

'Ireland in Schools'

## **St Brendan the Navigator**

Notes for teachers

1. The voyage of St Brendan - not just a tall tale?  
A note to help answer some of the queries raised in the classroom.
2. *Navigatio Sancti Brendani Abbatis* (Voyage of Saint Brendan the Abbot)  
'The bare bones' of the tenth-century text of St Brendan's voyage, 'rendered down into the factual narrative of a remarkable venture by sea'

## The voyage of St Brendan - not just a tall tale?

A note to help answer some of the queries raised in the classroom

St. Brendan was born in Ireland about 488 AD near Tralee in County Kerry. He was ordained by Bishop Erc and sailed about northwest Europe spreading the Christian faith and founding monasteries, the largest at Clonfert, County Galway, where he was buried in 577 AD. St. Brendan's Feast Day is 16 May. He is the patron saint of boatmen, mariners, sailors, travellers and whales.

### Voyage to the west

Brendan's most famous voyage was to the west. According to tradition, he was in his seventies when he and seventeen other monks set out on a westward voyage in a currach or coracle, a wood-framed boat covered in sewn ox-hides. They were seeking the 'Promised Land of the Saints', said to lie far to the west of Ireland. The monks sailed about the North Atlantic for seven years, according to details set down in the tenth-century Latin text *Navigatio Sancti Brendani Abbatis* (Voyage of Saint Brendan the Abbot).

Weaving through the topographical details of the *Navigatio* are a detailed description of the construction of his boat, which was not unlike the currachs still made in County Kerry today, and accounts of the perils and hardships of the sea. It is vivid writing, as in the description of the submarine volcano off Iceland, the Dantesque account of the weekend leave of Judas from Hell spent on a wave-drenched, but cooling rock, and accounts of unfamiliar monsters.

Several copies of this text have survived in monasteries throughout Europe. It was an important part of folklore in medieval Europe and may have influenced Columbus.

### Scepticism

Sceptics could not accept that such a fragile vessel as a currach could possibly sail in the open sea.

Several passages in the legend also seemed incredible. The monks were 'raised up on the back of sea monsters'; passed by 'crystals that rose up to the sky'; were 'pelted with flaming, foul smelling rocks by the inhabitants of a large island on their route', and finally arrived at the beautiful land they called 'Promised Land of the Saints'. They explored until they came to a great river that divided the land.

### Tim Severin's voyage

In 16 May 1976, Tim Severin, a British navigation scholar, embarked from Brandon Creek on the Dingle peninsula in a currach that he constructed using the details described by Brendan. His goal was to determine if the voyage of Brendan and his fellow monks was possible. They tanned ox-hides with oak bark, stretched them across the wood frame, sewed them with leather thread and smeared the hides with animal fat for water resistance.

Examination of nautical charts led Severin to believe that Brendan's route would be governed by the prevailing winds that would take him across the northernmost part of the Atlantic. This would take him close to Iceland and Greenland with a probable landfall at Newfoundland (St Brendan's Isle) - the route that Leif Erickson would have taken in the tenth century. Many of Brendan's stops on his journey were islands where Irish monks had set up primitive monasteries. Norsemen that travelled on these waters visited these islands and recorded their meeting with 'Papers'(fathers).

### Supporting the traditional story

Severin and his crew were surprised at how friendly the whales were that they encountered. The whales swam around and even under their boat. It could have been recognized as another whale by the giant mammals. The whales could have been even friendlier in Brendan's time, before motorized ships would make them wary of man. So friendly that they may have lifted the monks' boat in a playful gesture.

After stopping at the Hebrides islands, Severin proceeded to the Danish Faroe Islands. At the island of Mykines, they encountered thousands of seabirds. Brendan called this island 'The Paradise of Birds.' He referred to the larger island as the 'Island of Sheep.' The word Faroe itself means Island of Sheep. There is also a Brandon Creek on the main island of the Faroes, that the local people believe was the embarkation point for Brendan and his crew.

