

The Mystical Gatherings Newsletter

Imbolc 2003
(Volume 1, Issue 3)



Introduction

Although spring still seems a long way away, Imbolc is the first sign that winter is beginning to wane, which makes it an especially cheering and encouraging holiday for those pagans who don't care so much for cold and snow!

Imbolc is a fire festival that gives us an opportunity to celebrate and welcome the returning warmth of the sun, to clean our homes and heal our bodies, to rid our lives of things we've outworn or outgrown, and to rediscover those activities that make us feel happy and passionate! This issue is subsequently filled with articles that focus on hope, inspiration and new beginnings as we respond on a physical, emotional and spiritual level to the first subtle stirrings of re-awakening life. There are also recipes and rituals to try, along with historical information on the Goddess Brigit, to whom this Sabbat is sacred.

Happy Imbolc!



An Imbolc Ritual

by Layla Morgan Wilde

I like to call Imbolc a spring preview celebration. Every day, the increased sunlight feels a little warmer on my face. This holiday honours Brigid, the Celtic triple Goddess of fire, inspiration, healing and poetry. It seems the perfect holiday for a creative group such as ours.

The following is gleaned from my personal Book of Shadows. As with all rituals, please feel free to alter anything to better suit your needs.

The following ritual is to be performed on February 1st, after dark or before bedtime. If you want to invoke specific planetary energies, do it during the corresponding hours. This year it falls on a Saturday, and the corresponding hours are: 6pm = Sun, 7pm = Venus, 8pm = Mercury, 9pm = Moon, 10pm = Saturn, 11pm = Jupiter and midnight = Mars.

Place an offering for Brigid at your front door. I like to use a glass of red wine or port, and a piece of cake or a cookie. Open the door and say three times: "Welcome Brigid, to this home! Welcome Spring's quickening! Farewell, dead of Winter! Without Spring there can be no Summer, without Summer no Harvest, without a Harvest no Winter and without a Winter no new Spring. Blessed Be! "

Place a small white votive or tealight candle on every windowsill of your home. (Our house has 33 windows so I buy candles in bulk.) Light the candles, beginning in the east and moving through your home deosil (clockwise), floor by floor. As you light each candle, say: "May Brigid's light bring energy and abundance to this home." Leave the candles to burn out on their own. Please be mindful of the usual fire safety precautions.

In the morning, go to your outdoor altar. If you don't have one, go to your most convenient tree or bush. Place an image of Brigid, or an object representing her, on the altar or under the tree. Pour the wine and crumble the cake on the ground.

If you have a garden, walk around its perimeter deosil (clockwise). Visualize every tree and bush quickening with new life. If you planted any spring bulbs, imagine their life force gathering strength, ready to soon burst through the ground.

If you don't have a garden, visit a friend's garden, a park or even a small patch of forest. If you have a large property as we do, it may not be practical to visit every single tree or you may be talking to trees all day. In that case, focus on the area closest to the house. I have my favourite trees and I like to stroke their branches and buds. Our magnolia tree is already fuzzy with buds!

As you walk about, feel the new life percolating from the roots deep in Mother Earth, into the soles of your feet and up through your body, inspiring new creative energy. If you like, you can chant as you walk: "We banish Winter and welcome Spring!"

I like to end by saying:" As above, so below; as the universe, so the soul; as without, so within. Blessed Be!"

Hearth Day

Before celebrating the Spring Equinox, let's not forget to celebrate Hearth Day on March 1st in honour of the Greek Goddess of the hearth, Hestia and the Roman Goddess, Vesta. Being a triple fire sign, I love fire and will take any opportunity to make one.

If you have a fireplace, make a fire. If not, light a red candle in a cauldron or something else to represent a hearth. We automatically invoke Hestia/Vesta every time we make a fire in a hearth. You may want to place objects representing these Goddesses, such as bread, salt, fruit and a wooden spoon, in front of the hearth.

Stand in front of your fire and place your hands near it, feeling its warmth. Say: "Divine Mother, we light this fire in the name of the Mother of Hearth and Home. We ask for a blessing and protection for this house and household. So mote it be!" Let the fire go out on its own.



Finding Your Passion

by Therese Lean

"Human passions have mysterious ways, in children as well as grown-ups. Those affected by them can't explain them, and those who haven't known them have no understanding of them at all. Some people risk their lives to conquer a mountain peak. No one, not even they themselves, can really explain why. Others ruin themselves trying to win the heart of a certain person who wants nothing to do with them. Still others are destroyed by their devotion to the pleasures of the table. Some are so bent on winning a game of chance that they lose everything they own, and some sacrifice everything for a dream that can never come true. Some think their only hope of happiness lies in being somewhere else, and spend their whole lives traveling from place to place. And some find no rest until they have become powerful. In short, there are as many different passions as there are people.

