

Matins in a Celtic Tradition for the Feast of St. Brigit

Opening Sentence

May our purpose be strong;
To strive for what is fittest.
Let us all love Jesus,
For this is the highest thing.

Invocation

**Lord, be with us this day,
Within us to purify us;
Above us to draw us up;
Beneath us to sustain us;
Before us to lead us;
Behind us to restrain us;
Around us to protect us.**

St Patrick

Antiphon and Psalm

O Lord, open my/our lips:
And my/our mouth shall proclaim your praise.
**Glory to the Father and to the Son,
And to the Holy Spirit;
As it was in the beginning, is now,
And shall be for ever.
Amen.**

O God, you are my God;
Eagerly I seek you, my soul is athirst for you.

Psalm 95.1-8

Come, let us sing to the Lord,*
let us shout for joy to the rock of our salvation.

**Let us come before his presence with thanksgiving*
and raise a loud shout to him with psalms.**

For the Lord is a great God,*
and a great king above all gods.

**In his hands are the depths of the earth,*
and the heights of the hills are his also.**

The sea is his, for he made it,*
and his hands moulded the dry land.

**Come, let us bow down and bend the knee,*
and kneel before the Lord our Maker.**

For he is our God,
and we are the people of his pasture
and the sheep of his hand.*
O that today you would hearken to his voice!

**'Harden not your hearts,
as your forebears did in the wilderness,*
at Meribah, and on that day at Massah, when they tempted me.'**

Glory to the Father and to the Son:*
And to the Holy Spirit;
**As it was in the beginning, is now:
And shall be for ever.
Amen.**

O God, you are my God;
Eagerly I seek you, my soul is athirst for you.

Reading: A Commentary on the Life of Brigit of Kildare

According to the Annals of Ulster, Brigit of Kildare was born in 452. In Gaelic her name means "fiery arrow". Brigit was the primary foundress of the Irish feminine ascetic movement. "She was the foundress of the double monastery at Kildare, which held jurisdiction over a large part of southwest Ireland until the suppression of the monasteries (*in the sixteenth century*). In the twelfth century it was visited by Gerald of Wales, who noted the maintaining of a sacred fire, tended by the nineteen nuns (with Brigit tending it on the twentieth night). The metaphors applied to Brigit in 'Ultan's Hymn', such as 'golden, radiant flame' leading the faithful to the 'brilliant, dazzling sun', indicate the interplay of pagan and Christian motifs that seems to occur throughout the Brigit tradition....The sacred fire at Kildare, the fire symbolism of 'Ultan's Hymn', and the occurrence of a miracle showing a peculiar affinity with the sun in Cogitosus's *Life of St. Brigit* suggests that the Brigit persona may have something of the qualities of a goddess of fire or sun goddess as well. The designation of Brigit, in 'Ultan's Hymn', as the 'mother of Jesus' (as well as variants on this such as 'Mary of the Gaels', the 'foster-mother of Christ', and 'Mary's midwife') shows the extent to which the symbols and symbolic functions of different religious and cultural systems can be fused together in early Celtic sources."

Brigit's liturgical feast on February 1st coincides with the ancient festival of *imbolc*, which has been interpreted by some sources as a pastoral term meaning "milking", linking the cult of Brigit with maintenance of fertility and the reappearance of Spring in rural Ireland. Brigit was a close advisor and co-worker with many bishops who were, in turn, close to St. Patrick. She possessed a genuine discernment of souls that drew many to her. There was lots of hard work involved in founding a monastery. The building of wood and wattle clay huts had to be supervised, furnishings had to be provided, and Brigit had to provide training for her nuns. She traveled by chariot and dressed completely in white - a homespun habit, veil and cloak.

(Source: *Celtic Spirituality*, Intro. and Trans., Oliver Davies. New York: Paulist Press, 1999. pp. 32-33)

Response: "Ultan's Hymn"

**Brigit, woman ever excellent, golden, radiant flame,
Lead us to the eternal kingdom, the brilliant, dazzling sun.**

**May Brigit guide us past crowds of devils,
May she break before us the attack of every plague.**

**May she destroy within us the taxes of our flesh,
The branch with blossoms, the mother of Jesus.**

**The true virgin, easy to love, with great honor,
I shall be forever safe with my saint of Leinster.**

**One of the columns of the land with Patrick preeminent,
The adornment above, the royal queen.**

**May our bodies when we are old be in sackcloth,
From her grace may Brigit rain on us.**

**We pray to Brigit by the praise of Christ
That we may be worthy of the heavenly kingdom.**

(Irish Seventh century.)

Intercession

God, kindle Thou in my heart within
A flame of love to my neighbour,
To my foe, to my friend, to my kindred all,
To the brave, to the knave, to the thrall,
O Son of the loveliest Mary,
From the lowliest thing that liveth
To the name that is highest of all.

(Carmina Gadelica)

O Holy Jesus,
Gentle friend,
Morning star,
Midday sun adorned,
Fountain ever-new, ever-living, ever-lasting
Son of the merciful Father without mother in heaven,
Son of the Virgin Mary, without father on earth,
True and loving brother,
Give, grant, and impart to us your holy grace and your Holy Spirit, to protect and preserve us
from all our sins, present and future.

The Broom of Devotion, early Irish

Our Father...

Closing Hymn: The Hermit's Song

The Hermit's Song

I wish, O Son of the living God, O ancient, eternal king,
For a hidden little hut in the wilderness that it may be my dwelling.

**An all-grey little lake to be by its side.
A clear pool to wash away sins through the grace of the Holy Spirit.**

Quite near, a beautiful wood around it on every side,
To nurse many-voiced birds, hiding it with its shelter.

**A southern aspect for warmth, a little brook across its floor,
A choice land with many gracious gifts such as be good for every plant.**

A few men of sense – we will tell their number –
Humble and obedient, to pray to the King:

**Four times three, three times four, fit for every need,
Twice six in the church, both north and south:**

Six pairs beside myself,
Praying for ever the King who makes the sun shine.

**A pleasant church with linen altar-cloth, a dwelling for God of Heaven;
Then, shining candles above the pure white Scriptures.**

One house for all to go for the care of the body,
Without ribaldry, without boasting, without thought of evil.

**This is the husbandry I would take, I would choose, and will not hide it:
Fragrant leek, hens, speckled salmon, trout, bees.**

Raiment and food enough for me from the King of fair fame,
And I to be sitting for a while praying God in every place.

Ancient Irish

Conclusion

May Almighty God bless us,
deliver us from all evil,
and bring us to everlasting life.
May the souls of the faithful departed
through the mercy of God, rest in peace.
And rise in glory.
May the divine assistance remain with us always.
And with our absent brothers and sisters.

Amen

(Designed by David Keller using various sources, including *A Celtic Primer*, compiled by Brendan O'Malley, 2002.)