Severin's route carried them to the Labrador-Greenland iceberg belt ('The Crystal Pillar') and to Iceland where they wintered, as did Brendan, with two Icelandic volcanoes (the 'Island of Smiths' and the 'Fiery Mountain'). The

volcanoes, active for many centuries, might well have been erupting when the monks stayed there. This could have accounted for the ‘pelting with flaming, foul smelling rocks’, referred to in the ninth-century text. The monks had never seen icebergs before, so their description of them as ‘towering crystals’ would make sense.

Severin’s boat was punctured by floating ice off the coast of Canada. They were able to make a repair with a piece of leather sewn over the hole. They landed on the island of Newfoundland on 26 June, 1977. This might well have been Brendan’s ‘Land promised to the Saints’ referred to in the *Navigatio*.

Severin’s journey did not prove that Brendan and his monks landed on North America. However it did prove that a leather currach as described in the *Navigatio* could have made such a voyage as mapped out in the text.

### **Other evidence of the Irish in early America**

Other evidence of Irish exploration of North America has come to light with the discovery of stone carvings in West Virginia. Dated between 500 and 1000 AD, they are written in Old Irish using the Ogham alphabet (an alphabet for the Irish language based on twenty-five characters represented by a system of strokes or notches). It seems possible that the inscriptions may have been made by Irish missionaries in the wake of Brendan’s voyage, for these inscriptions are Christian with the early Christian symbols of piety, such as the various Chi-Rho monograms (Name of Christ) and the Dextra Dei (Right Hand of God).

The lack of any written account of this exploration could be explained by the explorers not being able to return to their homeland. If they indeed did reach what is now West Virginia, it would be extremely doubtful that they could manage to return to Ireland from an embarkation point that far south. The design of their currach required favourable winds and currents in the right direction in order to navigate. Severin discovered that it was extremely difficult to tack as other sailing ships were able to do. Perhaps that is the reason that it took Brendan seven years for his journey.

### **The meaning of Brendan’s voyage**

According to Professor George Simms (*Brendan the Navigator. Exploring the Ancient World*, O’Brien Press, 0-86278-241-4), Brendan’s journey was not measured by any map, nor was it organised by a timetable. It was quite a different kind of exercise with three separate meanings.

#### *Adventure and discovery*

First, Brendan and his companions undertake a challenging adventure with great seafaring skills. This sea-journey, often called Brendan’s navigation, has become famous. Other sailors, explorers, and adventurers have been inspired by Brendan’s great achievement. They have followed his example and, as a result, have often discovered new countries and unknown islands.

#### *Meaning of life*

Secondly, Brendan’s voyage is described as a journey of life. The meaning of the saint’s life is explained, as if he was from his first birthday right up to his death ‘on a journey’. We read of the problems that he faces. He meets many dangers. He escapes from storms and shipwrecks. He comes across enemies who attack the ship. He is also wonderfully helped by many kind, generous people on the way. His faith gives him and his crew the strength and the courage to keep sailing.

It is not possible, of course, in this life-journey to trace on any map the places which he visits. The names of the islands describe his experiences: The Island of Delights and the Land of Promise and the Paradise of Birds are more than places on a chart or a map. They are part of Brendan’s vision. With the help of this journey, with all that happens on the way, Brendan sees what life is for. His bravery and his hopefulness make his life with God closer. His faith is tested by these adventures, but grows stronger all the time. His life is made richer, more useful and more helpful to others. His example, even today, hundreds of years later, is followed by others who have been inspired by him.

This journey is not only a fine piece of navigation and seamanship. Quite clearly, it is a missionary journey. It is also a pilgrimage as Brendan wanders over the seas ‘for Christ’. It is, in fact, a spiritual journey. Brendan found not only new countries, which had not previously been discovered. He found happiness. The treasures he found were not highly-priced pieces of gold, silver or jewellery. They were instead valuable spiritual blessings, such as wisdom, new knowledge, true faith, and the freedom that is found by living a good and honest life, spent generously in God’s service with a caring love for all living creatures, including fellow human beings.

