



# The Legend of St. Patrick and the Shamrock

Share this legend with your student to help them understand how St. Patrick, the patron saint of Ireland, taught the pagan king of Ireland about the mystery of the Holy Trinity.

As a young boy, Patrick was captured by pirates and taken to Ireland, where he was forced to work as a shepherd for six years. Alone, cold, and forced into slavery far from home in Britain, Patrick turned to God to help him through his hardships. Patrick escaped by convincing the captain of a cargo ship to let him join the crew. Although the captain realized that Patrick was a runaway slave, he took pity on him. When Patrick finally returned home, his family saw that he had changed. They saw his faith. Patrick told them that he was going to serve God as a priest. He wanted to return to Ireland some day to convert the Irish people from their pagan religious practices of worshipping the sun, fire, and magic.

Patrick was such a wonderful priest and powerful speaker that he was ordained a bishop. He was sent to Ireland as a missionary when he was 42. Soon, new believers joined him. Together they made their way to Tara, the castle of the most powerful Irish king. Patrick knew that if he could convince the king of God's love and goodness, then the people of Ireland would follow him.

On the night before Easter, Patrick and his followers stopped on a hillside to celebrate the Easter Vigil. They gathered branches and lit an enormous Easter fire that could be seen for miles. Within a short time, they were arrested and dragged before the king. The Irish people were preparing to celebrate the feast of Tara, an important pagan festival honoring the god of fire. The land was to remain in darkness until the Tara fire was lit at the castle. By lighting their Easter fire, Patrick and his companions had unknowingly violated an important pagan law!

Patrick listened to the accusations against him. Then he began to speak about God's love for all people. He used a shamrock, which grows plentifully in Ireland, to teach the mystery of the Holy Trinity. Patrick explained that the three leaves on one stem represented the three Persons in one God—the Father, the Son, and the Holy Spirit.

The Irish king listened carefully to Patrick's teaching. He saw how sincere Patrick was and what a faithful believer he was. The king gave Patrick permission to preach throughout Ireland. He built churches and parishes everywhere he went. And like the shamrock, Christianity took root in Ireland.