

Winter Solstice

**“Stand in the circle. Weave the web of light.
Dance in the moonlight. Bring fire to the night.”**

-Brian Boothby



The sun enters the sign of Capricorn at the Winter quarter point in the Northern Hemisphere and her rays beam brightest at the Southern extreme. Our sisters in the Southern Hemisphere celebrate the Summer Solstice at this time. Here, we prepare for the shortest day and the longest night of the Wheel: The Winter Solstice.

In Celtic cultures, there was a belief that the Great Wheel of time stopped turning for a brief and crucial moment as one cycle ended and a new cycle began. Solstice called for a pause~ a look back and a movement inward to reflect before once again looking forward to the growth and activity that would come with the returning sun. From the Solstice point on (sol:sun, stitium/sistere:make stand still), the days will once again begin to lengthen and there is a rebirth within the cycle of the whole.

Since Samhain, the Earth has retreated deep into darkness where life underground is strengthened and mysteries have been sought. The deep wisdom explored in the dark has offered {in}sight. With the turning of the wheel, we have acknowledged the death of the old year and made space for rebirth.

In the past, sacred evergreens were brought indoors to honor the cycle of everlasting life. The church made attempts to stop these customs but in the end just adopted them. Door wreaths to represent the wheel of the year and decorated trees and candlelight to honor the return of the sun are but a few of these obvious symbols.

Though this night has been adapted and “birthed” the holy *Son* through many different traditions (not only Christianity), older traditions celebrated the rebirth of a sun goddess. Her festival began with its eve of “matrum noctem”~ the night of the mother. There were many early goddesses around this time of year and throughout the wheel systematically destroyed or taken over~ turned into Saints or demonized into devils. The church turned the Crone (symbolic in Winter) into the “evil” witch; an object of fear and superstition when prior she had been honored for her wisdom and inner winter reflections of deep knowing. Her connection to {in}sight and {in}tuition was almost lost to us. But we are remembering and helping to re-member her.

Winter brings deep rest, yet our modern day society attempts to jar us out of the reflective period with the outward consumerist culture of louder festivities, more stuff and massive over consumption in general. The outward and active celebrations are not misplaced~ for truly the return of the sun and growing light are something to celebrate. Still, the essence of the Winter Solstice is darkness. And as we know, it is in the deep darkness of the cauldron where transformation occurs. The period between Samhain and Yule is the darkest time of the year. The Earth withdraws and very little outer growth happens. But inside, underneath the surface of things, roots have been growing; bringing nourishment and stability to what lies within. When the outer world darkens, the inner world expands and we are offered the opportunity to truly experience the magic of the chrysalis.

And slowly, slowly we begin to bring the wisdom we have nurtured in the dark to the light of the world. We birth our seeds, our dreams and our visions. We, too rise up with the growing sun.

Honor

Ideas to spark your Winter Solstice celebrations:

- Bring in Evergreens. I urge you to consider either bringing in a live tree (planted) or cutting branches, boughs or twigs to use for decorations without harming the trees. I don't find issue with cutting and thinning trees, however I feel that this season particularly calls for a live tree, to truly represent the seasonal reverence. If you cut your own, take time to communicate with the tree and ask permission. Tap into your inner knowing to listen~ you'll hear the answer. Trust what you feel. Fake trees and boughs are beautiful and offer appropriate symbolism to add magic to your home and altars. Different evergreens hold different meaning and sacred connotation. Take the time to do some research and become familiar with what you choose.
- Burn a Yule log. It has been said that traditionally this was wood of Oak, as it burns slow and provides long warmth, but any wood will do~ it is the ceremony and intention that really counts. Many celebrate Yule and Solstice as interchangeable but they are in fact different festivals. While the Solstice marks an actual Astronomical quarter point, Yule is an old holy day of Norwegian origin meaning "Wheel" and celebrates that mystical turning point. Bringing these together by burning the Yule log at Solstice offers a reverence for both. Decorate your log with small twigs or vines, tying on anything you would wish to leave behind with the old year, as well as tying on any "wishes" you want to offer to the Sacred Flame to be released into the year ahead. If you do not have a fire place, you can easily hold a miniature version of this ceremony with a small twig or even a rolled up paper with your wishes written on it and burning it in a fire proof pot of an appropriate size. Use caution and have a clear head ~always~ when working with fire.
- This is the darkest night. Consider moving through the guided meditations offered in the previous moon or taking a journey to seek messages or an animal guide for the coming year. Similarly, take a walk

in the dark with the intention of being open to any messages or wisdom that wants to come through. If you use tarot, oracle, runes or other form of divination, this is an excellent time to lay out a “year ahead” spread.

- Stay up all night or wake extra early to watch the “birth” of the new sun break over the horizon.
- Celebrate the many gratitudes you have in your life. Family, friendships, animal kin... Invite them for a candlelit celebration to share stories of the old year and have everyone bring their favorite winter dish to share.
- Create a vision board or prayer wheel of what you wish to bring forth with the return of the light.
- Be still. Honor that *still* point of mid-winter. Meditate on where you’ve been, where you are and the direction you’re growing towards.

Reflection and Inquiry:

- What needs to be brought out of the dark? To honor? To reclaim? Offer gratitude? Shed light on?
- What are your hopes and visions for the year ahead? Speak them out loud~ to a friend or to Spirit. Give your words the power of your voice and the energy to push them forward.
- What are the traditions of your family around this time of year? If you know the lineage of your blood, what did they celebrate and honor during this time? If you’ve created a wheel, what shows up for Winter? What colors, foods, activities, festivities, etc.? · What are your own unique traditions and how can you actively embody the wisdom of this season?

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