

Tale from the Garden!

Ireland is well known across the world for its luscious rolling green fields, mossy glens, and heathery hills. When you think of Ireland or the luck of the Irish and flowers, the first thing that generally comes to mind is the clover, more specifically, a four-leaf clover. Another green leafy plant that often comes to mind when we think of Ireland is the Shamrock. These two flowers are found predominately through the Emerald Isles; therefore, it is only fitting that they would be commonly associated with Ireland.

Although arguably not exactly a flower, the shamrock is a small clover which is now the national flower of Ireland. It came to be so as it was once an important symbol to the ancient Irish Druids, as a plant naturally displaying the triad with its three heart-shaped leaves.

The Celts believed that everything important in the world came in threes; from the three dominions of earth, sky and sea, the three ages of man, and the three phases of the moon; so, it is only natural that a plant with three leaves would have been held in high regard.

It is believed that St Patrick realised the importance of this small plant to the Druids and decided to use the shamrock to illustrate the Christian teachings of the Holy Trinity. This was an effective way of spreading the word of Christianity throughout the land, in a way that best appealed to its people.

The shamrock was considered by many to have mystical properties and the ability to predict the weather; its leaves turn skyward when a storm is brewing.

In Celtic lore the shamrock has always been a charm against evil, which relates to the modern belief in the four-leaf clover as a good luck charm.

The Shamrock Today



A potted Shamrock house plant

There is still not a definite consensus over which precise botanical species of clover is the “true” shamrock depicted in lore and legend and used as the Irish symbol. Two separate scientific surveys were carried out in Ireland, one in 1893, and one in 1988 to try and get to the bottom of it.

Both surveys involved asking people from all across Ireland to send in examples of shamrock, which were then planted and allowed to flower, so that their botanical species could be identified. The results of both surveys were very similar, showing that the conception of the shamrock in Ireland had changed little in almost a hundred years.

The results show that there is no one “true” species of shamrock, but that *Trifolium dubium* (lesser clover) is considered to be it by half of Irish people, and *Trifolium repens* (white clover) by another third, with the rest split between *Trifolium pratense* (red clover), *Medicago lupulina* (black medick), *Oxalis acetosella* (wood sorrel), and various other species.

The *Trifolium dubium* (or lesser trefoil) is an annual with semi-erect stems to 25cm, small, bright green, trefoil leaves and small, pale yellow, clover-like flowers in summer. It can be a troublesome lawn weed, where it forms a mat of interlaced thin, wiry stems

But whichever one is your true shamrock, they all grow in abundance in Ireland, so the likelihood of spotting your own lucky charm all year round is very high!

Not to mention, it is very easy to grow your own, with many hybrid Shamrocks being grown and sold as house plants in the early spring, in time for St. Patrick's Day each year.

Numbers have extreme symbolic purposes in the Bible, and the number three stands out as one of the most prominent numbers featured in Scripture. Before we dive into the number three, we have to explore the meaning of the number in Hebrew. Many numbers in the Hebrew language tend to have a deeper meaning. The Hebrew for 'three' is 'shelosh' which means harmony, new life, and completeness.

No relationship or symbol in the Bible reflects this better than the Trinity itself. Father, Son, and Holy Spirit together are "perfect and whole," reflecting the absolute self-sufficiency, independence & autonomy of God. This wholeness is critical to the Christian faith itself, for it reminds us that Jesus is the Son of God and rose to be with him in Heaven.

The number three appears in the Bible 467 times, fewer than the number seven, but more than most of the other symbolically important numbers. Sometimes three is used as an emphatic triplet to describe the intensity of something. It's not just holy. It's 'holy, holy, holy'! We do have to keep in mind, three isn't always necessarily something good. In Revelation, we see an evil trinity: Satan, the Antichrist, and the False prophet (Revelations 12-13). However, typically, three means something complete and good.

Although we don't have time to dive into all 467 references to the number three, we can explore a handful.

1. God says something 3 times: We see God repeating a phrase three times in several places in Scripture. Jesus goes back to pray in the Garden of Gethsemane three times (Matthew 26 v4). God calls the prophet Samuel three times (1 Samuel 3 v8). Jesus told Peter that the rooster would crow after he had denied Jesus three times (Luke 22 v34). Repetition ensured Peter would remember Jesus' statement. We can also find hope as Christians who sometimes deny Christ or hide our light. Jesus knew what Peter would do and he still loved his disciple right to the end. And later, Jesus supplied Peter with the redemptive opportunity to cover each denial with a promise, also made three times and recorded in John: "Peter was hurt because he asked him the third time, 'Do you love me?' He said to him, 'Lord, you know all things; you know that I love you.' Jesus said to him, 'Feed my sheep'" (John 21 v17). Out of context, this sounds like nagging, but with the benefit of the full picture, one recognizes that each time Peter promised to feed Jesus' sheep, the Messiah was redeeming his earlier denial; emphasizing that Peter could leave his guilt behind.

2. Three of the same words: We see several instances of three of the same words in a row. "Woe" (three of them) is called out by an eagle in Revelation, foreshadowing terrible judgment (Revelation 8 v13), Jeremiah repeats the word "land" three times (Jeremiah 22 v29), & we hear the triplet of "holy" in Isaiah (Isaiah 6 v3). Threefold repetition stands in for an eternity of praise.

