

BRIGIT

by Susa Morgan Black, FSA, Scot

Druid, OBOD

*Bi Bride bhithe, bhana, leinn.*¹

Brigit is the Celtic Saint and Goddess of Poetry, Healing and Smithcraft. She has been worshiped by the Celtic people as a Saint for over fifteen hundred years, and as a Goddess long before the Roman invasion of Britain and the birth of Christ. Her cult was so powerful that the Celtic Christian Church had to adopt her as a Saint, and the Roman Catholic Church followed suit, for her people would not abandon her. Along with St. Patrick, she is the patron Saint of Ireland.

St. Brigit is often referred to as *Muire na nGael* "Mary of the Gael". Mara Freeman states, "Brigit is the nearest thing we have to a Great Mother of the Celts."²

Lands of the Goddess

The name "Britain" is a derivation of Brigit's name. Britain was named for an ancient Celtic tribe, the *Brigantes*, who worshipped Brigit and were the largest Celtic tribe to occupy the British Isles in pre-Roman times. The tribe originally came from the area that is now *Bregenz* in Austria near Lake Constance. The word "brigand" comes from this tribe of fierce warriors.

Her worship probably spread from the Continent, leaving place names behind, such as *Brittany* in France. Brigit place names are found in *Brechin*, Scotland, the river *Brent* in England, the river *Braint* in Wales, *Bridewell* in Ireland. Even London has a *Bridewell*.

The symbol of Britain – the Goddess *Brigantia* or *Britannia*, (still found on their fifty-cent coin) is Brigit in her aspect as Goddess of Sovereignty or Guardian of the Land.



Names of the Goddess

There are many variations, pronunciations, and spellings of Her name, including:

Scotland: *Bhrighde, Brighid, Bride*
Ireland: *Brigid, Brigit, Brighid, Brid, Brígh*
Manx: *Breeshey*

1. Scots Gaelic prayer, "The calm fair Bride will be with us."
2. Kindling the Celtic Spirit, page 47

Wales:	<i>Ffraid</i>
England:	<i>Brigantia, Britannia</i>
French	<i>Brigandu</i>

The name Brigit itself means either “Fiery Arrow”, “Bright One”, or “High One” in the ancient Celtic language, referring to her solar aspect. In the old Celtic language, she was *Briganti*, which is connected to the old Indo European word, *Bhrghnti*. In Sanskrit, *bhrati*, or *brihati* means “exalted one”.³

Druid Goddess

Brigit is a “pan Celtic” goddess, who was worshipped by both the *Goidelic*⁴ and *Brythonic*⁵ Celts in the British Isles and beyond. *She is a solar deity, who once hung her mantle on a sunbeam.*

In Celtic mythology, Brigit is the daughter of the Morrighan and the Dagda⁶, the Good God and Chief of the Tuatha de Danaan, the ancient fairy race of Ireland, and the sister of Ogma, who invented the Ogham alphabet. She was the wife of Bres, King of the Fomorians (who were at war with the Tuatha de Danaan). Brigit was said to have been the mediator of peace between the two ancient warring tribes. She was the mother of the Three Gods of Danu – Ruadan⁷, Iuchar and Ua⁸. These three Gods were said to have married the three princesses of Ireland – Eire, Fodhla and Banbha.⁹

In other sources, Brigid is the daughter of Boann, the Goddess of the River Boyne in Ireland. Boann (bo fhionn) means “white cow”, an association she shares with Brigid.

Brigit is primarily the patron Goddess of poets, healers and smiths. She is also a patron of other womanly arts – midwifery, dyeing, weaving and brewing, and the guardian of children and farm animals – particularly cows.¹⁰ The island of Ireland itself is said to be the green mantle of Brigit. She is also said to be the patron of travelers, sailors, and fugitives.

She is specifically a patroness to the Druids in her aspects of poetry (Bards), healing and prophecy (Ovates) and blacksmithing.¹¹ (Druids).

3. Candlemas, Feast of Flames, page 25

4. *Goidelic* – Gaels: Irish, Scots, and Manx Celts

5. *Brythonic* – British: Welsh, Cornish and Breton Celts

6. In other versions, Dagda is the son of Brigit; White Goddess, page 101. Dagda is the patron god of the Druids. In some versions, he is the consort of Brigid.

7. In some sources, it’s Brian, Iuchar and Iuchurba (White Goddess, page 101)

8. Article on Brigit on the OBOD webpage, by Winter Cymres (<http://www.druidry.org/obod/deities/brigid>)

9. White Goddess, page 102

10. Kindling the Celtic Spirit, pg. 47

11. Blacksmithing is the art of transformation of metal, and they were considered great wizards and mages in ancient times, which relates them directly to the transformative (alchemical) arts of the Druid.

Goddess of Poetry

Brigit is patroness *filidhact* (poetry and bardic lore) and the *filid* – (bards), who were the oral transmitters of the Celtic culture. This includes storytellers, folklorists, mythologists, balladeers, singers, composers, poets, musicians, particularly harpers, historians and clan genealogists. She provided the “fire in the head” of poetic inspiration. The Bards are the surviving class of the Druids, keeping the ancient traditions alive until the present day. Bards were the honored guests from cottage to castle, patronized and supported by a network of clientele. The Blind Harper, Turlough O’Carolan (1670-1738), was one of the most famous bards in Ireland, and made his living as an itinerant harper. He was a formidable composer, who is said to have learnt some of his music from the faeries themselves.

The word *file* – poet, is related to the word, *faic* – to see. Poets are inspired by the Other World, and have the gift of *fàisneachd* (prophecy).

In the county of Limerick, Brigit visited the household of a chieftain, and asked that his foster father and his sons play the harps that were hanging on the wall. She was told that the chief’s bard was away, and the children did not know how to play. Thereupon, she blessed their hands, and they played the harp with such skill that they became famous harpers, and the bards of kings for generations.¹²



Goddess of Augury

In Druid tradition, poetry (*filidecht*) was associated with augury (*fiosachd* or *fàisneachd*). So Brigit was also the patron of prophets and seers (*fiosaiche*). She was said to have foreseen the future of Christ when she was his nurse:

*Augury*¹³

*The augury Brigit made for her Foster son (Jesus)
She made a pipe within her palms:
“I see the Foster son by the well’s side,
Teaching the people assuredly*

*I set the augury towards the well,
And truly that was righteous work,
The King of kings teaching the people,
Yonder I see Christ, assuredly.”*

The form of divination Brigit used is called “*frith Bhrighde (augury of Brigit)*¹⁴”, where she curled her hand into a “seeing tube”. Looking through this “hand made tube”, she could find lost people or animals, report on the well being of distant people, etc. In Scots Gaelic, *frith* means “an incantation to find whether people at a great distance or at sea be in life.”¹⁵ *Frithir* is another word for seer or diviner in Gaelic. Water and Fire are both associated with divination. Celtic Seers divine by both looking deeply into water (*fàisnich uisge*) or into the flames (*fàisnich teine*).

12. Brigid of the Gael, Conrad Bladely

13. Carmina Gadelica, Lindasfarne Edition, pg. 533

14. Carmina Gadelica, Lindasfarne Edition, pg. 529

15. Gaelic Dictionary by Malcolm MacLennan

Triple Goddess

Brigit is sometimes referred to as a “Triple Goddess”, having two sisters, also named Brigit. More commonly, she is considered a triple aspect deity because she is the patroness of three primary skills in the Celtic world – poetry, healing and smithcrafting. In this image, one image carries a pair of blacksmith tongs and a sword, another image is handling two healing snakes, and a third image carries a wand with a crescent moon and a tablet.

Elements

Brigit rules the elements of *Water (Uisge in Gaelic, Dwr in Welsh)* and *Fire (Teine in Gaelic; Tân in Welsh)*.

As Water deity, Brigit is the patroness of healers, with many healing springs and wells dedicated to Her throughout the British Isles. Water is also associated with psychic ability, music, and poetry. Natural bodies of water were also sacred to her, particularly where three streams joined together.¹⁶

As a Fire deity, she is the patroness of blacksmiths and poets (a poet’s “fire in the head”). The hearth is sacred to her in every home. Another name for her feast day is *Candlemas*, in which all the candles for the coming year are made and blessed. “Brighid is the Triple Goddess of Fire – the fire of poetic inspiration and divination, the fire of health and fertility, and the fire of metal working and crafts.”¹⁷

Water and Fire were important elements to the early Celtic civilization long before they reached the British Isles. The elements were especially venerated at the end of a long harsh winter – fire was welcomed as the returning warmth of the sun, and water was celebrated as the ice and snow melted.



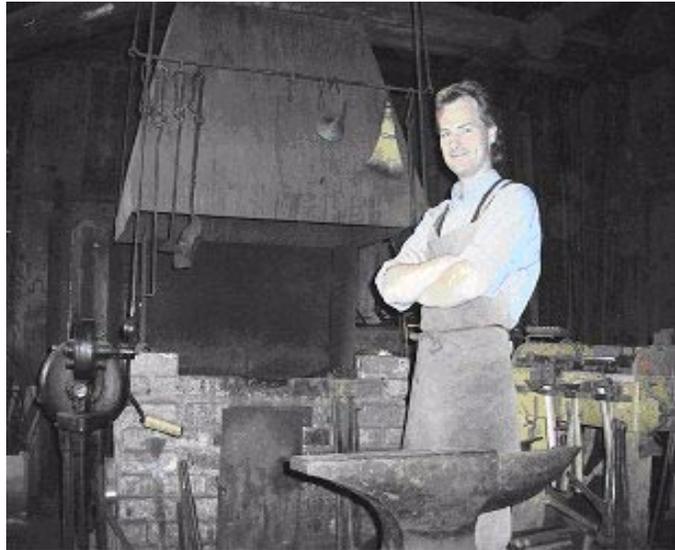
Brighid, the Triple Goddess, by JBL of Calcutta, *Images of the Divine*

16. Candlemas, Feast of Flame, page 28

17. The Fires of Brigid, by Miranda Gray, White Moon Gallery, <http://www.thewhitemoon.com/gallery/Brighid.html>

Patroness of Blacksmith

She is the patroness of blacksmiths, the King of Crafts on which all other crafts depend. She is not a blacksmith herself, that niche is occupied by the Celtic deities, *Goibnu* and *Govannon*, but she inspires the creativity and artistry of the blacksmith craft just as she inspires the creativity of poets. Her eldest son, *Ruadan*, was a blacksmith. When Ruadan was killed, Brigit keened (*caoine*) in grief for him, thus initiating the Celtic custom of keening for the dead.¹⁸



Blacksmith Chris Mead at the Ardenwood Forge Fremont, California.

