

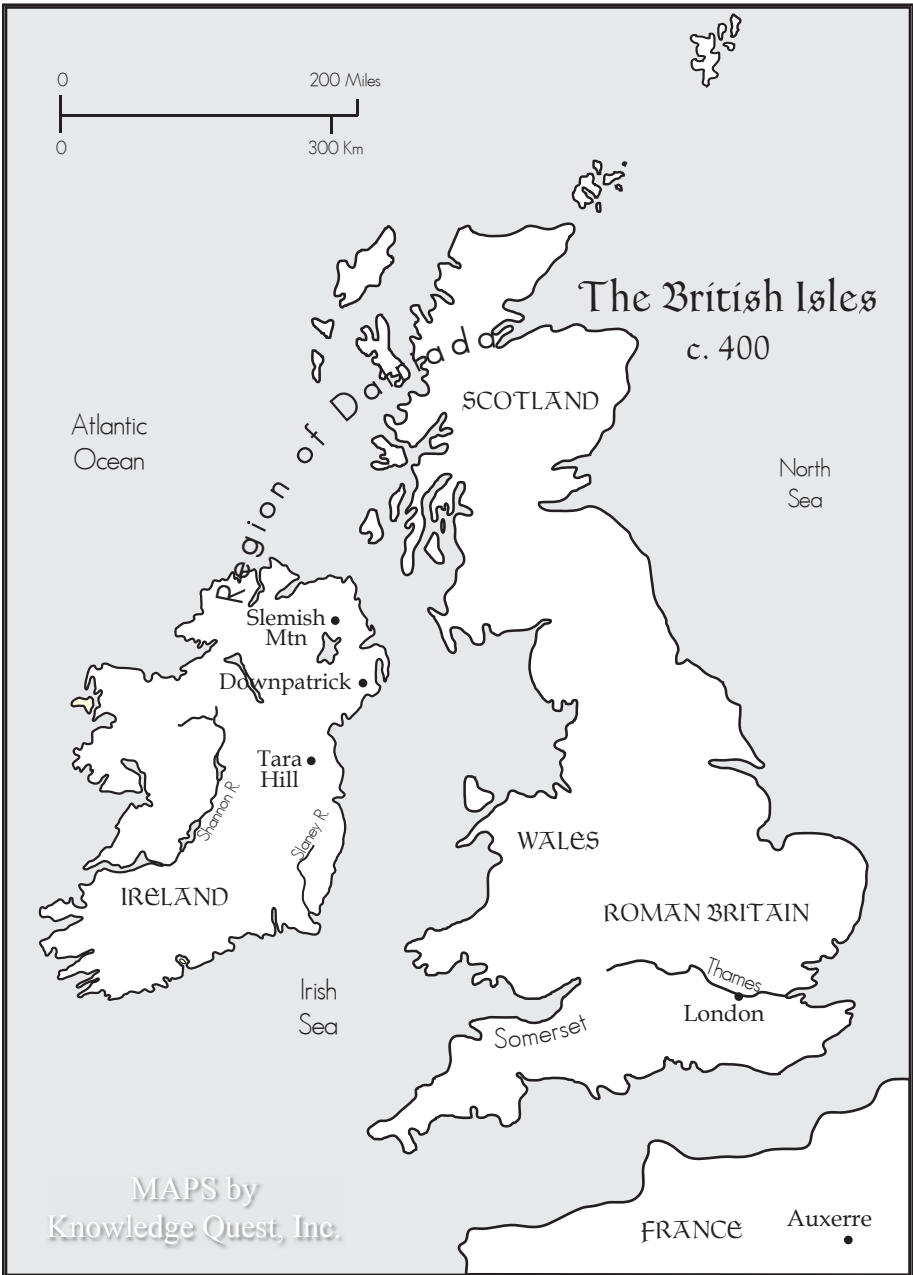


ST. PATRICK  
Sower of Light in Ireland  
*by Jennaya Dunlap*



# What *Really* Happened During the Middle Ages

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# I

## ST. PATRICK

### Sower of Light in Ireland

*By Jennaya Dunlap*

### The Land of Bondage

*Northern Ireland, around 432AD*



Patrick's heartbeat quickened to the pace of his feet as every step took him closer to the palisade in Dalriada, Ireland. Memories, now nearly forty years old, of slavery under Miliucc, the cruel chieftain king who ruled the region, came back to him as he trod along the wooded trail. He had escaped long ago, and now he was coming back to buy his freedom, so he could walk the land a truly free man.

