

Dear Friend

First, some good news! We have appointed a new church administrator. Her name is Penny Goswell, and we look forward to welcoming her to St Matthew's in the near future. Please pray for Penny as she begins her new role, as well as for Terry Mitchell, as he begins his life as a retiree!

This week we celebrate St Patrick's Day - on Wednesday 17th March. Although the dates of his birth and death are somewhat obscure, here are some biographical details:

Patrick was born in Britain, in the region of Carlisle. The son of a deacon he was brought up a Christian although he was, at best, only nominal in his faith.

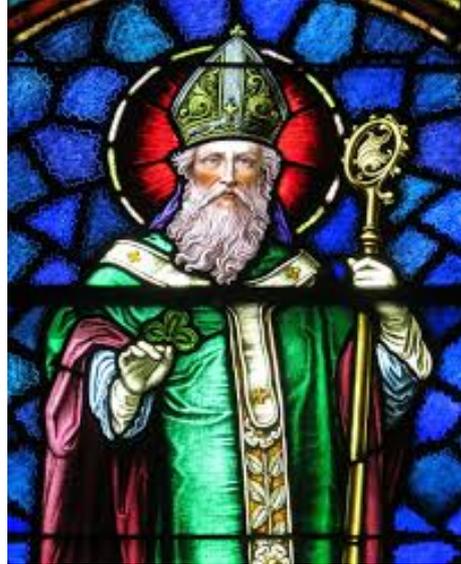
At the age of 16 he was kidnapped by pirates and forced to work as a shepherd in Ireland. During his captivity Patrick turned to God, eventually escaping his captors and returning to Britain. Details of his escape are sketchy but it is known that he travelled 200 miles from his place of captivity to a seaport. The adventures and escapades of his journey home honed his reliance upon God, and when he finally returned to his family he felt he should become a priest, and began a period of training that was to last for several years.

According to tradition, some years later in 431, Patrick, newly consecrated bishop, returned to Ireland. He devoted himself to evangelism, reconciliation among local chieftains, and the training of monks and nuns. He made frequent journeys throughout Ireland, and significantly influenced the island for Christ, laying the foundation of the church for the years ahead.

At some point in his life, Patrick was the subject of a vitriolic attack on his character. In response he wrote the *Confessions* - his personal account of his life. Patrick contrasted himself with learned and powerful men more concerned with political survival than in preaching the gospel. He is revealed as a man who experienced grace in a powerful way, and who chose to evangelise an unreached land in preference to Britain, whilst still remaining attached to his roots as a Romanised Celt, and thus to the Christians of Roman Gaul. Patrick is remembered as a man who trusted God against the odds.

I arise today
Through a mighty strength, the invocation of the Trinity,
Through belief in the Threeness,
Through confession of the Oneness
Of the Creator of Creation.

I arise today
Through God's strength to pilot me:
God's might to uphold me,
God's wisdom to guide me,
God's eye to look before me,
God's ear to hear me,
God's word to speak to me,
God's hand to guard me,
God's way to lie before me,
God's shield to protect me,
God's host to save me.



Lorica (or 'Breastplate') attributed to Patrick, prob. c. 8th century.

With love and prayers

Simon

