

Children's Ministries

The Origin of Halloween

The Rev. Jennifer Pratt
Director of Christian Education

The Celtic people who lived 2,000 years ago in the area that is now Ireland, the United Kingdom and northern France marked November 1st as the beginning of winter. Winter in northern Europe is dark and cold and was viewed by the Celts as the season of death. It was the time of the dropping of leaves from the trees, the death of crops, and of human deaths that would inevitably result from the harsh conditions of winter. On October 31st, it was believed that the boundary between the worlds of the living and the dead became blurred and the ghosts of the dead would return to earth. The Celts believed that these other worldly spirits would cause trouble such as damaging harvests but also make it easier for the Celtic shamans to make predictions about the future. These prophecies were an important source of comfort and direction for a people entirely dependent on the volatile natural world.

On the night of October 31st, the people of each village would prepare for the festival of Samhain (pronounced sow-in) by extinguishing their hearth fires which had been kept burning all during the preceding year. The people would gather as the shamans built a sacred bonfire. As the flames grew, grain and other crops and offerings would be offered to the flames in hopes of soothing and propitiating the spirits. During the ceremonies they would don costumes typically consisting of animal heads and skins and attempt to tell each other's fortunes.

No one knows for sure just when the first Christian set foot on British soil, but by 43 A.D.

the Romans had conquered the majority of Celtic territory. In their 400 year reign in Britain, it is certain that some among them were Christian. The first British martyr is St. Alban, believed to have died either in 209 or 305AD. In the 7th Century Pope Boniface IV designated November 1 All Saints' Day, or "All-Hallowmas" - a time to honor saints and martyrs. It is believed that he was attempting to replace the Celtic festival of the dead with a related but church-sanctioned holiday. But the Celtic customs and practices of Oct. 31st did not disappear. Gradually the 31st became known as All Hallows Eve, or Halloween, and in the year 1000, the church declared November 2 as All Souls' Day, a time to remember and honor all the dead. The people's holiday of Halloween continues to be celebrated to this day with bonfires, parades and dressing up in costumes.

Sunday School Begins!

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Thanks to all who made our first day of Sunday School such a great success! There is still room in all classes. We are offering Preschool ages 3-4, Primary 5-7 and Intermediate 8-10. Registration forms are located by the Christian Education Office door, in the Church Office and at the Communications Center. Don't delay, register today!

**World of Wonder Preschool
is also still accepting
registrations for children
ages 2, 3 and 4. Call the
Office at 253 858-3777.**