"What will they do to you?" Benen lifted anxious eyes to search Patrick's troubled face. This youthful son of another Irish chieftain was a new convert to Christianity, eager and loyal, but none of the trials that he had seen since he had joined Patrick could compare to the one that was coming.

"Be not afraid, Benen." Patrick put his arm around the

youth's shoulders as they walked. "God is with us and will protect us. This must be done in order for the Lord's work to be carried out unhindered."

Still, fearful thoughts pressed into his own mind. *They could kill you, Patrick. You are an escaped slave — by law you can be put to death. This is pure foolishness.*

The palisade was in view as they came out of the clearing. Patrick's heart pounded like the Irish war drums. Benen sung the words of the Lord's Prayer softly beside him, his voice shaky. Patrick drowned his thoughts in prayer — God had delivered them before and he prayed He would do it again.

As they approached the gates of the palisade, a strong odor of smoke met their noses. "Patrick, look! Smoke!" Benen halted and pointed, grabbing Patrick's attention. "It's coming from the center of the palisade! What could this mean?"

Patrick lifted his eyes and saw thick black smoke rising from Miliucc's fortress. Orange flames leapt from the walls, consuming them quickly. Bewildered, he stopped a young Irish slave who was fleeing from the fire. "What is the meaning of this fire?" he asked urgently.

"Master Miliucc heard that a former slave of his was coming, and he was afraid, and has gathered his possessions into his house with him and lit it on fire."

"But why?" Patrick's voice revealed his shock at the news.

"Because he heard that the slave was coming to convert him to his God," the slave told him, quivering. He turned and ran toward the woods.

"He could not bear to be converted, even in his old

age. He would rather die than be subjected to Christ's ways." Patrick watched, dazed, as the flames licked at Miliucc's futile earthly glory. As the choking, black smoke drifted toward them, he fell to his knees, shaken. What was God showing him now? His mind went back to that time so many years ago, when he first became a slave....

## From Wealth to Slavery

*Slemish Mountain, Northern Ireland, around 395AD*

The sheep wandered about the beautiful green hillside, grazing on the lush Irish grass. Patrick sat on the damp ground, his staff lying beside him. His stomach was in a constant turmoil from hunger and thirst, and the cold mountain air aggravated the pain of the beating the head herdsman had given him recently. It would be weeks now before he could collect provisions down in the village.

Could it have been so few months ago that the sixteen-year-old youth had sat at his father's banquet table in Somerset of Roman Britain, dressed in finery and enjoying his parents' wealthy position? He had grown up wealthy, with little restraint, the son of a civil magistrate and tax collector. His grandfather had taught him about Christianity, but he had never taken it seriously.

All the pain of the past months came back as the memories flooded him. The Irish raiders' boats, closing in to the shore, the fire, killing and destruction that had suddenly surrounded him as the warriors, armed with spears and

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helmets, tore through the town, now unprotected since the Roman legions had fled the land...

Patrick could vividly remember the pounding in his heart as he ran through the streets, followed closely by his pagan pursuers. They were faster than he was, and soon he was bound with ropes and forced onto a waiting boat. He had known even then what awaited him in Ireland – slavery and all the horrors and drudgery that came with it.

He cringed even now, to think of the terrible treatment he had gotten on the way to the Irish shores, and on the journey to the northern kingdom of the cruel, warlike chieftain, Miliucc. He had been used to a life of ease and comfort, to the disdain and anger of the herdsman in whose charge he had been put. Many a time would Patrick be beaten for doing a job wrong or carelessly.

