



Unit 8: Saint Colmcille

New Words

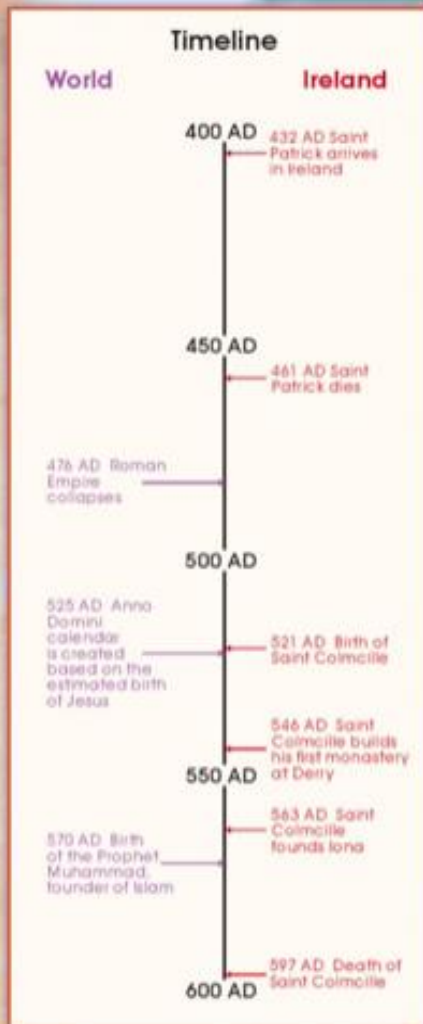
fostering

clan

ordained

exile

Picts



A BOOK WAR?

We sometimes hear about wars being fought over oil, wealth or religion. But have you ever heard of a war being fought over a book? This is just one of the stories in the life of one of Ireland's most famous saints: Saint Colmcille. Colmcille was born in Gartan, County Donegal, on December 7th, 521 AD. His family were descendants of Niall of the Nine Hostages, who brought Saint Patrick to Ireland.

Hot History

As the son of a chieftain, Crimthann could have become High King of Ireland, if he had put his name forward to be elected.

CRIMHTHANN

When he was born, Colmcille was named Crimthann, which means 'fox'. His parents wanted him to have a name that would make him seem clever! Crimthann moved away from home when he was a child, according to the old Celtic custom of fostering. Sons of kings and chieftains

were often sent to the houses of other chieftains to be brought up. This was done to ensure peace and friendship between the clans, or families, because nobody would want to attack a home in which their own son was living. Crimthann spent a number of years living in the home of a chieftain called Cruithneach.

Crimthann loved plants and animals and as a boy, he spent hours wandering in the hills and fields close to his home.



Crimthann

DOVE OF THE CHURCH

It was while he was living with Cruithneach that Crimhthann became known as Colmcille. Arriving home late one night, Cruithneach was amazed to see his house full of light, despite the fact that no fires or candles were lit. When he went in, he saw a flame above Crimhthann's head. He was sure that this was a sign that the Holy Spirit was with Crimhthann, so he renamed the boy 'Colm'. Colm means 'dove', which is a symbol of the Holy Spirit. The 'cille' part of his new name came from the other boys in the house. They saw that Colm spent a lot of time praying, so they named him 'cill', which is an old Irish word meaning 'church'. Crimhthann then became known as Colmcille, or the 'Dove of the Church'.

In 546 AD, Colmcille was ordained a priest. Later in the same year, he founded his first monastery at Doire, where the city of Derry now stands. For the next 17 years, he travelled throughout Ireland teaching the people about the life of Jesus. He worked with great energy and founded more than 30 churches and monasteries, including those in Durrow, Kells and Swords.



Cruithneach and Crimhthann



Kells Abbey



Copying Finnian's book

A FIGHT WITH THE HIGH KING

On one of his journeys around Ireland, Colmcille visited the monastery at Clonard that had been founded by Saint Finnian. Finnian had a beautiful book that was the envy of many of the monks in Ireland. Colmcille asked if he could borrow it. When Finnian refused, Colmcille decided to copy the book in secret. He worked by candlelight every night until he was finished.

