

Imbolc 2006

Ritual written and led by Karen and Alana
(Friday 4/08/06)*

Imbolc is one of the four principals festivals of the Celtic calendar, associated with fertility ritual. Remnants of this are found in the Christian holiday of Candlemas, and in the American Groundhog Day. It is usually celebrated on February 1 (northern hemisphere), August 1 (southern hemisphere). Since the Celtic year was based on both lunar and solar cycles, it is most likely that the holiday would be celebrated on the Full Moon nearest the midpoint between winter solstice and vernal equinox. It is the time when the God is the bright youth and the Goddess is transformed from the Crone of Winter into the Spring Maiden.

Traditional activities for Imbolc include making music, telling stories, drawing pictures and making Celtic Crosses. The making of the cross is connected to the preparation of seed grain for growing in the spring. This activity is usually begun at midnight. The Sun to the ancient Celts was feminine (the light masculine). The solar sign of the Cross is a sign of Brighid herself. They are usually hung in the kitchen, where it can bless your food. We will be drumming after our meditation, and drawing pictures to be burned in the cauldron as a gift to Brighid.

The name "Imbolc" in Irish means "in the belly"(I mbolg), referring to the pregnancy of the ewes, and is also a Celtic term for spring. The colours represented here are white (for light and milk) and yellow (for the Sun that we are calling back from His wandering path). Dairy products are appropriate for this celebration.

Since Brighid represents the life force that brings us back from the backside of winter into spring, Her presence is very important at this time of year. She is one of the triple Goddesses, known as the goddess of poets, healers and smiths.

The Dagda is known as the good god (skilled). He is the father of Brighid, and the husband of the Morrigan. He has a cauldron of abundance, a magic harp that summons the seasons and an enormous club that with one end can kill 9 men in one blow, but the other can restore them to life. He is often represented as a comic figure, whose short tunic fails to cover his buttocks.

Cast circle

Everyone call in the Quarters together...

East - Powers of Air Come to Us. May our Minds be cleansed of Confusion. Powers of Air, Purify Us. May our Minds be filled with Wisdom. Powers of Air, Bless Us.

North - Powers of Fire, Come to Us. May our Actions be cleansed of Malice. Powers of Fire, Purify Us. May our Actions be filled with Bliss. Powers of Fire, Bless Us.

West - Powers of Water, Come to Us. May our Hearts be cleansed of Resentment. Powers of Water, Purify Us. May our Hearts be filled with Compassion. Powers of Water, Bless Us.

South - Powers of Earth, Come to Us. May our Bodies be cleansed of Disease. Powers of Earth, Purify Us. May our Bodies be filled with Wellness. Powers of Earth, Bless Us.

Facing the altar - Powers of Spirit, Come to Us. May our Souls be cleansed of Despair. Powers of Spirit, Purify Us. May our Souls be filled with Hope. Powers of Spirit, Bless Us.

This is the feast of Brighid, the Goddess of Fire and Water. She is the year's midwife who births the Sun. Also we welcome the Dagda, the Lord of perfect knowledge. Let us join together to make our offerings in joy and reverence.

Welcome to Brighid - Lady of the healing hands, inspire us. Lady of the metal-working fires, regenerate us. We come together in your name, on this night dedicated to You. O triple one, Lady of Fire and Water, Goddess of poets, healers and smiths, we give you the Gift of welcome. Come into our Circle and bless our rite.

Welcome to the Dagda - O good god, father of Brighid, lord of perfect knowledge, play your harp of season's change. Bring your wisdom and lust for life. We give you the Gift of welcome. Come into our Circle and bless our rite.

All say together - Blessed be the earth, and all who dwell upon it. We give thanks for the season now departing from us, for the blessings it has bestowed upon us, and upon those with whom we share this world. Blessed be the new season. We pray that it will be a time filled with peace, with abundance, with prosperity, with wisdom, with love. Blessed be all who share this rite. Let us now prepare for the time ahead by opening our hearts, and our minds, and our spirits. Blessed be.

Meditation, Drumming, Drawing...

An Imbolc Meditation

©1996 - 2006 by Fiona Fitzgerald Broome

It is a lovely early spring day. The air is fresh with the fragrance of green plants eager to bloom. The sun's radiance bathes you in comfort, perhaps the first warmth you have felt in many months.

You sense that you are in Ireland, because it is so very green and everything feels clean and alive. The landscape is timeless and magickal.

In the distance, you hear birds singing as they welcome the unexpected warmth of the day. Happiness begins to bubble and dance within you, very quietly at first. It feels almost like anticipation, but it puts a smile on your lips as well.

You are walking up a slight hill. You sense that something wonderful can be seen from the top. As you walk, the grass is already tall enough to brush against your lower legs. This is a wild place where Nature flourishes.

Near the top of the hill, you see a dolmen - two standing stones and a large stone across the tops of them, like an arch. You wonder why you didn't see it sooner. This majestic dolmen seemed to appear, like magick, when you were just twenty feet from it.

