

St. Brigid's Cloak: Senior

St. Brigid is one of the most revered saints of Ireland and her feast day is celebrated on February 1st each year. On this day it is tradition to make a St. Brigid's Cross, woven from rushes, and hang it in the home for protection from evil.

It is believed that St. Brigid was born sometime during the 450s AD in Faughart, near Dundalk in Co. Louth. She lived during the time of St. Patrick and was deeply inspired by his preaching. She decided to become a Christian at an early age and is associated with great miracles, her kindness and healing qualities famous from childhood. According to legend, St. Brigid prayed to God that He would take away her beauty so that no man would seek her hand in marriage and she could continue to look after the poor, the sick and the elderly. Her prayer was answered and her father finally agreed that she could enter the convent.

St. Brigid's father was a pagan and named her after the Celtic goddess of fire, the arts, poetry and song - Dana. Dana was the mother of the Irish gods and was also known as Brid, meaning 'poetess'. St. Brigid's feast day on February 1st also coincides with the more ancient feast day of her namesake. In pagan Ireland it was known as Imbolc and celebrated the start of spring.

Sometime around 470AD, St. Brigid founded an ecclesiastical settlement for both nuns and monks in Kildare. The Abbey of Kildare became famous throughout Ireland and Europe. *St. Brigid's Cloak* is the legend of how she obtained the land on which to build it.

St. Brigid wanted to build a convent for her followers and she had found the perfect place in Kildare. She went to the King of Leinster to ask him for the land.

“The convent would be beside the forest, so there would be plenty of firewood to keep us warm in the winter”, St. Brigid explained. “We would have water and fish from the lake nearby. The land is also very fertile so we would be able to grow our own crops. We wouldn’t need to ask you for anything ever again.”

Now the King of Leinster was a greedy man. He laughed at St. Brigid for making such a ridiculous request. She tried her best to persuade him, but the King didn’t want to give any of his land away. In the end, she became very frustrated and said to the King, “Well, at least give me as much land as I can cover with my cloak!”

The King was tired with the argument. Amused by St. Brigid’s new request, he promised her as much land as her cloak could cover. It would hardly amount to anything at all, he thought!

The next day, the King of Leinster visited St. Brigid at Kildare. St. Brigid took off her cloak, and gave one corner of it to each of her four friends. One ran to the north, another to the south, one to the east, and the last to the west. The King of Leinster watched in amazement. The cloak grew and grew like a living creature until the four women were out of sight. St. Brigid’s cloak now covered many acres of the King’s fertile land.

“Stop!”, the King shouted out, “I see now that you are blessed by God and that he wants you to build your convent here. I should not have been so cruel to you when you visited me yesterday. I will keep my side of the bargain and you may build your convent here.”

St. Brigid built a fine convent under an old oak tree in Kildare.