

Mercy by the Sea
December 21, 2020

Yule and Winter Celebration

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Before you begin

Yule, also known as Midwinter and the Winter Solstice, is the longest night of the year. It marks the moment when the days begin to lengthen and the sun's power begins to grow. This is why Yule is celebrated as the birthday of the sun and the renewal of the light. Although it is the longest night, it is also the turning point of the year. Following this night, the sun grows stronger in the sky, and the days become gradually longer once more. Yule is an honoring of the cycles of nature, rebirth and a reaffirmation of the continuation of life. It is a time of peace and a celebration of hope that light will be reborn.

Because many ancient traditions affiliate darkness with sin and evil, how does this affect how we view people of color? With our senses heightened regarding the sin of racism and our white privilege, we must question this affiliation in our faith traditions. Perhaps we are being invited to stress instead the transforming aspect of darkness....and name the gifts of the darkness. Yule is a celebration to help goodness, along with its light and warmth, return. Winter Solstice celebrates new light born out of the womb of winter.

And so, we invite you to..

Create your prayer space

One of the most important symbols is light. This may include candles or other kinds of light. Fill the altar with symbols of winter, such as pinecones, evergreen boughs of fir, cedar, or holly, wreaths, or a yule log for a finishing touch. Use a cloth with the colors of this season.

Darkness is a beautiful gift although it is often equated with sin and evil. The seed in the earth must have darkness in order to grow. We were fashioned and formed in the darkness of our mother's womb. After a day of hard work, it is good to turn off the lights and let the darkness bring sleep to our eyes. Only when it is dark can we see the wondrous night sky with its display of moon, stars and planets. Lovers welcome the darkness as a time to be with the beloved. We honor the fruitful darkness of our lives, the comforting and restful darkness, the nurturing darkness.

Pray with us

Dear Fruitful Ground of our Being,
You turn the sun's face away from us as you gather us into the darkness of winter. You call us inside to the great fires in our hearts.

[Click here to see a short video](#) of the following prayers being read while the sun sets on the beach at Mercy by the Sea.

Dear Darkening Ground of our being,
When the deep loneliness comes, you cradle us in your enriching dark arms. In the darkness you teach us to trust what we cannot see, to hope what seems impossible, to have faith in the night of unknowing.

Dear Darkening Ground of our being,
In the darkness you cover us with beauty: the poetry of the moon and stars, the loveliness of nocturnal creatures who make music in the dark of forest. You send your night angel to close our tired eyes and breathe dreams and visions into our longing hearts.

Dear Darkening Ground of our being,
All of creation finds life in the watery womb of your darkness. The shell of the seed will soon crack open and blessings will rise up out of the darkness.

We continue to pray

O God, in the quiet darkness of this moment we search for the sacred light that shines on in our darkness. Just as we find this light in you, O God, help us understand that deep in the recesses of our souls, light shines. Thank you for all the things that grow in darkness. To find light we must go into the dark. Go with us into all dark places. Take away our fear. Be a lantern for us

that we may be lanterns for one another. (Adapted from *The Circle of Life* by Joyce Rupp & Macrina Wiederkehr).

Light your Yule Fire (candles or lights)

[Click here to view a short video](#) of a fire being lit on the beach at Mercy by the Sea using wood from our property and prayers offered in our chapel.

Listen to: *Leaning Into Darkness* by Velma Frye from CD Take Heart
<https://bit.ly/3gECR33> (Skip the ads—words are below)

*Draw me into the depths
Take me down to the holy darkness, to love's roots
I leaned into the darkness, the darkness that surrounds me
This nurturing room for my restless spirit.
Let me borrow your eyes beloved
Then I shall see in the dark for answers
I do not look, it is enough to wait
To wait in the holy darkness,
This nurturing womb for Love's yearning.
Listening to the sound of silence,
And leaning into the song of darkness, I wait for You.
Waiting with purpose for who I will become,
Waiting without agenda for things I can not change,
I become one with the One I love,*

*For I have seen too many stars,
Too many stars to let the darkness overwhelm me.
I keep vigil:
with my heart's eternal questions, and with my deep longings.
with those places in my being where the light has grown dim.
with those whose hearts are tired, & with those whose hope is lost.
for those who sleep and for those who can not rest.
for those with fearful hearts, and for those whose hearts are angry.
for those whose courage is waning and for those whose strength is growing.
for those who suffer, and for those who keep vigil.*

*I keep vigil. I keep vigil. I keep vigil. I keep vigil,
For I have seen too many stars,
Too many stars to let the darkness overwhelm me.*

Quiet pause—ponder the beauty of this sunset



Reading: Isaiah 58 9b-13, New International Version

“If you do away with the yoke of oppression,
with the pointing finger and malicious talk,
and if you spend yourselves on behalf of the hungry
and satisfy the needs of the oppressed,
then your light will rise in the darkness,
and your night will become like the noonday.
The LORD will guide you always;
he will satisfy your needs in a sun-scorched land
and will strengthen your frame.
You will be like a well-watered garden,
like a spring whose waters never fail.
Your people will rebuild the ancient ruins
and will raise up the age-old foundations;
you will be called Repairer of Broken Walls,
Restorer of Streets with Dwellings.”

