

In the **Wolf Month**, when hunger drives the ravaging beast from hill and forest to ravage the flock, at 'the time the sheep's milk comes' is Imbolc celebrated. In the dark night a mother searches for her daughter, her grief and sorrow have brought winter to the world. The secrets of spring are locked in the Lesser Eleusinian Mysteries, but the signs of winter's end are breaking the frozen ground with blossom. For Celts, Imbolc (also Imbolg) from the Old Irish *i mbolg*, 'in the belly', or *oimeic*, 'ewe's milk', was dedicated to the Goddess Brigid. Romans carried torches and candles through the streets in honour of Februa, celebrated the miraculous conception of Juno, Queen of the Gods, and held the Proserpinalia in honour of Hades' dark regent. It has been observed on the eve of February, on the eve of February 2nd or on February 2nd itself.

I M B O L C

This holy day is often more familiar to us now as St Bride's Day or Candlemas after the forcible Christianization of our ancestor's faith. Within Gaelic culture the festival itself is clearly a veneration of the pre-Christian goddess Brigid (Brigit, Bride, Brede, etc.) and most of the recorded customs centre around her. In Irish mythology, Brigid (the 'exalted one') was one of the Tuatha Dé Danann, the 'people of the goddess Danu', a mythical race of gods who, according to tradition, invaded the island almost two thousand years before the supposed birth of Jesus.

Brigid

Brigid's Cross, made of rushes, County Down, Ireland.

In *Cormac's Glossary* she is identified as the daughter of the Dagda, the 'good god' and High King of the Tuatha Dé Danann. She was one of three sisters, all called Brigit, but individually singled out as Brigit, woman of poetry, Brigit, woman of healing, and Brigit, woman of smithing. She is connected with another Celtic goddess, Brigantia, and even with the Norse god of poetry and eloquence, Bragi.

Wicca

Within Wicca, Imbolc takes its place as one of the eight Sabbats on the Wheel of the Year, a cross-quarter day, as of old, lying midway between Yule and Ostara. Many Wiccans see it as a time to commemorate the transformation of the Goddess from Crone to Maiden and celebrate the first signs of spring.

- *Wiccan Invocation* -

Dread Lord of Death and Resurrection, Life and the Giver of Life, Lord within ourselves, whose name is Mystery of Mysteries, encourage our hearts. Let the light crystallise in our blood, fulfilling us of resurrection, for there is no part of us that is not of the gods. Descend, we pray thee, upon this thy servant and Priest.



You can find out more about witchcraft and Wicca at Dr Leo Ruickbie's website Witchology.com. Dr Ruickbie is the director of the Witchcraft Information Centre & Archive (WICA) and the author of *Witchcraft Out of the Shadows* (2004) and *Faustus: The Life and Times of a Renaissance Magician* (2009).

Brede,
Brede, tar gais m'í,
thúe tar dyn thúe
ayms noight Foshil íee y'n
dorrys da Brede,
da Brede e heet st'igh

**Bridget,
 Bridget,
 come to my
 house,
 come to my
 house
 tonight.
 Open the
 door for
 Bridget,
 and let
 Bridget
 come in.**

Traditional saying, Isle of Man.