

Celtic Cross

MEMORY VERSE: ‘...clothe yourselves with compassion, kindness, humility, meekness, and patience. Bear with one another and, if anyone has a complaint against another, forgive each other; just as the Lord has forgiven you, so you also must forgive. Above all, clothe yourselves with love, which binds everything together in perfect harmony. And let the peace of Christ rule in your hearts, to which indeed you were called in the one body. And be thankful. Let the word of Christ dwell in you richly; teach and admonish one another in all wisdom; and with gratitude in your hearts sing psalms, hymns, and spiritual songs to God. Colossians 3:12-16 (NRSV)



STUDY PLAN: To know something of early Christianity in the British Isles, the roots of the Episcopal and Anglican churches in the USA.

To earn the Eucharist badge, you will need to do the following:

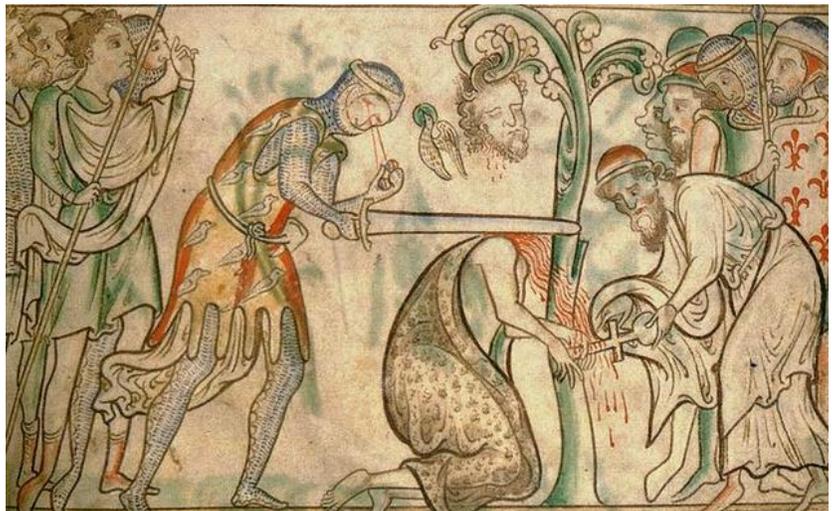
Step 1: Our Anglican Ancestry My initials _____



The Celtic Cross reminds us of our Anglican heritage passed down from the areas of Scotland, Ireland and Wales since at least the Second Century.

Legend tells that Joseph of Arimathea (the man who asked Pilate for Jesus' body and buried Him in his own tomb) was a tin merchant who made his way to the Island of Britain with the Holy Grail (the chalice used by Jesus himself at the Last Supper) and built the first church in Britain at Glastonbury. Although only a legend, the story speaks to the ancient roots of Christianity in the British Isles and the long-held Christian faith of the people of the area.

St. Alban is the first recorded Christian martyr in Britain. Alban gave shelter to a priest fleeing the persecution of the Roman Emperor Septimius Severus in 209 AD. The priest prayed day and night, and Alban was so impressed with the priest's faith and piety that Alban soon converted to Christianity. When officers came looking for their quarry, Alban dressed himself in the garments of the priest and gave himself up in the place of



The martyrdom of St. Alban

the priest. Then he was tortured and martyred in place of the priest he hid. In front of the judge, Alban testified, "If you wish to know the truth about my religion, know that I am a Christian and am ready to do a Christian's duty. I worship and adore the living and true God, who created all things. Alban was martyred about 20 miles from London. According to legend, the executioner's eyes popped out of his head so that the executioner could not rejoice over Alban's death. (see the picture on previous page)

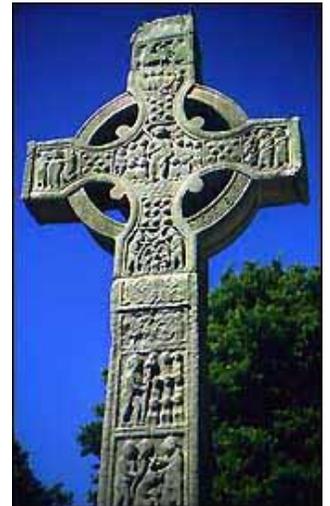
After centuries of Roman domination, at the beginning of the Fifth Century, the Roman legions withdrew from Britain and the land lapsed into a kind of disorder ruled by local kings. Then the Angles, the Saxons and the Jutes began a migration from Northern Europe to the British Isles. The Celtic tribes, with their Christian monks, withdrew to the farther areas of what is now known as Wales, Ireland and Scotland to avoid the new invaders.

