

Hestia

In Greek mythology, Hestia was known as the Goddess of the Hearth. In modern language, that might sound like the same thing as "goddess of the fireplace" or "goddess of the space-heater", but in ancient Greek mythology it meant much more than that.

In ancient Greece the "hearth" did refer to the home fire, but it represented something more sacred. The hearth was the center point of the home, which meant it was the center point of the family. In the context of a town, the hearth is the center point of the community. In ancient Greece this was taken literally as most towns had a common house, known as the prytaneum, which housed its own hearth. Visitors and immigrants to the town would be greeted there, where there would often be a statue of Hestia nearby as a means of worship.

Those who left to start a new colony would traditionally take a torch lit by the fire of the town hearth and carry it to the location of their new town. In the center of this new location they would build a new hearth and set it ablaze with the torch, thus "keeping the home fires burning".

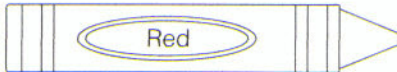
Every sacrifice made to the gods began with a sacrifice to Hestia. The sacred fire on the sacrificial altar was considered that of Hestia, and so the first portion of each sacrifice to any other god was given to Hestia to receive her blessing for the offering.

A sister to the great Olympian gods of Greek mythology Hestia was the first born child of the titans Chronos and Rhea, who also gave birth to Demeter, Hera, Poseidon, Hades, and Zeus. Hestia is also considered the last-born, due to the story of Chronos eating all of his children (except Zeus), then regurgitating them in reverse-order, meaning Hestia was the last to be re-born from him.

Unlike her sisters Demeter and Hera, Hestia was a virgin goddess her whole existence. She stubbornly refused to marry and even asked Zeus to make it so that she would be a maiden forever. He did, and even went so far as to ensure that the love goddess Aphrodite could not use her powers to make Hestia fall in love and change her mind.



Where does the expression "keep the home fires burning" come from?



Who were Hestia's sisters?



What is the "hearth" a symbol for within a town?



Why is the "hearth" important within a family?



Why was the first sacrifice made to the gods always made to Hestia?

What is a "prytaneum"?

What do you do when you make a "sacrifice"?