"Bastion Balthazer Bux's passion was books.

"If you have never spent whole afternoons with burning ears and ruffled hair, forgetting the world around you over a book, forgetting cold and hunger -

"If you have never read secretly under the bedclothes with a flashlight, because your father or mother or some other well-meaning person has switched off the lamp on the plausible ground that it was time to sleep because you had to get up so early -

"If you have never wept bitter tears because a wonderful story has come to an end and you must take your leave of the characters with whom you have shared so many adventures, whom you have loved and admired, for whom you have hoped and feared, and without whose company life seems empty and meaningless -

"If such things have not been part of your own experience, you probably won't understand what Bastion did next."

Michael Ende. *The Neverending Story*

I'm always getting bugged by those I love about my "obsessions". Whether it's my constant ramblings about Brian Setzer's latest rock and swing extravaganza, my love of nutcrackers, the fact that I have seen *The Two Towers* three times in a week and a half [author's note: the count is at four and growing now!], or that I play music 24/7, if you ever meet me you soon learn what I like in a very short period of time.

Well, unlike my well-meaning loved ones, I don't call these interests "obsessions." I call them passions and I find that my life is all the more fulfilling because of them. So why am I bringing up my passions (or "obsessions") in this newsletter? No, it's not just a ploy for me to talk about them even more, but because Imbolc is a celebration of Fire; and Fire, as we know, is symbolized in the creative and passionate flows of energy.

Fire is fascinating. It has this way of drawing a person to stare at it, and sometimes it transfixes us for so long that we have to shake our heads to clear the mind before blowing it out or calling 911. Fire is hot, Fire is bright, and Fire spreads rapidly when out of control. Fire both soothes and destroys. It has instilled a sense of awe in our psyche for hundreds of thousands of years. I believe it is Fire's unpredictability that has led us to associate the unpredictable way passion can turn with the Element.

It is our passions that make us the most interesting and the most remembered. Our passions give meaning and joy to our lives. They give us something to turn to when we are at a low point in our lives. They lift the spirit and soothe the soul.

My real passion is music. Whether playing my trombone or listening to my stereo, it has always been music that has taken me through the hard times and inspired me when I was bored. My changes in musical taste have conveniently been in direct correlation with major changes in my life, and I can tell you about any time of my life depending on which CD is popped into the stereo. Music gives me the strength to go on when I feel I can't, and makes me weep when I'm at my most emotional. I have the ability to do absolutely nothing for hours but lie back and listen to music, and *really* listen to it: every melody, bass line, intonation and phrasing. I could listen to one song several times and never get bored because I can always discover something new. In university, I only ever went to a club to sit back, drink a couple of beers and sing along to *every* g.d. song that I knew the lyrics to, even if I hated it! When I meditate without the stereo on, I find myself suddenly bursting out into a chant and I always find the most spiritual moments of my rituals happen while raising energy when I chant. Without music my life feels empty, hopeless and sad.

One of my guilty pleasures is to watch *Weird Homes* on the Life Network. The show travels around the U.S. featuring unique and just plain weird homes. I like to watch it to discover the homeowners' passion and how they lived it. Two older women are so passionate about Christmas that their entire house is a shrine to the holiday every day of the year! They have so much stuff that you literally cannot find their furniture, and they dress up in their Christmas best for all to see. Another episode featured a man who collects old gas pumps; another focused on a person with themed rooms (one is filled with thousands of smiley face paraphernalia while another had thousands of pencils glued to the wall). There's also a man who built a castle about the size of a modern house out of scraps of metal, and which comes complete with fire-breathing dragon! At first glance these people seem completely off their rocker, but a deeper look sheds light on something else. These people are *happy*. They're happy because of the outlet they have allowed themselves. They surrendered themselves to their passion and hence gave it a life of its own.

Now I'm not suggesting that to be happy we should surrender *everything* to our passions. What I am suggesting is to *enhance* your life by acknowledging and using your passion in your everyday life. Maybe by doing so it will brighten up your days just a wee bit more, or help you to stagger through those rough spots. There is no excuse good enough not to be able to do something you love doing. Tell the kids to occupy themselves or make the partner look after them for awhile so that you can have some alone time and get to it! Unsure of what your passion is? Use those fifteen minutes to look for it! Meditate on it, try something you've never done before like draw a picture, learn an instrument, write, play a sport, crochet, whatever you can think of! Not good at it? Who cares?! If you enjoy doing it that's all that matters. I have a terrible voice but I sing constantly because I love it, and I don't care that everyone (except my mother) rolls their eyes or tries to tell me to shut up. Your life will be so much more satisfying if you find your passion. Whole worlds that you never though possible will open up to you!