*I deserve this*, he had told himself. *I have sinned against God and rejected His ways.* The admonishing words of his Christian grandfather came to his mind in his despair, and he cried out to God aloud. “O Lord God, help me! Help me to repent and to follow Your ways! Give me strength in this hour of trials! Listen to my plea, O God!”

He had lain awake that night, under the stars, deep in prayer, as a new hope and faith came over him.

During the six long years of slavery that followed, he was beaten and mistreated as much as ever, but he found great solace in his walk with God. Throughout the cold days, spent with his sheep in the mountains, he prayed for hours at a time. He got up long before daybreak, even in the worst of weather, to continue praying and meditating on what he had learned.

One night, six years after the beginning of his enslavement, he had just gone to sleep on the mist-covered hill where he had been conversing with his Savior.

*Patrick!* His eyes flew open as he heard his name called in the darkness. He waited in silence for a moment, but nothing happened, and he drifted back to sleep. *Patrick!* The voice was distinct and urgent. As Patrick opened his eyes once more, a picture passed before his eyes — a ship sailing the open waters. *Come and see, for your ship is ready for you,* the voice spoke clearly.

He sat up straight and threw off his tattered cloak. This was the second vision telling him to return home. Perhaps it was now time to make his escape. He hurried up the path to the top of the hill, looking out over the quiet valley, and here he kneeled to pray, under the vast spread of the night sky.

The high, sweet call of a bird, fluttering about nearby, brought Patrick out of a light slumber with a start. He had fallen asleep, still on his knees. He stood for a moment in the pre-dawn cool, watching as the first streaks of light colored the distant horizon. In his heart he prayed still, asking for guidance. The first rays of sun shone on his face, lighting up the drops of dew on the grass. *Go now — it is time.* The moment had come.

Patrick quickly found his staff and the ragged bag of provisions that he had collected only yesterday, and he turned to leave.

## The Escape

Days of travel wearied Patrick, but the visions God had

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given him came back to his mind to renew his courage. He crossed the mountains, avoiding roads and civilized areas lest he be discovered and recaptured. Mile after mile fell behind him, and at last he could smell the salt in the air. Gulls flew about above him with their mournful cries. He had reached the sea at last.

Dogs barked in the distance as Patrick approached the port. He pushed back his wind-whipped hair to catch a glimpse of the trading ship that was preparing to sail. His heart jumped, for it was the same ship he had seen so clearly in his vision! If he had had any doubts before that God's hand was guiding him, he entertained them no longer.

The excitement inside him grew as he drew nearer to the ship. The sailors busily tied up Irish hounds to carry onboard, to trade when the ship arrived in Britain. Two men looked up as Patrick came toward them, and one hurried to bring the captain.

The captain, a gruff man with wild hair pulled back in a sailor-style knot, stepped forward as Patrick reached them. "What is it you want, youth?" he asked roughly.

Patrick felt his heart pounding, but he spoke boldly. "My God has shown me in a vision that I am to go on this ship to Britain."

The captain and the sailors exchanged knowing looks and burst into laughter. "What will you pay us?" the captain demanded.

"I have the fare for passage, right here."

"But we do not want you or your God to get on this ship. You'll have to go elsewhere." The other sailors laughed roughly



again.

“But God has shown me that I must go on *this* ship,” Patrick answered calmly. “I’ll kneel over there and pray for a while, to see if He will change your minds.” With this he strode some distance away and knelt by a rock, as the waves moved in and out around him.

*You led me to this ship, O Lord. I know you won’t fail me now. You can change the minds of these men.* Renewed confidence filled his heart as he prayed. Perhaps he should approach them once again to request passage. If this was God’s plan, he could face the jeering and taunting.

Footsteps sounded in the shifting sand behind him. A sailor called out to him, several feet away. “The captain says we’ll take you anyway. Hurry now – the tide is coming in.”

“Thank you, Lord,” Patrick said aloud as he followed the sailor back toward the ship. He boarded the ship in haste and was relieved when it set out quickly, for now there was no time for the men to change their minds.

