



Winter Solstice Reflections and Ritual

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Reflections on Solstice

On Wednesday, the 21st of December, many will gather to celebrate the time of winter's beginning at solstice celebrations. These celebrations come to us from the ancient past when men, women, and children joined together to honor the sun, to plead for its return and to rekindle hope that the earth would once again send forth shoots of grain and fruit. Let us be like those who on the solstice pause in honor and reverence to bid blessings and be blessed by our mother earth and father sky.

Once more the earth will shift and we will be flung toward the sun, our source of light, and warmth, and fiery energy. Yet it is good also to be in times of inner reflection, to enter the inmost regions of our hearts and souls, to return to the inner strength and inner sources of goodness and mercy and beauty. These have been called times of light and times of dark. Scientist, religious leaders, psychologist, mystics and poets write of the dark times of the soul and the light times of the soul sometimes as if one were better than the other. I tell you that they are times of our life, times of our being, and times of our living. We like the earth, must embrace it all. We like the earth, must learn to balance the four directions, and to do this we would remember that we are embraced and supported by the fine-tuned harmony of the universe. There is beauty above me, there is beauty below me, there is beauty at my right and my left, my north and

my south, and there is beauty inside me and all around me. The solstice time reminds me to rejoice in the harmony, which is our world.

The Solstice is a time for chants and candle lighting right here and now for we are amid a season of lights. Winter's chill invites us to kindle fires for warmth. Winter's darkness invites us to kindle candles for light.

I light a candle as we gather in the early darkness and deep cold of the year finding warmth from being with one other. We have gathered to turn darkness into a time of light, to nourish hope when hope may fail, to celebrate all that is joyful and holy in this season. We gather to express gratitude for the marvels of life, we rejoice in the wonder of making light out of darkness and victory out of struggles.

As we have gathered this day, in this season of almost winter, to acknowledge the winter festivals. Let us recall the many miracles of this season and as a church community let us remember to celebrate the many traditions and perspectives we bring here. The Pagan, the Christian, the Jewish, the Hindi, and even the ones from my growing up years and your growing up years. One of the nice traditions we have now is Toys for Tots, lots of you worked real hard to make that happen. We are giving to 167 families. Sheila, Mickey, Betsy, David and now for the past two years, Lenore and her kids come and help us sort out the bags by numbers so we can pass the toys out and they will be back this afternoon too. Lenore's son Joe helps with sorting bags by numbers and Nolan entertains Emilie so can get work done. I would guess that these kids will incorporate this as part of their traditions long into the future.

Many traditions, many celebrations yet in all these is found our desire to rekindle hope, to remember the struggles, and to be provided direction for living.

We gather in the early darkness and deep cold of the year finding warmth from being with each other. We gather to turn darkness into a time of light, to nourish hope when hope may fail, to celebrate all that is joyful and holy in this season. We gather to rejoice in the wonder of making light out of darkness and victory out of struggles.

Snow will fall; ice will come. Readiness is in order. As the earth prepares its nests, our souls keep vigil. Our moods may drift from eager and exuberant to pensive and ponderous.

But in gathering together, we find ourselves in communion with those we care deeply for, with those who care for us, with those who help us through the storms and bleak times, and with those with whom we dare to anticipate days of hope and blessing.

Enter into this week of Christmas madness with joy and add to the chaos.

May it be so.

Solstice Ritual

Welcome log, welcome!

Bring your blessings to this place

And all who dwell herein

Welcome log, welcome!

On Christmas Eve, I am going to take this yule log home, I will burn it a little each day in my living room fireplace until the Twelfth night- then whatever is left of the fragment I will put in a cloth and bring it down here to the church. I will put it inside the organ door entrance and next year on Christmas Eve if someone can remember I encourage you to take it out of there and use it at a service close to solstice and Christmas. You could place candles around it. Because we are in church we cannot re-lite the yule log but that a fragment remains from year to year will always be a reminder that good fortune, health and joy is wished for all who enter here.

The yule log is one of the ancient ceremonies that honors the Winter Solstice and the shifting of the earth again. Marilyn kindly made this log for us so that we could have rituals to mark this important time of the year.

The evergreen is clearly a symbol of the ever - lasting. Green and growth can never be stifled even in the coldest times. The evergreen survives and it reminds us of the re-emergence of life from times of bleak darkness. Today is the 18th of December and we are 2 days and 1 night away from the season we call winter. Winter is beautiful too; in its own way. This wreath that we have placed here as a centerpiece is a reminder of the growth in the midst of coldness, it is a reminder of the circle of life as it has no ending and no beginning, nature is our constant and gentle reminder of the cycle of being. Next to the wreath are some objects that are symbols of winter.

I am going to invite you to come up here, 1 by 1, to choose an object that you most celebrate of winter, to say a word or two of what that object means for you as we approach winter and then to place your object on our evergreen wreath.

Reflective words of prayer

Blessed be the world in which we live and move and have our being. Blessed be this wreath decorated now with memory and hope, with signs and symbols of the seasons. Blessed be each of us gathered here, may our dreams for living and caring and loving come true, may our wishes for hope and transformation sustain and support us. Blessed be this place, sacred and special enduring through times of bleakness and through times of joy and lightness. May all who enter here today and every day be warmed by the spirit of love that is our way of being.

So Be it.