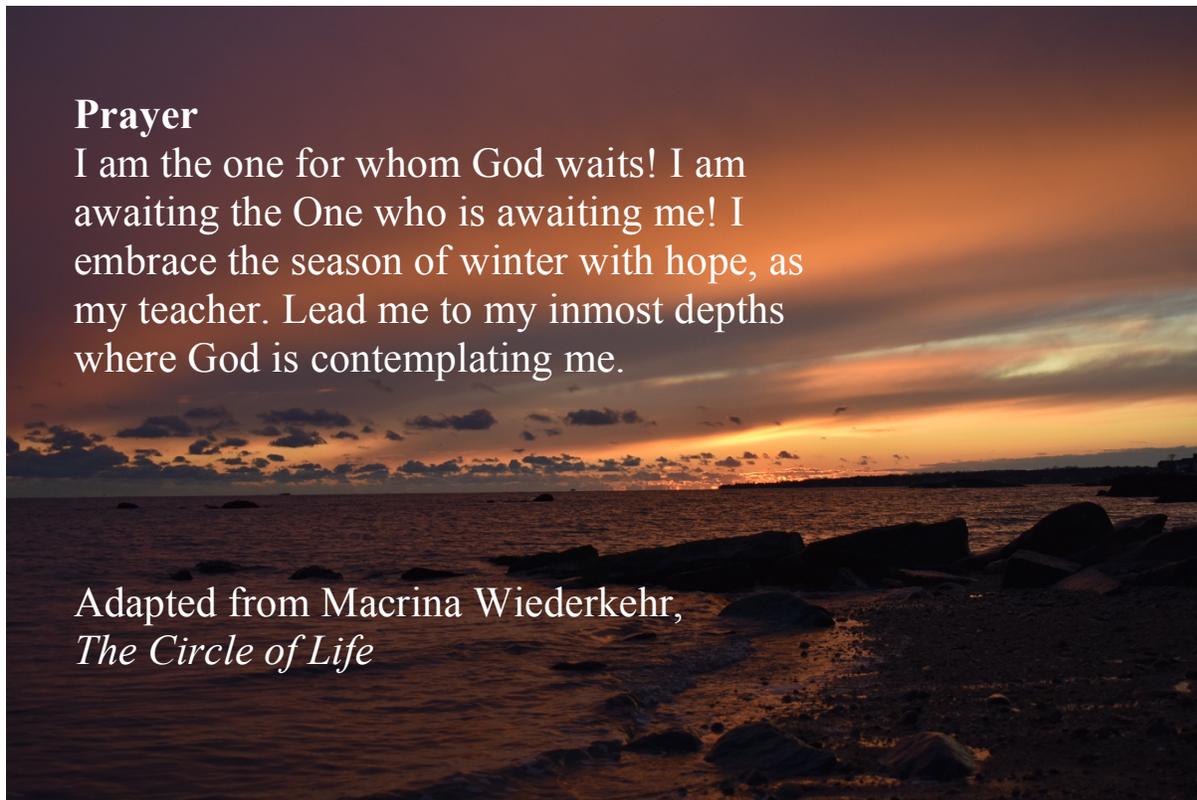
Musical Reflection: *O Come O Come Emmanuel* by Steven Sharp Nelson on Christmas
Cello: <https://bit.ly/3oJTP2R> (Skip the ads)

For your reflection

Extinguish your candles
Sit in darkness for ten minutes.
Listen for the part of you that yearns to grow.
Relight your candles.
Sit in light for ten minutes.
Listen to your inner yearnings.

Plant some seed

As a continuing part of your Yule celebration, plant some seed or bulbs in a pot. If you have a fireplace or compost use it to fertilize a garden area. As you care for them, let your care be reflective of your belief in future growth and life.



Prayer

I am the one for whom God waits! I am awaiting the One who is awaiting me! I embrace the season of winter with hope, as my teacher. Lead me to my inmost depths where God is contemplating me.

Adapted from Macrina Wiederkehr,
The Circle of Life

Celebrate the Return of the Light

Stand and walk three times around your prayer space or the candles, saying: “We’re coming out from the darkness of winter. The light returns! The light returns! *Name your hope for the future* Wonderful Light! Return to our land and to our heart.”

WINTER SOLSTICE BLESSINGS



MAY THE LONGEST NIGHT AND THE SHORTEST DAY,
BRING REST TO YOUR MIND AND SOUL, I PRAY.
MAY YOU FIND GUIDANCE AND MAY YOU FIND PEACE,
AS THE CYCLE OF LIGHT WILL SLOWLY INCREASE.
EMBRACE THE MAGIC THAT THE DARKNESS BEARS,
BREATH DEEP IN THE CHILL AND SHIFT IN THE AIR.
MAY YOU ALWAYS BE BLESSED WITH THE LIGHT FROM WITHIN,
AND MAY WELL-BEING BE YOURS AS THE NEW CYCLE BEGINS.