

Subject □ Junior Cycle History
Teacher □ Niall Lenehan

LESSON 4
Early Christian Ireland

Learning outcome 2.6

Consider the historical significance of Christianity on the island of Ireland, including its contribution to culture and society in the Early Christian period.

Learning Intentions

1. Understand the roots of Ireland's Christian identity and history.
2. Learn about the reality of life in monastic communities in the fifth and sixth centuries.
3. Understand the historical context of familiar historical sights and objects, e.g. round towers and manuscripts

Key words - Define these

- The Celts
- Paganism
- Missionary
- High Cross
- Monk
- Monastery
- Beehive Hut
- Scriptorium
- Filigree

Ireland before Christianity

- Before the arrival of Christianity to Ireland, we were a **Pagan** country and heavily influenced by **Celtic culture**.
- The Celts arrived between 800 and 400BC from Europe. Their influence spread throughout Ireland.
- It is believed the Pagans core beliefs centered around nature, our earth and the elements.
- Pagans also worshipped **many gods**.

The arrival and spread of Christianity

- Ireland was a **pagan** country until the **fifth century**.
- In 431 AD, **Palladius** was sent by **Pope Celestine I** to convert Ireland to Christianity. He was eventually banished from Ireland by the King of Leinster. The most successful Christian missionary would arrive after Palladius. His name was St Patrick.

St Patrick

- **St Patrick** was from Wales and arrived in Ireland after Palladius.
- St Patrick spent over **20 years preaching Christianity** in Ireland and died in 461 AD or 462 AD.
- He left behind an important document called the **Confessio**, which detailed his life and work.

- Patrick's success is believed to be in part due to the fact that he spoke the local **Gaelic language**, as he had been held in Ireland as a slave early in his life.
- Early Christianity adapted to Celtic culture.
- An example of this is the Christian celebration of **All Hallow's Day**, which falls on the same day as the Celtic festival of **Samhain**.

The First Christian Monasteries

- A **monastery** was a religious community.
- The men who lived in the monasteries were called **monks**.
- The monks wanted to dedicate their life to **prayer** and **worship**.
- Monks lived in **beehive huts**.
- Every monastery was centred around an **oratory**, or church.
- Examples of monasteries include **Skellig Michael** and **Glendalough Monastery**.



Beehive huts

- Many Irish monasteries also had a bell tower, more commonly known as a **round tower**.
- The round tower was used to signal for prayer time and also as a place of refuge when under attack
- **St Finnian of Clonard** played a vital role in the spread of the monasteries.



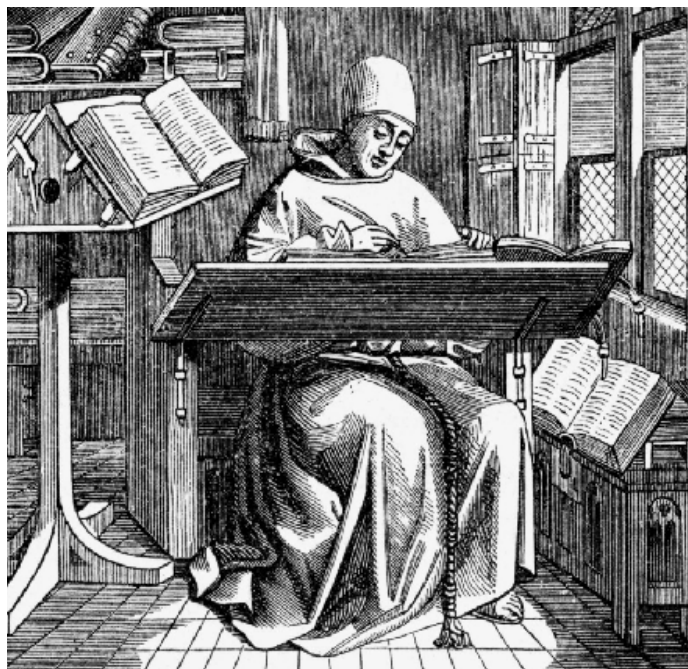
An oratory and round tower

Recap exercise 4.1

- Q1. What did Pagan core beliefs centre around?
- Q2. Who was the first Christian Missionary sent to Ireland? Who sent him?
- Q3. What did St Patrick do when he was in Ireland?
- Q4. How do we know so much about St Patricks time in Ireland?
- Q5. What was a monastery?
- Q6. What were some features of early Christian monasteries?