Blacksmiths were considered magicians and wizards themselves. And it was the excellence of Celtic metalwork that differentiated them from all other early cultures and brought them to prominence.

Goddess of Protection

In her aspect as *Brigantia*¹⁹, she carries a spear, an orb of victory, and wears a war crown. The word “Brigand” derives from this warlike version of Brigit.

In the British national anthem, “Hail Britannia, Britannia rules the waves. Britons never, never, never shall be slaves.” Her warlike, protective characteristics are emphasized.

As a saint, there were many prayers of protection invoking Brigit, which have been collected by Alexander Carmichael.

*Prayer of Protection*²⁰

*Thou Brigit of the kine,
Thou Brigit of the mantles,
Shield me from the ban
of the fairies of the knolls,
The faeries of the knolls.*



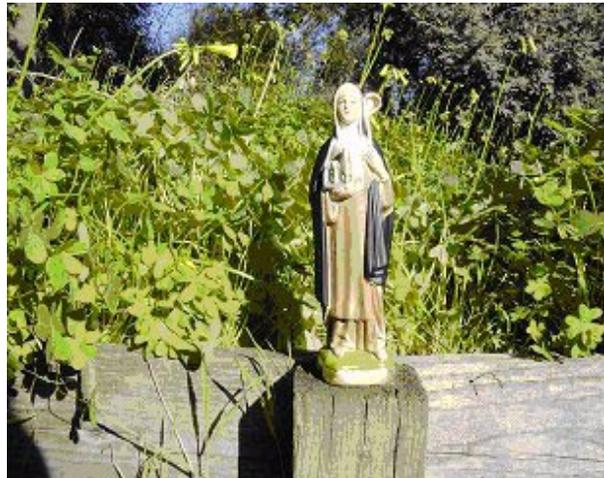
Brigantia statuette created by Oberon Zell, from the Mythic Images Collection

18. Brigit, by Winter Cymres. Caoine is Gaelic for keening
19. Stone relief of Brigantia from a site at Birrens, Dunfriesshire
20. Carmina Gadelica, Lindisfarne Press Edition

Christian Saint

Brigit occurs in Christian tradition as Saint Brigit of Kildare, Ireland. In some legends, she was a Druidess before she was converted to Christianity.

The Saint was born near Kildare, on February 1st in 453 AD, to a Druid father, Dubthach, and a bondmaid, Broicsech. Saint Patrick was still alive when she was born. Her father had a vision that his wife would “bring forth a daughter conspicuous, radiant, who will shine like a sun among the stars of heaven²¹.” In the vision, the father was told to name his child after the Goddess Brigit. When the radiant child was born, she was immediately bathed in milk. She would tolerate no impure food, and was nourished on the milk of a “white skinned, red eared cow alone”. The attributes of white skin or fur with red ears on an animal (usually a cow, hound, or deer) is indicative of an “otherworldly” or faerie animal in Celtic mythology.



This statuette of Brigit can be found in most Catholic supply shops or Irish import stores.

In some legends, it was a Druid who foresaw her radiant birth and future status, and she was later fostered and raised by the Druid

Brigit was famous for her generosity, giving away all she owned to the poor, including some of her father’s possessions. This displeased her father, Dubthach, so much, he took her to Leinster to sell at the court of the king. He left her with his sword in the chariot to make arrangements, and while he was gone, Brigit gave away his sword to a poor leper. When her angry father reported this to the king, the King of Leinster said, “It is not meet for us to deal with this maiden, for her merit before God is higher than ours.²² So saying, her father was prevented from selling her into bondage.

Brigit grew into a beautiful young woman, described as “blond and slender”²³ but had no interest in a secular life. When her family tried to force her to marry, she plucked out her own eye to make herself less attractive. When her family relented, she replaced her eye, miraculously healed.

She was to be Ireland’s first nun. She took the veil from the Scottish Bishop, Mél, who broke Christian tradition and ordained her as a female bishop, saying “No power have I in this matter. That dignity has been given by God unto Brigid, beyond every other woman²⁴.” (Perhaps this harks back to pagan traditions, when there were female Druids).

Brigit’s miracles include restoring the dead to life (as a baby, she breathed life into the stillborn son of the Queen of Conaille), causing a mystic blaze around herself, healing the mentally ill, sick, and blind, making the dumb speak, turning water to ale. Her shadow had healing powers. A man brought his consumptive mother to Brigit, and placed the woman in Brigit’s shadow, where

21. Saint Bride, by Iain MacDonald, page 13

22. Saint Bride, by Iain MacDonald, page 26

23. Candlemas, Feast of Flames, page 25

24. Saint Bride, by Iain MacDonald, page 9

she was immediately healed. Brigit gave her famous healing girdle to a beggar, who was able to make her living from it as a healer thereafter.

She also had the power to curse, and once cursed an apple tree to baroness when its owner refused to give apples to the poor. When refused the hospitality of ale at a feast, she cursed the proprietor's stock, and the stock of ale disappeared.

Brigit was a seer and a visionary, and once told Saint Patrick her vision of the Ploughs of Ireland, which prophesied the spread of the Gospel.

She was known throughout the land for her charity and could use up her stock of food and drink and it would replenish itself immediately. A starving hound once came to her door, and she gave him the stock of bacon. When her foster father asked what became of the bacon, she said, "Count them." and all the strips of bacon were in the larder again.

The Life of Brigid in the *Book of Lismore* describes her, "She is the prophetess of Christ, she is the Queen of the South, she is the Mary of the Gael."

Although she does not appear in the Bible, she is an integral part of Celtic Christianity. Legend claims her to be the midwife to Mary and the foster mother of Christ." From the prayers gathered by Alexander Carmichael in the Scottish Highlands, *Sloinntireachd Bhrìde*, *The Genealogy of Brìde: Is mi fo chomaraig mo Naomh Muire, is I mo chaomh mhuime Brìde.* (And I under the protection of my Holy Mary, and my gentle foster-mother is my beloved Bride.)²⁵

The legend states that angels came to escort Brigit to the manger where, as a midwife, she delivered the Christ child. This is an interesting legend considering she was born 500 years later. (This is another example of where the distinguishing line between the Saint and the Goddess is elusive.)

There is a story of how she used her Sight to discover Jesus when he was lost as a child in the Temple in Jerusalem and another legend of when she drew the attention of Herod's soldiers to herself by wearing a crown of lit candles, so that Mary and Joseph could escape with their baby son to Egypt.

A stone head of Brigit was discovered in a Neolithic tomb Drumeague, County Cavan, and brought into a local church. The head was canonized as Saint. Bride of Knockbridge²⁶.

Alexander Carmichael spent years in the Highlands of Scotland around the turn of the last century, gathering folklore, customs, practices, and prayers from the oral tradition of the country folk who lived in those remote areas. Much of their worship was devoted to Saint Brigit, and many prayers and invocations such as the above, were dedicated to Her. Carmichael published over six volumes on this subject, the *Carmina Gadelica, Hymns and Incantations*, in Gaelic with English translations.

25. *Carmina Gadelica*, Volume 1, page 175

26. *Kindling the Celtic Spirit*, page 48

Traditional Scottish Gaelic Supplication of Saint Brigit^a

Brighid nighean Dùghaill Duinn
'Ic Aoidh 'ic Cuinn 'ic
Criara 'ic Caibre 'ic Cais 'ic
Carmaic 'ic Cartaich 'ic Cuinn

Brighde nam brat,
Brighde na brig,
Brighde nan cleachd,
Brighde na frith.

Brighde nan gealachos,
Brighde na bith,
Brighde nan gealaphos,
Brighde na ni.

Brighde bean chomainn,
Brighde na brig,
Brighde bean chobhair,
Brighde bean mhìn.

Brighde ciabh Moire,
Brighde Moime Chrìosd, -
Gach latha agus gach oidhche
Nì mi Slointearachd na Brighd,

Cha mharbhar mi
Cha ghinear mi,
Cha charachar mi,
Cha ghonar mi,
Cha spaltar mi,
Cha spùillear mi,
Cha saltrar mi,
Cha rùisgear mi,
Cha reubar mi,
Cha mhó dh'fhàgas
Crìosd an dearmad mi.

Cha loisg grian mi,
Cha loisg teine mi,
Cha loisg ial mi,
Cha loisg gile mi.

Cha bhàth uisge mi,
Cha bhàth sàla mi,
Cha bhàth lighe mi,
Cha bhàth burn mi.

Cha laigh bruaill-bri orm,
Cha laigh suan-dubh orm,
Cha laigh druail-dri orm,
Cha laigh luaths-luis orm.

Tha mi for chomraig
Mo Naomh Moire;
'S I mo chaombh chomainn
Brighde.