### *A way of life - a floating monastery*

Thirdly, the journey was guided and given shape by the rules, not of navigation alone, but of the monastery from which Brendan had started. We read of the feasts and festivals, as well as of the times of fasting, which are celebrated out at sea by the crew. The prayers of the whole liturgical round of the Christian year are recited faithfully and regularly as they sail along. They follow the same pattern set by the prayers of the cloisters and the church within the monastery walls.

The travellers celebrate Christmas on one island, and Easter on another. They keep the fast of Lent and train, not only as oarsmen with hard rowing, but as monks who belong to a community, bound closely to one another and to God by prayers and psalms and spiritual songs. The long day is divided up. Every three hours they strengthen their lives and their spirits with prayer.

In the course of the voyage, they meet another community. St Ailbe, the abbot, welcomes them. They share the life of silence on an island out there far away from Ireland. They learn how the old abbot, now 140 years old, strengthens the life in his community and counts his blessings, since God gives to him everything he needs.

The monks loved the psalms in a special way. In some places they found that it was the custom to recite the whole book of 150 psalms each day. They spoke of praying the words of 'the three fifties'. In many places in the story of Brendan's navigation, written several hundreds of years after the voyage, there are quotations from these psalms. Some are psalms of welcome which they hear as they approach an island-harbour, like this one:

'Brother, how good and joyful a thing it is to dwell together in unity.'

Other psalms have a real taste of the sea in their words:

'They that go down to the sea in ships and occupy their business in great waters ... these see the works of the Lord and his wonders in the deep!'

### **Reflection**

Brendan's name has appeared on the old ocean-maps. His story has been told in many languages. Brendan (or Bran-don) island is marked in mid-Atlantic on the map, made in Portugal by Toscanelli in 1474, and used by Christopher Columbus.

There is a Brendan Society today which seeks to encourage all the nations of the world to combine in friendship and peaceful co-operation with a Brendan-like 'outgoing spirit'. The stone carving at Bantry, county Cork, outlines a boat, like Brendan's, as 'he rows heavenward'. Many are the signs and traditions surrounding this famous navigator. He, who has inspired intrepid explorers to adventure for Christ, remaining humbled by his own experiences in

'his dusty little coracle  
on the broad-bosomed glorious ocean.'

At the end of his life, he was still humble and not, in the worldly sense, at all boastful or proud of his achievement as he said:

'I fear the solitary journey by so dark a way; I fear the unknown journey to go before my King, the sentence of the Judge!'

*See overleaf for a tale for children*

# St Brendan. A tale for children

by Grainne Rowland

<http://www.irishcultureandcustoms.com/1Kids/StBrendan.html>

Many people think that St. Brendan, an Irish monk, discovered America nearly 1,000 years before Christopher Columbus. The story of St. Brendan's travels is full of strange adventures.

St. Brendan lived from the year 488 to about 580. One day, a friend told him about the Promised Land of the Saints. On this island day never ends. The rocks are jewels. Every tree had fruit which was good to eat. Every plant had flowers with wonderful smells. The air was always warm. St. Brendan set out to find this wonderful island.

First he and some of his monks built a boat. It had a wooden frame covered with cowhides. The outside was smeared with grease to make it waterproof. It had one sail. St. Brendan blessed the boat and had it filled with supplies. Then he set off to the West with a few monks.

After many days the men spotted an island. A dog led the monks to a large house, filled with marvellous furnishings. There was bread, fish, and water for each of the visitors. Then they slept in comfortable beds. For three days, the sailors ate and rested. Except for the dog, no other living creature was seen on the entire island. Then they set sail again.

On another island, the monks met a man who gave them many supplies. He also told them that they would sail for seven years before returning to Ireland.

