Praise be to God for your safe arrival Bishop, and for keeping you in the palm of His hand,” remarked Patrick’s old friend and colleague, Kent. “You look weary from your journey, dear brother.”

“My strength indeed is small, particularly as the shadow of my life grows longer brother Kent, but God remains faithful and good,” replied Patrick. “I doubt that I need to remind you that we are both getting a bit old for these cross-country journeys.”

“I can well remember the days when such travels would scarcely slow us down dear brother. I beg you, please enter in and rest your old bones for a while, and tell us of your journey. Oh, I almost forgot to introduce you to brother Michael. He has but lately arrived from the Synod in Armagh,” added Kent as he lifted his hands in the direction of the young missionary.

“I greet you in the High name of Jesus Christ, brother Michael,” opened Patrick. “I have learned through letters that you come to us with the highest recommendation of the church councils. We are honored to have you in our ranks, my dear young brother.”

“It is I who am honored to serve under so great a man of God, dear Bishop. Your name and reputation are everywhere known throughout the Isle,” replied the young missionary and pastor. “I am anxious to learn of your recent accomplishments for the Kingdom of Christ, as well as more about the history of the mission work in this region. “But please,” added Michael, “let us move into the next chamber and find a comfortable place where we all can enjoy an extended conversation. I have much to learn before the church meeting opens in earnest on the morrow.”

Moments later, the three men strolled into a nearby room where comfortable chairs and light refreshments were waiting for them. It was not long before these churchmen were seated in front of a blazing turf fire, as well as a table set with pewter plates that were filled with fruit and salted meats. Patrick began the conversation by stating, “We do indeed have

much to share about what God has accomplished through our humble efforts among the Irish people. But my recent journeys have also reminded me of how much work is yet before us. Only hours ago, I spoke with a lad who lives not far from this very spot who had never heard of Jesus Christ. We must do more to reach God's lost sheep with the good news of the Gospel of peace."

After a few moments of silence and reflection, Patrick's long-time friend and co-laborer, Kent, spoke; "With your permission Bishop, I think it might be helpful to tell brother Michael about the true story of our labor among the Irish people these many years. As we both know, so many myths and falsehoods already abound regarding our missionary efforts, and particularly your part in them, that it might do well to set the record straight in the hearing of this new brother."

"I have no objections," responded Patrick. "But when you are finished, do not let me forget to speak with you about the need to send a minister out to visit with that lad that I spoke of earlier, as well as his widow mother."

With a broad smile and a slight hesitation, the gray haired missionary named Kent settled into his chair and began to speak.



A Celtic warrior