

Lesson 2: Remembering St Brigid

This one-week lesson should be undertaken during the week in which the Feast of St Brigid is celebrated.

FROM THE CURRICULUM

Catholic Preschool and Primary Religious Education Curriculum for Ireland (2015)

During this lesson the children will engage with the following knowledge and concepts from Level 3:

CHRISTIAN FAITH

Mystery of God

- God calls people and they respond.

Mystery of Jesus Christ

- Jesus related to others, especially the poor and outcasts, with justice and compassion.

Mystery of the Church/Kingdom

- People witness to the Kingdom of God and help it grow by acting justly, loving others and caring for God's creation.
- Early Christian Ireland.
- Saints: local saints.

LITURGY AND PRAYER

Prayer

Formal Prayer

- Sign of the Cross
- Glory be to the Father

Additional Prayers

- Mass responses
- Invocation to St Brigid
- Prayer of thanks and praise to God

Liturgical Year

- Throughout the liturgical year our Church recognises and celebrates the lives of the martyrs and saints.

PRAYER SPACE

Place the following items in the prayer space as you begin this lesson:

- Green cloth (Ordinary Time)
- Bible
- Candle
- Cross/Crucifix
- St Brigid's Cross
- Holy water

As the lesson progresses, add the following items to the prayer space:

- Children's 'St Brigid' posters (*Let's Look Art Activity*)
- Children's 'St Brigid' crosses (*Let's Learn Craft Activity*)
- Children's 'St Brigid' collages (*Let's Learn Art Activity*)
- Children's St Brigid's Well (*Let's Learn Craft Activity*)

TEACHER REFLECTION

Brigid

You were a woman of peace.

You brought harmony where there was conflict.

You brought light to the darkness.

You brought hope to the downcast.

May the mantle of your peace cover those who are troubled and anxious, and may peace be firmly rooted in our hearts and in our world.

Inspire us to act justly and to reverence all that God has made.

Brigid you were a voice for the wounded and the weary.

Strengthen what is weak within us.

Calm us into a quietness that heals and listens.

May we grow each day into greater wholeness in mind, body and spirit.

Amen.

TEACHER NOTES

FOR MEMORISATION

Prayer associated with the 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.

DIFFERENTIATION

The children could:

- Research the Brigidine order, where and when they were founded and by whom, where their convents are today and what work they are engaged in.
- Investigate some of the holy wells in various counties in Ireland.
- Identify all the people they know who are called Brigid or who have Brigid as their Confirmation name.
- If possible, visit Solas Bhríde in Kildare town.



BEFORE YOU BEGIN

The Feast of St Brigid – *Lá Fhéile Bríde* – occurs annually on 1 February. In Celtic, pre-Christian times, the first day of spring was known as *Imbolg*. St Brigid's feast day signals the beginning of spring.

In previous *Grow in Love* programmes the children were introduced to St Brigid, with a focus on her love for God and her kindness to all. They learned the story of Brigid founding an abbey in Kildare, where everyone could gather to pray.

Brigid spent her life doing ordinary things in an extraordinary way. There are many stories of Brigid's compassion for the poor, her gift of healing and teaching, her generosity and her

courage in the face of adversity. Brigid has long been associated with the cycle of birth and rebirth in the world of nature and in the human spirit.

St Brigid, who is also known as 'Mary of the Gael', was born near Faughart in County Louth around the year 454. Her abbey in Kildare continues to be a place of prayer and pilgrimage, where people gather around St Brigid's Well to honour her and remember her life story.

The Sisters of the Brigidine Order devote their lives to God, taking Brigid as their inspiration and continuing her work.

LEARNING OBJECTIVES

That the children would be enabled to:

Understand

- Know St Brigid as a woman of great faith, who saw God in everyone and everything around her.
- Know some of the legends about St Brigid.
- Recognise the key symbols and places associated with St Brigid.

Communicate

- Recall all the facts they can remember learning about St Brigid.

- Share stories about St Brigid and other saints.