Not long after leaving that island, St. Brendan and his monks stepped onto a stony beach. They collected a small pile of driftwood and began to cook lunch. But as the fire burned hotter, the earth began to move. What could be happening? The monks shook in fear. The land began to shake and sink into the water. Racing for the boat, the monks paddled away as fast as they could. When they looked back, they saw the 'island' was really a giant fish.

Many months later, St. Brendan told the monks that Easter was near. They searched for land so that they could celebrate the Easter holy day. At last, they reached an island. It was full of trees, grass and flowers. The trees were so covered with snow-white birds that the leaves could not be seen. The birds sang so sweetly that St. Brendan called them his Easter choir! Easter was a cheerful day as the monks and birds sang together.

Far away from land, the monks saw a huge beast swimming towards them. The beast's mouth was wide open, as if it would eat the monks and the boat. It swam so fast that it made waves as high as a wall. The huge waves almost swamped the boat. The beast came nearer! The monks held onto the sides of the boat. Suddenly, from out of nowhere, another monster attacked the beast. The beast was killed and the monks were safe.

Sailing on, St. Brendan and his friends saw many strange sights. They found a land with many erupting volcanoes. So many fiery rocks were being blown from the volcanoes that it seemed as if demons were throwing flaming stones at the monks.

The monks saw places where sheep were as big as cows. Another place had grapes as big as apples.

St. Brendan and his crew visited many places before they found the Promised Land of the Saints. The land was so big that they could not explore all of it. They found fruit and jewels, some of which they took back to Ireland.

Some of St. Brendan's adventures sound like make-believe. But scientists have found some very, very old Irish items in different parts of North America. Do you think St. Brendan and his monks might have left surprises for us to find many, many years later? Do you think that just maybe St. Brendan DID find America first?

## ***Navigatio Sancti Brendani Abbatis* (Voyage of Saint Brendan the Abbot)**

Taken from *The Brendan Voyage* by Tim Severin, Abacus, 0-34910-707-6, pp 265-73

### **The Navigatio**

So many manuscripts of the *Navigatio Sancti Brendani Abbatis* have survived that it took an American scholar nearly thirty years to track them down - and even then he admitted that he had not found them all. He used eighteen of about 120 *Navigatio* manuscripts to produce his edition, which was printed by the University of Notre Dame Press as Number IV in their *Publications in Medieval Studies* (1959).... The following synopsis is only intended as a paraphrase. It is the bare bones of the *Navigatio*, rendered down into the factual narrative of a remarkable venture by sea.

### **The Text**

#### *Chapter 1*

Saint Brendan was living at Clonfert as the head of a community of 3000 monks when he was visited by a monk named Barrind. Barrind told Brendan how he had visited Saint Mernoc, a former disciple who had gone to live as an anchorite and was now the abbot of a monastery on an offshore island. Saint Mernoc had invited Barrind to go with him by boat to the Promised Land of the Saints. Setting out westward, they passed through a thick fog and reached a wide land, rich in fruit and flowers. For fifteen days they walked around the land, until they reached a river flowing from east to west. There they were met by a man who told them that they should go no farther, but return home. He told them that the island had been there since the beginning of the world, and that they had actually been ashore for a year, though they had not needed food or drink. This man accompanied the travellers back to their boat and they re-embarked. Then he vanished, and the travellers sailed home through the fog back to Saint Mernoc's monastery. There the monks told Barrind that Saint Mernoc often sailed away to the same Promised Land and stayed away a long time.

#### *Chapter 2*

After Barrind had left him to return to his own cell, Brendan picked fourteen monks from his own community, and told them that he dearly wanted to visit this Promised Land of the Saints. Promptly they volunteered to accompany him.

#### *Chapter 3*

After fasting, the Saint and his companions paid a three-day visit to the island of Saint Enda (Inishmore, Aran Islands) for his blessing.

#### *Chapter 4*

Then Brendan and his monks pitched tent on a narrow creek under a mountain called Brendan's Seat. There they built a wood-framed boat, covered in oak-bark-tanned oxhides, and smeared the joints of the hides with fat to seal them. In the boat they put a mast and sail, steering gear, supplies for forty days, spare hides and fat for dressing leather.