Make it a point this Imbolc, this Feast of Fire, to discover YOUR passion. Ask the Fire Elementals to aid you in your search or to help strengthen it. Honour Deities whose myths tell of Their passion and meditate upon candlelight the virtues of Fire.

Blessings to you and yours on this Imbolc, and never forget to feel the Fire in everything you do!



A Time for Cleansing and Healing

by Ann Brightman

Imbolc is my favourite seasonal celebration in the Wheel of the Year. Although spring is still six weeks away, Imbolc is the first sign that the season is beginning to turn. The days are getting longer, the evenings are growing noticeably lighter, and there's a touch of softness in the air on mild February afternoons, a reminder that the sun is returning to our northern latitudes and that we're at the halfway point between Yule and Ostara.

Imbolc is sacred to the Celtic goddess Bride or Brigid, who among other things is associated with healing and medicine. This makes Imbolc an ideal time for personal healing and cleansing, on both an inner and outer level. It's a good time to re-evaluate our jobs, relationships, well-being and self esteem, to discard or let go of what no longer works for us, and to make any other changes that might help improve our lives. It's also an excellent time to make plans for new projects or enterprises that we might want to undertake as winter gives way to spring and we start to come alive again.

Vivanne Crowley's *Celtic Wisdom* (one of my favourite books!) provides a comprehensive list of different ways to mark Imbolc. I've incorporated some of these into my own Imbolc celebrations and found them to be of significant value and helpfulness. I always feel refreshed and rejuvenated after Imbolc.

1. The chore of spring-cleaning arises in part from Imbolc, which has traditionally been associated with clearing out the detritus of winter and freshening up the home for spring. I can hear the groans now, but you can

actually make housecleaning into a meaningful ritual by performing your tasks with magickal intent (just don't try to do the whole house in one day or you'll exhaust yourself!). I hate dusting ornaments and scrubbing walls, but I find that if I stay focused on the vibrant positive energy that my dusting, tidying, washing, and clutter-clearing is introducing into my living space, it makes the job worthwhile. I can actually feel this energy moving through the room after I've finished and that makes me feel energized too.

You might also try rearranging some things into new positions – this is an excellent feng shui practice as well because, like cleaning, it gets the “chi” moving through the room and helps sweep out stagnation and negativity.

Of course, we're lucky that we live in a tiny, easy-to-manage house, as some of you have already discovered! If your house is really big, or if you find that spring cleaning is a useless task because of untidy spouses or kids, just concentrate on one room (as I usually do), or a single closet, piece of furniture or even just one shelf or drawer, and make it into a special cleansing ritual for yourself. That way, too, you won't get overwhelmed by the job.

One of my favourite Imbolc cleaning rituals is to polish my few pieces of solid wood furniture with natural beeswax, which you can buy at the hardware store. I do the task mindfully and love the way my furniture looks, feels and smells after I've finished. Cleaning tasks like this also help re-connect you with your surroundings and possessions and generate a renewed appreciation for your things. It also raises your awareness of any possessions that no longer resonate with you, reminding you that this is a good time to get rid of what you no longer want!

2. Set aside time to re-charge your body, mind, emotions and spirit. Treat yourself to a purifying bath using sea salt and/or cleansing herbs. Try to devote at least one day to eating healthy foods, drinking lots of pure water and allowing yourself time to relax, meditate, indulge in a favourite activity or hobby, or go for a long walk in a natural area to commune with the Earth.
3. Do some Imbolc candle magic. Pick a candle colour that symbolizes what you're seeking. (The following colour symbols come from *Celtic Wisdom* but you can use whatever source works best for yourself):

Orange – for a new job

Green – for love

Gold – for health

White – for purification

Violet – for developing psychic powers

Blue – for recovering from psychological illness

Red – for energy and strength

Pink – for peace and calm

Hold the candle (unlit) and visualize your intent being fulfilled. Anoint the candle from the middle to each end with an essential oil, still visualizing your intent. Light the candle and ask the Divine to bless your intent by saying: "Gracious Bride, bless this my intent and bring it forth on the earthly plane. So mote it be." Let the candle burn a bit, then put it out, saying: "As I extinguish this flame on the earthly plane, may it burn more brightly in the realm of Spirit. So mote it be." Repeat this same ritual every day for a week, using the same candle.