For three days the ship traveled on the sea, blown by the gale that greeted them from further out. Patrick helped the sailors with their work but spent his free time in a solitary place, deep in prayer, while the pagan sailors drank and mocked him and his love for Christ. The captain particularly disdained his faith and mocked him mercilessly.

On the third day they had reached land, but it was not the English port at which they had intended to pull in. Wilderness covered the shoreline for as far as Patrick could see.

As they pulled the boat to shore on a sandy ledge, the sailors exchanged frightened looks. “We’ve landed in Gaul,”

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one of them said. "Now we'll never reach Britain."

The men explored along the shore, looking for signs of civilization, but it was isolated and thickly forested, without a sign of other humans. The supplies on the ship grew scarce as days turned into weeks. The hungry sailors scoured the land for food, but with little success.

One morning, as they gathered wood to make a fire by the small shelter they had built, Patrick, as was his habit, retreated to the woods to pray. As the sun lit up the shore in dazzling orange light, he walked back toward the shelter. Even from a distance he could see the captain coming toward him.

His face held the same cruel, taunting look, but it was now mixed with anxiety and desperation. He stepped in front of Patrick. "What have you to say for yourself now, Christian? You boast that your God is all-powerful. We're starving to death, and we may not survive to sail back home."

"Nothing is impossible with God," Patrick answered him calmly. "Turn your heart to Him, and He will provide us with food for our journey." With this he knelt down again and beseeched God to bring them food.

He could still feel the sailors' disdainful glares as he stepped over to the fire to warm himself, but they were silent. There was no food, and the men, weakened from the lack of it, spent the morning close to the fire, arguing among themselves. Patrick stood up and turned to face the men.

"Before noon you will have food in great bounty. The Lord will have mercy on you." No one spoke, and for a moment the only sound was the crackling of the logs and the crashing of the waves on the nearby shore.

Patrick turned and walked toward the beach to spend some quiet time with God. The sun was nearly at its highest when he returned, with peace in his heart and renewed strength and confidence. He stepped quietly into the camp and sat down.

“Where is the food you promised?” a sailor asked. “Did your God give it to you at the beach?” A few laughed, but most of the men remained sober.

Patrick opened his mouth to speak, but a loud and continuous grunting grabbed the men’s attention. Large numbers of pigs rushed down the hill from the woods, covering the path thickly and blocking the way into the forest. The sailors jumped up, grabbing their spears with joy.

Evening came, and the men were still busy. In spite of the abundance of food, they ate comparatively little, and even the amount they stored seemed little to Patrick. Much of the meat they sacrificed, burning it to honor their pagan gods. Patrick felt God’s anger at the men for their ungratefulness, and he retreated to a dark corner of the ship to pray, while the men loaded it again.

### Beckoned to Return

Patrick tossed about on his bed, unable to sleep in spite of his weariness. His mind went over the travels of the last year, before he had arrived again on British shores. He had returned to his relatives and received a royal welcome. They had thrown a feast for him and heaped gifts upon him, yet somehow he did not feel content. He spent much time in prayer

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and now in reading the Bible, but God had not yet shown him what He wanted.

One night he drifted off to sleep at last, tired from another day of poring over his books, trying to make up for lost learning. A voice called his name, as clearly as in the vision in Ireland. *Patrick! Patrick!*

Before his eyes, he could see the people of Ireland, yearning for hope and light. A young man stepped forward from among them, carrying letters, as if from many of these people. One of these opened before him, so he could see the words on the page. "I am the voice of Ireland," it read. One person and another, and then everyone, cried out to him. "We beseech thee, holy youth, to return and walk among us again."

Tears flowed from his eyes, and he woke before he could read any further. He sat up, choked with emotion and tears. For hours he could not control them, and he prayed to God as he lay awake, begging Him to show him what His plans were.

Early in the morning he opened his books to study, but he could not bring himself to it. The words in the vision passed through his mind over and over, disturbing him greatly. He went through the day as if in a daze, and he was glad when night fell and he could rest.

As he slept, he again saw the Irish people, begging him to come among them again. He could hear their pleas, but he could not understand the words they spoke. Above it another voice spoke. "He that has laid down His life for thee, it is He that speaketh in thee."

