

Saint Patrick's Day Symbols



The Shamrock

One traditional symbol of Saint Patrick's Day is the Shamrock. "Shamrock" is the common name for several different kinds of three-leafed clovers native to Ireland. The shamrock was chosen Ireland's national emblem because of the legend that St. Patrick had used it to illustrate the doctrine of the Trinity. The Trinity is the idea that God is really three-in-one: The Father, The Son and The Holy Spirit. Patrick demonstrated the meaning of the Three-in-One by picking a shamrock from the grass growing at his feet and showing it to his listeners. He told them that just as the shamrock is one leaf with three parts, God is one entity with three Persons. The Irish have considered shamrocks as good-luck symbols since earliest times, and today people of many other nationalities also believe they bring good luck.



Leprechauns

The name leprechaun comes from the old Irish word "luchorpan" which means "little body." A leprechaun is an Irish fairy who looks like a small, old man about 2 feet tall. He is often dressed like a shoemaker, with a crooked hat and a leather apron. According to legend, leprechauns are aloof and unfriendly. They live alone, and pass the time making shoes. They also have a hidden pot of gold! Treasure hunters can often track down a leprechaun by the sound of his shoemaker's hammer. If the leprechaun is caught, he can be threatened with bodily violence to tell where his treasure is, but the leprechaun's captors must keep their eyes on him every second. If the captor's eyes leave the leprechaun - he's known to trick them into looking away - he vanishes and all hopes of finding the treasure are lost.

GREEN

The Color Green

Believe it or not, the color of St. Patrick was not actually green, but blue! In the 19th century, however, green became used as a symbol for Ireland. In Ireland, there is plentiful rain and mist, so the 'Emerald Isle' really is green all year-round. The beautiful green landscape was probably the inspiration for the national color. Wearing the color green is considered an act of paying tribute to Ireland. It is said that it also brings good luck, especially when worn on St. Patrick's Day. Many long years ago, playful Irish children began the tradition of pinching people who forgot to wear green on St. Patrick's Day and the tradition is still practiced today.



The Harp

The harp is an ancient musical instrument used in Ireland for centuries. It is also a symbol of Ireland. Harpists, who were often blind, occupied an honored place in Irish society. Harpists and bards (or poets) played an important role in the social structure of Ireland. They were supported by chieftans and kings. Although it is not as recognizable as the shamrock, the harp is a widely used symbol. It appears on Irish coins, the presidential flag, state seals, uniforms, and official documents. O'Carolan was one of the most famous harpists, and many Irish melodies inspired by him still survive to this day.



The Celtic Cross

Saint Patrick was familiar with the Irish language and culture, because of his time as a slave there. When Patrick went back to Ireland to convert the Irish to Christianity, he was successful because he didn't try to make the Irish forget their old beliefs. He combined their old beliefs with the new beliefs. One example of this is the Celtic Cross. Saint Patrick added the sun, a powerful Irish symbol, onto the Christian cross to create what is now called a Celtic cross, so that the new symbol of Christianity would be more natural to the Irish.