

## **The Holy Trinity – The Only True God<sup>i</sup>**

March 17 is celebrated as St Patrick's Day. The legendary St Patrick is the folk hero of the Irish people. The Irish like to sing and dance and dress up in green.

Few people know St Patrick as he was. The true story of his life has been clouded by legend and the active imagination of the Irish people. He was born of middle class parents about 389AD. His birthplace is moot. Scholars now say that he was born in England. Earlier writers made him a Scot. In any case Britain was then a Roman province and he was given the Roman name Patricius. Rome ruled Britain from the time of its conquest by Julius Caesar in 50BC until the fifth century after Christ. The first Christians came to England with the Roman legions who occupied the land. The first English martyr was St Albans, who was stoned to death for his faith in 305AD. The massive cathedral of St Albans, near London, marks the site of his martyrdom.

Although St Patrick's family had been Christian for almost two generations, the boy showed no particular signs of piety. At the age of 16 he was captured by a band of Irish brigands and carried off to Ireland as a slave. For the next six years he herded pigs for his slave master. In the lonely hours of that dismal occupation he passed from religious indifference to extreme piety. Every morning before taking the pigs to pasture he went out to pray in whatever weather, rain, hail, or snow. Eventually he escaped and made his way to France. After some time of wandering, in which he may have gone as far as Rome, he returned to his home to live with his parents. But something kept calling him to go back to Ireland. In the course of time he was convinced that he had a call from God to do so. He pursued religious studies for a while and went to Ireland where he soon was made Bishop of Armagh.

For the rest of his life he worked tirelessly among the Irish building and organising churches and monasteries with a passionate zeal. Facing the pagan worshippers, the Druids, with relentless courage, he suffered captivity, privations, and threats much like those recounted by the Apostle Paul. His pious Irish converts were to remember him through legendary chronicles that told how he "cleansed the lepers, wrote 365 books, and struck down the Druids with his awesome miracles."

What St Patrick truly had was an undoubting confidence in God's Word. Unlike most churchmen of his time he had a Bible and used it constantly. His challenging faith gave him a remarkable ability to recruiting devoted men and women who gathered about him to endure every privation for the sake of furthering the good news of the redemption of sinful man. If there ever was one person of whom it may be said that he converted a nation it is St Patrick. He richly deserves the appellation, "The Apostle of Ireland."

The association of the shamrock with Ireland recalls one of St Patrick's sermons in which he picked up a shamrock and held it before him to illustrate the doctrine of the Trinity. The legendary "Patrick's Breastplate" which is said to have protected him from the Druids was inscribed with the symbol of the Trinity. But above all we remember that his knowledge of the Bible made the book an integral part of his life. He quoted it constantly both in his sermons and in his other writings.

The real St Patrick stands firmly in the tradition of the Apostolic doctrine, preaching Christ the crucified and proclaiming the redemption of sinners in the name of Jesus. Not until 200 years after his death was Christian theology demeaned by the fantasy of the adoration of the saints and relics. St

Patrick knew none of that. His preaching missionary zeal had only one source of motivation, Holy Scripture. Few missionaries have been his equal.

We have a feeling that if St Patrick had returned to life in the Sixteenth Century he would have found happy relationships in Martin Luther's Wittenberg.

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<sup>i</sup> Taken from an article by N.S. Tjernagel, Christian News, March 10, 2014, *edited*