



Celebrate! Holidays In The U.S.A.

St. Patrick's Day

(March 17 or the preceding Saturday)

Many people who immigrated to the United States have come from Ireland. More than one-half of the soldiers who fought in the Revolutionary War had Irish ancestors. Today, it is said, Irish descendants in the United States put on a noisier and bigger St. Patrick's Day celebration than the people in Ireland. Every year on March 17 or the preceding Saturday, cities with a large population of Irish Americans have parades. Green is one of the national colors of Ireland and also one of the signs of spring. Green stripes are painted on the streets where the parade will travel. People wear green shirts, ties, hair ribbons and hats. Many American bars even serve green beer on that day!

Just like many other holidays in the United States, St. Patrick's Day has its origins in ancient times. A young boy named Patrick lived in the British Isles, a land that had been invaded and conquered first by the Romans and then by Germanic tribes. Patrick was captured and taken as a slave from the British Isles to what is now Ireland. He lived there for several years herding sheep. He was a religious boy and he prayed that he would someday return to his homeland.

Legend has it that one night while he was praying, a voice told him to escape from the farm, and find a ship that was waiting for him two hundred miles away. Patrick got to the ship, sailed to Europe, and disembarked in what is now probably France. He led several of the ship's crew through a dangerous forest, praying all the time. Neither Patrick nor any member of his crew was captured. When some of the men were about to die of starvation, wild animals appeared for them to eat. Events such as these appeared to be miracles and gave rise to later legends surrounding Patrick.

At home, Patrick felt that he was called by God to perform an important mission. He believed it was his duty to go back to Ireland and convert the Celtic people to the Christian religion.

Patrick arrived in Ireland and became a missionary, travelling from village to village and talking about his faith. Once, several members of a tribe approached Patrick and told him that they found it difficult to understand and believe in the Holy Trinity. Patrick thought a moment, then stooped down and picked one of the plentiful shamrocks growing wild around Ireland. "Here are three leaves," he said, "yet it is one plant. Imagine the Father, Son and the Holy Spirit as each of these leaves. Here they are, yet they are one plant." The tribesmen understood, because Patrick had used a familiar object to explain. From that time on, the shamrock has been a revered symbol of Ireland.

Stories of Saint Patrick, for by then he was a saint, reached far and wide. His most famous feat is forcing the snakes out of the entire country of Ireland. Even though there are many different stories about how he accomplished such a task, it is probably not true.

St. Patrick died on March 17 and the Irish people set aside the day to mourn. He became the patron saint of Ireland. Mourning turned to commemorating him and celebrating his life. Americans have inherited this custom. On St. Patrick's Day in the United States, millions of people celebrate whether they are Irish or not!

The Leprechaun

The leprechaun is a tiny elf connected with St. Patrick's Day. The word 'leprechaun' is from a mixture of 'luchorpan' or 'small person' and a word meaning 'one-shoemaker.' As a St. Patrick's Day symbol, the leprechaun is a smiling, merry little elf. However, legend tells us that he is always grumpy, untrustworthy and very tricky. In ancient myths, the leprechaun guards a hidden pot of gold which humans try to find but without success. As one story goes, an Irishman caught a leprechaun, managed to make him reveal which tree his pot of gold was buried under. The Irishman tied a red handkerchief around the trunk of it so he would remember the location when he went away to find a shovel. When he returned, he found that the leprechaun had tied a red handkerchief exactly like his own around every other tree in the forest!

*May the road rise up to meet you,
may the wind be always at your back,
May the sun shine warm upon your face,
and the rain fall soft upon your fields,
and until we meet again,
May God hold you in the palm of His hand.*

An Irish blessing

Embassy of the United States of America