

Saint Patrick

Saint Patrick is the main patron saint of Ireland who played a vital role in the conversion (nawrócenie) of Ireland to Christianity. His original name was Maewyn Succat. He changed his name when he became a bishop.

Actually, he wasn't Irish. He was British. Historians are not sure of the exact dates of Saint Patrick's life. Some scholars claim that he was born in or around the year 385 AD in Roman Britain. When he was about 16, he was kidnapped by Irish pirates and taken as a slave to Ireland. He worked there as a shepherd. During this period of captivity, he became increasingly religious. After six years he escaped and returned to his family. Then he studied in France at the monastery of St Martin's in Tours. When he became a bishop, the Pope sent him to Ireland in 432 AD as a missionary. He preached the Gospel throughout the country for the next 40 years.

He died most probably on 17 March in 461 AD. This supposed date of his death became the date of Saint Patrick's Day – a national holiday in the Republic of Ireland.

Saint Patrick is often associated with the symbol of shamrock. Some historians believe that the saint used the three-leafed plant to teach the Irish people about the Holy Trinity. He used to point to the leaves and identify each as the Father, Son and Holy Spirit. But there is no evidence he actually did that.

Another popular myth connected with Saint Patrick says that he drove all the snakes out of (wypędził) Ireland. Certainly, the story is not true. Scientists prove that Ireland was never home to any snakes because the island was too cold for reptiles. The “banishing of the snakes” (wypędzenie) can be interpreted as elimination of evil or paganism from Ireland and the triumph of Christianity.



Shamrock

It is a clover with three leaves. The legend about Saint Patrick says that Saint Patrick used it to explain the concept of the Holy Trinity. He compared a clover with three leaves to one God in three persons: the Father, the Son and the Holy Spirit.

The shamrock, which was also called the “seamroy” by the Celts, was a sacred plant in ancient Ireland. It symbolized the rebirth of spring. By the seventeenth century, the shamrock had become a symbol of emerging Irish nationalism. Many Irish began to wear the shamrock as a symbol of their pride and manifestation of their displeasure with English rule.

Nowadays, it is the most popular symbol of Saint Patrick’s Day – the national holiday in the Republic of Ireland on March 17. The shamrock is also used by the second largest Irish airlines - Aer Lingus - as its logo.



Harp

The harp has been used as a political symbol of Ireland for centuries. Probably, it has been present in Ireland since at least the 10th century. The instrument was used by Irish bards to play music and tell stories. The ancient Irish kings employed a harpist to entertain them at court.

Today, a representation of the traditional harp can be found on the Presidential Seal and on many official documents, on passports, on Irish euro coins and as a logo for a lot of prominent state-supported organisations such as the National University of Ireland. It is also used by Guinness and the largest Irish airlines - Ryanair.



Leprechaun

The leprechaun is the most famous creature in the Irish folklore. The original Irish name for the leprechaun is “lobaircin,” meaning “small-bodied fellow.” Belief in leprechauns probably come from the Celtic belief in elves or fairies who could use their magical power to serve good or evil. Leprechauns are usually shown as little bearded men, wearing a green coat, a hat and smoking a pipe. They are lonely creatures who spend their time making and mending shoes. By nature the leprechaun is cunning and mischievous. It is believed that he hides a pot of gold at the end of the rainbow. If you catch the leprechaun, he may grant you three wishes for his freedom or promise to take you to his crock of gold. But eventually he will deceive you and disappear.



Celtic cross

The true origins of the cross are unknown, but there are some theories about its beginnings. Undoubtedly, the Celtic cross is connected with the Celts. They were the people who lived in Ireland in ancient times. The Celts used to make stone circles as the places of sun worship. One theory says that Christian monks used the Celtic cross to connect the sun-god idea with the christian cross to bring Irish pagans closer to God and Christianity. Another theory says it was Saint Patrick himself who incorporated the sun into the cross for the same reasons.



Claddagh ring

It is in the shape of a heart held by two hands with a crown on top of them. The Claddagh ring symbolizes love, loyalty, and friendship (the hands represent friendship, the heart represents love, and the crown represents loyalty). It comes from the Irish fishing village of Claddagh near Galway. The ring is a popular gift for friends and lovers to give each other.