He awoke with the words still flowing through his mind. A certainty came over him and he knew now that he

must return to Ireland. Out his window, he could hear the first morning birds. He sat down by it and reached for the Scriptures on his table.

### Easter on Tara Hill

The wind stirred up Patrick's unkempt hair as he stood on the deck and gazed at the distant shore, still only a light speck on the far horizon. The ship rocked on the high waves as he held to the slimy rails. Ireland, at last, after so many years of waiting!

He had gone to a monastery in the town of Auxerre to study for the priesthood, not long after he had had his vision. But church politics had held him back from his calling for so long. Nearly forty years had passed since he had last set foot in the land where he had spent six years in slavery, and now he returned as a bishop.

Patrick met with opposition from the druids and chieftains nearly as soon as he set foot on Irish shores at the mouth of the Slaney River. The first man who showed interest in turning to Christianity committed suicide, and several times, for months at a time, druids and chieftains imprisoned him. The man who had been sent before him to be the bishop of Ireland had fled in terror, but Patrick stood his ground.

Benen, a chief's son, was one of his first converts. He listened with rapt attention as Patrick shared the message of the Gospel. When he had finished, Benen asked one question after another.

The next morning, as the sun rose slowly above the



horizon, spreading the sky with glorious colors, Patrick got up and awakened his companions, saying it was time to continue on their journey.

As they walked past the crude dwellings toward the hills beyond, Benen rushed toward them, his face alight in the dawn glow. He fell to his knees at Patrick's feet.

"Please allow me to come with you, Patrick, so I can learn more about this wonderful Jesus you told us about last night," he begged. "I want to serve Him, like you do."

Patrick looked at him seriously. "If you come with us you will face the same trials as we do. I will be able to spare you nothing of the hardships that may await us."

"You say that your God protects those who follow Him," Benen answered. "I'm not afraid — please let me come with you."

As he was talking to Patrick, the chief and other important men came and urged him to stay, lest his life be endangered. Benen refused and replied, "Nothing will sever me from this man whom God has chosen. I believe God wants me to go with him."

Patrick looked at the chieftain. "Allow him to have his way. He shall be heir to my sacred mission." At last the chieftain consented, and Benen set out with Patrick.

He became one of the most faithful Irish Christians, and he used his special gift for music to teach hymns and Psalms to new believers.

After discovering that Miliucc had committed suicide, Patrick headed toward Tara, where Loiguire, the high king, ruled, surrounded by his best druids. He arrived shortly before

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the night of the pagan Easter festival, when the high king annually lit a big bonfire and declared that light had returned to the earth at his command.

On that night, shortly before it came time for the king to light his bonfire, Patrick and his men gathered on a hill within sight of Tara and gathered wood to build their own bonfire in God's name. With trembling fingers, Patrick lit a torch and held it next to the heap of logs. In moments, flames caught onto the logs and spread, leaping high in the moonless sky. Benen started into a hymn, and soon they had joined hands around the bonfire, singing about Christ's resurrection.

In the palisade in Tara, King Loiguire raised the torch his druid handed to him, preparing to light the pagan bonfire. "Look," someone shouted, pointing toward the hill in the distance. "Another bonfire! Someone has already lit the first Easter bonfire!"

The king trembled with fear. Who would dare to defy the ancient pagan customs of the land? He called together his druid advisors, and one of them stepped forward with terror on his face. "O king, live forever. The prophecies of old times warn that if the fire is not put out this very night, it will spread throughout this land, and our traditions will be destroyed by the man who lit it and his coming kingdom."

"Never!" The king's face blackened with rage. "Prepare me twenty-seven chariots and gather all my druids and warriors together! We must confront and destroy this man!"

The horses, hitched to the chariots, tore through the Irish countryside, toward the hill where Patrick and his men added more logs to the fire, still singing. Patrick stood up, his heart



trembling within him as he turned to face the angry men. His companions hung back in terror, all except Benen, who stood by his teacher's side.