Christian practice in these areas, called Celtic or Insular Christianity, had many special traits, which will be discussed in Step 2. At this point, it is important to know that Celtic Christianity was uniquely gentle in its embrace of wild peoples of the West and North as successive waves of invaders pushed native peoples to the rim of Europe in Ireland, Scotland, and Wales. Few martyrs are recorded in Celtic history, probably due to the peacefulness and inclusiveness of the Celtic presentation of the Gospel of Christ and the monks' humility and modesty.



Ancient Standing Stone

An example of the inclusivity of Celtic Christianity is the legend explaining the form of the Celtic Cross. According to legend, St. Patrick was preaching to some soon-to-be converted heathens. He was shown a sacred standing stone that was marked with a circle that was symbolic of the moon goddess. (see photo at left) Patrick made the mark of a Latin Cross through the circle and blessed the stone making the first Celtic Cross. The legend implies that Saint Patrick was willing to meld ideas and practices that were formerly Druid with Christian ideas and practices.



Stone Celtic Cross

Patrick evangelized in Ireland and one by one, local kings were converted with their tribes and abbeys were founded. The most famous abbey is the abbey on the Island of Iona off the west coast of Scotland. The founder of the abbey at Iona was named Columba. He is credited with being a leading figure in the revitalization of monasticism. The year Columba died, Augustine arrived from Rome, sent by the Pope to establish Christianity along the more structured Roman lines. In 664, the Council of Whitby decided that from thenceforth the form of English Christianity would be Roman Catholic.

The Church of England became Roman, yet Celtic spirituality would cling to life in Wales, Ireland and Scotland.

Today we call ourselves Episcopalians and Anglicans, and we are part of the Anglican Communion of churches around the world. A part of our heritage is the Celtic Church which kept the faith of Christ alive in the farthest reaches of Western Europe from the Fourth through the Seventh Centuries. The legacy of this unique spirituality continues to be valued and has experienced a revival in the 20th Century as a community working for peace, social justice, holistic spirituality and healing.



Discuss

The Anglican Communion (165 countries) is the 3rd largest Christian communion in the world, after the Roman Catholic Church and the Eastern Orthodox Church. Adherents to Anglicanism are called Anglicans, or in the USA, Episcopalians. Anglicans base their faith on the Bible, the traditions of the catholic and apostolic church and the writings of the church scholars. The Book of Common Prayer is the collection of services that worshippers in most Anglican churches have used for centuries.

Some say that, despite the diversity of the Anglican Communion, we will always have something in common as long as we continue in common prayer.

- Discuss the pros and cons of using the Book of Common Prayer for our daily and weekly worship.
- Discuss the pros and cons of belonging to as larger organization such as the Anglican Communion, the Roman Catholic Church or the Anglican Catholic Church.
- Share experiences you have had worshiping in different Episcopal, Anglican and other churches.



Do It!

Do any of the following:

- Draw or print out a map of the British Isles.
 - Identify Iona, Canterbury, Whitby, London, Glastonbury and St. Albans.
 - Shade the countries of Ireland, Scotland, Wales and England. Note these areas were the “far“edges of Europe” during the first 1000 years after Christ.
- If available, watch the video posted by the Anglican Foundation about Archbishop Cranmer and the Prayer Book Tradition at <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=pXxIMk9haLE&list=PLuSJ8nX460uN-b0Af0mTEman9TS5pF9HQ>





Step 2: Characteristics of Celtic Spirituality

My initials _____

Celtic Spirituality is an expression of faith that has many special characteristics. It is possible to piece together a picture of their beliefs, practices and priorities. The picture that emerges is of a vibrant, outward-looking church, with much to teach us today. **Credit is given to www.celtic-christianity.co.uk for much of the information in this section.**



It was a church that was **Charismatic**. The Holy Spirit was present and active in believers' lives. Healing, prophecy, hospitality and mercy were foremost among the spiritual gifts.



