

St Brigid Feastday February 1st.

Most scholars agree that St Brigid of Ireland inherits much from Brigit the goddess. It is mostly in the area of imagery and symbolism that we see this relationship. Before the coming of Christianity, the Celts believed in gods and goddesses. Brigit, the triple goddess was revered and loved. She had a special relationship to the earth and the elements. The attributes associated with Brigit were in the areas of birthing, nurturing and nourishing. She was seen to be goddess of poetry, wisdom, learning, the hearth, medicines and smithcraft. Perhaps the strongest image associated with Brigit was that of fire whether this was the fire of inspiration or the fire needed for warmth or preparations of food, medicines and metals.

We gain our earliest knowledge of Saint Brigid from three 7th century biographies, Bethu Brigte, Vita 1 and Vita 2. Cogitosus, the author of one these 'Lives of Brigit' portrayed her as a woman through whom the power of God was at work.

Brigid was born in Faughart, Co Louth. The Annals of Inisfallen record the year 452 as her possible birth date and that she died in 524. Her mother Broiseach was a slave and her father, Dubhtach, a chief. It is said that Brigid was born at sunrise as her mother crossed the threshold of the house. We notice the imagery of 'slave and free', 'sunrise' and 'crossing the threshold'. Brigid is seen as a liminal person, one who crosses boundaries. Above all, she was crossing the boundary between paganism and Christianity.

Brigid spent her youth on the farm, tending the harvest and shepherding the flock. She grew up to be a very beautiful young woman who had a deep relationship with God. She set up a monastic community at Kildare which became a great centre of learning, holiness and hospitality. All were welcome, dignitaries, the poor and the animals. A fire that was lit in her lifetime was kept alive until the 16th century when it was doused during the Dissolution of the Monasteries. In 1993, Brigid's fire was re-ignited by the Brigidine Sisters. They are now the 'keepers of the flame' in their new eco-friendly Spirituality Centre, Solas Bhríde, located a short distance from Kildare town, close to two holy wells of St Brigid. The original site of Brigid's monastery is in the centre of the town and has a cathedral, round tower, high cross and a space commemorating Brigid's fire.

As second Patron Saint of Ireland, Brigid is revered throughout the country. Faughart and Kildare are both places of pilgrimage. In preparation for her feastday, Feb 1st, the town of Kildare has a whole week of events which focus on the care of the earth, peace, and justice. St Brigid is a great inspiration to us at 'Loving Sister Earth'. We hope she is such to you, too.

Helen Grealay