Early Christian Ireland

• Christianity came to Ireland in the 5th century A.D. Some people wanted to devote their lives to God in a quiet place.

• St. Enda set up a monastery on the Aran Islands copying Scottish monks

• Other monks set up a monastery on Sceilig Mhichil off the coast of Kerry.

• They built huts, grew veg, caught fish, and gathered birds’ eggs.

Clonmacnoise

• Set up by St. Ciarán beside a ford on the Shannon because it was close to an important tuath.

• It was the biggest Celtic monastery. People came there from all over Europe to study.

• Many kings were buried on its Holy ground.

St. Brigid

• Founded a celtic convent in Kildare (according to legend)

Celtic Monasteries

• A celtic monastery was similar to raths and cashels.

• All buildings were made of wood from nearby forests. Later churches and round towers were made from stone.

• Round towers were used as bell towers, as look out towers and to store treasure if they were attacked.

Daily Life

• Irish monks led harsh and strict lives.

• They spent their time praying, studying and working.

• Some were metalworkers, scribes and sculptors.

• Others were blacksmiths, carpenters, masons or farmers.

• Food Ate one or two meals a day.

• Usually ate bread, vegetables fish.

• Fasted on Wednesdays, Fridays and during Lent.
**Clothes**

- Wore basic clothes: inner tunic and outer casula and sandals.
- Cut their hair in a tonsure.

**Manuscripts**

- Monks called scribes copied the bible or other books by hand
- Some copies were illuminated manuscripts
- Monks wrote on vellum (calf skin) with ink from plants and powdered rock.
- They decorated the pages with curving celtic designs e.g The Book of Kells

**Art in the monasteries**

- Produced manuscripts illustrated with drawings. Example: Book of Kells.
- Sculpted large decorated high crosses. Example: St. Muireadach’s Cross.
- Made decorated objects from metal. Example: The Ardagh Chalice.

**The End of the golden Age**

Stories of the golden treasures in Irish monasteries attracted thieves. This encouraged the Vikings to raid and bring treasures back to Scandanavia. The arrival of the Vikings ended the Golden Age of Irish Monasteries.

**Key Terms**

- Relic= an object associated with a saint
- Reliquary= a container for relics
- Ardagh Chalice= used during the mass
- Manuscripts= a book copied by hand
- Scriptorium= a place where a monk (scribe) copies out books by hand
- Book of Kells= famous manuscript
- Clonmacnoise= biggest celtic monastery on the Shannon
- Sceilig Mhichíl= monastery off of Kerry Coast