

31 January 2013



eNewsletter of the Women's Alliance for Theology, Ethics and Ritual

February 1: Celebrating Brigit, Goddess of Healing, Holy Saint

February 1, Brigit's Day in the Celtic calendar is the ancient feast of Imbolc which marks the beginning of spring. Brigit, the female figure of divinity from Old Europe, was said to "breathe life into the mouth of dead winter."

Gather with friends or by yourself with a candle, a bowl of water, and a little milk, honey, and Irish Soda bread. (*Recipe below*).

Brigit's Fire (*Light a candle.*)

From Brigit's Arrow Invocation, Traditional

Most Holy Brigit, Excellent Woman,
Bright Arrow, Sudden Flame;

May your bright fiery Sun take us swiftly to your lasting kin-dom.

Brigit's Story by Diann Neu and Anna Roeschley

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 CE. My mother was sold to a Druid by my father, a chieftain, 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. I represent fire and sun, and I am also seen as a sister and 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 places where the veil between heaven and earth seems especially thin, and people feel keenly 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 biological father's house. He and his



Upcoming Programs:

February 11: Contemplative Prayer with Mary E. Hunt on Faith, 7:30 PM EST

- Come to the WATER office or join us by phone.
- RSVP with "Register Me Contemplation" by Friday, Feb. 8, 2013 to waterstaff@waterwomensalliance.org or call 301.589.2509. [Read more.](#)

March 11: Contemplative Prayer, 7:30 PM EST

April 8: Contemplative Prayer, 7:30 PM EST

May 13: Contemplative Prayer, 7:30 PM EST

Please consider making a [secure online donation](#) for your participation in this event. Thank you!

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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 it. 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 Well (*Put your hands in the bowl of water and let water flow through them.*)

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 and ask Brigit to heal you or a loved one in whatever way you need.

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. On February 1st the old cross is burned, and the new cross replaces the old one above the door, hung each year to protect the house from fire. (*Hang a Brigit's Cross and pray:*)

Holy Brigit, watch over this house and this community.
Mother of the Earth and Sun,
Keep us safe and keep us warm.
Give your blessing to each one.

Ritual of Bread, Milk, Honey

In Brigit's role as Mother Goddess, one of her symbols is that of a cow. She is often 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, dip it in milk and then in honey, and pray "Brigit's Table Grace."

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

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.



St. Brigid's Well in Kildare is reputedly a "healing well," one of many in Ireland.

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

Invite Brigit into your heart. What do you resonate with in these stories of Brigit? What aspects of Brigit's life do you relate to in your own? Open yourself to newness and to a connection to Divine Wisdom.

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 butter.
In a separate bowl, mix 3 eggs and
1 c. buttermilk. Add to above mixture.
Bless the dough by cutting a cross into it.
Bake at 350 for 1 hour in an iron skillet.

© Diann L. Neu, D.Min., is cofounder and codirector of WATER, dneu@hers.com. Special thanks to Mary Condren of the Institute for Feminism and Religion in Dublin, Ireland, for her groundbreaking work on Brigit. We are indebted to her for many of the ideas contained in this ritual. For an excellent guide to planning and preparing Brigit's festivals see www.instituteforfeminismandreligion.org.



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