



## St Brigid – Feast Day, 1<sup>st</sup> Feb

### St. Brigid's Cross

St. Brigid, " Mary of the Gael", abbess and patroness of Ireland, and founder of the first Irish monastery in Kildare, was born near Dundalk in 450 A.D.

Tradition tells us that her unbounded charity drew multitudes of the poor to her door and much enraged her father Dubhtach, a Leinster pagan Chieftain and a stubborn disbeliever. As he lay on his deathbed, she sat by him and whiled away the time weaving a cross from the rushes at her feet. Her father asked her to explain it's meaning and was so overwhelmed that he became a Christian before his death.



Many believed that this rush cross, which became her emblem, keeps evil and hunger from the homes in which it is displayed. For centuries, it has been customary on the eve of her feast-day for the Irish to fashion a St. Brigid's Cross of straw or rushes and place it inside the house, over the door. St. Brigid's feast day falls on the first of February, the day on which she died in 524 A.D. Her body lies at Downpatrick beside the graves of St. Patrick and St. Columba.

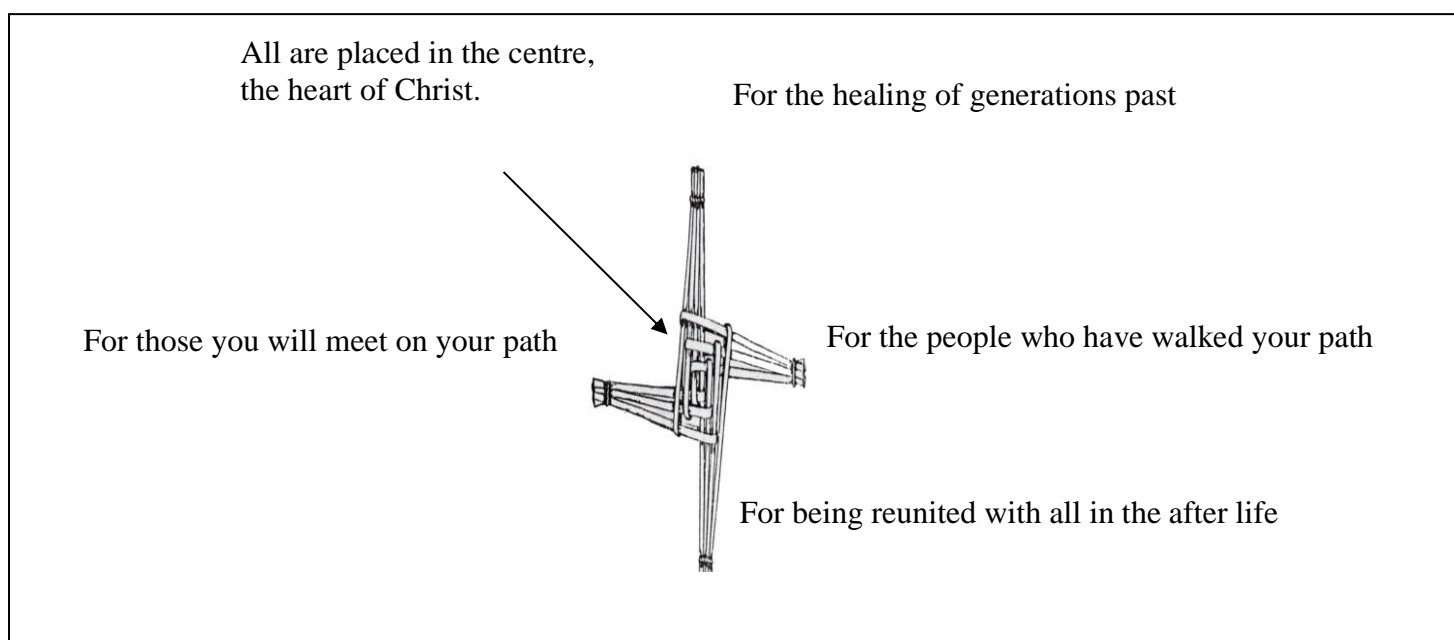
The cross is made from rushes and tradition has it that the women who made them prayed for different people as they made each arm of the cross.

Each arm in turn represents:

- The people who have walked the path before you.
- The people you will meet on your path.
- For the healing of all who have gone before you
- For being reunited with our loved ones in the afterlife

*And*

- All of these prayers are gathered weaved together in the centre, in the heart of Christ.



# Making a St Bridget's Cross

Making a St Bridget's Cross is a custom in Ireland. The St Bridget's Cross is made out of plants called rushes for hanging above the entrances to dwellings to invoke the help of St Bridget in warding off disease.

St Bridget's Day is celebrated on the 1st February each year and the crosses are made at that time. Rushes were traditionally used to make the St Bridget's Cross. These were collected from wetlands and cut into pieces, 8-12 inches long. Rushes can be hard to get for city dwellers so ordinary drinking straws are a good substitute. Use rubber bands to tie up the ends.

## You Will Need

- 16 Reeds (or Straws)
- 4 small rubber bands
  - Scissors

## What to Do

1. Hold one of the reeds vertically. Fold a second reed in half as in the diagram.
2. Place the first vertical reed in the centre of the folded second reed.
3. Hold the centre overlap tightly between thumb and forefinger.
4. Turn the two rushes held together 90 degrees anti-clockwise so that the open ends of the second reed are pointing vertically upwards.
5. Fold a third reed in half and over both parts of the second reed to lie horizontally from left to right against the first straw. Hold tight.
6. Holding the centre tightly, turn the three reeds 90 degrees anti-clockwise so that the open ends of the third reed are pointing upwards.
7. Fold a new reed in half over and across all the rushes pointing upwards.
8. Repeat the process of rotating all the rushes 90 degrees anti-clockwise, adding a new folded reed each time until all rushes have been used up to make the cross.
9. Secure the arms of the cross with elastic bands. Trim the ends to make them all the same length. The St Bridget's Cross is now ready to hang.