3. The third day: We can't talk three without talking about how Jesus rose after three days (1 Corinthians 15 v4). In Jewish culture, three days past the time of death indicated they were truly dead. Therefore, Jesus truly conquered death by not rising until the third day.

4. Three patriarchs: In Scripture, we have three patriarchs: Abraham, Isaac, and Jacob (Matthew 22 v32). These were the fathers of the Israelite nation, God's people.

5. Three prayers: Early Christians may have had three set prayer times a day, modelled after verses like Psalm 55 v17 'Evening, morning and noon I cry out my distress, and he hears my voice.' & Daniel 6 v10 'Now when Daniel learned that the decree had been published, he went home to his upstairs room where the windows opened towards Jerusalem. Three times a day he got down on his knees and prayed, giving thanks to his God, just as he had before.'

6. Three gifts: The Magi present to Jesus three gifts: gold, frankincense, and myrrh in Matthew 2.

7. Three angels: Three angels visited Abraham announcing that his wife, Sarah, was to give birth to a son (Genesis 18). In Revelation 14 v6-16, we encounter three more angels. The first, tells all the earth to worship God. The second, declares the fall of Babylon. And the third, declares that anyone who receives the 'Mark of the Beast' will receive God's wrath. There will be 'no rest day or night for those who worship the beast and his image'. It's a reminder that it 'calls for patient endurance on the part of the saints who obey God's commandments and remain faithful to Jesus.' The Apostle John is seeing a vision of the end of the corrupt world as we know it, to be replaced by one in which the Lord is praised ceaselessly. Worship is a constant - we are all worshipping something all the time, be it health, looks, family, or money - but in the perfect Kingdom of God, worship will ceaselessly be devoted to God.

8. The Trinity: Of course, we can't look at the number three without looking at the Trinity: God is three in one: the Father (1 Corinthians 8 v6), the Son (Colossians 2 v9) & the Holy Spirit (2 Corinthians 3 v17).

9. Jesus spoke of his threefold role: the way – the truth – the life

"Jesus said to him, "I am the way, and the truth, and the life; no one comes to the Father, but by me." John 14:6
Jesus spread Christianity for three years – according to the Gospel of John.

10. Saul's (Paul) Conversion to Christianity: Saul was on his way to Damascus when he fell to the ground hearing the voice of Jesus asking: "Saul, Saul, why do you persecute me?" When he opened his eyes he could not see anything. "And for three days he was blind, and did not eat or drink anything." (Acts 9:9)

Saul converted to Christianity and was later known as Paul. Paul suffered "Three times I was beaten with rods Three times I was shipwrecked." (2 Corinthians 11 v25)

11. Three Sons: Noah had three sons: Shem – Ham – Japheth (The story of Noah is in Genesis chapter 7 -10).

12. Jonah in the Whale: Jonah spent three days and three nights in the belly of a whale.

"But the Lord provided a great fish to swallow Jonah, and Jonah was inside the fish three days and three nights." (Jonah 1v 17); "For as Jonah was three days and three nights in the belly of a huge fish, so the Son of Man will be three days and three nights in the heart of the earth." (Matthew 12 v40)

13. 3 Days in Prison: Joseph was made governor after he had successfully interpreted the dreams of Pharaoh. When his brothers arrived in Egypt to buy grain, they did not recognize Joseph. Joseph put them in prison for three days. Genesis chapter 42.

14. The Temptation of Christ: After Jesus was baptized, he fasted for 40 days and 40 nights in the desert. During this time Satan tried to tempt Jesus three times - to turn stone into bread, to jump off a pinnacle and rely on the angels to save him & to worship the devil in return for all the kingdoms of the world.

15. Jesus raised three people from the dead: The only son of a widow from Nain (Luke 7v11-14), the daughter of the religious leader in Jairus (Mark 5 v35-42) & Lazarus of Bethany, the brother of Mary and Martha (John 11v1-44)

16. Parable of the Good Samaritan: "A man was going down from Jerusalem to Jericho, and he fell into the hands of robbers. They stripped him of his clothes, beat him, and went away, leaving him half-dead." (Luke 10v30) Three people arrived at the site where the man lay half dead: a priest who passed without helping; a Levite who passed without helping; & a Samaritan who showed mercy and took care of him.

What Should We, as Christians, Remember about the Number 3?

Even numbers aren't outside of God's grasp. God has ordered the world to follow mathematical and numerical patterns. We can see his design in how numbers operate even in nature, knowing that everything on earth points back to the fact that God exists, so we have no excuse not to praise him.

And to endorse the power of 3, we'll return to Ireland & Irish folklore!

Do you believe in Leprechauns? A leprechaun (Irish: leipreachán/luchorpán) is a diminutive supernatural being in Irish folklore, classed by some as a type of solitary fairy. They are usually depicted as little bearded men, wearing a coat and hat, who partake in mischief. In later times, they have been depicted as shoe-makers who have a hidden pot of gold at the end of the rainbow.



In Irish folklore there is a saying:

"If you catch a Leprechaun and set him free, the Leprechaun will grant you three wishes."