

**Saint Patrick, 389-461**  
**Feast Day March 17**

How do you teach a classroom that's as big as a whole country? How do you teach a whole country about God? St. Patrick's classroom was the whole country of Ireland and his lesson was the good news of Jesus Christ. How in the world did he do it? Well, it was only possible because he depended totally on God.

But letting God give him strength and direction didn't always come naturally to St. Patrick. That was a lesson he had to learn himself. And he didn't get to learn it from understanding, gentle teachers in a comfortable classroom. He learned it from a band of thieving, roving pirates.

Although we think of Ireland when we talk about St. Patrick, he wasn't actually born in Ireland. He was born in Britain, perhaps even in Scotland. His father was a deacon, and his grandfather had been a priest. But Patrick didn't think too much about God. We don't really know why this was. He probably thought he didn't need God. He probably thought other things could bring him as much happiness as God could. God just wasn't on Patrick's mind as he roamed the fields of his homeland, tending animals and learning how to be a man.

But his happy, carefree life ended one day when crowds of strangers appeared on the horizon. They looked dangerous and frightening, and they were. They were pirates and thieves, on their way to capture slaves to take back to Ireland. Patrick was one of those hundreds of captives. He was snatched from his family and his home. He was taken from all of his future hopes and dreams. Patrick was thrown on a ship, bound in chains, and taken over the sea to Ireland. He was sixteen years old. For six years, Patrick was a slave in Ireland. He was put to work watching sheep and cattle. Patrick had just enough food to live on, and when he wasn't working, he tried to rest in tiny huts that were damp and cold.

But something strange and wonderful happened in Ireland. All alone, frightened for his life, and among people who worshiped trees and stones, Patrick opened his heart to God. That happens to a lot of us, doesn't it? When everything's going great, we don't have any time for God. But then something awful and painful happens, and there we are, back at God's feet.

During those years, Patrick started to pray. He thought about God all the time, and it gave him peace of mind. He knew that no matter how much he was suffering, God loved him.

Eventually, Patrick escaped from slavery and traveled to France, which in those days was called Gaul. We're not sure exactly how much time Patrick spent in Gaul. But it was enough time for him to draw closer to God as he prayed and studied in a monastery.

One night, deep in a dreamy vision, Patrick heard voices. He heard many voices, joined together, pleading with him. "Come back," the voices cried, "come back and walk once more among us."

Patrick knew it was the Irish people calling him.

Strengthened by the courage that only God can give, Patrick went back. He returned to the very people who had stolen him from his family, worked him mercilessly as a slave, and knew little, if anything, about the love of the true God.

Before he left Gaul, Patrick was made the bishop of Ireland. He then traveled across the sea to teach Ireland about Jesus Christ.

It wasn't easy. The people of Ireland practiced pagan religions. They worshiped nature, and they practiced magic. They feared the spirits they believed lived in the woods. The Irish people believed they could bring evil spirits down on those they wanted to harm.

Patrick had a big job ahead of him. He had to show a country full of students that there was no point in worshiping nature. Trees can't forgive your sins or teach you how to love. The sun, as powerful as it is, could not have created the world. Patrick explained things using simple examples that people could easily understand. For example, he used the three-leaf clover to show people how there could be three persons in one God.

Patrick preached to huge crowds and small villages. He preached to kings and princes. He preached in the open air, and he preached in huts. Patrick never stopped preaching, and he never stopped teaching. He couldn't stop—the whole country of Ireland was his classroom, and he couldn't afford to miss even one student!

Soon, Patrick had help. Men became priests and monks. Women became nuns. Wherever they lived, those monks and nuns settled in monasteries and set up schools. More students were being reached every day.

But, of course, the greatest help Patrick had was from God.

When he was young, Patrick had forgotten God, but that would never happen again. He knew that God supported him in every step he took. God gave Patrick the courage to speak, even when Patrick was in danger of being hurt by pagan priests who didn't want to lose their power over the people.

Patrick's most famous prayer shows us how close he was to God. It's called "St. Patrick's Breastplate." A breastplate is the piece of armor that protects a soldier's heart from harm.

*Christ with me, Christ before me, Christ behind me, Christ within me, Christ beneath me, Christ above me, Christ at my right, Christ at my left.*

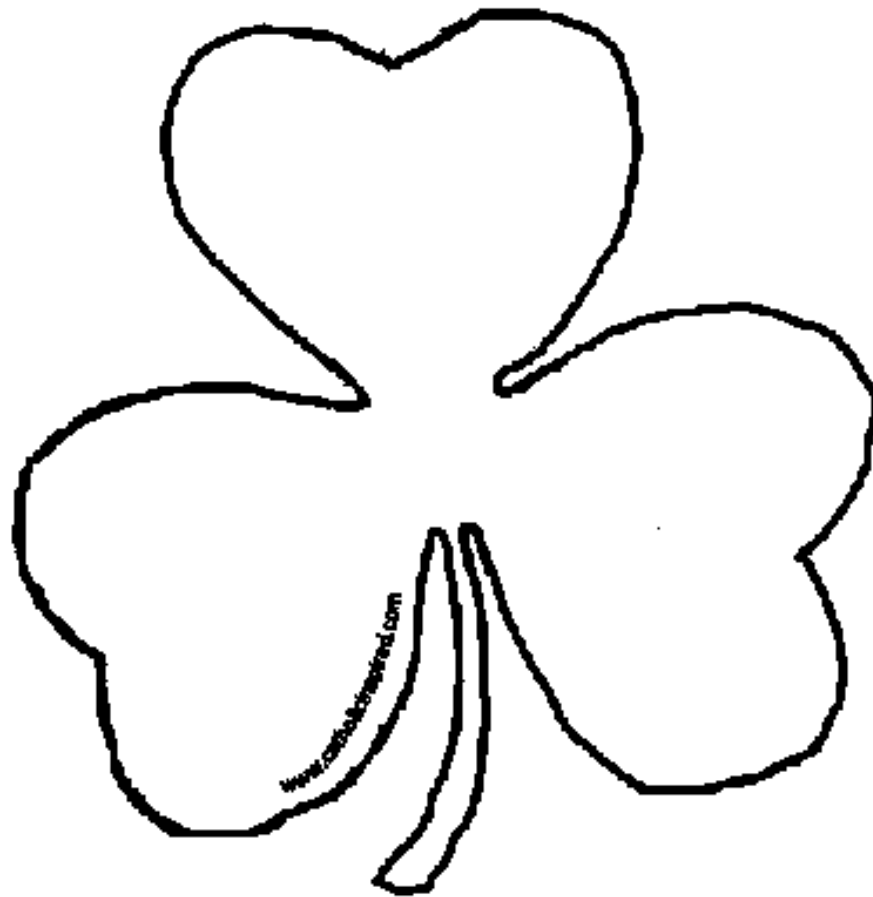
Source: <http://www.loyolapress.com/saints-stories-for-kids.htm?cId=77222>

### **Trinity Shamrock**

Children color shamrock. Then cut out pictures and past on leaves. Label, Father, Son, Holy Spirit if you wish. Best if copied onto cardstock or velum.

Source: <http://catholicinspired.wix.com/catholicinspired#!st-patrick/cw3c>

# The Trinity is like a Shamrock!



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Color the shamrock. Then cut out all the parts below.

Glue **God the Father**, **God the Son**, and **God the Holy Spirit**, one on each leaf.

For extra fun, tape/glue a real clover into the middle or add glitter!



