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Bring Saint Brigid of Kildare to Life for Our Youth (Jane G. Meyer)

[Ξένες γλώσσες / In English](#)

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She is the most well-known and beloved female saint in Ireland, Saint Brigid of Kildare was born in the fifth century (around 450—during that time when all of Christendom was still unified) right on the heels of Saint Patrick, that tireless bishop who came to love and believe in the people of Ireland. Together, Saints Patrick and Brigid made a mighty impact, spreading Christianity like wildfire to a pagan people who were open and ready to learn of Christ's salvation. Though there are many varied accounts of her life, all written after her death, the impression she made on the Irish land is undisputed, and the spirit of Saint Brigid comes across strongly in each of them. Even today, her feast day on February the first is celebrated widely and even more than 1400 years later, holy sites related to Brigid still abound.

One popular account of Brigid's young life shows her laboring by her mother's side as a dairymaid, learning to tend cows and churn butter. Her mother was a Christian bondswoman who was owned and worked for a druid, but Brigid's father was a pagan chieftain, and at the age of ten, Brigid left her mother to live and work in her father's house.

Once in charge of her father's large kitchens, Brigid surprised the household by giving away much of the food at her disposal. At that time in Irish history there were laws that regulated hospitality, and Brigid, with the love of Christ in her heart sometimes took this theme to a beautiful, radical extreme, giving to the poor well beyond that which was typically expected. Her father wasn't always pleased with the way she gave away his bread, his meat, his milk, even his coat. One story shows him so upset that he bundles her into his carriage to sell her to a neighboring king. She waits outside, seated in the carriage, while he seeks an audience, and a leper happens by. She has nothing to give the man—no food, no blanket—so she hands him her father's sword! When brought before the king a furious exchange happens as Brigid's father rants about this typical behavior. The king laughs, saying "if she gives away her father's things, how much more would she give away mine, since I am nothing to her!" The wise king encourages Brigid's father to set her free, and offers him one of his own fine swords as consolation.

Brigid's devotion to Christ tumbles over into a dream of becoming a nun. She establishes the first community of nuns in Ireland, eventually building a wonderful cathedral city at Kildare, where both men and women monastics settled around her, as well as a community of lay people and artisans. Kildare became known as a place of great arts, especially in metal craft, and learning, in fact, the monastery created the *Gospel Book of Kildare*, an illuminated manuscript that was said to have rivaled the famous *Book of Kells*. And though Brigid continued to live a simple life, she must have been an able leader and abbess for such a large community to flourish around her in such a short period of time.

Brigid influenced many, and helped establish countless monasteries in Ireland. She was a woman who met each man, each young girl or boy as if she were meeting Christ himself. Her acts of boundless generosity are reflected in this poem attributed to her:

I would like the angels of Heaven to be among us.

I would like an abundance of peace.

I would like full vessels of charity.

I would like rich treasures of mercy.

I would like cheerfulness to preside over all.

I would like Jesus to be present.

I would like the three Marys of illustrious renown to be with us.

I would like the friends of Heaven to be gathered around us from all parts.

he would bestow a good blessing upon me.

I would like a great lake of beer for the King of Kings.

I would like to be watching Heaven's family drinking it through all eternity.

This is but a tiny glimpse of her life. If you'd like to read more about her I'd recommend a quick visit to www.oca.org where you can search for her by her feast day, February 1st, or if you'd like a more indepth account of her life there is an extensive list of saints on the website of Saint Patrick Catholic Church in Washington D.C. www.saintpatrickdc.org



Learning about Brigid by Doing

Though Brigid's story is dotted with preaching and encouraging others through words, her actions are what have made her beloved. In fact, one of the most poignant stories is how she once told the story of Christ and His salvation to an old chieftain who was near death. As he lay suffering, Brigid picked up some of the rushes from the earthen floor and began weaving them into a cross. He asked what she was doing, and in this way, as her hands were busy, she told the story of

Christ's coming, his death and resurrection, and how this old chieftain might be saved. He believed, and was baptized before his death.

Weaving a "St. Brigid's Cross" is still done in Ireland each year, on the eve of her feast. The crosses are then hung above the door for blessing and protection.