4. Finally, here's a prayer you might like to offer up to Bride while meditating this Imbolc:

*O Gracious Bride
 who walks between the worlds,
 bringing light and life to women and men;
 come forth once more and walk in our ways.
 For where you have walked will spring forth flowers,
 where you have smiled, the sun will turn and linger,
 where you have sung, the birds will return.
 Gracious lady, bless our homes,
 may there be peace therein;
 bless our bodies, may be they well and strong;
 bless our hearts, may be they know joy and love;
 bless our minds, may they know the delight of creativity;
 bless our spirits, may they know the ecstasy of the Divine.*



Maria Lichtmess, the German Candlemas

by Sabina C. Becker

"Wenn's an Lichtmess stürmt und schneit, ist der Frühling nicht mehr weit; ist es aber klar und hell, kommt der Lenz noch nicht so schnell."

("When it storms and snows on Candlemas Day, spring is not so far away; but if it is bright and clear, springtime is not yet so near.")

German saying

Let's face it - Groundhog Day in North America is a farce. It's supposed to be. In the declining days of winter, people need a little harmless silliness to liven up the blue, blah, boring wait for spring. So we get dumpy men in white tailcoats and top hats knocking on the den door of an animal (more often than not an albino animal) that would rather be hibernating, and in any case is too sluggish to tell us how far away spring is. It's all good for a laugh, except maybe for the poor, sleep-deprived groundhog. And the Vernal Equinox is always six weeks away from Candlemas, regardless of whether the groundhog sees his shadow - or cares.

What most people don't realize is that Groundhog Day, the pseudo-holiday, is the bastard child of a real holiday (originally Pagan, later Christianized) and that the holiday is in turn associated with weather lore. And that Germany is the wellspring of that old, old lore.

Germans don't have a Groundhog Day, but they do have weather and climate lore associated with Candlemas, or *Maria Lichtmess*, as it's known over there. They also have groundhogs, or at least a European marmot equivalent. They're called *Murmeltiere*, literally "mumbling animals," because they "mumble" themselves up in their burrows. That is, they hibernate. (Maybe they also mumble, "Don't ask me when spring is coming, you jerky humans," in their sleep.)

However, the groundhog is not the original subject of Candlemas weather lore, and Germans don't recognize it as such; that's a more recent, American development. Let's take a look at the serious side of Candlemas.

Maria Lichtmess is a celebration of light in the darkness, the promise of spring's rebirth in the dead of winter. Symbolically, this is the day the Virgin Mary becomes pregnant with Jesus, who is always born (or reborn) at the Winter Solstice. Some Christians also call it the day of Mary's "purification;" that is, her re-admission to the temple after the prescribed 40 days of postpartum waiting. Women were thought to be "impure" for 40 days after the birth of a son (and twice as long after a daughter, which is terribly sexist!)

Imbolc, the Pagan holiday, has a similar theme, only it's the Goddess pregnant with her God-son, the Sun God. Light is "in the belly" of darkness. Since Mary brings a symbolic light into the world, while the Goddess (usually Brigid) brings a more literal one, it's easy to see the theologians' reasoning as they grafted a new story onto an older holiday!

Ordinary Germans, however, take a more practical view of the day. Since it's six weeks from winter's end, they naturally want to know: how does this day's weather affect what's to come?

A modern-day weather forecaster would caution against drawing any hard and fast conclusions, but folklore persists, mainly because German farmers love to

plan ahead - far ahead. At *Lichtmess*, some early-spring farm activities, such as plowing, can take place. Most *Lichtmess* weather lore holds that whatever the weather is on February 2, the opposite will be the case on the equinox (or Easter, which falls on the Sunday/Monday after the first full moon following the equinox.) Here's a sampling, with approximate translations:

Lichtmess im Klee, Ostern im Schnee.
Candlemas in clover, Easter in snow.

Lichtmess hell und rein, wird ein langer Winter sein.
Candlemas bright and clear means a long winter still ahead.

Lichtmess trüb, ist dem Bauern lieb
A dark Candlemas is dear to farmers.

Der Lichtmess-Sonnenschein, bringt großen Schnee herein.
Sunshine at Candlemas brings big snow later.

Ist's Lichtmess licht, geht der Winter nicht.
If it's bright out at Candlemas, Winter will not go away.

Lichtmess im Klee, Palmsonntag im Schnee
Candlemas in clover, Palm Sunday in snow.

Weißer Lichtmess, grüne Ostern
White Candlemas, green Easter.

Religious activities at *Lichtmess* include candlelight masses (for Catholics), hymn-sings, processions, vigils, etc. Attendees at services bring candles to be blessed. These candles are saved for occasions of special need, and are burned in conjunction with prayers, e.g. for the sick. Veneration of the Virgin is especially strong at this time of year, and every region - even every village - has its own unique devotional customs. Pancake meals are especially popular on this day.