It was **Bible-based**. The Celtic Church had a great love for the scriptures, especially the writings of John, and the Psalms. Much time was spent in copying, studying, memorizing and teaching scripture. The Bible was their "memory book", full of stories about God's dealings with his people and his mighty acts.



As a response to an awareness of life's natural rhythms, Celtic Christianity had a sense of **movement and flow**. Times in the quietness of the monastery were times of preparation for times in the busy-ness of the market place. Go-with-the-flow evangelism, pilgrimage and a sacrificial commitment to mission were qualities of its spirituality.



It was a **Caring** church. The Celtic Church encompassed a great care for all of creation. There was a particular concern for the poor, the sick and the oppressed. Gifts of hospitality and mercy were very much in evidence. They built communities of hope in a hostile world.



It was a **Praying** church. Much time was devoted to contemplative prayer and the development of personal holiness. Because Jesus was incarnate in the whole of life, no task, no situation was too small or unimportant for prayer. The hostile environment in which the church existed made the people aware of the reality of spiritual evil, and spiritual warfare was part of their prayer life.



Celtic thought sees life as a journey. On this journey certain places are significant, they are "**thin places**", where God seems closer; places that invite prayer. Some say, a "thin place" is as "thin" as our openness to God allows.

- Discuss whether we, as Christians, can believe that some places are more special, or sacred, or "thin", than others, when we believe in a God who is to be found anywhere by those who seek him. Can some places be more conducive to prayer due to historical, psychological or incarnational reasons?

If life is a journey, it can be a lonely one. We all need friends along the way. We all need a mature, experienced Christian, who will walk the road with us, modelling the life of Jesus. The Celts referred to such a person as an **anamchara**, a soul friend - someone who helps us develop a more Christ-like life and help us with the many choices we face.

Brigid of Kildare said, "A person without a soul friend is like a body without a head."

- Has anyone been a "soul friend" to you, helping you to develop a more Christ-like life?



Do any of the following:

- Attend a Celtic worship service or watch a recording of a service on the Internet.
- Compared to other women in the ancient world, Celtic women were able to function within their society on a much more equal footing with men. The Irish Brehon law gave more rights and protection to women than any other western law code at that time or until recent times. Women had political equality, and could even lead the tribe. They could ascribe to any office or profession open to men. They had equal right to divorce and to a share of property in such matters. They were able to own and inherit property.

Greek women, on the other hand, had no political rights, were subject to arranged marriages and had no right of inheritance. Roman women became a possession of the husband at marriage, could not own anything and had few political rights.

In the Celtic Church, women like Brigid, Ebba and Hilda were leaders of mixed monasteries, where men and women lived and worked in co-operation; their counsel was welcomed and expected at the court of kings. They also exercised authority over ordained clergy who worked alongside them.

Research notable women of the church in Britain, Ireland or Scotland and share what you have learned with your group:

- Julian of Norwich
- Evelyn Underhill
- Margaret Queen of Scotland
- Hilda of Whitby
- Brigid



Step 3: Celtic Symbols and Places

My initials _____



The shamrock is the national flower of Ireland and has had significance in the country since the days of the Druids. Legend tells that St. Patrick used the shamrock's three leaves to help explain the Holy Trinity to the pagans during his missionary work in Ireland, demonstrating that something can have three parts but still be one being.

The Celts believed that everything important in the world came in threes, for example, the three dominions of the earth, sea and sky and the three phases of man. This plant with three leaves was held in high regard.



The Triskele is an ancient Irish symbol, over 5,000 years old that stands for unity of the three. In the case of Celts, this is the physical, mental and spiritual. It also symbolizes the eternal life, the flow of nature, and spiritual growth.



The Triquetra, also known as the Trinity Knot resembles the Ouroboros, an ancient infinity symbol. The triquetra is constructed of one continuous line interweaving around itself symbolizing no beginning or end, an eternal spiritual life. A circle is sometimes drawn weaving around the circle to symbolize the unity of the three parts



St. Brigid's Cross also has pre-Christian origins. It is traditionally woven from rushes on St Brigid's feast day, February 1. Legend says that Brigid wove the cross at the deathbed of a local lord as part of her explanation to him of Christianity. Traditionally, the crosses are set over doorways and windows to protect a home from harm of any kind.