Lochru, the king's highest druid, stepped forward to demand that Patrick put out the fire. His evil eyes were filled with hate as he insulted Patrick and his faith. Patrick waited calmly as arrogant words were tossed upon him, but when Lochru heaped slanderous insults on his precious Lord, he stepped forward, anger warming his heart.

His eyes, gleaming with God's light and presence, met the druid's in a steady gaze. Forgetting his fears, he shouted out in a powerful voice, "O Lord, You can do all things, and You have sent me here to spread Your Word. May this evil man who blasphemes You and Your Holy Name be picked up and die through Your power!"

He stood in silence, surprised by his own boldness. Suddenly, Lochru was catapulted in the air and fell back onto the ground with great force. A warrior bent over him. "He's dead!" he shouted.

The king glared angrily at Patrick. "Seize him and kill him!" he cried out, pointing. Fearfully, the warriors turned toward Patrick.

The boldness in Patrick's heart did not die out. "May God arise and His enemies be scattered!" he declared. Confusion and chaos followed, as the earth began to shake. Horses spooked and galloped away, leaving the king's men stranded as the chariots twisted and broke.

The king trembled as he fell to his knees, his eyes filled with a mixture of anger and fear. His men knelt too, while

Patrick thanked God aloud for His deliverance.

King Loiguire never did become a Christian, but his opposition slowly died out as his fear of God's power grew. Several of his sons and daughters and some of his men were converted, however, and the way opened for Patrick's work.

### Missionary to the Irish

Ireland at that time was made up of many small kingdoms, each with its own king or chieftain, for towns did not yet exist in the country. They fiercely guarded their pagan ways and were hostile to Patrick's missionary efforts. Some of the kings were converted and often the people in the kingdom followed suit, but this was not always the case. Those who became Christians sometimes allowed their sons to travel with him, to be taught by him, in honor of an ancient custom. He usually brought gifts to the kings, in return for the freedom to spread the Gospel in their lands.

One day he was traveling on a lonely road in one of these kingdoms, having paid the king in full. Benen was with him, and so were many other people, some of them converts and others asking eager questions about Christianity. They pulled with them a cart with all their belongings.

Suddenly, a thunder of hoofbeats pounded toward them on the road behind them. The travelers turned to look, and their hearts thumped with horror. The king's warriors were approaching speedily on horseback, armed with spears and other weapons. The king himself rode between them.

Some of the people who were with Patrick fled, but he and his faithful companions stood fearlessly on the road. The horses snorted and reared as they were pulled to a stop nearby, and the warriors jumped off, their spears drawn.

“What is it you want with me?” Patrick confronted the king in a calm, clear voice. “I have paid all that you asked for, and you granted me your consent to start a mission in this kingdom.”

“I changed my mind – you came to destroy our old ways and replace them with your worthless religion!” the king shouted. He turned to his warriors. “Seize this man and his companions, and kill them.”

The warriors grabbed Patrick’s arms and held them in an iron grip, preparing to kill him. Patrick cried out aloud to God. “Oh my God, You have created this earth and everything in it. Save us in this hour of death, for You have shown me that You have more for me to do on earth.”

The king’s bloodshot eyes filled with rage, but the hands that held his reins trembled. At his orders, the armed men seized hold of the cart and took the bags from the travelers’ shoulders, making off with them. Patrick’s arms and legs were tied back and bound with iron, along with those of his companions. They were dragged to a dark jailhouse near the king’s dwelling.

Patrick fell to his knees in the darkness. He thanked God for his life and beseeched Him to guard over them still and help them to be freed.

He spent two weeks in prison before some dear friends, probably Irish converts, convinced the king to let him and his

men go. Patrick stepped into the sunlight again and thanked God for His intervention, as he looked around once more at the rich green hills of his adopted country. His belongings were returned, and, once more, he gathered his friends and companions and went on his way.

God blessed him and prospered his mission, and many hardworking Irish in kingdoms all over turned to Christ. Patrick baptized them and continued to teach them. When he had made many converts in one kingdom, he left a trusted Irish Christian in charge of teaching and helping them and went on to the next province or kingdom.