More recently, *Lichtmess* has taken on a secular overtone, with lavish carnivals and fancy-dress balls. People often dress up (comically) in clothes of the opposite sex, and servants and masters swap clothes, creating a topsy-turvy atmosphere of laughter, dancing, feasting, drinking and joking. The carnival, also known as *Fasching*, is a mock-solemn farewell to winter, an anticipation of the goofiness and light-heartedness of spring. Special societies in every German city organize a yearly *Fasching* carnival, often creating elaborate masks and costumes for the occasion. Behind all this comedy lies a serious side: the preparation for the ecclesiastical season of Lent, with fasting and deprivation prior to Easter. (The word "carnival" comes from *carne vale*, which is Latin for "farewell to meat.") In a spirit of penitence, devout Christians give up meat and various other pleasures during Lent. But first, they throw a big, big party!

In 1912, *Lichtmess* ceased to be an official national holiday in Germany, but Catholics and Protestants alike still mark the day. The growing German *Hexen* (Witches) movement has revived the older aspects of the festival, celebrating the return of the sun and anticipating the equinox much like their British and American counterparts. This is an excellent day for divination, healing, and any kind of magick concerning growth and progress toward abundance.

Happy Candlemas - and goodnight, Wiarton Willie!



Personalizing Your Sabbat Ritual

by Therese Lean

Over the past couple of years, I decided to branch out when it came to my Sabbat rituals. I'll be honest by saying that previously my Sabbat rituals had been...well, flat. I mostly said thanks, acknowledged the season, and then packed it up. I mean, I was honest in what I said and how I said it, but there was no oomph to it, nothing to say, "Hey! It's (insert appropriate Sabbat here) and this is how I REALLY feel!" Nothing to stamp it as being a ritual so my Deities would be able to say "Oh look! Em's doin' a ritual! I love her rituals, they're so her!"

So I decided I was going to change all that. I decided to make a signature for myself. I wanted to make my Sabbat rituals memorable. To do that, one of the major steps I took was to sit and really think about what the upcoming Sabbat meant to me.

For example, I know that Imbolc is the feast day of Brighid (Pagan Deity or Christian Saint). I also knew it is supposed to be the time of year when animals begin to produce milk, thus symbolizing the slow turning of the Wheel to springtime. The problem was that my Patroness is Cerridwen, not Brighid (I'm not one to use all the different Deities), and I don't own any lactating animals or see any flowers popping up anywhere. So how do I celebrate a Sabbat that seems to have no real bearing on my belief structure or climate?

Well, every time I think of Imbolc only one word pops into my mind and that is "cleansing." I do a major inner and spiritual cleansing at Imbolc. I take all the negatives in my life, physical and otherwise, and away they go! I physically clean

my altar, re-arrange everything and then cleanse and re-dedicate my altar tools. Then I'll focus on the biggest negative force of the previous year and do a major banishing on it. Banishing usually makes me feel a bit darker than usual due to the nature of what I'm doing, so I immediately follow it up with a cleansing of the spirit. This always leaves me so much more fulfilled than just saying, "Hey! Thanks for the milk!" and is something that is totally my own.

Although I leave plenty of room to improvise my rituals I do put a lot of thought into them now. It's been a slow process as every time I seem to add something new, but it makes me look forward to the Sabbats. I encourage everyone who doesn't already do so to make their own traditions at Sabbat. Ask yourself what the Sabbat really means to you and then use your own talents and ideas to create a ritual that is entirely you. Snag bits and pieces from other rituals you've read or even other cultural traditions that speak to you, and put a new spin on them. Don't be afraid to experiment; sometimes what seems like a great idea may end up faltering when you actually do it, but that's all right! Just try something different next time! Also, your idea of what a Sabbat means to you may change over time, which is also all right; you can adapt your old traditions or make new ones altogether. The important thing is that you leave the ritual feeling more spiritually satisfied and that you are reminded of your connection to whatever Divine Spirit is out there.



Imbolc: The Feast of the Goddess Brigid

by Ben Gruagach

Imbolc, February 1st, is sometimes called the "Feast of Bride," or the feast of St. Brigit in Ireland and the UK. In modern Irish, it's known as *Lá Fhéile Bríde* (pronounced law ayl-uh breej-uh). In Scottish Gaelic, it's *Là Fhèill Brìghde* (pronounced lah ayl breej-uh). No matter how it's pronounced, it's a special time to honour the Celtic goddess Brigid, also known as Brigit, Brighid, Bride, and Brigantia.