Brigit daughter of Dugall the Brown
Son of Aodh son of Art son of Conn^{b0}
Son of Criara son of Cairbre son of Cas
Son of Cormac son of Cartach son of Conn

Brigit of the mantles,
Brigit of the peat-heap,
Brigit of the twining hair,
Brigit of the augury.

Brigit of the white feet,
Brigit of the calmness,
Brigit of the white palms,
Brigit of the kine.

Brigit, woman-comrade,
Brigit of the peat-heap,
Brigit, woman-helper,
Brigit, woman mild.

Brigit, own tress of Mary,
Brigit, Nurse of Christ,
Each day and each night
That I say the Descent of Brigit,

I shall not be slain,
I shall not be wounded
I shall not be put in cell,
I shall not be gashed,
I shall not be torn in sunder,
I shall not be despoiled
I shall not be down-trodden
I shall not be made naked,
I shall not be rent
Nor will Christ
Leave me forgotten

Nor sun shall burn me,
Nor fire shall burn me,
Nor beam shall burn me,
Nor moon shall burn me.

Nor river shall drown me,
Nor brine shall drown me,
Nor flood shall drown me,
Nor water shall drown me.

Nightmare shall not lie on me,
Black sleep shall not lie on me
Spell sleep shall not lie on me,
"Luaths-luis" shall not lie on me.

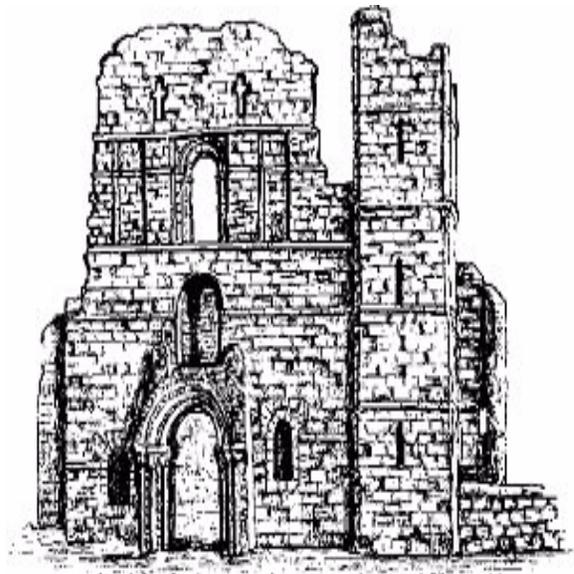
I am under the keeping
Of my Saint Mary,
My companion, beloved
Brigit.

a. Carmina Gadelica, Volume III, by Alexander Carmichael

b. ⁰ Conn is also the progenitor of Clan Donald, one of the clan sept names is MacBride

Brigit of Kildare

The King of Leinster granted Brigit land for a monastery in Kildare (*Cill-Dara*), (Church of the Oak²⁷), around 470 AD. Brigit was the Abbess of the first convent in Ireland, and after her death, a perpetual flame was kept in her honor. It was a center of learning and art, including metal work and goldsmithing. Its most famous illuminated manuscript being the *Book of Kildare* (*which no longer survives*) Only women were permitted to enter the hedge enclosure with the Eternal Flame, which was fanned by a bellows. There were originally nineteen nuns who kept vigil at the fire, one each night. On the nineteenth night, the nun would say, "Brigid guard your fire, this is your night." These Nuns may have been a continuation of a sect of Druids, the "Sisters of the Galliceniae"



who performed sacred female rites. According to Cogitosus, who wrote in 650 AD, Kildare was a "double community" of monks and nuns, presided over by an abbess.²⁸ Brigit's relics were kept in the abbey until the Viking raids in the Ninth Century. King Henry VIII of England, during the Reformation, dissolved the assets of the Catholic Church in Ireland and destroyed the abbey in the Sixteenth Century. All that remains of the Medieval building are a high cross and a round tower. The remains of what might be the original communal hearth from the time of Brigit were discovered in 1996.²⁹ About a mile away from the remains of the abbey, the original stone well still exists, with a cloutie tree (a Larch) nearby. The Larch's branches are still hung to this day with strips of cloth, bandages, ribbons, etc. in prayer to Saint Brigit for healing.³⁰

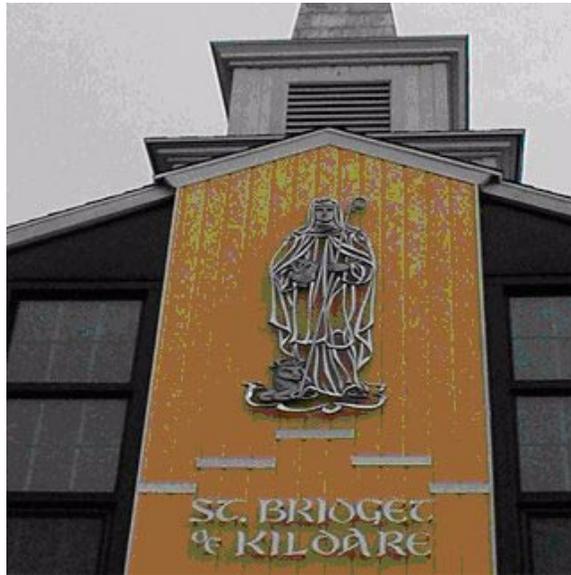
In 1993, Sister Mary Minehan, a Brigidine Nun, relit St. Brigid's flame in Kildare. They have set up a Solas Bhríde, a Christian Community Center, "for Celtic Spirituality in the spirit of Brigid of Kildare". They hold a festival, Feile Bhríde, at Imbolc in Kildare each year. They are raising funds to establish a permanent building to house the perpetual flame. Membership in Cairde Bhríde (Friends of Brigid) can be obtained by writing Sister Mary Minehan at Solas Bhríde, 14 Dara Park, Kildare, Ireland, telephone 045-522-890.

27. The oak tree is sacred to the Druids. Her monastery was built in a place that was sacred to the Druids.

28. Celtic Saints in their landscape, page 20

29. Celtic Saints in their landscape, page 19

30. Celtic Saints in their landscape, page 21



This photo was taken by OBOD Bard, Kate Reynolds of a Catholic church dedicated to Saint Bridget in Moodus, Connecticut, U.S.A., April, 2002

Brigit of the Mantle

In the legend of Saint Brigid's Cloak or Mantle, she found the perfect spot to found her abbey in Leinster, in a place called Kildare. There was an old oak, sacred to the Druids on the premises, making it a holy site. She went to the King of Leinster with four of her maidens and asked him to donate the land for an abbey. The King refused to give her the land. Brigid prayed to God for help, then asked if she could have just the amount of land that her mantle would cover. Laughing in derision, the king agreed. Each of the four maidens took a corner of the cloak, and walked East, North, West and South, the cloak stretching as they walked until it encompassed the parcel of land she desired for her abbey. The king, seeing the miracle, fell to his knees, and could deny her nothing, converting then and there to Christianity.³¹ Brigid built her church there, under the shade of the old oak, not far from a well, also dedicated to the saint. A cathedral was built on the site in the thirteenth century, but the original foundations of Brigid's church still exist!

An Irish blessing: *Faoi bhrat Bhríde sinn*. May you be under Bride's mantle. Ireland itself is sometimes described as the "green mantle of Brigid", and the color green is also associated with the faeries, which links her to her original status as a Goddess among the *Tuatha de Danaan*.

31. St. Brigid's Cloak, by Reg Keating

An Irish prayer to Bride:

*Dear to me is Erin,
Dear to me each land,
Praise be to it!
O, white flame of Leinster
Enlighten the whole land.*

*Chief of Erin's maidens
Chief of finest women.*

*Dark the bitter winter
cutting its sharpness
But Bride's mantle
Brings spring to Ireland.*

Brigit, the Healer

Brigit is the patroness of healers, using the elements of fire and water to heal. She taught the properties of herbs, and blessed many springs and wells across the land, that are still venerated today. Her girdle and mantle had healing properties, which she shared with others. A drop of water from her mantle created a healing lake. As a solar deity, she also taught that sunlight and water could be used for healing, especially the eyes. She advised sufferers to find a clean, clear spring, or fast moving body of fresh water, sparkling with sunlight, and bathe it on sore eyes for a restorative cure. In Catholic tradition, they pray to Saint Brigit for eye maladies.

In folk tradition, a girdle (belt) is woven of straw at Imbolc, wide enough for people to step through three times in a healing ritual. Stips of cloth or ribbon are also left out to be blessed by the Saint on Imbolc, imparting the healing properties of her own cloak to them.

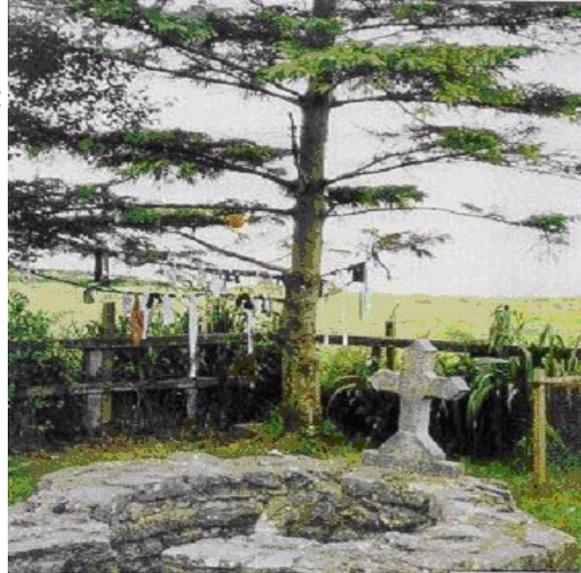


My Irish Kinsale cloak, hanging from a tree.
Made by Marian Hinderness, San Jose, CA.

