April may seem to be an odd time to begin a year long series of articles describing the year as seen and lived by people in the Middle Ages, but really it makes a certain amount of sense since until the transition from the Julian to the Gregorian calendar (1583 in most of Europe, and 1752 in England) the year began on 25 March, The Annunciation of Mary, or the festival celebrating Mary’s being told by the Archangel that she was pregnant. (Before I continue, I realize that there may be some people who object to the presentation of religious matters in the Saga, but I am describing the majority of the Middle Ages, and the Christian religion was a significant part of that period, and it can not be avoided completely. I will try to keep this as painless as possible for the non-Christians among us. In recognition that not everyone has a background in medieval Church practices, I may stop to explain terms. If you are not interested just skip over those terms – these will not be on the Test).

April generally is in the season of Lent, which simply means the 40 days of fasting and penitence between the big party in February (Mardi Gras / Carnivale / Shrove Tuesday / Fat Tuesday, etc.) and Easter (or some variation of Pascha in the rest of Europe).

Spring Planting is over, and the farmer begins preparing the follow fields for the next year's crop [they were ploughed two or three times before harvest). The cows have calved, and the Diary production has begun by this time.

Tusser, Thomas. *Five hundreth pointes of good husbandrie*, 1586

> “From April beginning, till Andrew be past;  
> So long with good huswife her diary doth last.  
> Good milch-cow and pasture, good husbands provide,  
> The res’due, good huswives know best how to guide.  
> Some fodder buyeth in fen where it lieth;  
> Small commons and bare yield cattle ill fare.  
> Some country lack plough-meat and some do lack cow-meat.  
> Man cow provides - wife dairy guides.  
> Ill huswife, unskilled, to make her own cheese,  
> Through trusting of others, hath this for her fees:  
> Her milk pan and cream-pot, so slabber’d and sost,  
> That butter is wanting, and cheese is half lost.  
> Where champion wanteth a swineherd for hog,  
> These may complaineth of naughty man's dog.”


> “Make Fens and spread Hillocks in Meadows for Hay.  
> Set poles for Hops deep and Strong  
> Sow Flax and Hemp, set and sow all kind of Garden Herbs, yet this rule do not forget, to sow dry and set wet.  
> Restore the liberty of the Laborious Bee by opening her Hive.  
> Now, let the good Wives look to their Gardens, and begin to think of their Dairies, for from April to St. Andrews tide Dairies do last. “