The life of a monk

- Monks dedicated their lives to **prayer** but were also **skilled workers**.
- Monasteries were **self-sufficient**, so monks were practised **farmers**.
- Some also worked as **scribes**, producing **illuminated manuscripts** such as the **Book of Kells**.
- Monasteries were often **self-sufficient**. In Skellig Michael, monks lived off milk, cheese from goats, fish and meat from seagulls.
- Other monks worked as **smiths**, producing work such as the **Ardagh Chalice**.
- Some worked as **stonemasons** and made high crosses, such as the **Cross of Cong**.
- Monks wore a **tunic** and had their hair cut into a **tonsure**.
- Monasteries also provided **medical care** for the sick and a place to stay for **travelers** who passed by.
- All monks had to obey the rules of the **head monk** called the **abbott**.
- Many monks **took a vow of silence**.
- Monks often **only ate one meal a day**, depending on what was available at the time of year.



A scribe working in a scriptorium.



Glendalough monastery today

The Scriptorium

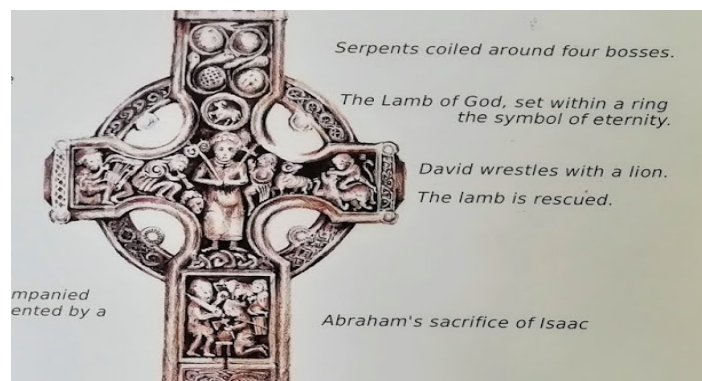
- Talented writers called **scribes** wrote out bibles and manuscripts in a room called a **scriptorium**.
- They wrote in a style known as **calligraphy**.
- Manuscripts were written onto **vellum (calfskin)** or **parchment (sheepskin)**.
- The **Book of Kells** is an example of this.



Illustrations from the Book of Kells

Stonemasons

- High crosses were used to **teach stories** from the bible to those who could not read.
- These were created by monks called **stone smiths**.
- Stories were told through engravings on the cross.
- Example: **Clonmacnoise, Co. Offaly**



Metalworking

- Monks were talented metalworkers and created many pieces of recognizable work.
- These **included chalices, brooches and croziers.**
- **Filigree** was used to decorate pieces of metalwork. Metal wiring was melted into the sides to add detail.

**Tara Brooch****The Spread of Christianity to Europe**

- Irish monks also played a role in spreading Christianity **beyond Ireland.**
- **St Colmcille** set up the **Iona monastery** in Scotland.
- **St Columbanus** and his followers travelled around Europe and opened many monasteries in places such as:

France**Switzerland****Italy**

- Irish style manuscripts were found in these European monasteries.

4.2 Exam focus - Try this for homework

Q1. Write about the life of a monk from Early Christian Ireland. (Your answer may refer to how they lived, life in a monastery, prayer life, work etc.)

4.3 Homework Correction

Q1. Identify a person that you have studied from your chosen civilization who you think is important in history.

Julius Caesar

Q2. Give two reasons why you think your chosen person is an important person in history.

- a. Julius Caesar reformed the Roman calendar from 355 days to 365 days. This is important as it the calendar that we use to this day.**
- b. Julius Caesar led invasions and worked throughout the Roman empire. He conquered Belgium, Britain and worked as the governor of Spain. He played a key role in expanding the Roman empire. Evidence of Roman settlements can be seen in these countries to this day.**

Q3. Describe two ways in which the actions or achievements of your chosen society were important in history.

- a. The Romans spoke in Latin. Most European languages spoken in Europe to this day are heavily influenced by Latin. This is because the Roman empire conquered most of Europe. For example, the word aquarium comes from the Latin word 'Aqua'**
- b. Modern Architecture is heavily influenced by Roman architecture. Large columns, arches, large front porches (porticoes) are key features of Roman architecture. Modern day buildings such as the General Post Office in Dublin and The White House in Washington D.C. are built using this style.**