Making a Saint Brigid's Cross

Weaving a Saint Brigid's cross would be a fun activity for an older Sunday school class or simply to do at home. While weaving, you can share ideas on how to show love for Christ by loving those around us.

Find some natural plant material from your local area, or from a florist. Rushes are traditional, but you could also use wheat stalks, long grasses, or if you're teaching very young children you could use pipe cleaners or straws. For each cross, you will need:

- 12 reeds, pipe cleaners or straws
- String, or four small, tan rubber bands
- scissors

Directions:

1. Hold one reed vertically, and fold another in half around the mid-point of the first.
2. Take a third reed and fold it around the second one, parallel to the first. You should now have a T-shaped piece, with one arm having one strand, another having two and the third having three.
3. Fold a fourth reed around the third one to form a cross.
4. Fold a fifth one around the fourth, parallel to the single strand. As you work, snug the reeds against the centre and hold it tight.
5. Continue folding reeds around the previous one (and the ones beside it) working in a circular fashion until you have created enough of a woven centre.
6. When the centre is as big as you like, hold the reeds together carefully and tie the ends of each arm tightly with reeds, string or some type of natural fibre, or bind with a rubber band. Trim the ends with scissors.

A traditional blessing said in some parts of Ireland for the hanging of St Brigid's cross:

"May the blessing of God and the Trinity be on this cross, and on the home where it

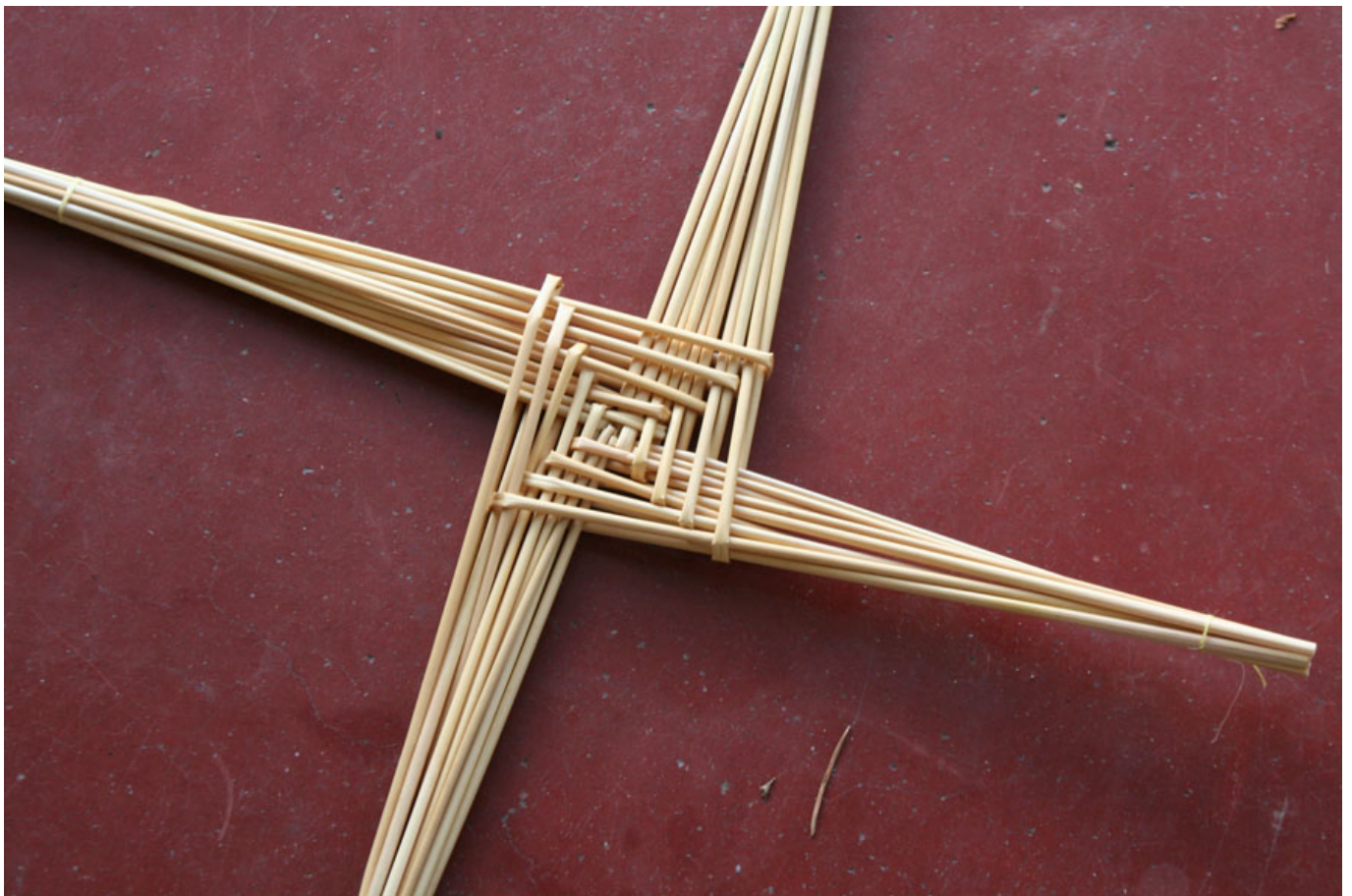
hangs and on everyone who looks at it.”