Participate

- Sing the 'Hymn to St Brigid' together.
- Work together on assignments relating to the lesson theme.
- Participate in opportunities for prayer.

FAITH FORMATION GOAL

That the children would also:

- Be inspired by the faith of St Brigid and the people of her time.

KEY WORDS

- **Abbey:** Name of place where monks and nuns usually live.
- **Staff:** In olden times a shepherd used a staff, which was a curved stick, to steer sheep that had strayed away from the flock. Today, bishops carry a staff to reflect their role as shepherds leading people to God. Paintings of St Brigid often show her holding a staff in her hand.

YOU WILL NEED

- A large sheet of art paper, colouring materials and old magazines for each group of children (*Let's Look Art Activity*)
- A large supply of bulrushes or art straws (*Let's Learn Craft Activity*)
- A large sheet of art paper and colouring materials for each group (*Let's Learn Art Activity*)
- A large container of water (ideally from local holy well), some stones, a St Brigid's Cross and a candle (*Let's Live Craft Activity*)

AT A GLANCE

CHATTING

- About St Brigid and other saints

STORY

- 'Megan Visits Brigid's Well'

ART ACTIVITY

- 'St Brigid' Poster

PRAYER

Let's
Look

SONG

- 'Hymn to Saint Brigid'

FACT FILE

- St Brigid's Cross

ACTIVITY

- Role-Play

STORY

- 'St Brigid and the Dying Chieftain'

CRAFT ACTIVITY

- St Brigid's Cross

ART ACTIVITY

- 'St Brigid' collage

TAKE A MOMENT

STORY

- 'St Brigid the Healer'

Let's
Learn

CRAFT ACTIVITY

- St Brigid's Well

Let's
Live

PRAYER SERVICE

- This prayer service is designed to take up one class period.

Prayer
Service

Let's Look ...

CHATTING

ABOUT ST BRIGID AND OTHER SAINTS

- Begin by recalling the lives of saints other than St Brigid already familiar to the children, using these or similar questions:
 - » Can you remember what was special about St Francis of Assisi? St Patrick? St Teresa of Calcutta (Kolkata)? St John Paul II?
- Then invite the children to recall any stories or facts about St Brigid that they remember from

earlier programmes. (The children will have heard the story 'St Brigid Builds her Church' and other stories about St Brigid in the Second Class/P4 *Grow in Love* programme.)

- Tell the children that they are now going to hear a story about a young girl's visit to St Brigid's Well in County Kildare.

STORY

TEACHER NOTE:

A sacred fire burned in Kildare reaching back into pre-Christian times. Scholars suggest that priestesses used to gather on the hill of Kildare to tend their ritual fires while invoking a goddess named Brigid to protect their herds and to provide a fruitful harvest. When St. Brigid built her monastery and church in Kildare, she continued the custom of keeping the fire alight. For her and her nuns, the fire represented the new light of Christianity, which reached our shores early in the fifth century. Some historians record that a few attempts were made to have the fire extinguished, but without success. It survived possibly up to the suppression of the monasteries in the sixteenth century. The sacred fire/flame was re-lit in 1993, in the Market Square, Kildare, by Mary Teresa Cullen, the then leader of the Brigidine Sisters, at the opening of a justice and peace conference. The conference, entitled 'Brigid: Prophetess, Earthwoman, Peacemaker', was organised by Afri (Action from Ireland), a justice, peace and human rights organisation. Since then, the Brigidine Sisters in Kildare have tended the flame in their centre, Solas Bhride.

Megan Visits St Brigid's Well

It was Sunday afternoon. Megan's mam was taking Megan and Gran to St Brigid's Well. As they drove along, Gran chatted about how, when she was young, she used to visit St Brigid's Well with her mam and dad on 1 February every year, because that was St Brigid's Day. They would say prayers and take home water from the well in little bottles, which they would use to bless themselves and the animals they kept on the farm. Gran told them that it was a custom among the local people to make a pilgrimage, a holy journey, to St Brigid's Well on that day.

