

The Feast of Brigit

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The first day of February is Brigit's Day, a major feast of the Celtic year. Brigit inherited the name and characteristics of Imbloc, the goddess of spring. She was said to "breathe life into the mouth of the dead winter." She is an ancient role model for women today. Use this ritual as a model for your community or as a meditation for yourself. At WATER we use versions of the following. May you enjoy praying with Brigit!

Place an oil lamp or candle, a bowl of water, Brigit's cross, Brigit's cloak, Irish soda bread, a glass of milk, a bowl of honey, and napkins in the center of a circle.

Brigit's Fire

(Light an oil lamp or candle.)

Brigit's Arrow Invocation

Most Holy Brigit, Excellent Woman, Bright Arrow, Sudden Flame;
May your bright fiery Sun take us swiftly to your lasting kin-dom.

Ritual of Bhrat Brid (adapted from the Institute for Feminism and

Religion) Invite Brigit to come and share her story. She calls three times saying, "*Ligigí isteach Bríd*" (Phonetic: "*Liggiggee istyock Vreed*"). After each call, respond, "*Sé beatha*" (Phonetic: "*Shay vaha,*" meaning, "*She is welcome*"). Brigit: "*Ligigí isteach Bríd.*"

Response: "*Sé beatha.*"

Brigit's Story

Greetings, Sisters! I am Brigit of Ireland. The stories and legends about me run deep and wide, but I will highlight a few for you. I was born in the middle of 5th century A.D. My mother was the slave-woman of a chieftain, whose wife made him sell my mother to a Druid while she was still pregnant with me. Thus, I was born into a Druid household and taught the secrets of the old religion by my stepfather. It is said that my Druid stepfather had a vision that I was to be named after the great goddess Brigit.

Ancient Brigit was goddess of the hearth and of the sacred practice of smithcraft, which involved the mastering of fire. Because I channel Brigit's characteristics, I am known as the Mistress of the Mantle, represent fire and sun, and am also seen as a sister, companioning figure. Some believe I was the midwife to Mary and the foster-mother to Jesus.

The context of my birth has great significance. I was born during a transitional time, as Ireland was moving from a time of the old religion into an era where St. Patrick and others were bringing the message of Christianity to the people. I was also born in a transitional location, the place of the threshold. It is said that my mother was carrying a pitcher of milk at the time, probably coming in from milking the cows. As she crossed the threshold into the house, she gave birth to me, in a place neither in nor out, neither day nor night. In Celtic spirituality thresholds are seen as sacred, thin places where the

veil between heaven and earth seems especially thin and people keenly feel the presence of the sacred. Even today, many hang my cross on their threshold or hearth to seek my blessing and to remember that the sacred is part of our everyday life.

Later in my life I returned to my real father's house. He and his sons tried to force me to marry, but I refused. Instead, I was the first person to free and organize Irish women into Christian communities. I also founded a famous monastery in Kildare, which housed a sacred flame until well into the 16th century. As the story goes, I asked a rich man for land to build the monastery. He offered to give me a site as far as my cloak would reach. When I spread my cloak it encompassed all of Kildare. Thus became the tradition of placing newly woven cloth outside one's home on the Eve of Brigit, for my spirit to pass over the cloth. It is then torn into strips and offered to loved ones for healing. This blessing is my gift to tired and weary spirits coming through the darkness of winter.

Brigit's Cloak

The cloak of Brigit symbolizes her generous spirit. Receive a piece of Brigit's cloak for protection, for healing your body and spirit, and to keep the flame of the spirit of Brigit alive for you this year. When you receive the cloak, say the blessing, "*Fay Vrat Breedja Shin*" meaning "We are under Brigit's cloak."

Brigit's Well

(Touch water and let it flow through your hands.)

As abbess of her vast monastery Brigit performed many miracles of healing using water. There are hundreds of holy wells in Ireland and Europe dedicated to her and alleged to have healing properties.

Wash your hands and face to symbolize spring cleaning of yourself to receive healing from Brigit. The original Imbolc ceremony involved washing hands, face, and feet.

Brigit's Cross

Brigit was a form of the sun Goddess, and her symbolism remains attached to the sun in the form of Brigit's crosses. On the eve of Brigit's Day, January 31st, people honor her memory by weaving crosses from rushes or straw. These "Brigit's Crosses" are believed to bestow the saint's special blessing on their households. February 1st the new cross replaces the old one above the door, hung each year to protect the house from fire. The old cross is burned to keep fire from the house.

(Hold a Brigit's Cross, and pray :)

Holy Brigit, watch over this house and this community!

Mother of the Earth and the Sun

Keep us safe and keep us warm.

Extend your blessing over each of us.

Ritual of Bread, Milk, Honey

In Brigit's role as Mother Goddess, one of her symbols is that of a cow. She is also depicted carrying a milk-pail. The milk of the Sacred Cow was one of the earliest sacred foods throughout the world, equivalent to our present day communion. Milk represented the ideal form of food for its purity and nourishment. Milk from the Sacred Cow was believed to provide an antidote to the poison of weapons. Mother's milk was especially valuable and was believed to have curative powers.

Take a piece of Irish Soda bread and dip it in milk and then in honey. (It might be best to dip it in the milk first so it soaks into the bread. Be sure to have the floor under the honey well protected!)

Brigit's Table Grace, from St. Brigid's Monastery, Kildare

I should like a great lake of finest ale
for all the people.

I should like a table of the choicest foods
for the family of heaven.

Let the ale be made from the fruits of faith,
and the food be for giving love.

I should welcome the poor to my feast,
for they are God's children.

I should welcome the sick to my feast
for they are God's joy.

Let the poor sit with Sophia at the highest place and the sick dance with the angels.

Bless the poor, bless the sick,
bless our human race.

Bless our food, bless our drink, all homes,

O God embrace.

Reflection

What do you resonate with in these stories of Brigit? What aspects of Brigit's life do you relate to in your own?

Brigit's Blessing

May Brigit's flame give you inspiration

May Brigit's girdle give you healing

May Brigit's creativity guide your way

Recipe for Irish Soda Bread

Mix 4 c. flour, 1 tsp. salt, 1 tsp. baking soda, 1 1/2 tsp. baking powder, 1 c. sugar.

Add 1 1/2 c. raisins and 1/4 lb. softened margarine.

In a separate bowl mix 3 eggs and 1 c. buttermilk. Add to above mixture.

Bless the dough with a cross.

Bake at 350 for 1 hour.

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