Goddess of the Healing Wells³²

Wells throughout the Celtic lands are named after Saint Brigit. There are many legends that the Saint had stopped by a well in her travels, and blessed and healed people at the site. "Clouties³³" are often tied to the trees (often Hawthorne) overhanging the wells, with healing wishes. These wells³⁴ were probably dedicated to the earlier Goddess, Brigit, with a presiding priestess or Druid.

Famous wells in Ireland dedicated to the Saint include: Kilbride parish, Co. Mayo; Chiffony, Co. Sligo; Faughart, Co. Louth; Ardagh, Co. Longford; Buttevant, Co. Cork; Castlemanger, Co. Cork; Dunteer, Co. Louth; Inismagrath parish, Co. Leitrim; Killinagh parish, Co. Cavin; Kilranelagh parish, Co. Carlow; Liscannor, Co. Clare; Marlerstown, Co. Louth; Mullingar, Co. Westmeath; Tully, Co. Kildare; and Outeragh parish, Co. Leitrim



St. Brigit's well in Tully, Ireland. Photo by Elizabeth Rees in *Celtic Saints in Their Landscape*

Brigit the Midwife

Brigit is the patroness of midwives. She was the midwife of Mary, bringing Christ into the world.

Bride Ban-Chobhair

Chainig thugam cobhair,
Moire gheal is Bride;
Mar a rug Anna Moire,
Mar a rug Moire Criosda
Mar a rug Eile Eoin Baistidh
Gun mhar-bhith dha dhi,
Cuidich thusa mise 'm asaid,
Cuidich mi a Bhríde!
Mar a gheineadh Criosd am Moire
Comhlíont air gach laimh,
Cobhair thusa mise, mhoime,
An gein a thoir bho 'n chnaimh;
'S mar a chomhn thu Oigh an t-solais
Gun or, gun odh, gun ní,
Comhn orm-sa, 's mor m' othrais,
Comhn orm a Bhríde!

Bride the Aid-Woman³⁵

There came to me assistance
Mary fair and Bride;
As Anna bore Mary,
As Mary bore Christ,
As Eile bore John the Baptist
Without flaw in him,
Aid thou me in mine unbearing
Aid me, O Bride!
As Christ was conceived of Mary
Full perfect on every hand,
Assist thou me, foster-mother,
The conception to bring from the bone;
And as thou didst aid the Virgin of joy,
Without gold, without corn, without kine,
Aid thou me, great is my sickness,
Aid me, O Bride!

As patroness of midwives, she was invoked at the door of the home where the woman was giving birth, by the midwife.

32. The Holy Wells of Ireland

33. Scots – small clothes

34. St. Brigit's well in Tully, Ireland. Photo by Elizabeth Rees, from *Celtic Saints in their Landscape*.

35. *Carmina Gadelica*, Volume 1, page 177

*"Bride, Bride, come in!
Thy welcome is truly made,
Give thou relief to the woman,
And give thou the conception to the Trinity."³⁶*

She is the guardian of every newborn child, their cradles often protected with a woven Brigit's Cross. Upon the safe birth of the child, it was "sained" by the midwife, with three drops of water on the child's forehead, dedicating the child in the name of the Trinity. A candle was also carried around the bed sun-wise three times. All these are elements from the Goddess Brighid, who was a solar deity also associated with healing wells. Could saining be from an older tradition of putting the newborn child under Brighid's protection?

Brigit of the Hearth

Brighid is also associated with the *teinntean* (the domestic hearth) especially in Gaelic Scotland, which is why Brighid doll's are placed near the hearth on her feast day.

The doll is usually dressed in white, with ribbons, lace and even jewelry added. Mine has a green (handkerchief) mantle, with a Brigit's Cross made out of a piece of Irish peat.

A *slat geal* (white wand) is often placed in the *leabe Bride* (Brigit's bed) with her image, as a fertility charm. She is the patron of agricultural, pastoral, and domestic fertility and abundance.

An offering of grain and milk products is left for her – bannocks, cheese, cream, butter, milk.

The Bridie doll is kept throughout the year near the hearth, hung on a wall, or near the door, as a talisman of protection, then burnt in the next year's Brigit's eve fire while a new one is fashioned.



Brigit doll made by OBOD Bard Kate Reynolds,
Druid wand made by James W. Maertens

Togail an Teine

*Mar a thogadh Muire.
Caim Bhrìde 's Mhuire
Air an tula 's air an Iar,
'S air an fhàrdaich uile.*

Beannachadh Smalaidh

*Smalaidh mis an tula
Mar a smaladh Muire;
Comraig Bhrìde 's Mhuire*

Kindling the Fire³⁷

As Mary would.
The encirclement of Bride and Mary,
On the fire, and on the floor
And on the household all.

Smoothing³⁸ Blessing

I will smoor the hearth
As Mary would smoor;
The encompassment of Bride and of Mary,

36. Kindling the Celtic Spirit, page 55

37. Carmina Gadelica, Volume 1, pages 233-242

38. Smoothing (Scots) – banking the fire.

*Air an tula 's air an lar,
'S air an fhardaich uile.*

On the fire and on the floor,
And on the household all.

Smoothing the fire: The women of the household rake the embers into a circle and divide them into three sections with a small boss in the middle. Three peats are placed in the spaces and ashes scattered over all so that the fire is banked down for the night and easily rekindled in the morning.

I have my own tradition, where I light a candle for Brigit and ask her blessing on my house:

*I kindle this candle in the name of Brighid,
Goddess of Smiths.
I sain³⁹ this house in the name of Brighid,
Goddess of Healers.
I smoor⁴⁰ this candle in the name of Brighid,
Goddess of Poets.*

Brigit and Animals

Brigit had a way with animals, and could call birds to her hand. A hunted boar once found its way to her courtyard, and was granted sanctuary from its pursuers, remaining at the monastery for the rest of its life.

A white skinned red eared fairy cow is associated with her. This fairy animal provided the only sustenance she would accept as an infant – it's pure white milk. This cow is said to be her favorite companion.

She saved a man's life who had accidentally killed the King's pet trained fox. The king condemned the poor peasant to death for his offense. Brigit replaced the animal with a wild fox from the woods who performed the same tricks that the king's fox had performed. The fox disappeared back into the woods as soon as the peasant was set free by the king.

Brigit is also associated with a white snake, and with fish that sometimes appear in her healing wells.



39. Sain – (Scots) to bless. At this point, I take the candle around the house

40. In this case, I blow the candle out and the ritual is closed

Brigit, the Milk Maid⁴¹

Cattle, milkmaids and milk were sacred to Brigit, “Thig a Bhríde mhor na loin, Thig, a bhanachaig losda Criosda.” (“Come, great Bride, the beautiful, Come thou milkmaid of Jesus Christ.”)⁴²

“White Brigit’s Day” is another name for her feast day, referring to her association with milk, a vital food product to the early pastoral Celts. Milk was left out for her overnight, or poured out on the ground as a libation to her

This plaque shows many of her symbols, the cow and pitcher of milk, the Bride’s cross, the barrel of ale, a duck and an owl, her abbot’s Sheppard’s crook, and the Druidic oak leaves and acorns.

She is associated with pastoral and agricultural enterprise – especially sheep and cows, during lambing and calving season, and thus a Goddess of animal fertility. She is particularly associated with milk and dairy products. She is thus a Mother Goddess with strong associations with Danu or Anu.



Brigit plaque made by Patricia Banker, www.saintspreserved.com

Shrines and Pilgrimage

There are many shrines and wells dedicated to Brigid throughout Ireland. In Faughart, the place many believe her to be born, there is an outdoor shrine where people come for healing. Cloths, bandages, ribbons, rosary beads and other items are tied to bushes around the shrine. A stream flows nearby with stations of the cross marked for pilgrims to honor her, usually the first Sundays in February and July.

In Killmogh, there is a “bullaun” (stone block with cup like depressions). Supplicants ask the Saint for help, and turn smaller rocks within the depression⁴³

Candlemas

The Catholic Church celebrates Candlemas on Brigit’s feast day (which is also celebrated as the “Purification of the Virgin Mary”). This is appropriate, because Brigit is a patroness of light. In her earlier version, she was a solar deity. On Candlemas, the members of the parish carry their lighted candles in a procession around the church, then the priest blesses the candles. The candles are then taken to their homes and used in protection from storms, demons and evil. February 3rd is the feast of Saint Blaise, where two crossed candles are placed at the throat to protect the person from throat ailments.

41. Brigit plaque made by Patricia Banker, <http://www.saintspreserved.com>

42. *ibid*, page 271

43. Brigit of the Gael, Bladey, page 128

Imbolc, Feast of Saint Bride

*Imbolc*⁴⁴, or *Óimelc*⁴⁵, occurring the first of February, is one of the four major Celtic festivals in the year, going back to Druid times. The other three are Beltaine (the first of May), Lughnassad (the first of August), and Samhain (the first of November.)

“The important Celtic feast of Candlemas fell on February 2nd. It was held to mark the quickening of the year. In Ireland and the Highlands, February 2nd is, very properly, the day of St. Brigit, formerly the White Goddess, the quickening Triple Muse⁴⁶.”

Imbolc, Là Fhéill Bhrighde, was a festival of the original herding culture – where lambs are born and ewes are in milk. The milk provided drink, butter, cheese, and whey after a long, hard winter when the stocks of food were low – a matter of life and death to early Celtic people.

The rite of Imbolc is a women’s ceremony, where the coming of Spring is celebrated with Brighid’s feast (Maiden aspect of Goddess), and the waning of the Cailleach’s winter power is acknowledged (Crone aspect of Goddess). It is at the other side of the wheel of the year from Lughnassad, which is a male rite, celebrating *Lugh*, the God of Light. The struggle for power between the Cailleach and Brighid is the turning of the seasons from winter to summer. Early February marks the time when winter first begins to lose its power and the light can be seen to increase, thus it is also called Candlemas, when candles are blessed. In the myths, Cailleach brings winter snows while Brighid brings the first spring rains.