www.irelandseye.com/irish/people/saints/brigid_cross.shtm

I especially recommend watching this short YouTube video in advance of your class, which shows a woman from County Sligo in Ireland actually making a cross in real time.

<http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=iMj7RJDwp8U>

Directions taken from [*The Life of Saint Brigid*](#) by Anna Egan Smucker, published by Appletree Press.



Matthew 25 in Real Time

Another teaching idea either for the home or for a church school setting is to read *The Life of Saint Brigid: Abbess of Kildare* alongside the latter verses of Matthew 25 (beginning with verse 31). Once finished, open up the conversation to discuss simple ways we can love our neighbors in the name of Christ. By handing each child an index card and a pencil, you could challenge them to think of some form of giving they could do during the week and write it down. The following week they could report on how their acts of generosity turned out. Some ideas to help the

children in their thinking are:

- Write a note to a neighbor who is sick or draw someone a picture and deliver it with a smile
- Bring an extra apple or sandwich to school and give it away to someone who normally sits alone, or bake cookies for someone who might normally be shunned
- Say a prayer and light a candle each evening for someone who is struggling or who is difficult to love
- Look through your closet and give away some of your old things or maybe even go through your neighborhood, passing out flyers and collect clothes that you can take to a shelter, especially warm coats and blankets

Kneading Prayers into Loaves of Bread

Saint Brigid wasn't frightened of the poor or lonely. Her love of Christ was the reason for all her goodness and openness. She churned endless vats of butter because of that love. She tended sheep because of that love. She traveled the countryside enduring hardships, establishing monasteries because of that love.

Here in Santa Barbara we host a large population of homeless people because of our nice weather, and our church has embraced these folks, ministering to them by offering food and clothing, support and counseling. I admit that these folks are sometimes tough to deal with, but what a blessing when there is a turn-around in one of their lives—when after years of abuse someone takes the steps to become sober or when a job is found and the road to housing begins. This miracle has happened more than once in our community. But I have small children, and can not participate daily, or even weekly, in a ministry like this. So in the spirit of Saint Brigid I started doubling up on my bread making, always baking twice as much bread as our family needs. What a blessing this has been. When I knead, I pray for those to whom the bread will go, and when the bread is baked, I head out into the streets to give it away. Sometimes I simply run it across the street to an unsuspecting neighbor, sometimes I'll give it to a family with a new baby, and other times I'll walk it to the back of the park where I know I'll find hungry folks hidden in the bushes. This is just a small gift that I can give, but the act of giving has softened my heart and taken me out of my own cozy world—opening my door a little bit more to those same strangers that Brigid loved.

May all of our lives reflect that love—may we make a difference, too, changing the world a little at a time, with our good deeds, our good thoughts, our fervent prayers and our abundant love of the triune God.

Troparion:

O holy Brigid, you became sublime through your humility, and flew on the wings of your longing for God. When you arrived in the eternal City and appeared before your Divine Spouse, wearing the crown of virginity, you kept your promise to remember those who have recourse to you. You shower grace upon the world, and multiply miracles. Intercede with Christ our God that He may save our souls.

By Jane G. Meyer

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