#### *Chapter 5*

Just as they were about to set sail, three monks came down to the beach, and begged to be taken aboard. Brendan agreed, but he warned that two of them would meet a hideous fate, and the third also would not return from the voyage.

#### *Chapter 6*

Sailing westward for fifteen days, they lost their bearings after a calm and were blown to a tall rocky island, with streams falling down the cliffs. With difficulty they found a tiny harbor like a cleft. Here they landed and were met by a stray dog who led them to a settlement, where they entered a hall and found food set out for them, which they ate. For three days they stayed, seeing no one but always finding food ready set out.

#### *Chapter 7*

Toward the end of their visit, one of the latecoming monks tried to steal a silver bridle he had found, but Brendan rebuked him. At that, a small devil jumped out of the monk's bosom, and the man died.

#### *Chapter 8*

Just as they were re-embarking in their boat, a young man came up with a basket of bread and jar of water which he gave them for their voyage, which he warned would be a long one.

#### *Chapter 9*

Their next landfall was an island with many large streams, full of fish. It was called the Island of Sheep, because flocks of splendid white sheep ran wild all year round. Here the travellers stayed from Maundy Thursday to Holy Saturday. An islander brought them food, and prophesied they would visit a nearby island for Easter Day and then land on a third island not far to the west called the Paradise of Birds, where they would remain until the eighth day of Pentecost.

#### *Chapter 10*

This nearest island was stony and without grass. Beaching their boat on it, the monks hauled it up with ropes and lit a fire to cook some of the meat from the Island of Sheep. But as the pot began to boil, the island started to shake and move, and the monks scrambled back into their boat in panic. They watched the 'island' move off to sea, the fire still burning on it, and Brendan told them that the 'island' was the biggest fish in the ocean, called Jasconius.

#### *Chapter 11*

Now the monks sailed to the Paradise of Birds, lying across a narrow channel to the west of the Island of Sheep. They hauled

their boat for almost a mile up a narrow stream to its source, where they found a vast tree covered with a multitude of white birds. One bird was very tame and flew down to land on the boat and spoke to Saint Brendan to explain that the birds were men's spirits, and that Saint Brendan would search seven years before he reached the Promised Land. At vespers and other times of prayer the birds sang hymns and chanted verses. The travellers spent some time on the Paradise of Birds, eating supplies brought over by the Procurator or 'Steward,' the same man who had supplied them on the Island of Sheep. He also brought them fresh water, warning them not to drink direct from the island spring, water from which would send them to sleep.

#### *Chapter 12*

Continuing on their voyage for three months with only sea and sky around them, the travellers were so exhausted when they next sighted land that they could scarcely row there against the unfavorable wind. But they managed to reach a small landing place and fill their water-vessels at two wells, one clear and one muddy. Here they were met by a grave and white-haired elder who led them to a monastery two hundred yards from the landing place. Eleven silent monks greeted them at the entrance with reliquaries, crosses, and hymns. They embraced the travellers, and the abbot of the monastery washed their feet. Then they sat down to a meal of sweet roots and white bread, sitting down with the monks. The abbot now broke his rule of silence to explain to Brendan that the loaves were brought miraculously to their larder and that the lights in their chapel never burned away. No cooked food was eaten at the monastery and the monks, of whom there were twenty-four in all, never seemed to grow any older.

After the meal Brendan was shown their church with its circle of twenty-four seats and church vessels of square-cut crystal. The church itself was also square. After compline, the visiting monks were taken away and given accommodation in the cells of the monks, but the abbot and Brendan stayed behind to witness the miraculous lighting of the lamps. As they waited, the abbot explained that they had been on the island eighty years, hearing no human voice, and communicating only by gestures, and no one had ever been sick or afflicted by worldly spirits. Abruptly a fiery arrow sped in through a window, touched and lit the lamps, and then suddenly sped out again.

