The Gods and Rituals of Yule

Yule, the 12-day winter festival that occurred at Winter Solstice, was a sacred celebration in honor of the gods and goddesses, especially Woden (the chief god), Thor (also known as Thunor, the god of thunder), Frigg (also known as Frea, the god of fertility), and Nerthus (the goddess of the earth). Most of the rituals and traditions performed during Yule were done in order to show gratitude towards the gods and to ask for productivity in the coming year.

The burning of the Yule Log was an important ritual that took place during the Yule festival. It was typically made of oak, which was sacred to Thor, and burned in order to honor him and ask for his blessing. The remnants of the Yule log were supposed to be kept as a charm for protection, and should also be used to light the next year’s Yule log.

Feasts were significant during the Yule celebration. A boar’s head was a central part of the feast; the wild boar was significant to Anglo-Saxons because they associated them with warriors. (The image of the boar was a significant part of the Anglo-Saxon culture and could be found on shields and helmets as a symbol of protection and bravery.) In addition, the boar was sacred to Logan and Nerthus.

Wassail comes from the Anglo-Saxon “wass healf” which means to “be whole” or “be healthy.” The drinking of wassail was a fertility rite that was performed during Yule. It symbolized gratitude for the fruit of the apple tree and demonstrated a desire for the tree’s productivity in the coming year. Wassail was also possibly used to pour over the roots of trees and crops in order to bless the ground and ensure a bountiful harvest during the new year.

Other Symbols: Candles were lit symbolically to ensure the return of the sun after solstice. Apples and oranges were given as gifts, also representing the sun.