



Sage's CIRCLE

with Candice Marie Sage, PhD

The Legend of Ostara

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In my previous column (Carl Jung's Celtic Connections), I discussed St. Brigid's Day (February 1) and the ways in which we celebrate the revered saint. This coincides with Candlemas (February 2) - a Christian celebration of light that falls forty days after the birth of Jesus. It also corresponds with Imbolc, one of the four greater pagan Fire celebrations (called Sabbats) that takes place February 1 to 3, celebrating the tri-goddess Brigid: Healer, Poet, and Keeper of the fires of the Smithy and Hearth. Spring is in the air (even though our groundhogs predicted there would be another six weeks of winter this year), the days are getting longer, and hope is swelling for warmer days and sweeter times.

In this edition of Sage's Circle, we look at a lesser-known goddess associated with the Vernal Equinox - Eostre - who presides over the Sabbat of Ostara. Herein lie the pagan roots of the Christian celebration of Easter, Christ's crucifixion and resurrection, which takes place the first Sunday after the first spring full moon.

Eostre is reflected in Old English, Old Saxon, and Old High German. She was a West Germanic Spring goddess, associated with the dawn, new beginnings, and nature's rebirth after winter (resurrection). Her pagan feast is called Ostara, and her name became Ostara as Anglo-Saxon dialects and cultures evolved. She is symbolized by rabbits and hares (for their fertility), as well as eggs (new be-

ginings). The hare is an archetypal symbol across Christianity, Judaism, Buddhism, and Islam, associated with rebirth, fertility, lunar cycles, and the magic of birth. It is a nocturnal animal, except during the spring mating season. The hare is a messenger between the goddess and the human world, moving through the moonlight until spring when it is seen in plain sight under the warm sun - traveling across the Veil (the collective unconscious) between our ancestors and our lands.

“*The Spring Equinox, with its equal hours of night and day, symbolizes the balance of masculine and feminine energies.*”

Here we see the archetypes of the divine masculine in the Sun, the provider and protector to the divine feminine, the land itself.

The legend of Eostre/Ostara is connected to spring, as she travels across the lands to melt the winter snows. In one tale, she comes across a shivering bird near death and transforms it into a hare, giving it the power to lay eggs (embodied within the hare) so that the bird may produce offspring. Some versions recount that the hare lays colourful eggs in gratitude to the goddess. It is said that Eostre/Ostara can turn into a hare, and the medical term oestrogen (the fertility hormone) comes

from her name. Today, rabbits and hares remain her symbol along with eggs decorated in her colours of green, yellow and purple.

The hope of spring is programmed into our DNA. The pagan celebration of Ostara connects us to the Celtic values of creativity, authenticity and reverence for Mother Nature. It is a powerful time of anticipation. Through reflection and imagination, we have an opportunity to re-birth ourselves and to examine new paths of possibility as the days get longer and we are inspired by the feverish bloom and majesty of the natural world awakening. The goddess Eostre/Ostara embodies possibilities for renewal and growth.

For many, life is very challenging, and we may be anxious about forces beyond our control that threaten our well-being. This year at the Vernal Equinox (March 20), you are invited to take some time to reflect on the power of goddess Eostre/Ostara, and the promise that spring will come in all its glory. Get outside and slow your pace to see, hear, touch, smell and feel this power of renewal. May it inspire you to dream, to create, and know that you are a part of this magnificent becoming, you are connected to the world around you and your ancestors who came before you.

Happy Ostara!