



The Winter Solstice: The Sacred Traditions of Christmas the Sacred Traditions of Christmas

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Brimming with stories, activities, folklore, and recipes, this popular holiday gift book traces the history behind traditions of the season and provides practical suggestions for celebrating the Winter Solstice as a joyous, life-affirming festival.

The Winter Solstice: The Sacred Traditions of Christmas the Sacred Traditions of Christmas Details

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Meg says

Enjoyed this book very much. Beautifully written, and gorgeous pictures. I loved hearing the history behind different aspects of Christmas traditions (e.g. Father Christmas; the wren). I was a little skeptical about the historical veracity of some of the information here. There's a list of books in the back, but no footnotes, so there's no way to verify information; and sometimes there are dubious extrapolations (along the lines of "Clearly this tree was a fertility symbol..."). Overall, though, I really liked the book. I liked the suggestions for activities, and although initially I wanted this to be a Pagan-specific book, I enjoyed that they explored the meaning of the Solstice for different traditions and how many of these practices could be meaningful for folks of any religious path.

Kimberly says

I've re-read this book every year--at least in part--for the past several years. There's a lot here--mostly European and from Roman times forward, but still including the occasional other times and places, too. Poems, songs, stories, recipes, all within a frame discussing some of the recurring images and figures in winter solstice celebrations in many times and places. Fascinating for any fan of comparative mythology/anthropology/cultural history.

A long section on the 12 Days of Christmas highlights traditions associated with each day, but--like other reviewers--I was bemused by the random inclusion of "snow day" as a filler on one of the days without many historical connections. Also, the writer includes suggestions for meditations or modern ways to celebrate the same traditions; easy to focus on those short sections if you're so inclined; easy to skip if you're not.

I've noticed a few minor errors, and I've seen other reviewers point out others. Sources aren't really cited, which is a shame, because I've seen enough of this elsewhere, also in snatches, to long for a scholarly work on the same general topics. Still, a fun read, and a reminder of how generations of people have marked or celebrated the shortest day of the year and the days around it.

Emily says

This is fascinating history of Christmastime. I've never even heard of most of the traditions surrounding the winter solstice. Some of them seem odd because of my modern-day mentality. Most of them seem heathen, and a few of them supernatural. Not very many deal with the birth of Christ. Many deal with alcohol. :-P If our neighbors found us trying some of the traditions, they'd probably think we'd gone crazy and call the cops. Here are the main things I DID pick up and can apply:

1. The 12 days of Christmas START on Christmas Day, not end.
2. 12th Night is the final of the 12 days of Christmas. I should go back and read Jeff Wheeler's Scourge of Muirwood so I can see all of the cool symbolism from that night.
3. The yummy cake with interesting surprises baked into it would be fun to do, hoping that no one chokes or breaks a tooth.

Amanda says

just the best book on the winter holiday season

Timothy says

Had some interesting history of various winter customs. Seemed to be somewhat scattered in its organization. Nice illustrations. Where it lost me was in the new-age application of some old customs. Or just new-age concepts that are loosely based on ancient practices. For example, it goes through how the 12 days of Christmas were celebrated. One day didn't have a particular celebration tied to it, so the author just decided that you should use that day to honor Snow. And then writes a page or so on honoring snow, in his mind. Contains some promising recipes and a great list of alternative holiday music in the back, including the Christmas Revels and Medieval Baebes. My only disappointment was when it strayed from history into new age suggestions; I was looking more towards true history.

Katee says

I was hoping that this book would be more scholarly than it ultimately was -- certain parts, particularly those concerning the celebration of one aspect of Midwinter or another, seemed geared towards readers with a background or interest in pagan spirituality. I've nothing against that personally, and can appreciate the desire to engage in traditional Solstice customs in a society whose holidays have become significantly disconnected from their roots, but the tone shift from intellectual to spiritual was disconcerting, and I would have skipped all of the shrine-building and meditation-leading sections if I weren't a stickler for completion.

Additionally: the layout of the book doesn't lend itself well to serious sit-down reading, as each chapter is chopped up into a large number of sub-sections that often only span half a page, in column format, with photographs and images scattered throughout. There's little flow from section to section, which makes the book more suited as a coffee table accessory than anything else.

Despite these two (relatively small) complaints, plus the presence of a few typographical errors and silly pop culture references (I'm still cringing at the Koontz reference), I really enjoyed reading *The Winter Solstice*, and can definitely say that it gave me the renewal of holiday spirit and enthusiasm I was looking for. My advice is to read this while listening to some nice brass orchestral arrangements of your favorite holiday carols -- it'll have you hankering for a festival in no time.

Claudia Loureiro says

This book is really a must for the end of the year festivities, regardless of your religion. It not only compares traditions of the celebrations of light from pagan times onwards, but offers explanations of the symbolism of all that we take for granted in what goes to make the season jolly. Recipes, crafts and lots of other great ideas!

