



## Galaxies Evening Service 7 October 2007

Service by Pete Cowley



### Welcome:

Tonight we are celebrating and learning about the festivals of Walpurgis Night (somewhat Christianised) & Beltane (Wiccan). Both are spring festivals that occur late in October - We're doing this a bit early to allow other things into the schedule!!



Walpurgis Night bonfire in Sweden

### **Gathering together** (Written by Jono, Matthew & Chris, **St, Andrew's Rainbow Room**)

Leader Haere mai

We come to this place of sea and sand and fire  
We come to worship God, however you conceive  
We come to welcome God with our prayers and deeds  
We come to think of people in our past and our present  
We come to share the starlight of love.



### Introduction:

Leader: Let us praise God, who created the world and its seasons

**PEOPLE: Blessed be god forever!**

Leader: Today we seek God's blessing on all that grows and lives again. We celebrate and acknowledge the arrival of spring. Here in our southern sky, we often get reminders that winter is still close by - cold snaps and lots of wind to blow our streets clean. Our bonfire tonight, whether it be large and on the beach, or small and indoors, signifies the warming sun of summer - how we look forward to the greater warmth and light that it brings.

**PEOPLE: Blessed be god for whom all things are possible**

## Affirmation of faith (said all together)

**We believe**

**in God the creator who gives birth to all that is .. with labour and sighing and looks to the world with joy and love.**

**We believe**

**in Christ the reconciler, who is earthed in our life and enfleshed in its patterns of dying and rising, who gives honour to our reality and grace to our way.**

**We believe**

**in God the free Spirit, who weeps with our grieving in the depths of our darkness and dances among us high on life's mountains – the Spirit who finds us with newness and hope.**

**We believe**

**in the community of faith, which is born of our humanness, is nurtured in sharing and grows whole in our struggling and celebration as one people of God.**

## Notices

If you have any notices to bring to our attention please speak up.

## Contemporary reflections

The festival is named after Saint Walpurga (known in Scandinavia as "Valborg"; alternative forms are "Walpurgis", "Wealdburg", or "Valderburger"), born in Wessex in 710. She was a niece of Saint Boniface and, according to legend, a daughter to the Saxon prince St. Richard. Together with her brothers she travelled to Franconia, Germany, where she became a nun and lived in the convent of Heidenheim, which was founded by her brother Willibald. Walpurga died on 25 February 779 and that day still carries her name in the Traditional Catholic Calendar. Her relics were transferred on 1 May, and that day carries her name in, for example, the Finnish and Swedish calendar.

Historically the Walpurgisnacht is derived from Pagan spring customs, where the arrival of spring was celebrated with bonfires at night. Viking fertility celebrations took place around February 25 and due to Walpurga being declared a saint at that time of year, her name became associated with the celebrations. Walpurga was honoured in the same way that Vikings had celebrated spring and as they spread throughout Europe, the two dates became mixed together and created the Walpurgis Night celebration. The main mascot of Walpurgis Day is the witch.



*Sint-Walburgakerk, Bruges*



## Germany

In Germany, Walpurgisnacht (or Hexennacht, meaning Witches' Night), the night from April 30 to May 1, is the night when allegedly the witches hold a large celebration on the Blocksberg and await the arrival of Spring.

Walpurgis Night (in German folklore) the night of April 30 (May Day's eve), when witches meet on the Brocken mountain and hold revels with their gods..."

Brocken is the highest of the Harz Mountains of north central Germany. It is noted for the phenomenon of the Brocken spectre and for witches' revels which reputedly took place there on Walpurgis night.

The Brocken Spectre is a magnified shadow of an observer, typically surrounded by rainbow-like bands, thrown onto a bank of cloud in high mountain areas when the sun is low. The phenomenon was first reported on the Brocken.

—Taken from Oxford Phrase & Fable.

A scene in Goethe's Faust Part One is called "Walpurgisnacht", and one in Faust Part Two is called "Classical Walpurgisnacht".