A tradition in the Highlands and Ireland is to put a strip of cloth or ribbon outside your door on Imbolc Eve (Jan. 31st) for Brigit to bless. This cloth represents her mantle and can be used for healing throughout the year. Children are encouraged to notice if the cloth has grown the next morning, as Brigit’s mantle did!⁴⁷

I’ve designated a tree in my own backyard as a “cloutie tree”, which has been used in many a healing ritual for my family and friends.

The ceremony is also a rite of purification, and homes and barns are cleaned out and blessed, after the dregs of winter. Imbolc rites solicit the return of light and warmth, the beginning of a new season of growth and abundance, planting, fertility and health.

Imbolc is also a traditional time to do divination. Looking into the ashes in the hearth the next morning one might find symbols of the coming year, or perhaps the very footprint of Brigit herself.

44. Imbolc, means “in the belly”, referring to the early signs of spring – pregnant sheep, early flowers

45. Oilmelc means “ewe’s milk”, referring to lactating ewe’s providing the first milk of the season

46. The White Goddess

47. Mara Freeman’s website, <http://www.chalicecenter.com/imbolc.htm>



Lady Day⁴⁸

by Susa Morgan Black

*It's Lady Day throughout
the Land.
The sacred fires of Orisio
are lit.
Goddess of the
Blacksmith's Forge,
Of Healing Wells and
Dardic Wit.*

*Refrain:
The Sun is returning,
Spring is on her way.
We light the sacred fire,
for this is Orisio's Day.
At Candlemas, we light our
Lamp,
And hold the vigil through
the night.
And on this blessed evening,
We welcome back the holy
light.
Refrain*

48. Lady Day, Candlemas, or Imbolc – celebrated February 1st or 2nd

*The Season of ghosts is
nearly past,
As they retire to burial
mounds.
The Cailleach returns to
her cave,
The Hunter recalls his reo-
deared hounds.*

Refrain

*The Winter storms are
passing,
And crows are nesting in
the trees.
Spring's first flowers are
emerging,
Winter's harshness begins
to ease.*

Wales

In Wales, Saint Brigit is called *Saint Ffraid*. There are many churches called *Llansantffraid* which were dedicated to her. A Medieval Welsh traveling prayer, "Saint Ffraid, bless us on our journey."⁴⁹

Brenin, the Welsh word for King, means consort of Brigantia.⁵⁰

Picts

Each Pictish king was given a *Bruide* name (a throne name), in his manifestation as the consort of Brigantia. The Picts are thought to be an early Brythonic tribe of Celts who settled in Scotland.⁵¹

Isle of Man

In Manx legend, Saint Brigid came to the Isle of Man to receive the veil from Saint Maughold. Her feast day is known as *Laa'l Breeshey* in the Manx language, (which is similar to Irish and Scots Gaelic.)

The lady of the house placed rushes by the hearth for a bed for the saint, then called out,

"Brede, Brede, tar gys my thie tar dyn thie aym's noight

Foshil jee yn dorrys da Brede, as ihig da Brede e heet staigh"

Translation:

"Brigid, Brigid, come to my house, come to my house tonight.

Open the door for Brigid and let Brigid come in."⁵²

49. The Celtic Saints, page 21

50. Candlemas, Feast of Flames, page 31

51. Candlemas, Feast of Flames, page 10

Cornwall

In St. Ives, Cornwall, *Saint Ea* day is celebrated around the first of February with music and guising. Saint Ea was said to have floated to Cornwall from Ireland on an ivy leaf. They dress the Saint's well, which is famous for curing diseases, especially of the eyes. Heated pennies are thrown to children from the balcony of the town hall. A silver ball is passed around until noon, and whoever has it when the bell strikes, is rewarded. The pennies and the ball are solar symbols. Thus, the themes of fire and water are acknowledged in the ceremony.

Ireland

Oíche Fhéile Bríde, the eve of the Feast of Bride in Ireland was celebrated by bands of children carrying a Bride doll from home to home. Women brought out cake and ale and invited neighbors in for a ceilí, to welcome Brigit. Milk products – butter, cheese and milk, were always served. The Saint herself was said to be abroad that night with her sacred white cow, blessing farmsteads and homes. People left out a piece of cloth, representing the *brat Bríde*, a piece of her sacred mantle, for the saint to bless as she passed by, which would be used to heal people and animals, especially in giving birth, the coming year. An offering of food for the saint and her cow was left in exchange.⁵³

In the Leitrim – Donegal area of Ireland, families gather on St. Brigid's Eve. Rushes would have been gathered and left at the door until the ceremony began, at midnight. At the appointed time, a designated person covers her or his head and knocks at the door. The *Bean an Tighe* (woman of the house) welcomes Brigid, saying "*Fáilte leat a Bhríd*" (Welcome Brigid), to which the newcomer replies, "*Beannacht Dé ar daoine an tigh seo.*" (God bless the people of this house.) Holy water is sprinkled on the rushes, which are then brought into the house. All participate in making new Brigid's crosses or Celtic crosses for the year, and burning the ones from the previous year.⁵⁴

St. Bride's Day, Scotland

In the Scottish version, the *Cailleach*, the old Goddess of Winter, transforms herself into Bride on this day by drinking from the *Tobar Og* (Well of Youth). With her white wand, she touches the ground and the flowers of spring emerge. In her aspect as Cailleach at the onset of winter, her blackthorn staff shrivels the growth into barren winter.

"Bride with her white wand is said to breathe life into the mouth of the dead winter and bring him to open his eyes to the tears, and the smiles, the sighs and the laughter of Spring. The venom of the cold is said to tremble for its safety on Bride's Day, and to flee for its life on Saint Patrick's Day⁵⁵,"

"*Chuir Bride miar 's an abhuinn la na Feill Bríde*" (Bride put her finger in the river on the Feast Day of Bride⁵⁶)

In another legend, the *Cailleach Bheur* (the old woman of winter the highlands of Scotland) ended summer with her blackthorn staff, banging it on the ground three times to signal the beginning of winter. With her severe presence came the winter gales and icy storms. The snow was her white mantle. *Angus Og*, the Celtic God of Love, was the handsome son of the

52. Candlemas, Feast of Flames, page 10

53. Kindling the Celtic Spirit, page 63

54. Quoted from Philomena Rooney, in *Eight Sabbats for Witches*, page 63

55. *Camina Gadelica*, Volume 1, page 172

56. *Camina Gadelica*, Volume 1, page 172

Cailleach.

The Cailleach kept the Maiden of Spring, the Goddess Brighid prisoner, as her slave, making her life wretched with the hard work. Angus, who lived in the land of Everlasting Youth, saw Brighid one day in a vision, fell instantly in love, and was determined to marry her. But the Cailleach, his mother, knew that if he married Brighid, who in reality was the Sovereignty of the Land, Angus would become king, and would no longer be ruled by his mother, who would be deposed.

It was still winter, and travel was impossible. Yet Angus was determined. He borrowed three days from the summer months and the sun appeared and melted the snow, and he traveled to the Grampian Mountains, his mother's abode. He searched and searched, but could not find his maiden, until he heard her sad voice singing in the forest near his mother's castle as she gathered wood. When he found her, she looked up at him and she, too, was smitten with love. The day he found her was February 1st, and was known as Bride's Day from that day forth, the beginning of Spring. In her footsteps the early spring flowers, snow drops, emerged from beneath the snow.

His furious mother had her vengeance on the couple. She mounted the forces of winter against them, borrowing days from the harsh mid winter, causing devastation to the newly emerged flowers and young animals. But her power was waning and the love between Angus and his Bride were too strong for her. The Cailleach withdrew from the landscape, and turned to into a large gray stone, biding her time until the other side of the year when the Queen of Winter would reign again.

On the night of Imbolc Eve, the women of the household make a *brideag*⁵⁷, or *dealbh Bride*, a corn dolly of wheat, rushes, or grain from the last of the harvest. She is decorated with shells, stones, ribbons and early spring flowers, such as snow drops and primrose. A crystal is sometimes put over the heart to represent the "Guiding Star of Bride".⁵⁸ The doll is placed in a "Bride's bed" of woven wheat, a basket, or a cradle, which was placed near the front door of the cottage with a white candle burning nearby all night. In some traditions, the bed is put near the hearth. A white wand (birch, willow) is sometimes placed with the dolly to represent the wand of Brigit in legend. The woman of the house goes outside and cries out, "Brigit, Brigit, come in. Thy bed is ready." three times. In other traditions, she exclaims "Brigit is come! Brigit is welcome!" Candles are often left out overnight for the Saint to bless. Also strips of cloth, representing the cloak of Brighid, which are used for healing throughout the year. An offering of a *bonnach Bride* (*bannack*) was left for the saint.



Dealbh Bride made by Kate Reynolds, OBOD Bard

In a more public ceremony, the village girls, all dressed in white, carried the *brideag* in a procession throughout the town. The townspeople were required to give the group a gift of

57. Scots Gaelic for "Little Bride"

58. Kindling the Celtic Spirit, page 55

flowers, food (Bannocks, butter, cheese), in gratitude to the Saint for the year's bounty. They finally gathered at the end of the day in a particular home, to put the Bride to bed and prepare for the feast the next day. Young men would come to pay their respects to the Bride, and there would be a *ceilidh*, with dancing and singing. At dawn, the group would sing a hymn to Brighid, and distribute the food to the poor.

In Barra, Scotland, fisherman cast lots for fishing banks after church services on Bride's Day. The priest, "recited the virtues and blessings of Bride, and the examples to be drawn from her life."⁵⁹

In the Outer Hebrides women meet to make an image of the Maiden aspect of the Goddess, or Brighid. The doll is dressed in white, and a crystal is placed over its heart. She is placed in a cradle. Brighid is invited into the house by the female head of the household, and sacred songs and chants are sung in Her honor.

