



Galaxies Evening Service 22 March 2009

Service by Pete Cowley
& Fergus Collinson



Welcome:

Welcome to our gathering this afternoon.

Our theme is : **Autumn Equinox: Dying to be reborn.** Reflection on the slow death of summer with the nights drawing in and sunrise becoming later. The leaves of the deciduous trees are turning red, yellow, gold and other wondrous colours.



Late autumn colours – who said death can't be glorious?

Call to togetherness and sharing:

- Leader: We are all part of the rhythm of life.
As we gather together to share of ourselves and our journey, may peace and love be with us.
- All: May we be makers of the peace and givers of unbounded love.

Passing the Peace:

Leader: Now that we are reminded that God the free Spirit shares itself with us, we can share our peace and love with one another.

Let us feel the power of the earth that holds us together.

Let us celebrate our gifts in song and dance.

Let us all rejoice in our power and our beauty.

All: We open our hearts to the miracle of birth and the mystery of God's love in all Creation. We carry in us the divine spark. The gift of love, which we share tonight, deepens us as people, deepens us as sisters and brothers.

Each person shares hugs, or whatever you are comfortable with, with those around them.



Notices

Reflection

The Autumn Equinox is also known as: Alban Elfed, Fall Equinox, Autumnal Equinox, Cornucopia, Feast of Avilon, Festival of Dionysus, Harvest Home, Harvest Tide, Mabon, Night of the Hunter, Second Harvest Festival, Wine Harvest, Witch's Thanksgiving, and the first day of autumn.

The word "equinox" was derived from Latin term "*æquinoctium*" which, in turn, came from "*æquus*" (equal), and "*nox*" (night). It refers to the time that occurs twice a year when the nighttime is equal to the daytime -- each being 12 hours in duration.

There is often a sense of calm around autumn equinox as the fine weather lingers on with seductive steadiness, making winter seem far distant. Yet shadows are beginning to lengthen and sunbeams slant under verandas, shafting in under low windows. In our case autumn has been quite variable with unexpected cold weatehr and showers.

At autumn equinox, light and dark come one more into balance. It is time to give thanks and make offerings, to acknowledge the power of seeds to carry life during their time of gestation over the dark months. This is the moment of time to tune into the mystery of the changeover, knowing that what appears to be dying is really part of the movement forward into renewal and rebirth. This is the moment to hold faith that the darkness will bring forth new life at the spring equinox.

Autumn/Fall celebrations by various faiths and countries - ancient and modern

- **ANCIENT BRITAIN:** Both the solstices and equinoxes "were the highly sophisticated preoccupation of the mysterious Megalithic peoples who pre-dated Celt, Roman and Saxon on Europe's Atlantic fringe by thousands of years." Stonehenge and other stone structures were aligned so that the solstices and equinoxes could be determined.
- **ANCIENT IRELAND:** The spring and fall equinox were celebrated in ancient times. A cluster of megalithic cairns are scattered through the hills at Loughcrew, about 55 miles North West of Dublin in Ireland. *Loughcrew Carin T* is a passage tomb which is designed so that the light from the rising sun on the spring and summer equinoxes penetrates a long corridor and illuminates a backstone, which is decorated with astronomical symbols. A speeded-up video of the backstone's illumination is available.
- **ASTROLOGERS:** On the day of the fall solstice, the sun enters the sign of Libra -- the constellation of the balance or scales.
- **CHRISTIANITY:** The Christian Church replaced earlier Pagan solstices and equinox celebrations during Medieval times, with Christianized observances. Replacing the fall equinox is Michaelmas, the feast of the Archangel Michael, on SEP-29. "His feast was celebrated with a traditional well-fattened goose which had fed well on the stubble of the fields after the harvest. In many places, there was also a tradition of special large loaves of bread made only for that day. By Michaelmas the harvest had to be completed and the new cycle of farming would begin. It was a time for beginning new leases, rendering accounts and paying the annual dues."

