

IRELAND: ST. PATRICK

by Ross Mulkern

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St. Patrick's Day, which celebrates the national saint of Ireland, is a popular event in many countries. Celebrations often include parades, festivals of music and dance and of course conspicuous marketing opportunities for companies such as Guinness and Ryanair. But who was St. Patrick, and why is he such an important figure for Ireland?

Patrick's name as a child was Maewin Succat and, although he is known as a Christian saint today, he was not always a Christian. His family were Welsh pagans, who worshipped the many gods and spirits of the natural world.

Maewin's life changed very suddenly when one day, at the age of about 14, he was kidnapped by pirates and taken across the sea to Ireland, where he was sold as a slave. His life as a slave was very hard and his master was very cruel. Each night, Maewin would go to sleep and think about his family, about his mother and father who he might never see again.

One night, as he was dreaming, Maewin heard the voice of God. The voice told him to go to the sea and look for a ship. This ship would then take him back to Wales and freedom. At first, Maewin ignored the dream, but night after night it came back to him, the same voice, the same message: find a ship.

Eventually, Maewin decided to listen to the voice in his dream and whilst his master wasn't looking, he ran in the direction of the sea. Sure enough, a ship was waiting for him and the sailors on board happily agreed to help the young boy.

Back home in Britain, Maewin returned to his parents and there the story could have ended. But Maewin knew that he needed to repay God for helping him escape his cruel master. It was at this time that he changed his name to Patricius and converted to Christianity. Patrick made it his personal mission to return to Ireland and convert the pagans there.

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Patrick was a very charismatic young man and he soon converted many people. He even converted one of the Irish kings. When the king asked how there could only be one god, if Christians worshipped the Father the Son and the Holy Spirit, Patrick showed him a shamrock plant. Patrick explained that although the plant has three leaves they are all part of a single plant. Because of this, the shamrock remains a symbol of St. Patrick to this day.

Through actions like this, Patrick's fame began to grow. He worried that if his old master found him, he could be captured again and return to being a slave. Because of this, he decided to visit his old master and buy his freedom officially. Patrick had already become such a famous figure, though, that when his master heard that he was coming, he thought that Patrick was coming with an army to kill him. He started to panic and, in a moment of madness, killed himself by setting his own house on fire and jumping inside!

Patrick went on to perform many miracles such as bringing a girl back from the dead and, most famously, removing all of the snakes from Ireland. So next time you celebrate St. Patrick's day, take a moment to remember the story of Maewin Succat and how he became such a legendary figure in the history of Ireland.