#### *Chapter 13*

Brendan and his monks spent Christmas with the Community of Saint Ailbe, and on the eighth day after Epiphany set out again by sea, rowing and sailing until Lent. Their food and drink ran out and they were very distressed, but three days later they came upon another island. On it they found a clear well of water, surrounded by plants and roots, and fish swimming along the river bed toward the sea. They gathered the plants and roots to eat, but the well water caused some of them to fall into a deep sleep, some for three days, others for two days, some for a day. Saint Brendan prayed for them and, when they recovered, told them they must quit the island. Loading only a little water and taking fish from the river, they set out again in their boat and sailed north.

#### *Chapter 14*

Three days later the wind dropped and the sea was so smooth it seemed to be coagulated. Brendan ordered his crew to ship their oars and let God direct the boat. For twenty days they drifted aimlessly until a westerly wind sped them eastward.

#### *Chapter 15*

The wind brought them back to the Island of Sheep where, at the same landing place as the previous year, the Steward greeted them joyfully, pitched a tent, made ready a bath, and provided them with fresh clothes. Then after they had celebrated Holy Saturday and eaten supper, he told them to go again to the whale to celebrate Resurrection Sunday and afterward to proceed to the Paradise of Birds. He himself would ferry across bread and drink while they stayed there.

This they did - landing on the whale, then sailing on to the Paradise of Birds and listening to the birds. The Steward told Brendan that for seven years he would repeat the cycle, spending Maunday Thursday on the Island of Sheep, Easter on the whale; from Easter to Pentecost on the Paradise of Birds; and Christmas with the Community of Saint Ailbe.

So it turned out, and the Steward brought them their food until it was time to set out again in the curragh with provisions from the Island of Sheep.

#### *Chapter 16*

After sailing in the ocean for forty days, they saw a beast of huge size following the boat. He spouted foam from his nostrils and came ploughing toward them at great speed as if to devour them. The monks were very frightened and called upon the Lord, but Brendan comforted them. Then the huge beast came even closer, pushing great waves before him right up to the boat, and the monks were even more terrified. At that moment another mighty beast appeared from the opposite direction, the west. Passing near the boat, he attacked the first monster, breathing fire. Before the monks' eyes, he cut the first great beast into three pieces, then swam back the way he had come.

Another day, the travellers saw a very large wooded island. Landing on it, they came across the tail portion of the dead sea beast. Brendan told them they would be able to eat it. Setting up a tent, they cut off as much flesh as they could carry, and in the south part of the island found a clear well and many plants and roots which they gathered. In the night, unseen beasts stripped the carcass, leaving nothing but bones next morning.

Storms, strong winds, hail, and rain kept the monks on the island for three months. One day a dead fish was washed ashore and the monks ate part of it, and Saint Brendan told them to preserve the rest in salt, for the weather would improve, and the swell and waves would diminish, and allow them to leave.

Loading the boat with water and food and collecting supplies of plants and roots, the monks launched and, raising sail, headed north.

### *Chapter 17*

One day they came to an extraordinary flat island, barely above sea level. It had no trees, but was covered with purple-and-white fruit. Around the island moved three choirs, one of boys in white, one of youths in blue, and one of elders in purple. As they moved, they sang hymns. Brendan's curragh landed at ten in the morning, and at midday and 3:00 P.M. the choirs chanted appropriate psalms, as well as for vespers. When they finished, a bright cloud rolled over the island and hid the singers from view. Next morning dawned cloudless, and the choirs sang again and celebrated communion, after which two members of the choir of youths brought a basket of purple-and-white fruit to the boat. They also asked the second of the latecoming monks to join them. Brendan gave his permission, and this man stayed behind with the choir of youths when the curragh set to sea again. At three o'clock the travellers ate one of the purple-and-white fruit which had been given them. The fruit were all the same, the size of a large ball and full of juice. Saint Brendan squeezed a pound of juice from one fruit, which he divided between his men. Each fruit fed a man for twelve days and tasted of honey.