Brigid is usually depicted as a three-fold goddess. One of her aspects oversees the art of poetry, the second the art of healing, and the third the art of smithcraft. The poetry aspect also includes the mystic skills of divination and prophecy – in Celtic cultures, poets were assumed to be especially in tune with hidden forces and divine inspiration. In some myths, Brigid is associated with other vital crafts such as dyeing, weaving, and brewing. She is also associated with cattle and is considered a guardian of farm animals. She has two special cows, named Fea

and Feimhean, who often wandered the countryside with her. She was also the considered guardian of the wild boar. It is said that Brigid will direct cows and wild boars to raise a warning cry if Ireland is in danger.

Saint Brigid, supposedly born around 453 C.E., is the Christian attempt to absorb the goddess Brigid's associations and myths and make them more acceptable in a Christian context. She was born under unusual circumstances – her mother gave birth while stepping through a doorway, so Brigid was born neither “within nor without.” Brigid was said to be unable to eat normal food, and was raised on the milk from a special white cow with red ears. In Christian myth, St. Brigid travels with a single white cow that provides her with sustenance.

Brigid, both the goddess and the later Christian saint, are also associated with fire and arrows. The fiery arrow is the sudden bolt of inspiration that strikes poets, driving them to produce amazing works of literature and filling their hearts with holy passion. Brigid's faithful often light sacred flames in Her honour. There is a group of Christian nuns in Ireland, the Brigidine sisters, who kept a sacred flame lit for centuries until it was extinguished over a hundred years ago. In 1993, this group of nuns decided to re-light the sacred flame, and to this day it still burns, tended by the nuns. The Brigidine nuns are located in Kildare and apparently welcome visits to the sacred flame by the public.

Other associations made with Brigid include the triad of fire, art, and beauty. In Christian myth, she is also considered to have been midwife at Christ's birth, and is therefore associated with childbirth. When a woman is in labour, the midwife would sometimes go to the doorway, face out, and whisper a welcome to Brigid, asking her to attend the birth and ease the mother's pain.

Imbolc is a celebration of women, the hearth, and the home. On the Bride's Eve, the last night in January, girls of the household would make a female figure out of a sheaf of grain and decorate it with coloured and sparkling things like shells or small glass ornaments and beads. An especially attractive and shining shell or crystal would be placed over its heart as the “guiding star of Bride.” The doll was called the *bideag* (pronounced bree-jag) which means “little Bride.” Girls and young women, known as the banal Bride (or Bride's maiden band) would dress in white and with their hair down would take the doll around town in procession. Houses they visited would give small gifts, like flowers or crystals, or bits of food like warm bannocks and cheese or butter, in thanksgiving. The girls would take the doll to a house where it was laid in a special small bed or cradle by the hearthfire, while the girls would stay and prepare a feast for the next day. In the morning, people would arrive, pay their respects to the Bride doll, and join in the feast.

It's interesting to see bits and pieces of traditions that exist in modern Hallowe'en (going door to door for treats), and Christmas (decorating something and placing it in a spot of honour, often near the hearth of the home) showing up in the

traditions of Imbolc. It would be interesting to discover which holidays these traditions started with, and which ones adopted them later.

Another interesting connection with Imbolc is found in the fairy-tale story of the ancient veiled woman who transforms into a youthful maiden. To some, Imbolc is the time when the very first signs of spring start to manifest – and Brigit as the Winter Queen transforms into the Maiden of Spring. This might not be so obvious in climates like southern Ontario where winter is still in full force during February. In other areas, though, such as Vancouver, parts of the United States, and some parts of Europe and the UK, February does start to show signs of warmer weather to come.

Recommended Books for Brigid Lore

Kindling the Celtic Spirit, by Mara Freeman (ISBN 0-06-251685-X.) This was the primary source for the information in this article.

A Witches Bible, by Janet and Stewart Farrar (ISBN 0-939708-08-6.)

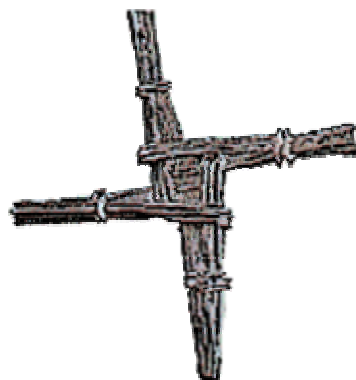
The Witches Goddess, by Janet and Stewart Farrar (ISBN 0-919345-91-3.)



Making a Brigid's Cross

by Shae Clancy

(from <http://www.ravenquest.net/WyldeWoods/brighidcross.html>)



The following are step-by-step instructions for how to make a Brighid's Cross.

Get a bundle of rushes or straw about 15 inches long. (Plastic drinking straws can also be used successfully.)