In some parts of northern coastal regions of Germany, the custom of lighting huge Beltane fires is still kept alive, to celebrate the coming of May, while most parts of Germany have a derived Christianized custom around Easter called "Easter fires".

In rural parts of southern Germany it is part of popular youth culture play pranks on Walburgisnacht, e.g. tampering with neighbours' gardens, hiding possessions, or spraying graffiti on private property. These pranks occasionally result in serious damage to property or bodily injury.

Curiously Adolf Hitler, with several members of his staff (including Joseph Goebbels), committed suicide on Walpurgisnacht, April 30/May 1, 1945. In the History Channel's documentary, Hitler and the Occult, author Dusty Sklar stated that "It's believed by some people that he chose April 30th deliberately because it coincided with Walpurgis Night, which is believed to be the most important date in Satanism. So according to one commentator he was giving himself up to the powers of darkness."

## Sweden



*A large crowd, mostly students in typical Swedish white student caps, participating in the traditional Walpurgis Night celebration with song outside the Castle in Uppsala. The silhouette of the cathedral towers may be seen in the background. To the right are banners and standards of the student nations. Image from c. 1920.*

Walpurgis (sw: Valborgsmässoafton or Valborg) is one of the main holidays during the year in Sweden alongside Christmas and Midsummer holiday in Sweden. The forms of celebration in Sweden vary in different parts of the country and between different cities. One of the main traditions in Sweden is to light large bonfires, a custom which is most firmly established in Svealand, and which began in Uppland during the 18th century. An older tradition from Southern Sweden was for the younger people to collect greenery and branches from the woods at

twilight, which were used to adorn the houses of the village. The expected reward for this task is to be paid in eggs.

The tradition which is most widespread throughout the country is probably singing songs of spring. Most of the songs are from the 19th century and were spread by students' spring festivities. The strongest and most traditional spring festivities are also found in the old university cities, like Uppsala and Lund where both current and graduated students gather at events that take up most of the day from early morning to late night on April 30, or "siste April" ("The last day of April") as it is called in Lund and elsewhere throughout the country. There are also newer student traditions like the carnival parade, The Cortège, which has been held since 1909 by the students at Chalmers in Gothenburg.

## Finland

Today in Finland, Walpurgis Night (Vapunaatto) is, along with New Year's Eve and Juhannus, the biggest carnival-style festivity that takes place in the streets of Finland's towns and cities. The celebration is typically centred on plentiful use of sparkling wine and other alcoholic beverages. The student traditions are also one of the main characteristics of "Vappu". From the end of the 19th century, "Fin de Siècle", and onwards, this traditional upper class feast has been co-opted by students attending university, already having received their student cap. Many people who have graduated from lukio wear the cap. One tradition is drinking sima, whose alcohol content varies.

Fixtures include the capping of the Havis Amanda, a nude female statue in Helsinki, and the biannually alternating publications of ribald matter called Äpy and Julkku. Both are sophomoric; but while Julkku is a standard magazine, Äpy is always a gimmick. Classic forms have included an Äpy printed on toilet paper and a bed sheet. Often the magazine has been

stuffed inside standard industrial packages such as sardine-cans and milk cartons. The festivities also include a picnic on May 1st, which is sometimes prepared in a lavish manner.



*A team of students performing the traditional "capping of Havis Amanda" during Helsinki's Vappu.*

The Finnish tradition is also a shadowing of the Soviet Era May Day parade. Starting with the parties of the left, the whole of the Finnish political scene has nominated Vappu as the day to go out on stumps and agitate. This does not only include right-wing parties, but also others like the church have followed suit, marching and making speeches. In Sweden it is only the labour and socialist parties which use May 1 for political activities, while others observe the traditional festivities. The labourers who were active in the 1970s still party on the first of May. They arrange carnivals and the radio plays their old songs that workers liked to listen to. The labour spirit lies most in the capital of Finland, Helsinki.

