

St. Brendan was an Irish monk who lived from 484 to 577 AD in western Ireland. He was a charismatic leader who was well known for his ocean voyages through northwest Europe spreading the Christian faith and founding several monasteries. The most intriguing of his travels was the account of a seven-year voyage that is chronicled in the "The Voyage of St. Brendan the Abbot" otherwise known as the "Naviagatio" (written in the 10th century). The legend tells that St. Brendan had heard of the "Land of Promise" and set sail to find it with a number of other monks in a curragh (a hide covered wood framed boat with sails). He reported reaching several islands, one whose description suggests the volcanoes of Iceland. He eventually reached "The Land of Saints" which many people believe was North America. Whether the tale is true or not, the account as written in the Navigatio was widely believed, and when Columbus set out to find a western route he had a map that featured a large land mass labeled St. Brendan's Island in the middle of the Atlantic

Many scholars have sought proof that St. Brendan reached America, however the voyage remains a matter of speculation and myth. An adventurer named Severin recreated the voyage in 1976 ala Kon Tiki. He built a curragh faithful to what is known of the original design, and set sail with a crew to see if he could recreate a voyage to America. They sailed from Ireland to Scotland, the Hebrides, the Faroes, Iceland, Greenland and eventually Labrador. These were lands that could be construed to fit with the descriptions of descriptions of land-falls written in the Navagatio. It was a wild ride, but they proved that the voyage was possible.

St. Brendan's cross is a Celtic cross that is specifically associated with the monk. All Celtic crosses have four arms with a circle surrounding them. There are many interpretations of the symbolism of each element. St. Brendan's cross is shown on the sails of the boats above and at left. Several scholars have speculated that St. Brendan invented and used a crude navigational tool shaped like to the cross, and the Celtic cross that is associated with the monk took roots in this tool. Another, more stylized, Celtic cross is also associated with St. Brendan. This cross is a circle of 4 dolphins whose tails meet in the center to form a cross. This version of St. Brendan's Cross has inspired many modern jewelry makers to fashion items such as earrings and pendants based on the design.