Remembering the miserable years of his own slavery, he fought against the slave trade in Ireland and eventually succeeded in abolishing it entirely, but not before many long years of perseverance. He was the first known person to speak out against slavery, at a time when almost no one saw anything wrong with the cruel practice.

Little did he know that the next slaveholders he would confront would be not from Ireland, but from Wales, another part of the British Isles.

### Coroticus

Hoofbeats clattered on loose rocks in the Irish hills beyond the site of the new church, where new converts were at work raising the stone walls and preparing to lay the rafters. Patrick set down the heavy stones he had in his arms, turning to see what the other men were watching. The rider tore toward them at a frenzied speed, his head bent forward with

concentration.

Patrick hurried down the hill with a pounding heart. It could only be bad tidings that this man, a young priest whom he had discipled for years, from a nearby coastal kingdom, had come to convey. He offered a steadying hand as the man slid from the horse's bare back, sweating and out of breath.

"What brings you here, brother?" Patrick asked anxiously, offering the man water from the heavy jug.

"Terrible – terrible news," the man gasped out between heavy breaths.

"Tell me, what has happened?"

"A Welsh warlord, Coroticus, and his men – they raided our kingdom as I was conducting baptisms for new converts." He paused, his eyes full of anguish and anger. "They have killed so many of our men, and they have taken the women and children as slaves. I escaped, and so did a few others, but they have wrought so much death and destruction!"

"How dare they do such an evil deed – and they call themselves Christians. They blaspheme against God's Name! Where have they gone?"

"Back toward the coast," the priest told him. "Patrick, we must do something! We cannot let them get away with this!"

Patrick fell to his knees and prayed aloud. He wept openly about the vicious attack on these new children of God. What should he do? As he prayed, suddenly he knew what must be done.

"Take several of my trusted presbyters with you, and go after them. Beseech them to let these converts go, and report to me what they say. May God be with you and help your words

to prevail.”

It was not long before they returned, weary and frustrated. Coroticus and his men had only jeered at the presbyters and did not listen to their pleas. Patrick went into the house where he was staying and wrote a letter of excommunication to Coroticus and the men who had carried out his cruel orders, so that no Christians would associate with them.

The letter explained what they had done in patient detail, condemning it with great indignation. Even though he was the bishop of Ireland, and not of Wales, he felt that it was the only way to prevent more such raids, but it caused resentment among the people who read it in Britain.

### Rest at Last

By the year 457AD, Patrick had worked among the Irish for twenty-five years. We don't know exactly how old he was by then, but he was probably somewhere in his seventies. Tired and worn-out, he returned to Downpatrick, the place where he had first arrived on Irish shores, so many years ago, and there he lived for the last few years of his life.

He died on March 17, around 460AD, though the exact year of his death is still disputed. The Ireland he saw when he first arrived there as a slave and the country it was at the time of his death were vastly different.

Christianity now had a firm hold on the Irish nation. Patrick had founded 300 churches in kingdoms across the country and brought more than 120,000 people to Christ. Irish

slavery had ended, and so had human sacrifices, and women and the very poor were no longer so downtrodden. And the writings from Europe that he had preserved survived throughout the Dark Ages, when much of the wisdom people had gained up to that time was lost in this time of hardship and ignorance.

Seeing all that he had accomplished, it is easy to understand why Ireland still cherishes him in memory, celebrating St. Patrick's Day on March 17<sup>th</sup> every year in honor of him.

*About the author:*

Jennaya Rose Dunlap wrote this story at the age of 15. Jennaya, now 16, is home schooled and the editor of a magazine for home schooled girls, ages 8 to 18, *Roses In God's Garden*, published by LightHome Ministries, [www.lighthome.net](http://www.lighthome.net). She is also the author of *Against All Odds*, a researched historical novel set in World War II Poland under Nazi occupation, published as a serial story in her magazine. Jennaya enjoys writing and researching, drawing, singing, playing violin, horseback riding, and discovering Eastern European folk songs on the Internet. She enjoys spending time with her family on their acre beside a meadow with a mountain view, in California.