Take two and cross them at the centre.

Fold one back on itself around the other one.

Take a third one and fold it around the second one, parallel to the first. You should now have a T-shaped piece, with one arm having one strand, another having two and the third having three.

Fold a fourth rush around the third one to form a cross again.

Fold a fifth one around the fourth, parallel to the single strand.

Continue folding rushes around the previous one until the central square is about one and a half to two inches wide (this is optional, but the cross gets a bit unwieldy if it's much bigger).

Finally, tie the ends of each arm tightly with wool or other natural fibre. Tidy up the ends with a scissors.

Straw can be used instead of rushes, but sometimes it is brittle and breaks easily when being folded. Remember too that freshly cut rushes will dry and the cross will become loose. Just untie the ends and pull them all tightly together again.



Imbolc Recipes

Faery Wine

as told by Laurie Cabot

from: (<http://www.geocities.com/aerinleigh/bos/sabbats/imbolcrecipes.html>)

You will need:

1 1/2 cups milk per serving
 1 tsp honey
 1/8 tsp vanilla extract
 cinnamon

Warm milk, being careful not to boil. To each glass or mug add honey and vanilla. Fill with milk and sprinkle top with cinnamon.

Brigit's Serpent: A Baking Meditation

as told by Starhawk, Diane Baker and Anne Hill

(from <http://www.geocities.com/aerinleigh/bos/sabbats/imbolcrecipes.html>)

You will need:

4 cups flour
 3 tbsp sugar
 1 tsp salt
 1 tbsp double-acting baking powder
 4 tbsp butter or margarine at room temperature
 1 1/2 cups of milk
 jam
 dried fruit (cranberries, apricots, raisins, currants or cherries)

Set aside 6 raisins or cranberries. Chop the remaining dried fruit until you have a cup and place it in a bowl. Cover it with water and let it soak.

Put the flour, sugar, salt and baking powder into a sifter. As you sift them together, say thank you for the different kinds of grains and foods that grow out of the earth.

Cut the butter into small pieces, add to dry ingredients and mix, using your fingers. Say thank you for any of the extra good things in your life - the things that you don't need but that make life more fun or richer, like butter on bread. The butter should end up so well mixed in that you can hardly see it, the flour just looks a bit grainier than before.

Make a well in the center of the mixture. Think about the well you have inside you, and what you need right now to fill it up. Pour the milk into the well, remembering that the Goddess always does fill our well of love and joy and ideas, and thanking her. Mix everything together, kneading it with your hands just enough to make it stick together. Don't knead it too much or it will get tough.

Divide the dough into three parts. On a floured pastry board, roll and pull one section of the dough until it make a long, thin cylinder. Then roll it lengthwise with a floured rolling pin until it is even longer and thinner. If you don't have room on the board, use the table. The dough should end up about 1/4 inch thick or slightly less.

Spread jam on the dough, not quite to the edge. Make a line of the dried fruit all along the jam covered dough. Think about what in your life you would like to see bear fruit, what poems you'd like to write, what pictures you'd like to paint, what creative things you'd like to do, and ask Brigit's blessing. Fold the dough up and over the fruit, so that you make a long tube. Pinch the seams shut.

Grease and oil a cookie sheet. Place the tube on the cookie sheet and form it into a loose, open spiral. Form one end into a triangular serpent's head and place raisins or cranberries for eyes.

Repeat with the other two sections of dough.

Bake at 450°F for 20 to 25 minutes. Baking temperature is important. If your oven is not reliable, take special care.

Before serving, say: "Brigit, we offer you this serpent, made of grain and milk, with thanks for the food that feeds our bodies, the fire that feeds our spirit, and the waters of healing." Break off pieces and feed each other, saying: "May Brigit's serpent bring you inspiration."

Imbolc Ritual Cake

(from <http://www.wicca.com/celtic/akasha/imbolcrecip.htm>)

1 3/4 cups all-purpose flour
 3/4 cup water
 3/4 cup sugar
 1/4 cup vegetable oil
 2 tbsp poppyseeds
 1 tbsp grated lemon peel
 1 tsp baking soda
 2 tbsp lemon juice
 1/2 tsp salt
 powdered sugar

This is all done in one pan, so clean up is a breeze! Preheat oven to 350°F degrees. Mix flour, sugar, poppyseeds, baking soda, and salt with a fork in an ungreased 9"x9"x2" baking pan. Stir in the remaining ingredients, except the powdered sugar. Bake 35-40 minutes or until toothpick inserted in center of cake

comes out clean, and the top is golden brown. Remove from oven and cool. Sprinkle with powdered sugar. Makes 8 servings.