Other substitutions by the Church were:

- Replacing the [spring equinox](#) by the *Feast of Annunciation of the Blessed Virgin Mary*. It is held on MAR-25, on the nominal date of the spring equinox according to the old Julian calendar. There was a "*brief flirtation with calling the Vernal Equinox 'Gabrielmas.'*" "This is the time when the angel Gabriel told Mary that she was pregnant. (Luke 1:26-38)
- Replacing the [summer solstice](#), Midsummer Day, is the feast of St. John the Baptist, celebrated on JUN-24.
- Replacing the [winter solstice](#) is [Christmas](#), on DEC-25 when Mary is traditionally believed to have given birth to Jesus, [while still a virgin](#).
- **CHUMASH:** This is a Native American tribe from Southern California. They celebrate their fall equinox sun ceremony during their month of Hutash (September). It takes place "after the harvest is picked, processed and stored....Kakunupmawa is a ritual name for the Sun. According to traditional Chumash lore, all humans were known as children of the Sun, or 'sons of Kakunupmawa.'" The spiritual thoughts of the tribe would become focused the importance of unity in the face of winter confinement, death and rebirth.
- **DRUIDS:** At this time of the year, the ancient Celts conducted a mock sacrifice of a large wicker-work figure which represented the vegetation spirit. This might have been the origin of [Julius Caesar's comment](#) in his Gallic Wars that the Druids performed human sacrifices. Although he never witnessed a human sacrifice and never met anyone who had, this story has been accepted and repeated often enough to be accepted as truth. The Celtic mock sacrifice has been reborn in the *Burning Man Project*, a yearly fall

festival celebrated for one week in Black Rock Desert in Nevada. The movie "The Wicker Man" was based on the Celtic tradition; to say more would ruin the film if you are seeing it for the first time.

- **FRANCE:** A new calendar was adopted at the time of the French Revolution in the late 18th century. The first day of the year, the 1st of Vendemiaire (the grape-harvest month), was the date of the fall equinox in the Northern Hemisphere. The year was divided into twelve months of 30 days each. That left five or six surplus days which were celebrations ending the year, in honor of virtue, genius, work, opinion, prizes and revolution.
- **MAYAN:** The ancient Mayans constructed a pyramid at Cihick'n Itz' which displayed different patterns of triangles of light at the time of the solstices and equinoxes. The dates signaled the start of a harvest, planting, or a religious ceremony. On the fall equinox, seven triangles become visible on the pyramid's staircase.
- **NATIVE AMERICAN SPIRITUALITY:** There are countless stone structures created by Natives in the past and still standing in North America. One was called *Calendar One* by its modern-day finder. It is in a natural amphitheatre of about 20 acres in size in Vermont. From a stone enclosure in the center of the bowl, one can see a number of vertical rocks and other markers around the edge of the bowl "*At the winter solstice, the sun rose at the southern peak of the east ridge and set at a notch at the southern end of the west ridge.*" The summer solstice and both equinoxes were similarly marked.

"*America's Stonehenge*" is a 4,000 year old megalithic site located on Mystery Hill in Salem NH. Carbon dating has estimated the age of some charcoal remnants at 3,000 and 4,000 years ago. Researchers have concluded that the site was erected either by Native Americans or an unknown migrant European population. The site contains five standing stones and one fallen stone in a linear alignment which point to both the sunrise and sunset at the and fall equinoxes.

- **NEOPAGANISM:** This is a group of religions which are attempted re-creations of ancient Pagan religions. Of these, [Wicca](#) is the most popular; it is loosely based on ancient Celtic beliefs, symbols and practices, with the addition of some more recent Masonic and ceremonial magic rituals.

Monotheistic religions, like Judaism, Christianity and Islam, tend to view time as linear. It started with creation; the world as we know it will end at some time in the future. Aboriginal and Neopagan religions see time as circular and repetitive, with lunar (monthly) and solar (yearly) cycles. Their "*...rituals guarantee the continuity of nature's cycles, which traditional human societies depend on for their sustenance.*"

Wiccans recognize eight seasonal days of celebration. Four are minor sabbats and occur at the two solstices and the two equinoxes. The other are major sabbats which happen approximately halfway between an equinox and solstice. Wiccans may celebrate Mabon on the evening before, or at sunrise on the morning of the equinox, or at the exact time of fall equinox.

