

The Man Behind Saint Patrick's Day

On March 17, many around the world will celebrate Saint Patrick's Day. The real Patrick was a bold evangelist who lived during the fifth century and was persecuted for his faith while sharing the gospel among the Druids in Ireland. Later, shamrocks and mythological leprechauns would creep into the holiday celebrations of Saint Patrick's Day.

Patrick's life was spent in hardship. Just before he turned 16, his family's holiday villa in Britain was raided by Irish pirates who kidnapped Patrick and sold him into slavery in Ireland. Though raised in a Christian home, Patrick came to faith in Christ during his time in slavery. In his autobiography, he wrote, ***"The Lord opened my senses to my unbelief, so that ... I might remember my many sins; and accordingly, I might turn to the Lord my God with all my heart."***

Patrick was forced to be a herdsman, but his faith in God grew as he prayed while shepherding flocks. After six years as a slave, Patrick escaped his slaveholders, returning to Britain and his parents. As he settled back into his home, he studied to become a priest. But one night he had a dream of a man carrying a letter with the words "The Voice of the Irish," and he heard the voices of the men he had worked with shouting for his return.

Patrick planned to return to Ireland, but his parents as well as church leaders opposed this idea as they did not think the Irish people were worth saving; additionally, the Druids in Ireland were known to torture runaway slaves. At the risk of his life, Patrick returned to Ireland and shared the gospel with his former slaveowner, who refused to hear it.

That was just the beginning of Patrick's challenges as he spread the gospel across Ireland. The Druids tried to poison Patrick; a barbarian warrior speared his chariot driver to death in an attempt to kill him; and he was often ambushed at his evangelistic events. He was even briefly enslaved again. However, Patrick faithfully shared Christ throughout Ireland until his death on March 17 in A.D. 461.