Bride's Brunch

(from <http://www.wicca.com/celtic/akasha/imbolcrecip.htm>)

2 pie shells (9")
 3 tbsp green onions/chives, finely chopped
 1/2 pound Canadian style bacon/thin sliced ham
 1/2 tsp salt
 8 eggs
 1/4 tsp pepper
 1 tbsp milk

Line a quiche dish with 1 pie shell. Arrange 1/2 of bacon or ham in bottom of shell. Break 7 eggs into the dish. Pierce the egg yolks with a fork, but do not mix the egg yolks with the egg whites. Add the green onions/chives, salt, and pepper. Arrange the remaining bacon or ham on top. Cover with remaining pie shell. Mix the remaining egg with the milk and lightly brush the top crust with the mixture. Bake at 400 degrees for 30-40 minutes. Serve hot or cold. Makes 6 servings.

Imbolc Oil

(from <http://www.jaguarmoon.org/public/Wheel/Imbolc/Oils.html>)

6 drops frankincense oil
 3 drops sandalwood oil
 3 drops lavender oil
 2 drops cinnamon oil

Imbolc Potpourri

(from <http://www.jaguarmoon.org/public/Wheel/Imbolc/Oils.html>)

1 cup oakmoss, dried
 2 cups dried heather
 2 cups dried wisteria
 1 cup dried yellow tulip petals
 1/2 cup dried basil
 1/2 cup chopped bay leaves
 45 drops musk or myrrh oil

Imbolc Incense

(from <http://www.jaguarmoon.org/public/Wheel/Imbolc/Oils.html>)

5 parts wormwood
 4 parts cinnamon
 2 parts goldenrod
 3 parts acacia gum
 10 ml musk oil per 8 oz. dry ingredients

*Meditation for Inspiration*

by Hilaire Wood

(from <http://www.brigitsforge.co.uk/inspiremed2.htm>)

You find yourself walking along the bank of a river. The light of the sun is dancing on the surface of the water. It is so bright that it begins to dazzle you and your vision of the physical world is blotted out. You become aware that you have stepped beyond the ordinary world into the Otherworld.

As you gaze, half-blinded into the river, you see in the distance shapes bobbing along the surface of the water. When they approach you realize that they are the hazelnuts of wisdom which have come from the nine hazel trees which grow over Connla's Well. Suddenly there is a bright movement in the water and you catch a glimpse of a salmon as it swallows one of the nuts.

You climb down the riverbank and lean out into the water. If the time is right for you to grow in wisdom you are able to reach into the water and catch the salmon as it passes you, floating or swimming on the gleaming surface of the water.

The wisdom that illuminates may be so bright and dazzling that it overwhelms our vision and we are unable to assimilate it in its raw state. As Finn cooked the salmon of wisdom and Taliesin tended the mixture of herbs and water boiling in Cerridwen's cauldron, so we must cook the fruits of wisdom before we can digest them.

Gather kindling and branches of dead wood that are lying near where you are and make a fire on which to roast the salmon. Notice how easy or difficult it is to find the wood for the fire. How easy is it to find the resources you need?

Light the fire, noticing how easy or difficult it is for you to do so.

When you have lit the fire, take a few moments to call upon Brigit and to ask for her blessing on your undertaking.

Meditate upon how you would like to use your wisdom. Do you want to enhance your life with it or the lives of others? To solve a particular problem, either personal or in your work? To become an inspired poet, or craftsman, or healer?

Think about how fulfilling your own creative potential could also benefit a community you are part of.

Then eat the salmon. You are aware of the taste as if you have never tasted anything ever before. It is an experience that overwhelms you. For a while there is nothing but yourself and the taste of the hazelnuts or the salmon you are eating. You are drawn into the world of the hazelnuts and have a flash of knowledge of hanging on the hazel tree; its branches move gently in the wind, its roots deep in the earth, draw up the moisture and minerals it needs for its nourishment.

You experience being the salmon as it moves through the water that is its element. Sometimes it swims fast with the current, sometimes it struggles against it, using all its will-power to reach its birthplace and give birth in turn.

You realise that you have access to the wisdom of the Otherworld and of otherworlds.

Then, slowly, you become aware of the sound of the water, and feel the earth and grass beneath you. You find yourself lying on the riverbank.

You become aware of a glow inside you, a feeling of warmth and joy, of clarity and inspiration. Looking down at your body you see that it is shining.

Sit for a while, taking in all you can experience of this. In the months and weeks ahead, when you need to, you may remember this experience of the wisdom that illuminates.

Eventually, when you feel ready, become aware again of your breathing, of the movement of your breath, in and out. Then slowly come back into the room and the everyday world.