The First of May is also a day for everything fun and crazy: children and families gather in market places to celebrate the first day of the spring and the coming summer. There are balloons and joy, people drink their first beers outside, there are clowns and masks and a lot of fun. The first of May includes colourful streamers, funny and silly things and sun. The first of May means the beginning of the spring for many people in Finland. There is also an erotic frisson involved with Vappus ribald side. The only semi-humorous adage is that who doesn't have a paramour on Vappu, will have to make do without one also on midsummer night.

Traditionally May 1st is celebrated by a picnic in a park (Kaivopuisto or Kaisaniemi in the case of Helsinki). For most, the picnic is enjoyed with friends on a blanket with good food and sparkling wine. Some people, however, arrange extremely lavish picnics with pavilions, white table cloths, silver candelabras, classical music and lavish food. The picnic usually starts early in the morning, and some hard-core party goers continue the celebrations of the previous evening without sleeping in between. Some Student organisations have traditional areas where they camp every year and they usually send someone to reserve the spot early on. As with other Vappu traditions, the picnic includes student caps, sima, streamers and balloons.

## Estonia

In Estonia, Volbriöö is celebrated on the night from April 30 to May 1, with the following day (May 1) being not so important, rather than just a public holiday called "Spring Day" (Kevadpüha). Yet Volbriöö itself has a considerable importance as one of the main reasons to party across the country. Influenced by the German culture, the night originally stood for gathering and meeting of witches. Nowadays some people still dress up as witches and wander the streets in a carnival-like mood.

Yet for most Estonians, Volbriöö has become a reason to celebrate the arrival of Spring with huge outdoors drinking and partying throughout the night. This is especially strongly honoured in Tartu, the university town in Southern Estonia. For Estonian students in Student Corporations, the night starts with a traditional march on the streets of Tartu, followed by visiting of each others' corporation houses all night, drinking lots of beer as they stay with the hosts and move along the streets from one place to the other. The following day (May 1) is known as Kaatripäev (Hangover Day, with its meaning coming from 'Kater' standing for 'Hangover' in German).

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The Beltane (Wiccan) festival is also a spring festival but it is celebrated on the 31<sup>st</sup> of October which is halfway between spring equinox and summer solstice. It is a high energy time, when the whole earth sings of growth and regeneration. Birds are nesting, deciduous trees leafing, flowers are blossoming, and the increasing sun-power quickens both sap and blood.

The similarity between Walpurgis Night and Beltane is that both have bonfires as central themes and focal point to their rituals. People danced sunwise around the flames or leaped over them to purify themselves and encourage increased productivity. Sacrifices were made to Belenos, sometimes with the slaughter of sick beasts that had not weathered the winter well. People carried burning torches around the fields to invoke the sun. Often these rites included sexual intercourse to invoke fertility in the ground.

## Spring Haiku

a little shoot  
a leaf in the wind  
now green, now spun, now gold

sunlight in the leaves;  
punga tendrils unfurl  
tender shoots of green    - Ron Riddell from River Stones

## Blessing

May the blessed sunlight shine on you like a great peat fire,  
so that stranger and friend may come and warm themselves at it.

And may light shine out of the two eyes of you,  
like a candle set in the window of a house,  
bidding the wanderer come in out of the storm.

And may the blessing of the rain be on you,  
may it beat upon your Spirit and wash it fair and clean,  
and leave there a shining pool where the blue of Heaven shines, and sometimes a star.

And may the blessing of the earth be on you,  
soft under your feet as you pass along the roads,  
soft under you as you lie out on it, tired at the end of day;  
and may it rest easy over you when,  
at last, you lie out under it.

May it rest so lightly over you that your soul may be out from under it quickly;  
up and off and on its way to God.

And now may the Lord bless you, and bless you kindly.

Amen.

## Departure

As we depart from this place  
of light,  
                    love,  
                    and warm hearts

may we be a light to others  
          may we treat all we meet with loving-kindness  
                    may we warm others hearts with our care and commitment  
                            to compassion, truth and justice  
                                    in all our dealings.