Does it mean something? Is it real? You do not pause to wonder, but keep walking towards it.

As you pass between the upright stones, you notice carvings and symbols on the sides of the dolmen. Some of them are lines and marks, which you suspect are an ancient and timeless Ogham message. Others are symbols and spirals, which you will return to look at, another day.

As you pass through the dolmen and continue up the hill, an invisible curtain brushes over you gently.

In the space of a blink, it is a clear, crisp night. The stars are above you, brilliant and twinkling. You know the moon is behind you, but you do not notice its light because there is a sparkling fire just ahead, at the crest of the hill. There is no breeze, but the evening is chilly as you would expect when winter is still a fresh memory.

You pull your clothing more closely around you, as you continue up the hill. You are eager to reach the warmth of the fire, which is bigger than you thought at first. In fact, it is a bonfire and you realize you have arrived at Imbolc.

You run the last few steps to stand next to the fire, pushing your hands towards it, to capture the heat from a safe distance. Tall yellow and white flames seem to warm you inside and out. You pause to look at the sky again, and savour the moment.

Looking across the flames, you realize that you are not alone. You can see the top of someone's head. You pause. Have you have intruded on a private ceremony? Slowly, you walk around the fire, and your companion stands up from the rock she was sitting upon.

She is a tall, strong woman, with long hair so light you cannot tell if it is blonde or white. She looks like the Queen of Pentacles in a way, with an ageless sense of knowing and accomplishment. She wears a long gown and an embroidered cape, but you can see her bare feet peeking out from under her skirt. You know she is someone noble yet without artifice.

Without a word, she stretches out her hands to take yours in welcome. You know, as if you've known her all your life: This is Brighid. This is a special and sacred moment.

She welcomes you to her fire, which will burn tonight and every night, for Imbolc is her festival and her fire is never extinguished.

You sit down next to her, on large flat rocks that are warm from the fire, and very comfortable. She begins to explain to you the meaning of Imbolc, and its promise of a fresh beginning--not just to the plants and animals, but also to everyone on Earth who chooses to permit Imbolc into their lives.

She helps you to remember your past dreams, especially the childhood ones which began, "When I grow up..."

As you recall these fantasies and goals, you discover that many of them were left behind with your childhood, yet others are still alive in what you do each day. This is not a sad realization.

Tonight, you know that you can start afresh. Every one of those dreams is still with you.

Brighid picks up a fallen twig from a nearby yew tree. It looks like any other twig, in the firelight.

However, when Brighid places it into the fire, the bark on it flares and flames like a sparkler, giving enough heat energy to set the twig burning brightly. Silently, Brighid has shown that even a small spark will set alight your oldest and most neglected dreams.

The lesson was simple, but vital.

Now it is time to return to your own world. As you stand, Brighid offers you a cup of clear water, which you sip. The sensation in your mouth is unique. There is a kind of life-giving energy, that is spring itself.

You take a larger swallow of the water, and your entire body responds to that water with a vitality that--like your forgotten dreams--you had almost forgotten from childhood.

After returning the cup to Brighid, and then a quick embrace, you stride purposefully around the fire and back to the dolmen. Passing under it, you emerge back into the daylight, and the warm air and clear sunshine of an early spring day. You have not merely learned the meaning of Imbolc, but actually experienced it in your soul.

From now on, every time you sip fresh water, or see twigs and branches burning in a bonfire, you will feel Brighid's presence, and be reminded of the fire--and dreams--that burn within you, too, and will never be extinguished.

Farewell to Brighid and the Dagda

Brighid - Loving lady of Fire and Water, we thank you for the gift of your presence here tonight. Go now with love. Hail and farewell.

Dagda - Lord of Knowledge, we thank you for the gift of your presence here tonight. Go now with love. Hail and farewell.

Everyone farewell the Quarters together...

Altar - Powers of Spirit, we thank you for your healing gifts and your presence here tonight. Hail and farewell.

South - Powers of Earth, we thank you for your healing gifts and your presence here tonight. Hail and farewell.

West - Powers of Water, we thank you for your healing gifts and your presence here tonight. Hail and farewell.

North - Powers of Fire, we thank you for your healing gifts and your presence here tonight. Hail and farewell.

East - Powers of Air, we thank you for your healing gifts and your presence here tonight. Hail and farewell.

Close the Circle, singing...

May this circle be open but unbroken
May the peace of the Goddess be ever in our hearts.
Merry Meet and Merry Part
and Merry Meet again.

** This ritual is a combination of the author's original ideas and information obtained from various books and/or internet sources.*

Selected from various sources, including: wikipedia.org/wiki/Imbolc
inanna.virtualave.net/imbolc1.html
celticloreandmagic.com/meditations/Brigid-imbolc.htm
livingmyths.com/Celticmyth.htm
worldspirituality.org/Imbolc.html