Alexander Carmichael states that, "Dedications to Bride are common throughout Great Britain and Ireland. From these traditional observations, it will be seen that Bride and her services are near to the hearts and lives of the people. In some phases of her character, she is much more to them than Mary is."⁶⁰

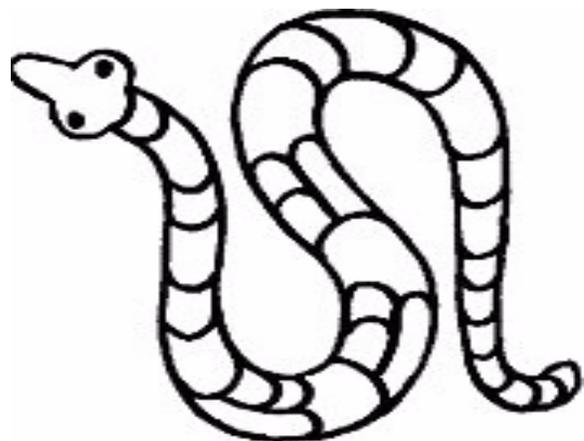
Symbols

The Serpent

One of her symbols is a white snake that spirals upon a wand. "*La Bride breith an earaich, thig an dearrais as an tom.*" (The Day of Bride, the Birthday of Spring, the Serpent emerges from the knoll."⁶¹

*Moch maduinn Bhrìde, Thig an nimhir as an toll;
Cha bhoin mise ris an nimhir, Cha bhoin an nimhir rium.*⁶²

Early on Bride's morn, the serpent will come from the hollow. I will not molest the serpent, nor will the serpent molest me.



(The Greek Caduceus also has a snake motif for a healing symbol.)

19 is her sacred number. There were nineteen virgins who kept her perpetual flame in the monastery at Kildare. Prayer beads are made from 19 milk-white stones dedicated to the saint. (I have a necklace of 19 white quartz beads, with a Brigit's cross attached.) Spells invoking Brigit take 19 days. For instance, lighting a special candle dedicated to her for 19 days along with prayers of supplication.

59. Camina Gadelica, page 173

60. Camina Gadelica, page 173

61. Camina Gadelica, Volume 1, page 172

62. Irish Gaelic, Brigid of the Gael, Bladey

3 is also a sacred number, as Brighid is a “Triple Goddess”.

Colors

*White (geal)*⁶³ is her color, and symbolizes purity. It is also the color of her sacred food – milk and milk products. White also brings to mind the pristine snowy landscape during her festival in early February.

Red (*ruadh*) is also her color, the color of the hearth fire.

Blue (*gorm*), In Christian tradition, her mantle is blue, which is also associated with the Virgin Mary.

Green (*glas*). Her mantle is also said to be green, a color associating her with faeries. Ireland is sometimes described as her green mantle.

The Swan

According to Robert Graves, one of her symbols was the White Swan.⁶⁴

Black the town yonder,
Black those that are in it,
I am the White Swan,
*Queen of them all*⁶⁵

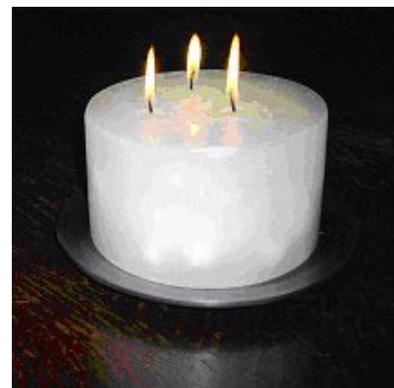


Cloak or Mantle

Brigit wore a healing cloak that she once hung on a beam of sunlight. Perhaps that is the inspiration for the traditional blue cloaks nurse’s once wore.

White Candle⁶⁶

Brigit’s feast day is also called *Feill-Bride*, Candlemas, a time when candles are blessed by the Saint. A white candle should be dedicated specifically to the Saint and kept on her altar. Better still, a white candle with a three wicks.



Three wick candles sold by Illuminations
(<http://www.illuminations.com>)

63. Colors white, red, blue and green in Scots Gaelic

64. The White Goddess, pg. 394

65. The White Goddess, page 412

66. Three wick candles sold by Illuminations (<http://www.illuminations.com>)

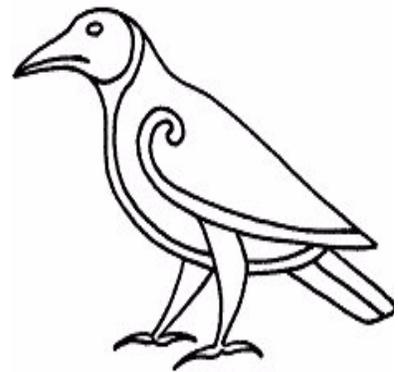
Anvil

As patroness of Blacksmiths, the anvil, or any blacksmith's tool, is an appropriate symbol of the Goddess and Saint.



The Raven

Raven is associated with Imbolc, the Feast of Saint Brigit, because it is the first bird to nest in the Highlands, around the beginning of February. "*Cuirear fitheach chon na nide*", (The raven goes to prepare his nest.⁶⁷)



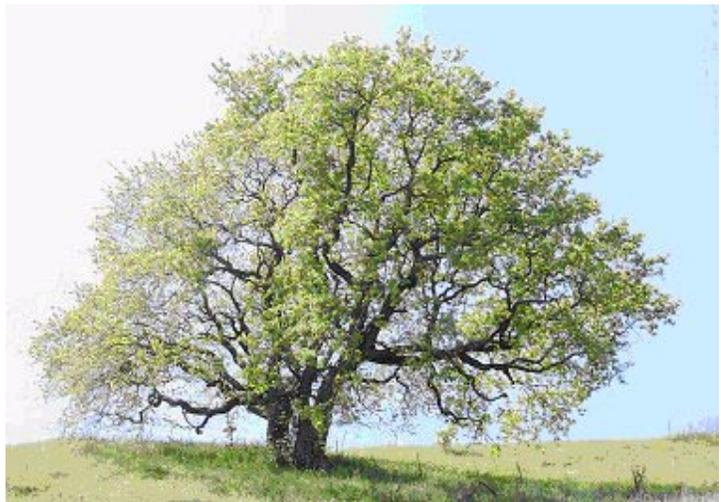
Brigit Statuettes

Most Irish shops or Catholic supply stores will carry small statuettes of Brigit for the home altar. I have collected several images of Brigid from various sources listed in the appendix.

Sacred Woods

Both the Goddess and the Saint are reputed to own a white wand, made of birch or willow. According to her prayer card, in Catholic tradition, her sacred wood is vine.

She is also associated with oak, as her church at Kildare was built in *nemeton*, a traditional Druids' oak grove.



67. Camina Gadelica, Volume 1, page 173

Brigit's Cross

While tending a dying Chieftain, the Saint prayed and wove an equal arm cross from the rushes on the floor. When the dying man asked her about it, she told him about the salvation of Jesus Christ, and he agreed to be baptized before he died. In more ancient times, this was her symbol as a solar deity. Brigit's crosses can be made with either three or four legs.

The cross is usually hung above the front door of the home to protect it. Children's crosses are hung above their beds. Crosses were hung in the barn over the byre.



The old cross is burned in the hearth fire on Saint Brigit's eve, while the new one is made for the saint to bless for the new year.

Imbolc Meditation

Make yourself comfortable and relax. Breathe slowly and deeply. You are about to go on a sacred journey to Ireland. Close your eyes and let go of the “here and now”, you are traveling to a place in the Other World. Slowly, with your eyes still closed, become aware of what’s around you.

You are walking through a pristine white, snowy wood just before dawn. The dark nights are beginning to lessen now, so near to Imbolc. The stars are bright in the black sky and you are very cold and weary. You crunch through a snow crusted path, and notice the first buds of snowdrops and primrose pushing up through the snow along the way.

Ahead, beyond the dark pines, you see a light, and hoping for the sanctuary of warmth, you pick up speed and travel toward it. The trees open up to reveal a small abbey compound, surrounded by magnificent oak trees, their leaves mysteriously green in the midst of winter.

Gratefully, you hurry toward the main building and pound on the oaken door. It opens, and you enter, enjoying the rush of warm air.

“Failte⁶⁸.” A figure in a dark gown with a long veil, greets you.

You notice other figures, women similarly dressed in simple dark gray homespun tunics, and long white veils. She beckons you forward and you comply. She leads you to a central round stone hearth, blazing with fire. You hold your frozen hands out to warm, and the warmth spreads throughout your body. She hands you a goblet, filled with warm milk and honey. You gulp it down, and the elixir both relaxes and yet vitalizes you, as your weariness vanishes. You thank her.

She tells you her name in a quiet voice. She moves over to the altar and picks up a small bronze strung harp. She plays the instrument delicately as she sings in the ancient Irish language, and the music sweetly fills the stone chamber of the abbey. Others join her and their voices form a harmony of indescribable delicacy. You stand and listen, mesmerized, for what must be hours.

pause

You notice that there is a side door, open to the compound, and curious, and you decide to explore. You stand at the door and look outside. You see several other small stone buildings, a barn, several pens of well fed cattle, goats, and sheep.

In the center of the inner yard is a stone well. A woman in a hooded green mantle is turning the handle, pulling up a heavy pail of water. You go to her and offer to help. She turns to you and you are struck dumb by her beauty.