### *Chapter 18*

Some days later a great bird flew over the boat, carrying the branch of an unknown tree. The bird dropped the branch into Saint Brendan's lap. At the tip of the branch was a cluster of bright red grapes the size of apples. The monks ate the grapes, and lived on them for eight days. Then, after three days without food they came in sight of an island covered with trees bearing the same fruit. The air smelled of pomegranates. For forty days they stayed, pitching a tent on the island, gathering the fruit and also plants and roots of all kinds which grew near the springs.

### *Chapter 19*

Sailing on at random with a store of fruit, their boat was attacked by a flying Gryphon. But just as the Gryphon was about to strike its talons, the same bird which had brought the grapes reappeared and drove off the Gryphon, tearing out its eyes, so that the Gryphon flew higher and higher and was finally killed, falling into the sea in view of the monks. Then the savior-bird flew away.

### *Chapter 20*

Soon afterward the travellers regained Saint Ailbe's Community, and again spent Christmas with them. Then they sailed in the ocean for a long time, only calling at the Sheep Island and Bird Paradise as before from Maundy Thursday to Pentecost.

### *Chapter 21*

Once on these travels, on the Feast of Saint Peter, they found themselves sailing in sea water so clear that they could see the different kinds of fish lying on the sand, like herds at pasture. They lay in rings, head to tail, and when Saint Brendan sang, they swam up to the curragh and swam in a great shoal around it as far as the monks could see. When Mass ended, the fish swam away as if fleeing. It took eight days at full sail to cross the area of clear sea.

### *Chapter 22*

Another day they saw a pillar in the sea. It seemed close by, but they took three days to come up to it. It was so high that Brendan could not see the top of it, and a wide-meshed net was wrapped around it. The boat could pass through an opening in the mesh which was the color of silver but harder than marble, while the column itself was of bright crystal. Taking down the mast and sail and shipping the oars, the monks pulled their boat through the mesh, which they could see extending down into the clear water, as did the foundations of the pillar. The water was as clear as glass and the sunlight was as bright below as above.

Saint Brendan measured the mesh as six to seven feet each side. Then they sailed along one side of the pillar, which was square, and Saint Brendan measured each side at seven hundred yards. In its shadow they could still feel the heat of the sun. On the fourth day they found a chalice and paten of the crystal, lying in a window in the side of the pillar.

After taking his measurements, Saint Brendan told his monks to eat. Then they took hold of the mesh and worked their boat out of it, raised the mast and sail, and sailed to the north for eight days.

### *Chapter 23*

On the eighth day they came to a rocky, rough island, full of slag and forges, without grass and trees. Brendan was worried, but the wind blew them straight toward it, and they heard the sound of bellows and thud of hammer and anvil. An islander came out of a forge, caught sight of the curragh, and went back indoors. Brendan told his men to row and sail as fast as they could to try to clear the place. But even as he spoke, the islander reappeared and hurled a great lump of slag at them. It flew two hundred yards over their heads, and where it fell, the sea boiled and smoke rose up as from a furnace. When the curragh had gone about a mile clear, more islanders rushed down to the shore, and began hurling lumps of slag at the monks. It looked as if the whole island was on fire. The sea boiled; the air was filled with howling; and even when they could no longer see the island, there was a great stench. Brendan said they had reached the edges of Hell.

### *Chapter 24*

On another day they saw through the clouds to the north a high smoky mountain. The wind drove them fast toward it, and they ran aground a short way from land. Before them was a coal-black cliff like a wall, so high they could not see the top of it. The third of the latecoming monks jumped from the boat and began to walk toward the base of the cliff, crying out that he was powerless to come back. The monks saw demons carrying him off and set him on fire. Then a favorable wind blew them clear, and looking back they saw that the smoke of the mountain had been replaced by flames which shot up and sucked back, so that the whole mountain glowed like a pyre.