Mabon is the second and main Wiccan harvest festival.

- Selena Fox of *Circle Sanctuary* comments: "The Goddess manifests in Her Bountiful Mother aspects. The God emerges as the Corn King and Harvest Lord. Colors are Orange, Dark Red, Yellow, Indigo, and Brown. It is the festival of thanksgiving."
- Lee Wavedancer of *Witch on the Go.com* comments that the Wiccan God "has sacrificed the last of Himself to provide us with a final harvest of food before the winter begins. Celebrants gather to mark the turning of the wheel and to give thanks for the ultimate sacrifice of The God, recognizing that He will be reborn at Yule. This holiday has been called 'The Witches' Thanksgiving' and is a time for feasting together with family and friends."
- The author of the *Pagan Family Circle* writes: "While in the past, most all were farmers, this harvest festival traditionally applies to the harvest of foods, yet in this day and age, the 'harvest' may also apply to the 'seeds of dreams and wishes' that were planted many months earlier. Now is the time to see if they have come true. Whether they have come true or not ... a ritual to thank the growing energies of the God and the fertility of the Goddess should be preformed at this time. Lay upon your altar a sampling of your 'harvest' use it freely in your ritual. (Note: even if your 'harvest' came up empty, IE: your dreams were not fulfilled, the God and Goddess should still be thanked for the effort put forth in your name)"
- **JAPAN:** "...the Spring and Autumn Equinox is observed as the six-day celebration the Higan-e. It is celebrated "for three days before and after the Equinox. Six days was chosen because it is based on the six perfections, giving, observance of the precepts, perseverance, effort, meditation and wisdom - needed before one goes from this shore of sams'ra to the further shore or nirvana. The literal meaning of Higan is 'other shore.' The ritual includes repentance of past sins and prayers for enlightenment in the next life. It also includes remembrance of the dead and visits to the family graves. It is thought that the Spring and Autumn Equinoxes, being the most temperate times of the year, are ideal moments to reflect on the meaning of life."

[Walking to the Fall Equinox](#) by Rafael Jesús Gonzáles

One morning the bedroom
fills with rainbows --
the light slants golden
& fall has come.

For one brief moment
day & night dance in balance
& the time is come
for the pressing of the grapes.

Lady Autumn (by Deirdre Akins)

Lady Autumn, Queen of the Harvest,
I have seen You in the setting Sun
with Your long auburn tresses
blowing in the cool air that surrounds You.
Your crown of golden leaves is jeweled
with amber, amethyst, and rubies.
Your long, flowing purple robe stretches across the horizon.
In Your hands You hold the ripened fruits.
At Your feet the squirrels gather acorns.
Black crows perch on Your outstretched arms.
All around You the leaves are falling.
You sit upon Your throne and watch
the dying fires of the setting Sun
shine forth its final colors in the sky.
The purple and orange lingers
and glows like burning embers.
Then all colours fade into the twilight.
Lady Autumn, You are here at last.
We thank You for Your rewards.
We have worked hard for these gifts.
Lady Autumn, now grant us peace and rest.



Blessing

"Dear Mother, we gather in ancient rite for renewal of spirit.

Let there be sensitivity and belief of the spiritual reality behind what we refer to as "Nature and Humanity.

Let us share a sincere love of Earth Herself and a desire to communicate with all of Her children.

Let there be a belief in, and love for, the individual lives of this planet."

Author Unknown

Blessings for Humanity - Blessings for the Earth
Blessings for the sacrificed and those that mourn
May the Wisdom of the Ages clear the vision of those blinded
May Love be sown and respect be propagated
May understanding and compassion flow as the waters of our Mother Earth
May the winds take our prayers and our wills drive the change
May we find strength within
May we learn and may we grow
Blessed Be
~ Tara