

“In the Belly of Imbolc”

Inspired and co-led by the UUFES Sunday Services Committee

February 3, 2019

**Welcome** - Rev. Betsy Tabor

Our service is about the Celtic festival Imbolc, Feb 2<sup>nd</sup> being the midpoint between winter solstice and spring equinox. Imbolc means “in the belly” and in the belly of the earth right now, life is stirring. In deepest winter, warm milk flows to newborn lambs and bear cubs. Baby foxes, raccoons, beavers and opossums will be born in the next few months.

An Imbolc spiritual practice is to notice what is alive within us. Where is our quest taking us? Traditionally, people have called on the divine feminine, honoring Brid, the fiery goddess of healing, creativity, fertility. She’s also associated with midwife and supportive mentoring relationships.

In the spirit of the spark within and relationships that support us, we light our chalice with the words of Albert Schweitzer:

At times our own light goes out and is rekindled by a spark from another person. Each of us has cause to think with deep gratitude of those who have lighted the flame within us.

**Opening Words** (read by Anneliese Smith): “Imbolc” by Caitlin Matthews

**Readings** - Excerpts from *Wheel of Life* by Teresa Moorey and Jane Brideson

.... At Imbolc the most noticeable fact is that light is growing. Each evening dusk hesitates a little longer. Each morning the pale light steals in a little earlier, from behind the bedroom curtains. It may still be very cold and the ground may be hard and white with snow or frost, but we have proof that spring is on its way.

... At Imbolc the goddess most remembered and honoured is the Irish Bride (pronounced “Breed”). It is quite in order to think at times in terms of one Goddess...for this...helps to bring the Divine Feminine to life for us, whether our belief is literal or symbolic. Brigid/Brid was later Christianised as St. Bridget.

Brid is goddess of healing...poetry, childbirth and creativity....

Brid is...a Triple Goddess...Maiden, Mother and Crone....

...the **Maiden**...full of the energy of youth,...is huntress and athlete. She gives herself where she wishes, yet belongs to no-one.

...The **Mother** is generous and giving. She brings bounty, fertility, richness of mind and body....

... [And] The **Crone** brings wisdom, knowledge of secrets and sometimes acquaintance with sorrow that eventually enriches us....[She] too is the mistress of magic and healing.

...Imbolc...has both a delicacy and a determination, a gentleness and a ruthlessness....[It] is perhaps the most “feminine” of the festivals.

## What Stirs Within - Margaret Rieser

From the Hebrew Bible:

To every thing there is a season, and a time to every purpose under heaven:  
 A time to be born, and a time to die; a time to plant, and a time to pluck up that which is planted;  
 A time to kill, and a time to heal; a time to break down, and a time to build up;  
 A time to weep, and a time to laugh; a time to mourn, and a time to dance;  
 A time to cast away stones, and a time to gather stones together; a time to embrace, and a time to refrain from embracing;  
 A time to get, and a time to lose; a time to keep, and a time to cast away;  
 A time to rend, and a time to sew; a time to keep silence, and a time to speak;  
 A time to love, and a time to hate; a time of war, and a time of peace.

To everything there is a season. And while some seasons are tougher than others, they're all part of our lives, and in that way, they're all good. This morning we draw on traditions of Imbolc, the day that divides the first half of winter from the second. So perhaps we can think about today as an intermission, a pause between Winter, Act 1, and Winter, Act 2. During this pause, let's reflect on what kind of season this is for you; what you've been up to, and what you might be doing next.

As Anneliese and Betsy have already mentioned, this special day, Imbolc, is about what's in the belly. So the question I'm inviting you to ponder is really, what might be stirring deep within you these days? What's taking shape, but perhaps is not ready for the light of day? Maybe not by a long shot. Or maybe you're farther along? Maybe something rich and powerful is flowing within you?

It's so different for each of us. And there's no "right" way. Let's enjoy an Imbolc scene: A lesbian family I know is pregnant with their second child. In fact, he's due to arrive on this snowy scene a month from today. The first child in the family, born 15 months ago, drinks milk produced by one of his moms; the one within whose belly he first stirred. And soon he and his little brother will have two milky moms. Oh, the possibilities, the richness.

Another Imbolc scene: My mother, nearing her tenth decade, just this week moved from her home of many years into an independent living apartment. She left most of her things behind, and while she is frustrated by her loss of memory and all the changes she has recently experienced, I can see in her a deep resolve/desire to maintain an essential sense of connection with those she loves and with her world.

What I'm trying to say is, whatever is stirring within you, whatever seed is unfurling its tiny leaves, whatever season you're getting ready for is good, and it's yours.

On this frosty, precisely midwinter morning, as we pause for winter's intermission, we invite you to sit quietly and feel what moves within you. What is trickling, maybe melting or quickening? About what might you be riding a wave of emotion? We will sit quietly together. Ponder. And we will have the opportunity to share and listen to our stirrings a little later in the service.  
 [A time of meditation.]

### **Listening - Rev. Betsy**

Ancient pagan holidays can ring true for us today. As old as they are, they feel relevant to us. We all experience the lengthening light. We all know that sense of quickening celebrated at this time, whether faint or sure. And so we continue to draw on the Imbolc tradition.

In the spirit of the divine feminine, the Goddess Brid, as midwife – one whose essence is “being with or witnessing”– we will share with each other, in a few minutes, what we have noticed about our inner stirrings.

First, we’ll sing #346 “Come Sing a Song With Me.” We will sing it softly and gently, making eye contact with each other. [Hymn.]

“That I might know your mind.” That I might see you, that I might witness what’s happening with you. That I might “be with” you.

It’s time to share. We invite you to turn to people near you and make groups of three. Each person will have about a minute to share their experience today of movement or stirring within. The role of each listener, like a midwife, is to *be with* and witness. [Members of the congregation share, followed by invitation to congregation to share.]

### **Benediction**

The words of poet May Sarton:

Come out of the dark earth  
Here where the minerals  
Glow in their stone cells  
Deeper than seed or birth.

Come into the pure air  
Above all heaviness  
Of storm and cloud to this  
Light-possessed atmosphere.

Come into, out of, under  
The earth, the wave, the air.

Love, touch us everywhere  
With primeval candor.