

# Candlemas<sup>1</sup>

Candlemas, also known as Imbolc and Groundhog's Day, occurs at the beginning of February. It marks the middle of Winter and holds the promise of Spring. The Goddess manifests as the Maiden and Brigid. The Groundhog is a manifestation of the God. Colors are White, and sometimes Red. It is a festival of spiritual purification and dedication. Thoroughly clean your altar and/or temple room. Do a self purification rite with Elemental tools -- cleanse your body with salt (Earth), your thoughts with incense (Air), your will with a candle flame (Fire), your emotions with water (Water), and your spiritual body with a healing crystal (Spirit). Bless candles that you will be using for rituals throughout the year. Invoke Brigid for creative inspiration. Take a Nature walk and look for the first signs of Spring. Reflect upon/reaffirm spiritual vows and commitments you have made.

## Candlemas Customs & Lore

by Selena Fox

The following is a study guide from a work in progress © 1996, Selena Fox, Circle Sanctuary, PO Box 219, Mt. Horeb, WI 53572 USA used in conjunction with workshops presented by Selena Fox at the 1996 Candlemas Festival at Circle Sanctuary Nature Preserve and as part of the Celtic Shamanism weekend seminar at Singing Wolf Center in Lake Geneva, Wisconsin.

**Festival Names: Festival Dates:** January 31, February 1, February 2, February 6, February 7.

**Multicultural Parallels:** Ground Hog's Day (USA); Aztec New Year; Chinese New Year; Roman Lupercalia; Valentine's Day (USA); Armenian Candlemas.

**Flames:** Sacred Fire

torchlit processions circling fields to purify & invigorate for the coming growing season (old Pagan)

lighting & blessing of candles (11th century, Christian)

sacred fire of Brigid (Celtic Pagan)

torchlit procession to honor Juno Februata/Regina (Pagan Rome; Christianized, 7th century)

**Brigid:** Celtic Goddess

Triple Aspects

- Goddess of Inspiration - poets, poetry, creativity, prophecy, arts
- Goddess of Smithcraft - blacksmiths, goldsmiths, household crafts
- Goddess of Healing - healers, medicine, spiritual healing, fertility (crops, land, cattle)

Symbols

- Fire - flames, candle crown, hearth
- Water - cauldron, springs, wells
- Grain - Brigid wheels, corn/oat sheaf Goddess effigy, Brigid's Bed
- Creatures - white cow with red ears, wolf, snake, swan and vulture
- Talismans - Shining Mirror to Otherworld, Spinning Wheel and Holy Grail

Name variations: Brighid; Bride (Scotland), Brid, Brigid, Bridget, Briganta (England), Brigan, Brigindo (Gaul), Berecynthia, Brigandu (France)

Name means Bright One, High One, Bright Arrow, Power.

Christianized forms: St. Brigid (Irish), St. Ffraid (Welsh), St. Bridget (Swedish), Queen of Heaven, Prophetess of Christ, Mary.

### Pictish Pagan Roots

Bruide, the Pictish royal throne name, is said to derived from the Pagan Goddess Brigid. The Bruide name was given to each Pagan Pictish king who was viewed as the male manifestation of the spirit of the Goddess. The most sacred place of the Picts was Abernethy in Fife. It was dedicated to Brigid, in Pagan times, and to St. Brigid, in Christian times.

Columban monks tended a Celtic abbey there and hereditary abbots were of the Earl of Fife branch of the Clan MacDuff, which survived to the present day as Clan Wemyss (Weems).

### Irish Transitions and Traditions

When Ireland was Christianized, veneration of the Pagan Goddess Brigid was transformed into that of St. Brigit, said to be the human daughter of a Druid. St. Brigit became a saint after her "death" and was supposedly converted and baptized by St. Patrick. Pagan lore was incorporated into the Christian traditions and legends associated with Her as a saint. For example, as St. Brigit, She had the power to appoint bishops and they had to be goldsmiths. She was associated with miracles and fertility. Into the 18th century a women's only shrine was kept to her in Kildare (meaning Church of the

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Oak) in Ireland. There, nineteen nuns tended Her continually burning sacred flame. An ancient song was sung to Her: "Brigid, excellent woman, sudden flame, may the bright fiery sun take us to the lasting kingdom." Brigid/St. Brigit was said to be the inventor of whistling and of keening.

#### Customs

- Blessing rushes/straw and making Brigid wheels
- Putting out food and drink for Brigid on Her eve (such as buttered bread, milk, grains, seeds)
- Chair by hearth decorated by women; young woman carries in first flowers & greens, candle.
- Opening the door and welcoming Her into the home. "Bride! Come in, they bed is made! Preserve the House for the Triple Goddess!" Scottish Gaelic Invocation: "May Brigit give blessing to the house that is here; Brigit, the fair and tender, Her hue like the cotton-grass, Rich-tressed maiden of ringlets of gold."
- Brigid's Bed (Scotland): Putting grain effigy and a phallic wand in a basket next to the hearth/candles at night and chanting three times: "Brigid is Come! Brigid is Welcome!"

#### Purification

removing Yuletide greens from home & burning them (Celtic)  
cleaning up fields and home (old Roman, Februa "to cleanse" month)  
Mary purification festival (Christian, Western church)  
burning old Brigid's wheels and making new ones (some parts of Ireland)  
placing Brigid's wheel above/on door to bless home (Celtic, Wiccan)

#### Signs of Spring: Ground Hog's Day

seeds as a symbols of new life to come  
first greens and flowers as offerings  
weather - bright or grey  
hibernating animals - groundhog, bear, badger

If Candlemas day be sunny and bright, Winter again will show its might.

If Candlemas day be cloudy and grey, Winter soon will pass away. (Fox version)

If Candlemas day be fair and bright, Winter will have another flight.

If Candlemas day be shower and rain, Winter is gone and will not come again. (Traditional)

#### Spiritual Awakening: Spirit Within

initiations - self, group (Dianic & Faery Wiccan); Christchild in temple (Christian, Eastern church)  
dedication - shrines, temples (contemporary Pagan)  
self blessing and spiritual dedication  
inner journey for Divine inspiration  
affirming the artist/innovator within; energizing creative work.

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