Her hair is as gold as the sunlight filtering through an autumn wood; her eyes as blue as a clear summer sky; her skin as white and translucent as fresh winter snow; and her mouth is the pale pink of a summer flower. She wears a sparkling white samite⁶⁹ gown with golden glints under her cloak, with a wide golden belt, buckled in an intricately carved solar face. The light of the dawn seems to emanate from her, rather than the sky. She has an eternal, ageless look to her

68. Scots Gaelic - Welcome

69. A rich Medieval silk fabric, interwoven with silver or gold. Webster’s Seventh New Collegiate Dictionary

and a grace beyond beauty.

"I am Brigid." She says to you in a voice like a chord of golden harp strings. "and you are welcome to *Cill Dara*⁷⁰ She places the pail on the stone rim of the well.

You are astounded to be in the presence of the patron Saint of Ireland, who is in fact one of the ancient Goddesses of the Celtic people, and stammer a greeting. Then you ask bluntly, "Why did my path lead me here to you?"

"To learn the healing way." She answers with a mysterious smile. "You want to learn, do you not?"

"Yes, but there is so much to know, so many paths to travel, which one is mine?" you ask.

"There are many paths of healing," She tells you, "Some heal with a touch, some with herbs, some with medicine, some by acknowledging a person's pain and helping them to face it, some by releasing their spirit from an ailing body and sending them into the next cycle." She smiles at you gently, "Healing is an act of compassion, and of joy. Those who love the path they are on will find they can develop skills and the ability to help others. Those who find it a burden, will not succeed." She takes both your hands between hers, and you kneel before Her. Listen to what she has to say to you.

pause

*"Beannachadh ort."*⁷¹ She whispers, and the wind picks up her voice and carries it through you. She releases your hands, and they are tingling with energy. You rise.

The Saint lifts the heavy pail from the rim of the well and turns to go inside one of the buildings, which is the infirmary. It is a while before you find you can move again.

You re-enter the abbey. Your guide had stopped playing her harp and is nowhere to be seen. You wanted to say goodbye to her before you left. You are reluctant to leave, but know you must move on, and you sadly turn toward the oak door that leads back to the world from this magical sanctuary.

As you stand at the door, ready to face the cold winter woods, one of the nuns comes toward you bearing something in her arms. It is your guide.

"This will keep you warm." She says as she spreads a warm green woolen mantle about your shoulders. "It is from Brigid."

"Thank you!" You hug her close for a moment. "and thank Her for me. Will I see you again? Can I come here again?"

"You are always welcome here." She tells you, "I am one of Her *Naoi Déag*⁷² and I am sent to guide you as a healer. Call on me when you need me and I will come," and she kisses you on

70. Irish Gaelic for the Church of the Oak (Kildare) Kildare was built within a traditional Druid's grove in the Sixth Century. It may have been a Druidic college for women originally.

71. Scots Gaelic: Blessing upon you

72. Irish Gaelic – Nineteen (referring to Saint Brigid's nineteen nuns)

the cheek, smiles and turns back.

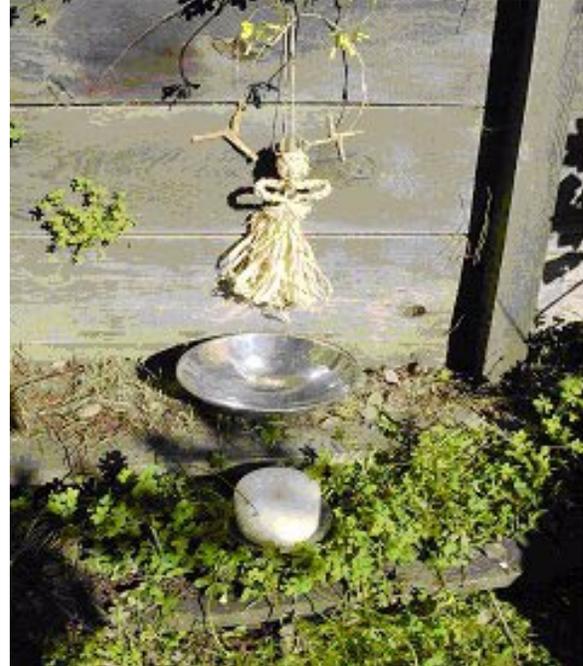
With the warmth of Brigit's mantle and the love you feel from the cloister of Druidic nuns, you are able to face the outside world again, and you leave the abbey, feeling renewed and confident.

Siné!⁷³

Brigit's Shrine

An altar to Brighid should always contain elements of fire and water. Here, in a simple outdoor shrine, I included a basin of water and a white candle with three wicks, a *brideag* and two *Brigit's crosses*.

The three legged cross is the older style, acknowledging her triple aspect.



73. Gaelic for "That's it" or the end.

Top to clockwise: Bride in her bed, goblet and pitcher of milk, herbalist's knife, Druid's crystal egg (in nest), three Brigit statuettes and white triple wick candle, healing wand, Bardic Harp miniature, and blacksmith anvil miniature. Center: bowl of water and fire

Druid strikes anvil (or rings bell) three times to invoke the “patroness of the forge”.

Druid gives traditional Gaelic welcome to participants and instructs participants to hail the four directions.

Fàilte na h-uile duine agus Lá Fhéile Bríde sona daoibh.

(Welcome, everyone and Happy Saint Bride's Day!)

Fail-cha na hoola doonya agus la eeley

Breed sona day-ov. Cuir sinn fàilte nan Àirdean.

(We hail the directions)

Coor me fail—cha nan air-jeen

Elemental archetypes and sacred directions are greeted in the pattern of a Celtic Cross.

East

In the East, I call upon Eala, the White Swan, Spirit of Air!

Guma bithidh sìth anns an Ear. (May there be peace in the East.)

Gooma bee-yug shee awns an air

West

In the West, I call upon Bradan, the Salmon of Wisdom, Spirit of Water!

Guma bithidh sìth anns an Iar. (May there be peace in the West.)

Gooma bee-yug shee awns an eer

South

In the South, I call upon Nathair, the Sacred Snake, Spirit of Flame!

Guma bithidh sìth anns an Deas (My there be peace in the South)

Gooma bee-yug shee awns an jee-us

North

In the north, I call upon Torc the Great Boar, Spirit of Earth!

Guma bithidh sìth anns an Tuath (May there be peace in the North)

Gooma bee-yug shee awns an too-ath

Druid

Guma bithidh sìth troimh an Talamh. (May there be peace throughout the land).

Gooma bee-yug shee trov an talav

All

Awen, Awen, Awen

All

Grant O Goddess, thy Protection
And in Protection, Strength
And in Strength, Understanding
And in Understanding, Knowledge
And in Knowledge, the Knowledge of Justice
And in the Knowledge of Justice, the Love of It
And in the Love of it, the Love of All Existences
And in the Love of All Existences,
The Love of Spirit and All Goodness.⁷⁵

Druid lights the triple wick candle as he/ she says:

With the Fire of Her Eternal Flame in the abbey in Cill-Dara (Kildare), I light this candle to Brigit in Her Triple Aspect, Goddess of Poets, Healers and Smiths, and Patron of Bards, Ovates and Druids.

Druid hands candle to **Fire**

Fire walks around the circle, sunwise with candle and says:

With the flame from within Brigit's holy sanctuary, I consecrate this Circle with the element of Fire.

West picks up goblet of water and walks around circle, sunwise and says:

With water from the Well of Sagais, I consecrate this circle with the element of Water.

West pours the water, as a libation, into the bowl.

Air

Brighid of the Prophets, Seer of the Celtic people, bless us with your Sight.

Earth

Brighid of the ancient Brigantes, who protects the sacred lands, shield our circle from all ill.

Druid

A Bhrigid, scar os mo chionn do bhrat fionn dom anacal.

Oh, Brighid spread above my head your mantle bright to guard me.

May Brighid, Saint and Goddess bless this, her Sacred Rite of Imbolc.

Druid takes up a taper and lights it from the Brighid's candle.

Druid lights the first of the floating candles and says a line, then passes it on to the next person who lights the next candle, and says a line, and passes it on. The taper is passed 19 times.

In time, the bowl is alight with 19 floating white candles, and Brighid is honored with fire and water.

75. Traditional OBOD Druid's vow.

Druid

From Her Flame, we light ours, as we take our inspiration from the Goddess and Saint.

- I light the first candle to honor Brighid as Muire na nGael “Mary of the Gael”
- I light the second candle to honor her as Brigantia, guardian of the Land
- I light the third candle to honor Brighid, daughter of the Morrigan and the Dagda, of the Tuatha de Danaan
- I light the fourth candle to honor her as Mother of the Three Gods of Danu – Ruadan, Iuchar and Uar, who wed the Three Goddesses of Eire :Eire, Fodhla and Banbha
- I light the fifth candle to honor her human birth, daughter of Dubthach & Broicsech
- I light the sixth candle to honor her foster father, the Druid, who foresaw her eminence and was her teacher
- I light the seventh candle to honor Bishop Mél, who was inspired to ordain her as a bishop in the Christian church
- I light the eighth candle to honor her as Sun Goddess, and Maiden of the Hearth
- I light the ninth candle to honor her as Guardian of the Holy Well which heals
- I light the tenth candle in honor of her as the inspiration of Poets and Bards
- I light the eleventh candle to honor her as midwife and healer, protector of children
- I light the twelfth candle to honor her patron of the Blacksmiths, and all other crafts.
- I light the thirteenth candle to honor her as prophetess and Seer, as taught by the Druids
- I light the fourteenth candle to honor her as mistress of domestic arts & crafts
- I light the fifteenth candle to honor her as the celestial dairymaid patron of agriculture and fertility and protector of animals, both wild and domestic
- I light the sixteenth candle to honor her as a Lady of Charity, who gave away all she had to those in need
- I light the seventeenth candle to honor her as Brigit of the Mantle, who spread her healing cloak
- I light the eighteenth candle to honor the Druid’s Oak, under which she built her abbey at Kildare
- I light the nineteenth candle to honor her as mistress of the nuns at Kildare, Keepers of the Flame

All say:

Brighid, guard your fire, this is your night!

