

SAINT PATRICK

Saint Patrick's name is synonymous with Ireland, and yet the historical details of Patrick's life are shrouded in legend. I have to confess that it was wee bit difficult to accept that the Patrick whom I knew growing up in Ireland did not really exist.

Due to the findings of scholarship, gone is the bishop dressed in green vestments, miter and crozier marching all over Ireland; gone is the fire at Slane to challenge the High King and druids; gone is the battle of miracles by which the druids were single-handedly defeated; gone is Patrick reaching for the shamrock to explain the Trinity; and no, Patrick didn't banish snakes from the Emerald Isle! (a medieval addition).

As the cherished stories vanish into murky myth, the fog of these legends is burned away, what appears is a fascinating story of an amazing man – a real man. The Patrick we meet in his own words is a man who deeply loves God and people, who has to deal with his own sins and weaknesses, who is lonely and hurt, but who is also deeply thankful for all that God has given him.

When did Patrick live? From the internal evidence of the Confessio, Patrick was born maybe 390; he arrived in Ireland 432 and died 17th March 493. Where was he born? South west coast of Britain (high density of Roman villas). He tells us that was about 16 years old when he arrived in Ireland as a captive.

There were two sources of light in the world of Patrick, son of Calpornius, the author of the two letters named the Confession and the Letter to Coroticus: Holy Scripture and his own dreams.

The Confession is a short document, “this is my Confession before I die.” about the length of a magazine article, yet it contains seven distinct dream narratives, and it is clear that each is seen as vitally important by Patrick himself. They are various and striking, and so vividly told that they, more than the recital of events, give liveliness and freshness to the narrative.

The Letter to **Coroticus** is a blistering denunciation of a British raider and his men. Nominally a Christian, Coroticus captured a group of Patrick’s recently baptized converts and sold them to pagans. The letter was to get Patrick into a whole heap of trouble with the bishops of Scotland and Britain. Patrick’s wrath was aimed at their sale to pagans, not at slavery. It was this letter that led to Patrick’s authority being questioned.

The most striking characteristic of Patrick’s recorded dreams, they are clear statements which need little or no interpretation. His dreams are clear and remarkably concise messages. Nether Freud nor Jung is of any relevance, at least in regards interpretation.

Patrick tells us that he didn’t have a solid education in Latin or the Church Fathers, it’s highly unlikely that he would have been appointed by Rome for any episcopal task. Patrick makes it clear that his mission is to the pagans in Ireland. Missionary activity to the barbarians was not carried out by the church in Rome at that time, and was even frowned upon due to the view that the barbarians were less than fully human.

Patrick was sent to Ireland by the Church in Britain, when his authority as bishop was questioned, he was accountable to the bishops of that region.

It wasn't until the seventh century, when the Irish church was being brought into conformity with the Roman Church, that the tradition of Patrick's connection with the Church of Rome arises. Until that time there had been substantial differences between the two churches which led to the excommunication of the Irish church: the date of Easter, the question of the need for baptism, abbots holding great jurisdiction than bishops.

The southern part of the island had conformed by 640, but the northerners held out for another fifty years. Part of this settlement involved granting Armagh the primacy of Ireland, based on its unquestioned association with Patrick.

It's from this time on that the events in Patrick's life may have been mixed up with the events in the life of Palladius, an earlier bishop sent to Ireland.

SUMMARY: From all the controversies arising from the study of Patrick I would attempt to give a reasonable summary of his life.

He was born around 390 and brought up in Britain. He was taken to Ireland when he was 16 years old, and tended sheep for six years near Killala in County Mayo. In response to a dream he made his way across Ireland to the east coast and got on a boat to Britain. He made his way home to his family. In response to a dream he was made a priest and returned to Ireland. While on a short visit to Gaul, his name was proposed to lead a missionary expedition to Ireland.

He set out around 432 as a bishop and went to the headquarters of the Ulaid and established his first church at what is now Armagh. From there he traveled predominantly in the north and west and made many converts, and trained many priests.

After some time, his integrity was questioned, resulting in an inquiry at the hands of the British bishops, but he was subsequently vindicated. As the Ulaid were pushed out of more and more territory, Patrick moved with them to spend his last days Down, from which he wrote his Confessio. He died around 460.



Thank you for this excellent in-site into St. Patrick.