

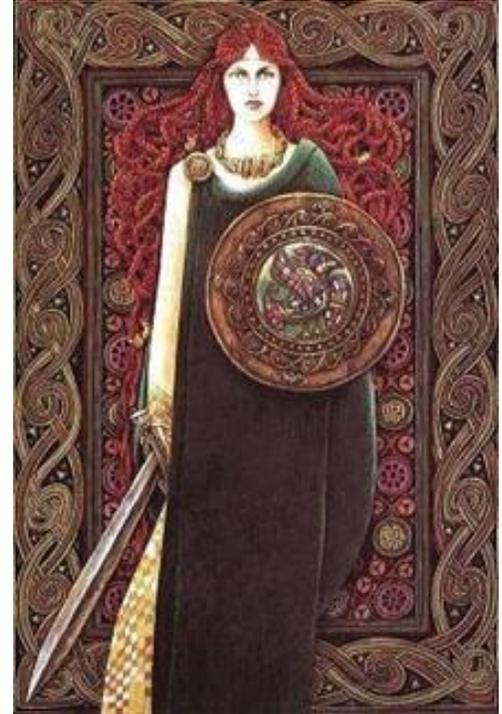
Imbolc

The Return of the Light

“The Sabbat Imbolc marks the first beginning of spring, the actual date when the winter’s temperatures start rising halfway between Winter Solstice and Spring Equinox. In the deepest cold of winter, the spring is born and nurtured.

Imbolc is a time of light, inspiration and poetry, creativity, the nine muses and graces, metal smithing, healing, dedication and initiation.” ~ Diane Stein, “Casting the Circle”

Imbolc, most sources agree, derived from a medieval Irish word meaning “ewe’s milk.” This recalls the time each year that baby lambs were born, and their mothers began to give milk.



The Goddess of the Holy Well



Brigid or Brigid is the goddess most often associated with Imbolc. Across Ireland, she is the goddess of the holy well, or the connection to water as a source of healing and inspiration. Therefore, she is associated with the cauldron, natural springs and wells, and poetic “wellsprings” of inspiration. Her wells are often lit by flames of illumination so that devotees can partake of healing waters.

The Healing Fire of Imbolc

A Triple Celtic Fire Goddess in her origins, she is also the goddess of the sacred flame, or the fires of purification and healing. Her everyday influence can be seen in flames and the hearth of your home.

Edain McCoy, in her book, *The Sabbats*, suggests that Roman as well as Celtic traditions have bearing on Imbolc observances. She writes the “month of February was dedicated to the Goddess Juno Februa and the God Februs for whom the month is named. An aspect of Juno, a patron of women and mothers, Februa is the goddess of fresh starts. If June is for weddings, then perhaps February is for engagements.

During the Roman occupation, an early Irish Abbess Brigit encouraged women’s literacy, and allowed the women in her order to marry. February may be thought of as a time for cleansing and clearing our abodes, our sacred spaces, our body temples, and cleaning up unfinished business.

Working with the Energies of Imbolc

Imbolc is a time to work with any type of creativity. Seed planting for the upcoming growth period focuses on what you choose to create and bring to fruition. Initiation ceremonies are powerful at this time.

Preparation for the upcoming growth time may include internal cleansing, spring cleaning, and getting your home, files, and life in order. This is a time of purification from the dark forces of winter and focuses on the making of magical candles.

Imbolc Altar Decorations

Consider decorating your altar all in white and add white candles to represent purity and new light. Use sacred, blessed water and symbols of fire and water to invite illumination and inspiration.

Brigid's Traditions with Modern Meanings

In the rendering of Saint Brigid, we can see the shepherd's crook, associated with lambing, a metaphor for childcare. Why not renew your connections to family, and read your own little lambs traditional favorites, like "Nancy Endicote in her white petticoat" or "Mary Had a Little Lamb," and consider their original meanings in light of the Brigid stories.

The traditional Brigid's cross is depicted here, visually joining with the protective metal shield with the cruciform marking the Wheel of the Year and man's place within space and time. To honor Brigid, and ask for her protection, craft the distinctive, square Brigid's Cross in her name and hang it in your kitchen or on a nail above the inside front door.



Traditional Imbolc Foods

Dairy products, sprouts, lambs, and braided bread are traditional additions to the Imbolc table. Consider cooking a homemade blackberry cobbler in her honor, as milk and blackberries are among her sacred foods.

Celebrating Imbolc as a Medicine Woman

"As a Medicine Woman, what needs to "cook" in my healing cauldron, both literally and figuratively? What are the ingredients I need?" one might ask.

Consider doing more research on Imbolc, Brigid or another aspect of this Sabbat to design your own personal Imbolc observance. Then, keep a record of your discoveries, rites and rituals in accordance with your Medicine Woman path and tradition. Take photos, make notes, and track your insights.

Tune into your inner Brigid's flame and ask her to assist with the following questions.

- How might I best honor the healing energies of Imbolc to create the new beginnings I crave?
- What new knowledge need I acquire in the upcoming year to assist me in furthering my work?
- Am I paying attention to what needs to be cleansed in myself, home, and affairs? What needs attention?
- What is one small task I can do today to take an important step toward getting my life in order?