Druid says line as participants make themselves comfortable and scry into the flaming bowl

Holy Brighid, we ask that you encircle us with your green mantle and bring us clarity and vision while we are within your sacred embrace.

Look deep into her elements of fire and water before us. Hold the sight until your eyes grow heavy, then close your eyes upon this world during this hallowed time.

Here, **Druid** can lead participants on a meditation, play soft music, especially harp, or keep silence for a spell. After a while, Druid gently leads people back to consciousness.

Druid pours milk from pitcher into goblet, says the line, and passes the goblet around.

Milk, her sacred drink, from the bo fhionn, the white cow who sustained her.

Druid passes the plate of edibles around.

Food, grown within her sacred fields, she freely gave to away to all, for she had the power to replenish all that she gave away.

During this time, participants are encouraged to share their visions and meditative experiences.

While they are doing this, **Druid** burns last year's Bride's dolls and ribbons.

Then, **Druid** blesses the new materials and passes out rushes, wheat, or straw and teaches participants to fashion corn dollies or Brighid's Crosses.

Druid or most able assistant works on one corn dolly especially made for the grove. She should be dressed in a beautiful white gown, perhaps a lace handkerchief, decorated with jewels and flowers. She can be as simple or as fancy as your heart desires. A woven basket or cradle is also prepared as the Bride doll's bed, lined in white linen, or lace, or whatever would be beautiful and comfortable for the Saint to rest in for the night.

Druid lays the doll in the bed and takes it to the spot by the hearth or the door, where it will be left for the night.

Druid places a white wand (birch or willow) or his Druid Oak wand in the bed, beside the doll – a symbol of fertility.

All hold hands around the Bride Bed.

One person can be assigned to open and shut a door for Bride to come in.

Druid says:

Bride, Bride, come to my house, come to my house tonight. Open the door to Bride, and let Bride come in.⁷⁶

All repeat after Druid

Bride, Bride, come to my house, come to my house tonight. Open the door to Bride, and let Bride come in.

Druid blesses strips of white cloth or ribbon in Bride's name, and hands them out to each participant.

Guma Beannachd a' Bhrighid air an ribin. (May the Blessing of Brighid be on the ribbon.)

Gooma Be-nock a-vreed air on riben.

Druid

In token of this holy night, partake of the mantle of Brighid. Take this ribin Brighid home tonight, and leave it out to be blessed by the Saint. Use this holy relic in the coming year for healing of mind, body, spirit and soul. A year from now, we shall return it to Bride in her sacred fire. It is time to close our right.

All hold hands.

76. From Manx Tradition, found on <http://www.dreampower.com> website.

All

We swear by peace and love to stand,
Heart to heart and hand to hand.
Mark, O Spirit, and her us now,
Confirming this, our sacred vow.⁷⁷

East

Tapadh leibh, thank you, Eala, the White Swan, Spirit of Air!

West

Tapadh leibh, thank you Bradan, the Wise Salmon, Spirit of Water!

South

Tapadh leibh, thank you Nathair, the Sacred Snake, Spirit of Fire!

North

Tapadh leibh, thank you Torc, the Great Boar, Spirit of Earth!

Druid

Guma Beannachd Bhrighid leibh. May the blessing of Brighid be upon you.
May you carry her flame in your heart, may you draw on the well of her wisdom.
I declare the Feast of Brighid closed in the apparent world, but forever a part of your
mind and heart.

Practicum

There are many ways you can show your dedication to the Saint/Goddess Brigit and ask her for blessings, protection, and guidance:

Dedicate a white Brigit's candle to her and light it whenever you perform a ceremony dedicated to her. Ask her for inspiration in poetry and any kind of artistic and craft work, ask her guidance for healing, ask her for protection from harm. Use the traditional prayers gathered by Alexander Carmichael in the *Carmina Gadelica*, research other prayers to her, or make up your own.

Float 19 small white candles in a basin on Candlemas, to represent Brighid's 19 nuns who maintained her eternal fire in Kildare.

Hang ribbons (*ribin Brighid* – St. Brigid's ribbons) or strips of cloth on a tree on Candlemas Eve for the saint to bless for healing. Her colors are white, red, blue and green.

In the pagan community, Brighid is a significant time for initiation⁷⁸. The Goddess acts as a guide to initiates. If you are a part of an initiatory religion or organization, this is an ideal time to perform the ceremony.

Create your own ritual on Imbolc. Have an intimate party for your family and closest friends. Serve wholesome foods made with milk products. Dedicate a white candle to her and leave it out overnight to be blest by the saint. Use that candle for the rest of the year in your Brigit rituals.

77. Traditional OBOD Druid's vow.

78. Candlemas, Feast of Flames, page xiv

Make a Brigid's crosses, or a corn dolly, dressed in white and place it in a basket bed. Flower shops sell "raffia" by the bundle, which works very well for making a "corn dolly". Be sure to call out, "Bride, thy bed is ready!" See <http://www.iol.ie/~scphadr/makecross.html> for instructions on how to make a Brigid's Cross. Be sure to leave bread and fresh butter on your window sill for her on St. Brigid's Eve, and a little straw or hay for the fairy cow that travels with her this holy night. This is also a good time to give generously to the poor. Keep a symbol of her (a corn dolly, a Catholic Saint Brigit statuette, a Brigit's cross) near your hearth, for she is the hearth keeper. If you don't have a hearth, keep it near your stove. Make sure it is safe from the heat! If you are lucky and have a hot tub, keep a symbol of her nearby, for she is the patroness of healing wells, and hot tubs are a modern version! Alternatively, some people keep it by their front door, or in the highest corner of their house

Create a rite of purification in your bathtub. Light white candles and ask the Goddess to bless the water. Let yourself soak in the healing water and focus on the candle flame while you meditate on her healing qualities. If you have a fireplace, dry off at the hearth, asking for her blessings with the element of fire. She is the Goddess of fire and water, and you have thus invoked both her properties in a healing rite.

Invoke Brigit's guidance when you practice *Frith* or divination. Put yourself in a receptive meditative state, and make a tube out of your hand. Peer through it with your mind's eye and see what you can see. If you perform other types of divination, light her candle and ask for her guidance. Since Brigit's elements are fire and water, *pyromancy*⁷⁹ and *hydromancy*⁸⁰ are particularly effective methods of divination to use under her guidance. In some legends, she is the sister of Ogmios, who invented the ogham, a traditional style of Celtic divination

Make and dedicate a wand in the service of Brigit. In legend, she used a white birch or willow wand. She is also associated with oak. Use this in rituals of healing to invoke her guidance. She was said to have owned a white snake, which aided her in healing, and the white wand represents the snake.



Birch wand with healing snake motif made by James W. Maertens of the *Bardic Institute*.

Website: <http://home.earthlink.net/~alferian/WANDS.HTML>

Brigit wore a green or blue mantle so powerful that it spread itself over Kildare, forcing the king to grant the land to Brigit. Brigit once hung the magical cloak on a sun ray. Make a mantle (use the pattern for an Irish *brat* or cloak), and ask St. Brigit to bless this garment to use for healing.

Spread it over the ailing person, and send healing prayers to Brigit. If you practice of the rite of "calling down the Goddess" use this cloak to call Brigit's spirit into you.

Make a prayer necklace of 19 white beads. You can add a special symbol that represents Brigit to you – a Brigit's cross, a Catholic Saint Brigit medal, a swan or snake pendant, etc. Use this

79. Divination by fire (staring into hearth fire or candle flame)

80. Divination by water (staring into a bowl of water or a natural pool)

necklace as a focal point for meditation with Brigit. Keep it with you when you need her inspiration or protection

Meditate on Saint Brigit. You can find prayer cards of the Saint in Catholic supply shops. Meditating for 19 minutes acknowledges the 19 day cycle of her worship at Kildare.

There are many crafts, talents, and skills that Brighid patronizes. Ale and mead brewing, dying, cloth weaving, wheat weaving, smithcrafting, poetry, singing, harping, agriculture and animal husbandry, divination, midwifery, and healing. Explore these fields as a possible vocation or hobby, and see if it brings you deep satisfaction, with her guidance.

Be willing to volunteer your time and resources in her name when she calls to you. I volunteer as a harper to senior citizens and to the ill. There are many charitable organizations under the saint's name as well.

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Statuettes

The Mythic Images Collection, Principal Artist Oberon Zell, www.MythicImages.com or call 1-888-Mythic-1 for catalogue.

Images of the Divine, JBL of Calcutta, <http://jblstatue.com/index.html> or call 1 (800) 290-6203

Saints Preserved, www.saintspreserved.com

Organizations

(other than those listed under websites)

Cairde Bhride (Friends of Brigid); Write: Sister Mary Minehan at Solas Bhride, 14 Dara Park, Kildare, Ireland, or telephone 045-522-890.



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All the Oak pictures in this document were taken by Micheal Black in Pleasant Hill, California.

About the Author

Susa Morgan Black is a Druid, a member the *Order of Bards, Ovates and Druids* since 1998, co-founder of *Doire Bhrighid*⁸¹⁷ (a Druid “seed grove” dedicated to Brighid), and a practicing Witch from the NROOGD tradition since 1979. Susa has a BA in *Integrated Health Studies* from *New College of California*. Born near *Imbolc*, she has always been under the healing and bardic influence of *Bridget*. Susa’s first love is writing, and she is a poet, screenwriter, and novelist. She also plays the Celtic harp and is a student of the Scots Gaelic language.



81. ⁷ “The Oak Grove of Bridget” Scots Gaelic