Eventually they arrived, and Megan followed Gran down the stone steps to the well. As Megan dipped her hand into the cold, clear water, Gran told her she should say a prayer to St Brigid, because she was always listening.

Then they went over to look at the statue of St Brigid that was beside the well. Megan thought St Brigid looked very friendly, and her eyes were shiny and welcoming. Then she noticed that St Brigid was holding a flame, so she asked Gran why that was. Gran



explained that St Brigid had built an abbey where people could pray, and that she had lit a fire that she and her companions wanted to keep burning always. Eventually the fire was quenched. 'But,' Gran explained, 'the Sisters of the Brigidine Order, who are named after St Brigid and who live in Kildare and follow the example of St Brigid, lit the flame again many years later, and they keep it lit day and night in memory of St Brigid. Standing on her tippy-toes,



Teacher Tip:

There is a weblink online to photographs of St Brigid's Well.



Megan could just about touch the torch in St Brigid's hand.

Mam had brought a small picnic, but before they sat down to eat, Gran suggested that they do a 'round' of the well. And before anyone could ask what that was, Gran started

walking around the well while saying, 'St Brigid, Mary of the Gael, pray for us'. Mam and Megan joined in and the three of them felt excited at making their own little pilgrimage.

Eventually they headed for home. Megan thought quietly about St Brigid and she wondered if she might choose the name 'Brigid' for her Confirmation.

After you have read the story, check the children's understanding using these or similar questions:

- Why did Megan and her family decide to go to St Brigid's Well?
- What did Megan see and do at the well?

Then dig deeper by asking questions such as:

- Have you ever been to a holy well? What saint was associated with that well? What did you see there?
- Have you ever been on a pilgrimage or do you know anyone who has gone on a pilgrimage? Tell us about that.

ART ACTIVITY

'ST BRIGID' POSTER

Note: You will need a large sheet of art paper, colouring materials and old magazines for each group of children.

- Invite the children to work in groups. Give each group a large sheet of art paper, some art materials, such as crayons or markers, and some old magazines.

- Ask the children to create a poster that could be used to teach younger children about St Brigid.
- Invite the children to present their posters to the class before placing them in the prayer space.

PRAYER

Sign of the Cross

Teacher: St Brigid knew that God was always with her. She saw God in the world of nature. She saw God in the people around her.

May we follow St Brigid's ways by opening our hearts to the presence of God in our lives, especially during this season of spring, when there is new life all around us. The response is: *St Brigid, pray for us.*

All: St Brigid, pray for us.

Teacher: May we see God in the budding trees and flowers.

All: St Brigid, pray for us.

Teacher: May we see God in the building of nests and the singing of birds.

All: St Brigid, pray for us.

Teacher: May we see God in the baby lambs in the fields.

All: St Brigid, pray for us.

Teacher: May we see God in the lengthening of the days.

All: St Brigid, pray for us.

Teacher: May we see God in the love and care of our family.

All: St Brigid, pray for us.

Teacher: May we see God in the goodness of our friends.

All: St Brigid, pray for us.

Teacher: We know that God is always with us. Together let us give thanks and praise to God as we pray the *Glory be to the Father* using the gestures we have learned.

All: *Glory be to the Father* (Glory be to the Father, and to the Son, ...)

Remember to invite the children to take their book home and to engage with the At Home page with their parents/guardians at an appropriate time towards the end of the week.

Let's Learn ...

SONG

'HYMN TO ST BRIGID'

Introduce the song 'Hymn to St Brigid' (CD 1, track 26, p. 430) to the children and chat about the words. You can sing this song throughout the week.

STORY

In this legend about St Brigid and the chieftain, Brigid uses a cross made of rushes to teach a dying man about God's compassion.

St Brigid and the Dying Chieftain

It was a cold evening in the middle of winter when Brigid heard a gentle knock on her door. On opening it, she saw a young boy in bare feet looking up at her anxiously.

'My master, the chieftain, is dying,' the young boy said in a timid voice. 'He sent me to see if you would come to him.'

Brigid pulled her cloak around her shoulders and asked the boy to show her the way.

