

17 March

**Patrick
Bishop, Missionary,
Patron of Ireland c.460**

Almighty God, who in your providence chose your servant Patrick to be the apostle of the Irish people: keep alive in us the fire of the faith he kindled and strengthen us in our pilgrimage towards the light of everlasting life; through Jesus Christ our Lord.

Amen.

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Patrick was a Romano-Briton born in about the year 390 of Christian parents in the latter years of the Roman Empire in Britain. The exact place of his birth – named by him in his *Confession* as Banaven Taberniae – has never been identified. Claims from places in West Britain as far apart as Dumbarton and Cornwall have been made; present day opinion favours the neighbourhood of Carlisle.

He was captured by Irish raiders when he was sixteen years old and taken to Ireland as a slave. After six years, he escaped and seems to have gone to continental Europe. He eventually found his way back to his own family, where his previously nominal Christian faith grew and matured. He returned to Gaul and was there trained as a priest and much influenced by the form of monasticism evolving under Martin of Tours. When he was in his early forties, he returned to Ireland as a Bishop, ministering first at Saul near Downpatrick, and later making his base at Armagh, which became the centre of his See. He evangelised the people of the land by walking all over the island, gently bringing men and women to a knowledge of Christ. Although he faced fierce opposition and possible persecution, he continued his missionary journeys.

Patrick left two pieces of writing which are accepted as genuine, his *Confession* and a *Letter to Coroticus*. These are of immense value as they reveal Patrick the man, humble and aware that all he achieved was by the grace of Christ. Irish Christians today, of all traditions, equally identify with this holy man and draw inspiration from his life and writings. Despite being unsuccessful in his attempts to establish the diocesan system he had experienced in Gaul, his monastic foundations proved to be the infrastructure required to maintain the faith after his death, which occurred on this day in the year 461.

Sourced from 'Exciting Holiness'