

## **Preparation**

Altar set up - image of Gwyn as Winter King, a candle for Gwyn, an extra candle.

Make a snowflake to hang in the window to honour Gwyn and winter\*.

Offerings - mead or cider.

## **Intro**

The winter solstice is the time of the shortest days and the longest nights. It is the time when for three days and nights the sun stands still.

We have little Brythonic lore connected with the winter solstice. Yet we do know that in *Culhwch and Olwen* Gwyn ap Nudd 'White son of Mist' and Gwythyr ap Greidol 'Victor son of Scorcher' battle as 'winter and summer kings for Creiddylad, a fertility Goddess, on Calan Mai. Gwyn's abduction of Creiddylad in the tale suggests Gwyn takes Creiddylad to Annwn on Calan Gaeaf and this explains the coming of winter.

This story, unlike the battle of the oak king and holly king, in the work of Robert Graves, does not take place on the Winter Solstice. Yet we know the prehistoric people of Britain celebrated this time by the layout of various monuments. For example Thornborough Henge, in northern Britain is laid out to mirror the three stars in Orion's belt (our ancestors may have seen the Hunter as Gwyn) and is aligned towards the midwinter sunrise and sunset. The gypsum used for its banks, shiny white, might be connected with Gwyn 'white'.

So this was perhaps a time when Gwyn was honoured as Winter King and as a guide of the dead, perhaps visiting the tombs of the dead, where the living gathered with their ancestors and held feasts and told stories in this dark time.

A time of the height of Gwyn's reign as Winter King and the beginning of its end.

## **Ritual**

Welcome

Spirits of place / land acknowledgement

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## Opening

Brenin y Gaeaf  
The Winter King

I hear your call as the grey geese fly from the North and the first new moon  
of winter rises

(All chant)  
THE WINTER KING COMETH  
ALL HAIL THE WINTER KING

The sun stands still as your haunting eyes reflect the dying flame upon the  
horizon. Earth is held within your gaze

(All chant)  
THE WINTER KING COMETH  
ALL HAIL THE WINTER KING

I look up into the cold blackened branches bare against the midnight blue,  
forming the silhouette of your antlered crown you are here

(All chant)  
THE WINTER KING COMETH  
ALL HAIL THE WINTER KING

Skeletal fingers pierce my skin as you brush aside the beauty of Autumn and  
the last crimson leaf spirals upon your icy breath

(All chant)  
THE WINTER KING COMETH  
ALL HAIL THE WINTER KING

As you raise your scythe beneath winters greying cloak  
I know I shall become as the rotting wood Death sustaining life within the  
forest floor

(All chant)  
THE WINTER KING COMETH  
ALL HAIL THE WINTER KING  
AND ALL LIFE SHALL RETURN TO HIM

~

## **Honouring Gwyn as Winter King**

A space for prayers, poems and songs.

### **Winter King**

you take me back to what is raw,  
glacial plains of horror,  
the obnoxious beauty of it all

to beyond the ice age  
when millennia ago we met  
when the universe drew breath,

when the binding song coalesced.  
You came as cold wind  
and your inspiration was death.

You are the muse that moves the forest,  
the ice that strips the hills,  
the hunt that runs without flesh or bone

by the force of its boreal will.  
Your voice is the chill that keeps me alive,  
the poem that sparkles when all else dies.

When frost rimes my window I cannot forget  
you were there at my beginning  
and will greet me again at the end.

~

### **Meditation**

In this meditation we will be going to Winter Hill in Lancashire which I have climbed many times and on several occasions made offerings to Gwyn. I can see it, sometimes snow-topped, from a knoll on a local park, cold and haunting.

It's a place with a mixed past. Bronze Age burial mounds. Cairns 'the Wilder Lads' supposedly marking the graves of the two sons of a Saxon king who got lost and died up there. Murders, air disasters, UFO sightings. The famous and very prominent Winter Hill TV Mast glowing red at night like the eyes of Annuvian hounds. It has recently been ravaged by devastating wild fires.

Our intention is to travel to the summit to converse with Gwyn and from there with him to look back on the old year and to look ahead to the new.

I invite you to close your eyes and bring your attention to your breath. Your breath, that divine inspiration and exhalation connecting us to the air around us, to all living beings, to the dead, to the Gods, the awen that comes from Annwn.

Taste the air. Colder now. You're standing at the foot of a hill. Near Belmont where the Stone the Crows Border Morris group dance the sun up on Calan Mai with their crow gowns, facepaint, morris sticks, violins, pipes and drums.

It is not that time but you see a crow feather and look up to see a crow. He will be our guide today as we set off up Rivington Road, along the grass verge, take a hedged lane, sparkly with frost, then the path to the summit. Stepping from flagstone to flagstone. Icy. Treacherous. But not so much as the peaty ground to either side, still bearing the scars of the wildfires, the cottongrass growing back into the cracks and grooves, the peaty waters returning.

Up, up, up you go, crow black against grey skies perhaps promising snow. Up towards the silver spear of the television mast distributing visions and sounds. Soundless. Iconic. Tall. Not the true summit. Not tall as the Winter King.

Picture Him now. The true source of visionary experience. The King of Annwn. Beckoning you to Him. To the summit of truth. Crow black. Blessed white.

Now is your chance to stand at this liminal time when the sun stands still. Of endings and beginnings. To look back on your year with Gwyn and ahead to the new.

(10 minutes meditation)

Your time with Gwyn is at an end. You say farewell to Him. Turn away from the mast, the buildings, begin your descent back down to the hill. The crow flies before you, leading you down. Before you leave the footpath you speak a brief prayer that the scorching feet of Gwythyr do not scorch the hill this summer.

You return down the lane, down Rivington Road, back to the frosty car park where the crows will dance on a far warmer day and feel your breath

beginning to warm as you come back to your body, to your seat, to our celebration.

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Sharing of experiences and intentions.

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Ceremony - light the candle and drumming to set our intentions.

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### **Closing prayer to Gwyn**

Dear King of Annwn

Through cold and mist, may our breath coalesce as one

May our minds eye see that which cannot be seen

Through the veil of the In-between spaces

We find our way with guiding hands and words unspoken

What we give and what we are given

One of devotion, the other a gift

Lessons learned and others unlearned

May it all set us upon the path of Annwn

To share in the intricate web of Life

Forever entangled with the Awen

Blessed be the cauldron

Blessed be our words put forth

Blessed be our steps that choose to follow where you lead

Dear King of Annwn