As they approached the chieftain's house, the boy said, 'He hasn't been well for days, and when he gets sick he gets very cranky.'

The boy became silent as they entered the brightly lit room where the chieftain was lying on a bed, curled up like a wounded animal.

It was obvious to Brigid that the man was dying. His eyes were closed and he was breathing rapidly. Sitting down beside his bed, she gently wiped the sweat from his forehead and began talking to him in a soothing voice.

Over the course of the night, the chieftain became calmer and his breathing grew softer, but he never opened his eyes. To fight the urge to sleep, Brigid began to gather some of the rushes that were spread on the floor and she started twisting them together into the shape of a cross, singing quietly as she did so. Being engrossed in her task, Brigid didn't realise that the chieftain had woken and was watching her.

'What is it you have been humming?' he asked her, his voice barely audible. 'I don't recognise the tune.'

Brigid stopped what she was doing. She knew the chieftain was afraid to die.

Brigid told him that she was singing



a prayer and that she sometimes did that to keep herself awake when she was very tired. 'I sing to myself about God's love for us all.'

The chieftain saw a wonderful light in Brigid's eyes as she spoke.

'That must be a great God that you believe in,' he whispered, for he believed in many different gods. 'Would you tell me about this God of yours?'

With that, Brigid took up the cross that she had made. Then, holding the dying man's hand, she began to tell him the story of Jesus, the Son of God, and of how he had come from God to show us how to live our lives with love and compassion. She told him about how Jesus had died to save all people, including him. She pressed the chieftain's hand as she spoke. Soon the man fell into a deep, peaceful sleep.

Brigid stayed by the chieftain's bedside till dawn broke across the sky and a new day began.

The legend does not tell us whether the chieftain recovered from his illness or how long he lived after that. However, it does tell us that the chieftain was so overcome by the God that Brigid told him about that he was baptised a Christian.

After you have read the story, check the children's understanding using these or similar questions:

- Why do you think St Brigid agreed to visit the sick chieftain?
- How do you think she felt when she saw the dying man curled up on the bed?
- How do you think she used the cross made of rushes to teach the man about God?

Then dig deeper using questions such as:

- Why might the chieftain have requested that

Brigid come to him? What do you think he might have been hoping for?

- In what ways do you think St Brigid helped the chieftain?
- What does the story tell us about St Brigid?
- What might you use to help you tell the story of Jesus?

Refer the children to page 97 of their book.

FACT FILE

ST BRIGID'S CROSS

- St Brigid's crosses are traditionally made from rushes on the eve of St Brigid's Day, 1 February.
- In the past, Irish families would make a St Brigid's Cross and hang it over the door of their home, as protection from fire and illness and as a blessing on all who entered and left.
- In some homes, the new St Brigid's Cross would be hung alongside the previous year's cross. In other homes, the old St Brigid's Cross would be burned as the new St Brigid's Cross was hung.
- This is the prayer that was often recited as the St Brigid's Cross was hung above the door:

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.

- Today, the St Brigid's Cross is still hung in homes, schools and other places as a protection against fire and theft, sickness and disease, and as a blessing on all who enter and leave these places.

Refer the children to page 98 of their book.

CRAFT ACTIVITY

ST BRIGID'S CROSS

Note: You will need a large supply of bulrushes or art straws.

- Invite the children to make their own St Brigid's Cross.
- There is a weblink online to a video clip that includes instructions on how to make a St Brigid's Cross.
- Ask the children to place their St Brigid's Crosses in the prayer space.

STORY

This is a legend about how St Brigid healed her two companions.

St Brigid the Healer

One day Brigid and two of the sisters from her abbey were returning home on horseback. The little group travelled along in silence, as neither of her two companions could hear or speak. However, Brigid and the women had found other ways to communicate with each other using their hands and facial expressions. They had just shared a joke when all of a sudden a rabbit darted out from a burrow and ran right under the front legs of Brigid's horse, causing the horse to rear up and throw Brigid to the ground. As she landed, her forehead hit a sharp stone and she groaned in pain.

