

## St. Patrick

By the 3rd century AD there were already groups of Christians in England among both the Romans and the Britons who lived there, and now that the emperor himself [Emperor Constantine c.325] was a Christian, they could openly worship the Savior without fear of persecution. The new faith spread and many more people were baptized. As history testifies, this newly adopted religion of Rome would prove to be even more durable than its stone-cobbled roads.

### The Gospel in a Shamrock

It was during this new Christian era of Rome's occupation that a certain sixteen-year-old boy in Britain was kidnapped by a raiding party from Ireland. The Irish were still a pagan people and made a habit of pirating the coastal lands nearby whenever they felt like it. The boy's name was Patrick. His captors took him back to Ireland where they sold him as a slave to a farmer. He endured long, hard months of labor under a harsh owner who didn't understand a word of Patrick's language.

Though Patrick's parents were Christians, Patrick himself had never thought too much about religion and had not committed his life to Christ. Now, he had plenty of time to think about God while he slept out in the cold watching the farmer's sheep, and, with his situation both desperate and miserable, it wasn't long before he sought to be reconciled to the only One who could help. He surrendered his life to God. As Patrick wrote later in his *Confessio*, "[God] guarded me, and comforted me, as would a Father his son." Then one night he heard a voice saying to him, "See, your ship is ready." Patrick believed it was God telling him to escape. So, he risked the harsh punishment that awaited him if he were recaptured and headed for the coast. A ship bound for France "just happened" to be docked right where Patrick ended up, and the captain was willing to take him aboard if he helped with the work. He arrived in France and made his way to a monastery. He stayed and studied under the monks for a while but eventually was able to travel back home to Britain. He would have liked nothing better than to just stay there, but God had other plans.

Patrick began to sense that the Lord was calling him to take the news of the gospel to the very folk who had so brutally enslaved him. Returning to Ireland, he spent the rest of his life in a missionary effort to win the Irish tribes to Christianity. Because of the great success of his work there, we know him today as St. Patrick, and St. Patrick's Day is celebrated each year in his honor.

Irish tradition says that Patrick used the common three-leaf clover, or shamrock, to explain the concept of the Trinity to his new converts. The shamrock remains the most recognized symbol for Ireland to this day, and in the hearts of Christians everywhere it stands for God's miraculous work in and through the man named Patrick.



## Rome Gets Vandal-ized

The Roman Empire started having major problems around this time—from both inside and out. Inside, it was inflation, government corruption, and a huge government debt. Outside, it was Germans. Yes, Germans, but they weren't called that yet. "Germania," the general area we know as Germany today, was full of heathen tribes like the Ostragoths, the Visigoths, and the Vandals (from which we get our words *vandal* and *vandalism*). These tribes were uncivilized and uneducated compared to the highly advanced and educated Christian Romans, and they liked the climate of Italy and France and the loot they found when they won a city. So, they started coming down into Gaul and Italy to take over one city after another. They had no centralized government, but they had a common religion and culture, and their languages had a common base which linguists group together as being *Germanic*.

As Roman cities came increasingly under attack from these northern barbarians, Rome began to bring her troops closer to home, abandoning the more distant outposts and far-off places. Britannia fit that description. So, in 410 AD the last of the Roman troops left Britain. The towns and forts were abandoned. Latin would never again be the common tongue in that part of the world. But, hey, that left the Celts free at last after having their territory occupied by foreigners for centuries. Culturally they were still distinctly Celtic, not Roman. However, they had added Christianity to their cultural soup, along with its accompaniment of well-educated monks and priests and the language of Latin, the language used by scholars for all formal books and important records.

## The End of an Empire and the Close of an Age

Now, look at the timeline at the front of this book. Officially, Rome fell as an empire in 476 AD. Historians mark the end of the Roman Empire as the official close of ancient history. The next period—with which most of this book is concerned—is the Middle Ages. If you round up the date for the fall of the Roman Empire to 500 AD, then it's really easy to memorize the dates for the Middle Ages: 500 AD to 1500 AD, an even thousand years. That means the Middle Ages went from the *middle* of the first millennium to the *middle* of the next. Get it? That's why it's the *middle* ages... That's not really the reason for the name, but it will help the dates stick in your mind. So Rome fell, ancient history closed, and the Middle Ages began.

The beginning of the Middle Ages marks the beginning of the history of our language because, with the Romans gone, Britain was now vulnerable to the *next* invasion, the invasion that brought English to the shores of England.



AD 435. This year the Goths sacked the city of Rome, and never since have the Romans reigned in Britain. ~The Anglo-Saxon Chronicle