### *Chapter 25*

Sailing south for seven days, they saw the strange sight of a man sitting on a rock with his cloak suspended on an iron apparatus in front of him. The rock was being battered by the waves which sometimes broke over the man's head, while the wind flailed

his cloak into his eyes and forehead. Brendan asked who he was, and he replied he was Judas, and that the Lord spared him to sit on the rock on holy days free from the torment of Hell in the fiery mountain. At the evening hour, innumerable demons covered the sea, circling the rock and shrieking at Brendan to go away. Brendan argued with them, and the demons followed the boat as it left, then they turned back and lifted Judas up with great force and howling.

#### *Chapter 26*

Three days to the south Saint Brendan and his companions came upon another small island. This one was circular - about two hundred yards in circumference, with sheer cliffs and no landing place. The flintlike rock was bare. Eventually they found a landing, a ledge so narrow it could just take the prow of the curragh. Brendan went ashore by himself and climbed to the top of the island, where he found two cave entrances facing one another on the east side of the island. At one cave entrance was a tiny spring of fresh water. In this cave dwelt an ancient anchorite, entirely clothed in his long white hair and beard. He told Saint Brendan that he had once been a monk at Saint Patrick's monastery, and when the Saint died, Patrick's ghost had told him to set out on the sea in a boat. Of its own accord the boat had brought the anchorite to the island, where for thirty years he had lived on fish brought every third day by an otter, who also brought him firewood. Then he had found the twin caves and the spring, and lived there for sixty more years. The anchorite said he was now 140 years old, and he told Saint Brendan to stock up with water from the spring because he had a forty-day journey before him, back to the Island of Sheep and the Paradise of Birds. After that, he would have a forty-day voyage to the Promised Land of the Saints, a forty-day stay there, and then God would bring Brendan safely back to Ireland.

#### *Chapter 27*

Saint Brendan and his crew received the old anchorite's blessing and began to sail south. They were carried hither and thither, living only on the fresh water from the island. Eventually, on Holy Saturday, they came again to the Island of Sheep. There the Steward met them at the landing place, helped each man out of the boat, and gave them supper. Then he came aboard with them, and they beached on the whale Jasconius, who took them on his back across to the Paradise of Birds. The Steward told them to fill their water vessels, because this time he would sail on with them and be their guide. Without him, he said, they would not reach the Promised Land of the Saints.

#### *Chapter 28*

Saint Brendan, the Steward, and the crew now crossed back to the Island of Sheep to stock up with supplies for the forty-day trip. Then they sailed forty days to the east. The Steward went up into the bow of the boat to show them the way. One evening after forty days a great fog swallowed them, so they could scarcely see one another. The steward told Brendan that the fog perpetually encircled the land which Brendan had been seeking for seven years. An hour later a great light shone, and the boat came to shore. The monks disembarked in a wide land full of autumnal fruit-bearing trees. When they had gone in a circle around the land, it was still light. They ate fruit and drank water, and in forty days' exploring did not come to the end of the land. But one day they came upon a great river, which Brendan said they could not cross, nor did they know how big the land was. Here they were met by a young man who embraced them, called them all by name, and told Saint Brendan that God had delayed them in their quest to get there in order to show them his secrets in the great ocean. He instructed them to gather fruit and precious stones, and to return home as Brendan's last days were near. The land, the young man said, would be made known to Saint Brendan's successors when the Christians were being persecuted, and the river divided the island.

Brendan gathered samples of fruits and gems, took his leave of the Steward, and sailed out through the fog. Then they came to the Island of Delights, where they stayed three days with the abbot, and then Brendan went home to his own community.

#### *Chapter 29*

His monastery received Brendan joyfully, and he told them of everything he remembered happening on his journey. Finally he told them of his approaching death, according to the young man in the Promised Land. The prophecy was correct. Shortly after Brendan had made his proper arrangements and taken the sacraments, he died among his disciples and went to the Lord. Amen.