The sisters dismounted immediately. One went to calm Brigid's horse, while the



other knelt down beside Brigid to see if she was okay. Blood was streaming from Brigid's forehead, forming a puddle on the ground





beside her. Helping Brigid to her feet, the sister happened to touch some of the blood.

'That's a nasty cut,' she said to herself. 'We'd better get her home quickly so that we can get it cleaned up.'

'Did you just say something?' Brigid asked, her face full of surprise. It was then the sister realised that not only had she spoken for the first time, but she had also heard Brigid's voice.

Realising what had happened, Brigid called the other sister over. Dipping her thumb into the puddle, she made a mark on the other young sister's forehead, and prayed to Jesus for healing. Her prayers were answered and the other sister let out a startled laugh.

The journey home to the abbey that evening was like no other. The three women talked and laughed and wondered about the great miracle that had happened, and they gave thanks and praise to God.

After you have read the story, check the children's understanding using these or similar questions:

- How did St Brigid and the sisters travel to the abbey?
- How did St Brigid and the sisters communicate with each other at the beginning of the story?
- What happened when the rabbit ran in front of Brigid's horse?

Then dig deeper using questions such as:

- What do you think it would be like not to be able to speak or hear?
- What do you think the three women might have talked about on their way back to the abbey?

Refer the children to page 98 of their book.

ACTIVITY

ROLE-PLAY

- Invite the children to gather in groups of three, with each child taking on the role of one of the sisters in the legend.
- Ask the children to imagine and act out the conversation that might have taken place

between the three women as they returned home that evening to the abbey.

- Invite volunteers to perform their drama for the class.

ART ACTIVITY

'ST BRIGID' COLLAGE

Note: You will need a large sheet of art paper and colouring materials for each group.

- Recall with the children the following aspects of the story of St Brigid:
 - » St Brigid's Cross
 - » St Brigid's Well
 - » St Brigid's flame
 - » St Brigid the teacher
 - » St Brigid the healer

- Then invite the children to work in small groups and make a collage based on St Brigid's life, using images, symbols and colours.
- When they have completed the collage, invite volunteers from each group to present their work to the class.
- Ask the children to place their artwork in the prayer space.

TAKE A MOMENT

Using these or similar words, invite the children to take a few moments for silent reflection:

I invite you to pause for a moment. You may close your eyes. Sit quietly, with your two feet flat on the floor ... and your back resting against the back of your seat ... and your hands placed gently on your lap ... Notice your breath as it moves slowly

in and out of your body. Think about St Brigid ... how kind and loving she was ... a healer ... a teacher ... a leader ... someone who cared for the environment ... a person with great faith in God ... With your inside voice, you might like to ask St Brigid to help you to live a life of love and faith, just as she did ... When you are ready, open your eyes.

Let's Live ...

WHAT HAVE YOU TAUGHT?

There are many stories and legends about St Brigid. They reveal a person of great faith who was a teacher, a leader, a healer, a lover of people and someone who cared deeply for the environment. St Brigid continues to be a role model for people of faith in modern times.

CRAFT ACTIVITY

ST BRIGID'S WELL

Make a St Brigid's Well with the children for your class's prayer space. For this you will need:

- A large container of water to represent the well – ideally with water from a local holy well
- Some stones to be placed around the container to represent the 'round'
- A St Brigid's Cross
- A lighted candle
- The children's collages serving as a backdrop



Preparation:

- If possible, have the children arrange their seats in a circle around the prayer space containing the 'St Brigid's Well' and the 'St Brigid' collages.
- Ensure that each child has their own St Brigid's Cross. Invite the children to hold their St Brigid's Cross throughout the prayer service. They may bring the crosses home afterwards.
- Choose five children to ask the questions during the dialogue section.
- Prayers of intercessions could be written by the children themselves and used in addition to or as a substitute for those given below.
- Ideally, have some water from a local holy well available for the blessing at the beginning and/or at the end of the prayer service.

Sign of the Cross (optional blessing using holy water)

Teacher (*lighting candle*): St Brigid made the light of Christ shine on others. We, too, make the light of Christ shine as we light this candle.