The table of contents has:

- 1) The Solstice Dream (this chapter talks to Solstice celebrations and lore across the world and across the ages - from egypt to china to Rome. Poetry and prose from other sources are included.) All chapters end with celebration activities
 - 2) Child of Wonder (this chapter talks to the birth of different gods across the ages - such as apollo, mabon, jesus)
 - 3) The Green Bough (this chapter talks to the symbolism of the tree, the use of evergreens versus cherry tree etc. Green man is also discussed)
 - 4) Old Sir Christmas (this chapter talks to the jolly old elf as well as the Shaman in the Tree and others across the cultures)
 - 5) The Solstice Animals (this is about the slaughter of animals - 'nough said there - go vegetarian!)
 - 6) The 12 days of Christmas
- At the end of the book is a few pages on additional resources/references which is pretty good.
Great book! Most complete I've found and I like how it looks across cultures.
It is more of a scholarly history than a magickal book. I love it!
-

Harrison says

Really attractive, engaging easy-to-read book. The illustrations, especially the medieval illuminations, are exquisite. But wait... where are the sources? Perhaps a bibliography could be furnished upon request, and the publisher felt like most people reading the book wouldn't be interested in one. But personally, I have a difficult time getting through history books when for all I know, the author could be making everything up. The information in this book sounds legitimate, but how should I know? If sources are given, this would definitely be a keepsake book for me.

Christine Whittington says

I have wanted to begin reading this book near Solstice every year since I have had it, and somehow other things have gotten in the way. Thank goodness I finished the dreadful book I was reading in time to dip into this. It's more of a reference book than a cover-to-cover book, but I am already finding traditions that I would love to adopt, such as decorating an outside tree for birds and animals at winter solstice.

This is a wonderful book for anyone of any spiritual persuasion who wants to celebrate the turning of the seasons.

Love it.

Rachel Kopel says

This is the most wonderful book for celebrating the Winter Holidays. It speaks eloquently about the age-old traditions that people have observed during the time of increasing darkness and the return of the light. It is also very interesting to see which of these are echoed in the Christian Festival of Christmas. I get it out each year, put it on the coffee table, and dip into it from now until the end of the year. Beautiful illustrations and the Matthews are excellent writers.

This is back on the shelf for another year. It got put aside this year for the other Christmas season book I was

reading, but will always come out again.

11/09 Back on the coffee table for the winter solstice season. Always a wonderful sign of moving into winter.

Ami says

I read this book during Winter Solstice 2009. It is quite a thorough discussion of the history of the solstice in other times and cultures, and in our own. It gives some interesting information about Christmas and how traditions for that holiday have often evolved from Winter Solstice traditions. There are lots of nice photos too, along with some recipe and activity suggestions. I saw another reviewer write that she uses it as a seasonal coffeetable book, and that sounds like a perfect use for it. I read it all the way through, but I think it would have been more enjoyable to savor a bit at a time.

Aj says

Some great information within but it is more of a coffee table style book which was a bit frustrating to read at times. Lots of information that I did not know but the suggestions for celebrating didn't inspire me at all. I will say that I liked "Saturn and the Dragons of Solstice" tale in the back.

Sarah Evans says

Part of my Christmas book collection, I finally pulled this off the shelf and read it through. Each chapter focuses on a different aspect of solstice celebrations that is common across multiple traditions, in order to explain elements of how we celebrate Christmas today. Though most of the examples come from the United Kingdom, other people's lore is brought in as well. There are suggestions for ceremonies to perform if you wish, but of most value to me was gaining a better understanding of the history and how my ancestors celebrated the turning of the seasons. Enjoyed it enough to track down the author's companion book on the summer solstice.

Gofita says

This time I didn't skim through the chapters; I actually read through the whole thing. He really gives a wonderful and insightful overview of Winter Solstice traditions throughout the many centuries. He gives suggestions on how to plan for one's celebration from Dec. 1 through Epiphany of January 6th. I'm planning on adding a few more traditions to my own family's celebrations. This is an excellent resource.

Min says

Covering cultures around the world yet focusing mostly upon the European roots, and traditions of what is Christmas-tide. A celebration suggestion is offered at the end of each chapter.

A section at the end is dedicated to the 12 Days, stories, traditions, and feasts for each day.

What makes this book special for me is the inclusion of an original rite that can be performed with a group, or used as a personal meditation, written by the author called, The Sun in the Greenwood. Included in the cast is Santa Claus, The Green Man, Mother Carey, and St. Lucy, amongst many others that offer an active way to participate in the stories of these characters introduced in the book's text.

Also, is a Mystery Play by Martin Ludgate named Saturn and the Dragons of the Solstice. A piece for eleven people, yet can be performed with fewer by doubling parts.