Iona Abbey is one of the oldest Christian religious centers in Western Europe. **St. Columba** founded the monastery in 563 and was a center for the spread of Christianity to the Picts and the Scots. The prime purpose of the monastery was to create 'a perfect monastery as an image of the heavenly city of Jerusalem.



The Abbey of Kells is reported to be founded by **St. Columba** in 554, and was re-founded in 814. It was the home of the **Book of Kells** until the 1650's. The abbey was continually raided by the Vikings during the 10th century.

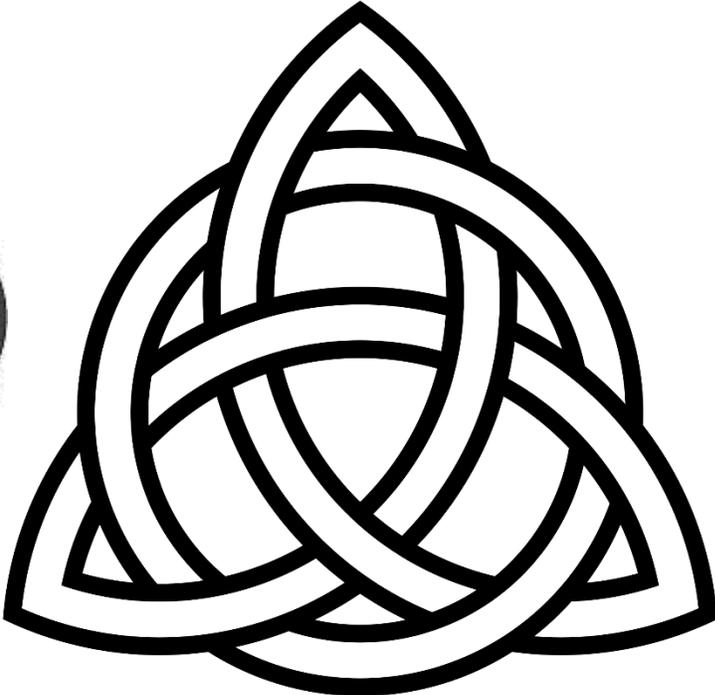
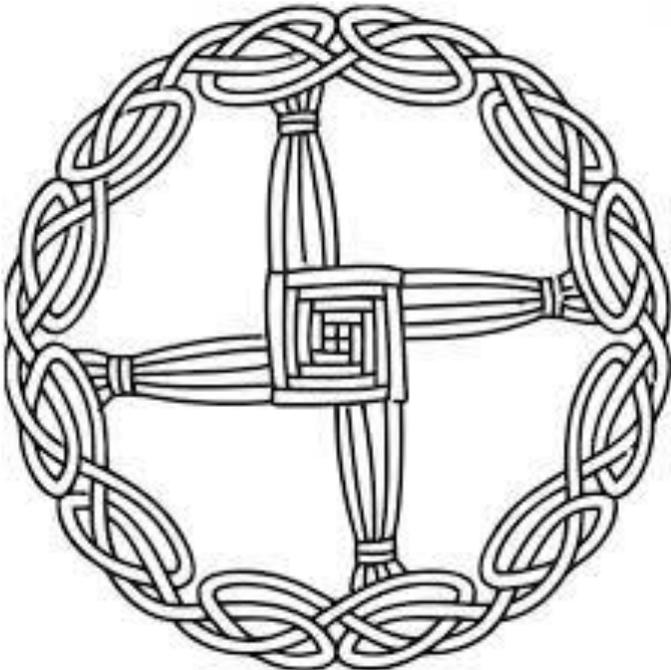
Do any of the following:



- Draw and color any of the Celtic symbols described above
- Create a small poster using the verse for this badge on page 1 and decorate with Celtic symbols
- Research and learn more about any of the famous ancient

Christian sites in the United Kingdom

Celtic Symbols



Outline Map of The British Isles

