



## Rector's Reflection during Coronavirus Period of Social Distancing March 17, 2020 – St. Patrick's Day

*From The Rev. Meredith T. Heffner  
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Yesterday I wrote a reflection for today, focusing on our anxiety and our hope. Then I awoke to be reminded of St. Patrick and the fun of St. Patrick's Day. I rewrote my reflection, considering his example, and the luck of the Irish. (You'll see my original reflection tomorrow.) My thought today, as we continue our adjustment to the "new normal," is that sometimes it's helpful to be a little light.

Let's have some fun today and celebrate St. Patrick! Why? Because most of us are staying home, and we can't show off our green. Ancestry.com says I'm 38 percent Irish, but who's tracking?! So let's begin.

First, who is St. Patrick and why do we care?

### **The Basics**

Each year the Episcopal Church celebrates the Feast Day of Saint Patrick, fifth century bishop and missionary of Ireland, on March 17, the day of his death in 461.

*Holy Women, Holy Men* (Church Publishing, 2010) relates that Patrick was born on the northwest coast of Britain in about 390. His grandfather had been a Christian priest, and his father was a deacon in the early Christian church. When Patrick was a teenager, he was captured by a band of Irish slavers and was forcibly taken to Ireland to serve as a shepherd. When Patrick was in his early 20s, he escaped and returned to Britain, where he was educated as a Christian. After taking holy orders as both presbyter and bishop, he had a vision, calling him to return to Ireland.

Sometime around the year 431, when Patrick returned to Ireland, he began converting Irish pagans to Christianity by appealing to the local kings, and through them to their tribes. Patrick built Christian churches over sacred pagan sites, carved crosses on old druidic pillars, and protected sacred wells and springs with Christian saints.

Saint Patrick is generally credited with being the first bishop of Armagh, Primate of All Ireland. Saint Patrick's Day, March 17, is celebrated as both a liturgical and non-liturgical holiday. In popular culture, this feast day is often a celebration of Ireland itself.

### ***The (More Fun) Spin from Lent Madness ([Lentmadness.org](http://Lentmadness.org))***

As a sixteen-year-old, Patrick herded sheep. He kept guard as the lambs gnawed clover from the field. Patrick took care of a lot of animals, watching for sickness, cleaning out muck, and gathering in wanderers. With all of that work, his forearms were more muscular than a few months before. He had outgrown his boyhood's lanky frame and expanded into the body of a man.

Patrick changed in other ways as well. His heart pierced as he thought of his family and birthplace. Out in that space, Patrick felt the acute loss of all he loved. He could not escape the ache of his homesickness, and with no one else to turn to, he began to pray. A few months earlier, bandits had

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captured Patrick and stolen him from his home in Roman Britain. They had moved him to Ireland, where he became a slave. In his desperate captivity, without the distractions of friends or family, he began to rely on God. Patrick converted to Christianity, and his faith grew deep through his trials.

Six grueling years later, Patrick dreamed that a ship was ready for him. He escaped from his captors and returned home. While Patrick was in Britain, he continued to study Christianity and became a priest. Then Patrick had another dream. Someone delivered a letter to him with the heading, "The Voice of the Irish." In it, the people of Ireland begged him to walk among them again. He felt deeply moved, but he also had nagging doubts about responding to the call. He didn't have as much education as he wanted.

Though Patrick was not initially welcome in Ireland, he eventually settled in a place where his ministry flourished. He became a bishop, baptizing thousands of people and ordaining priests who started new churches. He encouraged wealthy women to become nuns and ministered to the royalty. His legends include driving snakes out of Ireland and raising thirty-three people from the dead.

Today, festivities abound in his honor on St. Patrick's Day. In memory of the patron saint of Ireland, exuberant people parade and green beer flows. The most pervasive emblem harkens back to those grazing sheep. People pin clover to their chests, recalling how Patrick plucked the three-leaved plant from the field in order to illustrate the Trinity. (by Carol Howard Merritt)

*Sidebar: St. Patrick, unfortunately, was defeated by Brother Lawrence in the Round of 32. For more, see 2020 [lentmadness.org](https://lentmadness.org). (You should play!)*

### **Collect for Saint Patrick**

Almighty God, in your providence you chose your servant Patrick to be the apostle of the Irish people, to bring those who were wandering in darkness and error to the true light and knowledge of you: Grant us so to walk in that light that we may come at last to the light of everlasting life; through Jesus Christ our Lord, who lives and reigns with you and the Holy Spirit, one God, for ever and ever. Amen. (From *Holy Women, Holy Men*, p. 273; [episcopalchurch.org](https://episcopalchurch.org).)

### **A Quiz!**

Here's more fun! (Thanks to Morningbrew.com)

Who doesn't love a good Irish proverb on St. Patrick's Day? See if you can complete the first part of the popular Irish sayings below, *without cheating....!* Answers will be revealed tomorrow.

1. The older the fiddle...
2. May your home always be too small to hold...
3. You'll never plow a field by...
4. May misfortune follow you the rest of your life, and...
5. If you're enough lucky to be Irish...

Happy St. Patrick's Day. Take care of yourselves. Reach out to one another. Be safe and wash your hands.

Wherever you go and whatever you do, may the luck of the Irish be always with you!

*Rev. Meredith*

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***Survey question of the week!***

I shared yesterday the song “Psalm 139” by Sons of Korah, but my favorite non-churchy song is Tom Cochrane’s version of “Life is a Highway.” (Really!)

What is your favorite song? What are you listening to these days? What songs lift your spirit? Want to join me in putting together a St. James’ play list? Email me your suggestions at [rector@stjamespotomac.org](mailto:rector@stjamespotomac.org) and let’s see what we can do! “Churchy” and “non-churchy” songs are welcome.

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