All: Thanks be to God.

Opening Song: 'Hymn to St Brigid' (CD 1, track 26, p. 430)

DIALOGUE

Reader 1: Why are we having this special prayer service?

Teacher: Because today is the first day of February, the Feast of St Brigid/Because we wish to remember St Brigid, whose feast day occurs on 1 February.

Reader 2: Who is St Brigid?

Teacher: St Brigid is one of the great Celtic saints of Ireland. She was born many hundreds of years ago in Faughart, County Louth, and later she lived in County Kildare.

Reader 3: What was so great about St Brigid?

Teacher: St Brigid loved God. She showed great kindness and generosity to people and to the environment. She also founded an abbey.

Reader 4: What is an abbey?

Teacher: An abbey is a place where people commit to live in community and spend time in prayer and service. Many people joined St Brigid in her abbey. The abbey was built on a farm. Each day, when they had finished their work, St Brigid and the other

sisters prayed together. St Brigid helped them to see that God loved them very much.

Reader 5: What kind of a person was St Brigid?

Teacher: St Brigid was a kind and loving person. She was always willing to teach people about God and she helped people to grow in their faith and love of God. She welcomed visitors to the abbey. She shared food with those who were hungry and in need. She helped and healed the sick. She showed respect for the environment.

Teacher: The response to the prayers is: *Pray for us.*

All: Pray for us.

Teacher: St Brigid, woman of prayer ...

All: Pray for us.

Teacher: St Brigid, lover of all creation ...

All: Pray for us.

Teacher: St Brigid, teacher of God's love ...

All: Pray for us.

Teacher: St Brigid, faithful leader ...

All: Pray for us.

Teacher: St Brigid, generous and kind to all people ...

All: Pray for us.

Teacher: St Brigid, healer of pain and suffering ...

All: Pray for us.

Teacher: St Brigid, patron saint of Ireland ...

All: Pray for us.

Invite the children to come forward and bless themselves with the holy water – ideally taken from a local holy well.

INTERCESSIONS

Teacher: We pray for all those who suffer in any way, that there will always be someone to help them in their need. Lord, hear us.

All: Lord, graciously hear us.

Teacher: We pray for all those who are hungry, that those who have food will share with them. Lord, hear us.

All: Lord, graciously hear us.

Teacher: We pray for all those who are sick, that



they will be provided with the care they need. Lord, hear us.

All: Lord, graciously hear us.

Teacher: We pray for all those who are homeless, that ways will be found to provide them with homes. Lord, hear us.

All: Lord, graciously hear us.

Teacher: We pray for all those who are lonely, afraid or sad, that they will find friendship, courage and love. Lord, hear us.

All: Lord, graciously hear us.

Teacher: Loving God, help us to follow the example of St Brigid by helping others. We ask this through Christ our Lord.

All: Amen.

Closing Song: 'Hymn to St Brigid'

Sign of the Cross (optional blessing using holy water)

26. Hymn to Saint Brigid

Bernard Sexton

1. Brigid, gen - tle wom - an, strong of spir - it, Be our
 guide, our joy, our hope, our strength, our light.
 Brigid brought God's love to all God's peo - ple and pro -
 claimed it, mak - ing day from dark - est night. Let us
 sing our praise to Brig - id, with hearts o - pen as we
 gath - er here to - geth - er now to pray. May her
 life for us re - main an in - spi - ra - tion. May her
 faith be with us now, and ev' - ry day.

2. Brigid, peaceful woman, who showed courage,
 Show us all the courage that we so often need.
 Brigid loved the poor, the sick and the lonely.
 Show us how to love in spirit and in deed.
3. Brigid who gave up her wealth to save us
 Teach us kindness, teach us to be more like you.
 Brigid who was firm, but always graceful,
 In your grace, help us be firm, help us be true.
4. Brigid be the voice that guides all peoples.
 Bring us peace from all the conflict in our world.
 Lead us to the kingdom of our Saviour.
 Lead us to the truth, the truth that we have been told.