Hot History

Work on the Book of Kells, which is one of Ireland's greatest treasures, was begun on the island of Iona by some of Colmcille's monks.



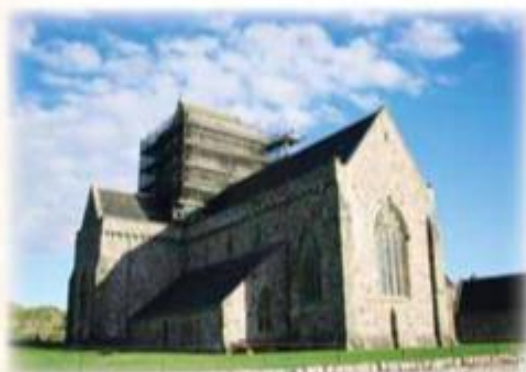
When Finnian found out that Colmcille had copied his book, he was furious. He complained to the High King of Ireland. The High King sided with Finnian and he said, "To every cow its calf and to every book its copy." This meant that Colmcille had to give Finnian the copy that he had handwritten so carefully. This made Colmcille very angry indeed.

Colmcille returned home to Gartan and he got in touch with the other members of his family. Some of them were delighted to be given a chance to fight the High King and they saw this as a perfect excuse. An army was gathered and a great battle was fought at Cul Dreimhne, County Sligo. More than 3000 men were killed in that battle. When Colmcille saw the horror that he had brought to the people of Ireland, he promised to leave the country and to live in exile (away from his home) for the rest of his life.



Finnian and the High King

WORKING IN EXILE



Iona Abbey

In 563 AD, Colmcille and 12 of his friends left Ireland. They sailed to the island of Iona, off the west coast of Scotland, where they set up a monastery. Colmcille and his followers set out on a mission to convert a Scottish tribe called the Picts to Christianity. Colmcille travelled all over Scotland, preaching the word of God and setting up churches and monasteries. He travelled back and forth between Iona and Scotland, always returning to Iona to work in the fields or in the scriptorium with the other monks. Colmcille continued to work and spread the message of Jesus until the day he died in June, 597 AD, at the age of 75. His feast day is celebrated on June 9th.

Hot History

Colmcille became so important in Scotland that he was given the job of naming the new king. The new king was then crowned at Iona.

Hot History

Colmcille is said to have saved a man from being killed by the Loch Ness Monster in Scotland. A large number of local people saw this and they converted immediately!

ACTIVITIES



A. Can You Remember?

1. What name was given to Colmcille at birth?
2. When was Colmcille ordained a priest?
3. Who founded the monastery at Clonard?
4. In which county did Colmcille's family fight the High King?
5. What was the name of the Scottish tribe that Colmcille worked to convert?



B. Choose the Correct Answer to Complete Each Sentence.

1. Colmcille means 'Dove of the _____'.
A. cathedral, B. cloister, C. chapel or D. church
2. Finnian founded the monastery in _____.
A. Iona, B. Clonfert, C. Clonard or D. Kells
3. "To every cow its calf, to every book its _____."
A. copy, B. page, C. paragraph or D. author
4. Colmcille set up a monastery on the island of _____.
A. Saltee, B. Mann, C. Iona or D. Spike



C. Think About It.

1. (a) Why do you think it was important for chieftains to send their sons away to other families to be brought up? (b) Do you think that girls were also sent away to other families in this way?
2. Do you think the High King's decision about the book and its copy was fair? Explain your answer.
3. How do we know that Saint Patrick had a big influence on life in Ireland at the time of Colmcille?

D. Get Creative.

1. Look up the island of Iona on an atlas. Sketch a map of the island.
2. Describe the challenges that you think Colmcille and his monks might have faced while setting up their life on the island.
3. If you had to choose a new site for a monastery on Iona, where would you put it? Give a reason for your answer.

E. Digging Deeper

1. Use the internet or the library to research some of the key words and phrases from Unit 8, such as 'Colmcille', 'Iona', 'Book of Kells' and 'Gartan'.
2. Use the internet to find out more information about Saint Colmcille. Your teacher will give you a list of words to key into a search engine.