

renew
WITH
+ ANNA GREENWOOD-LEE



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Who is St Patrick, anyway?

I thought that today I should tell you a little bit about Saint Patrick.

It always makes me chuckle that the patron saint of Ireland is actually an Englishman. Scholars think that he was born in Cornwall in about the year 385. And when he was a teenager he was kidnapped by Irish pirates and forced to serve for six years as a slave as a shepherd in Ireland. Alone on the hills with the sheep Patrick developed a deep sense of God's presence.

And eventually he managed to escape slavery and went to Gaul where he studied to be a priest. He was determined, in fact, to be the first bishop of Ireland and lobbied hard for that position but was denied it because he didn't speak Latin and was seen as not quite sophisticated enough. Another man became the first bishop of Ireland. But he didn't stay long before moving on to Scotland and Patrick became the second bishop of Ireland.

Patrick worked tirelessly building churches and monasteries, bringing Christianity to Ireland. Scholars look back on the work that he did and say that it was actually perhaps Christianity in Ireland saved civilization during the Dark Ages.

It's remarkable to me that a man would want to return to the land of his captivity to do such good. And good he did. One of the historical documents we have that remains from Patrick is a letter he wrote to an English general lambasting him for the English' treatment of the Irish.

Some of the other stories about Saint Patrick, like driving all the snakes out of Ireland, probably aren't true. There just probably weren't any snakes there in the first place. But it may well have been Patrick who introduced the shamrock as the emblem, having used it to explain the Trinity to the Irish.

Saint Patrick died on the 17th of March 461. For me, his life teaches us about what it is to serve God, what it is to find a deep sense of peace, what it is to be willing to serve even those who have taken part in our oppression. And so today, on Saint Patrick's Day, I wish you every blessing and every peace. And I hope that you too find ways to serve. Amen.