

Anyone still wearing green from yesterday? What about shamrock pins? St. Patrick's Day actually started out as a religious festival celebrating of all people, St. Patrick. Patrick was born British. He was kidnapped by Irish raiders who made him work as a shepherd in the early 400s. He escaped but in 432 he went back and brought Christianity to the pagan people there. It is said he used a three leafed shamrock to explain the Trinity to the people. That's probably why people wear green and shamrocks on March 17<sup>th</sup>.

Even though St. Patrick is credited with bringing Christianity to Ireland it won't do us any good to talk about him too much today. Nor any other saint for that matter. Satan has worked hard to try and steal our stuff. Christmas is a frenzy of commercialism. Easter is a spring festival of green plastic grass, bunnies, and chocolate eggs. Even St. Patrick is celebrated by people looking to drink too much and pretend to be Irish. People would much rather focus on anything else rather than care about how to get good with God. Jesus certainly isn't working for them. There must be something or someone else.

Included in the gospel is one of the most familiar portions of the Bible. This one verse, memorized by most, is loved for simplicity as well as its deep message. This message Satan cannot take away because Jesus shares what he was sent to do. We gather during this season of Lent to...

### **Rejoice for God sent his Son**

**To look to**

**To save us**

When Moses lifted it up in the desert it wasn't much to look at. Think about it from the perspective of an Israelite. You grumbled against God and poisonous snakes were sent by God to bite you. Their venom was deadly and it wasn't long before you started feeling faint. Now you begged Moses and God for help. The remedy God sent was a bronze snake on a pole so you could look at it. The very thing killing you was the very thing you now had to look at to live. Being forced to look at the bronze snake reminded you of the complaining you did to get the poison bite in the first place. How awful.

Jesus was talking with Nicodemus, a religious teacher who was coming to him to ask more questions and get some answers about Jesus. But Nicodemus got a lesson on life. He was transported back to that day when the Israelites were being bitten by snakes. Jesus used it as a picture of something greater. **"Just as Moses lifted up the snake in the desert, so the Son of Man must be lifted up."** Nicodemus wasn't a fool. He knew the power wasn't in the snake Moses lifted up. The power was in God. But now Jesus was claiming that the bronze snake actually pictured something else that would be lifted up, something better. The Son of Man, a name for God's own son, the Messiah would be lifted up in a similar way. Only Jesus knew exactly what that meant.

Someone involved in a violent car crash in a hospital bed with all sorts of tubes, wires, and other medically important things coming out doesn't need to have a mirror held up so they can see themselves. They don't need a visual reminder of how bad things look. Holding up a mirror to our sinfulness is something we would rather avoid too. It's horrible because we don't want to be reminded of our sins. We don't want to admit that our ugly sins are like poison venom causing our death. Sins like gossip and back talk to your parents. Unscriptural sinful divorce. Failed relationships or injured friends from things you did. We know our sins and the deadly venom they strike with. But we've turned away. It's easier to ignore sin and not look, even while it kills us.

Initially the cross of Jesus is like a mirror that makes us jump back. The punishment Jesus received was terrible, torturous, and deadly. That punishment was ours. We should have been the ones dying up there. God knows we deserved it. Look again at the cross. Just like dying Israelites looking at a bronze snake, God really invites you to look at the only thing that gives life. **"So the Son of Man must be lifted up, that everyone who believes in him may have eternal life."** That's God's own son being lifted up on the cross for all to look at. It's exactly what God wanted because there he showed his love. Christ's cross doesn't bring death for you it brought death for him. Our sins don't stop God from loving us. Not one of your sins of gossip, divorce, or insults can turn off God's love in Jesus. Instead Christ's cross forgives those sins and all others.

The snakes were punishment. The guilty verdict that brings death to all people is consequence for our sins. But God doesn't want sinners to perish. **"For God so loved the world that he gave his one and only Son, that whoever believes in him shall not perish but have eternal life."** God wants sinners to look to him in faith, all sinners. He wants us to look and believe in Christ. Worthiness to hear this gospel and look to Christ comes only from Christ. So God loves the world. You are of the world. Your sins make you worthy of death. Through Christ Jesus you have eternal life and your sins are forgiven. All people's sins are forgiven. Rejoice for God sent his Son so you might look and live.

You know what it feels like to be sleeping when someone comes in and throws on the light. It's like blindness at first. Your eyes struggle and you just want the light to go away. You can't look because it hurts. The world is in darkness, not physical but spiritual darkness. Sinful people don't want light, they prefer darkness. Shadows hide sin easier. It's more comfortable to sin and feel like you're getting away with it. Evil deeds don't seem so evil when we're the only ones that know about them. God threw on the light when he sent his Son to the cross to save us. It's a light that hurts and our sinful nature just wants the light out. It's a sign of unbelief.

Unbelief is more than just blindness. That would be too easy. Unbelief is really a refusal to step into the light that removes the blindness. To unbelievers the light is objectionable so they avoid it and despise it. They would prefer to stay blind than be saved. So they refuse the light which saves. **“Whoever does not believe in him stands condemned already because he has not believed in the name of God’s one and only Son.”** They stay condemned as if Judgment Day were today. They love the spiritual darkness that hides their sins. Are you living in the darkness to not have to deal with a sin? Maybe you’re hoping the darkness will convince you and others that whatever sin it is really is no one else’s business but yours. It’s private. Then people won’t judge you or look down on you for doing something completely against God’s law. As long as the sin is hidden in the darkness I’m okay.

You’re not okay. Jesus is the light. He wants us to be in the light of his gospel. **“This is the verdict: light has come into the world.”** Jesus is the only true moral, spiritual light. His light frees you from the bondage and entrapment of sin. He wins us with a message that says our sins are forgiven. He comes and promises we will not be condemned. **“Whoever believes in him is not condemned.”** Those who stand with Christ don’t stand a chance of being condemned. The Savior has removed all condemnation from them. You’re standing in the light as believers in Christ. You can be open about your evil deeds because standing in the light they are washed away in Jesus. Rejoice because God sent his Son to save you by his light.

Faith doesn’t ask how or why. It simply clings to that life given to it by the gospel light of Jesus in the middle of death and destruction. Faith isn’t the something we have to do. Believing isn’t the something we have to do in order for God to save us. By grace through the Holy Spirit we believe in the light. Our hope for eternal life is certain in Christ. Mercy is God’s mandate to us. **“For God so loved the world…”** Any and all good we do comes from him. **“Whoever lives by the truth comes into the light, so that it may be seen plainly that what he has done has been done through God.”** We are saved by the Son God sent.

Yesterday was the day to rejoice if you’re Irish. You could rejoice for being Irish or for St. Patrick who helped to bring the Irish people to Christianity. Today is a day for rejoicing too, but not for any particular saint from the past or any particular heritage or culture. We rejoice that God sent his Son for us to look at and to save us.