



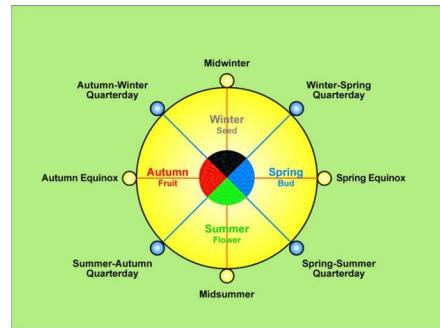
Winter-Spring Quarterday (Imbolc)

Festival of Dedication

Beginning of February

The winter-spring quarterday marks the cusp of winter and spring, when winter ends and spring begins.

Like all quarterdays, and unlike the solstices and equinoxes, it is not a time that can be easily noted by the position of sunrise on the horizon, unless markers have already been set out for this purpose. However, the change-over from one season to the next can be perceived by using our subtler senses of awareness. Weather conditions are not necessarily a good guide to this. They vary from year to year and do not determine the seasons and their cusps. On the contrary, the weather is subsidiary to the seasons as well as being affected by other factors. The real changes from one season to the next are determined by the changes in the position of the Earth in respect to the Sun, as a result of the Earth's orbit around the Sun during the course of a year.



In the classical Mysteries this quarterday marks the time when Persephone returns from the Underworld of Hades, where she resides during the winter months, to the World of her mother, Demeter. In this, Persephone represents the spring-time sap rising in the vegetation that brings about a renewal of nature's abundance.

In Celtic countries this festival is known as Imbolc or St Bride's Day (1 February) and symbolised by the streams of water emerging out of the hillside or from melting snow and ice, and by the young red-haired maiden, Bride or Bridget, emerging out of the darkness of winter into the light of spring (or from childhood to maidenhood), purifying or cleansing herself in the water.

In the Christian calendar the quarterday is celebrated as the Feast of the Purification of the Blessed Virgin Mary, or Candlemas, the Feast of Lights (2 February), the time when, like Bride, the Virgin Mary underwent purification followed by her presenting her Christ child in the temple and dedicating him in service to God.

All quarterdays are gateways leading from one season to the next, from one quarter of the Wheel of Life (or Time) to the following one. They are associated with the four gates of Paradise, each of which is guarded by a great Cherub. These in turn are associated with four of the signs of the zodiac. Because of the phenomenon known as the Precession of the Equinoxes, these zodiacal signs (and Cherubs) gradually change positions. During the last Age (approx. 157 BC - 2003 AD) the Festival of Dedication was associated with Aquarius, the man-faced Cherub. Now it is the Cherub of Capricorn who stands in this position.

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