**Winter Solstice
Readings and Prayers***(O Dayspring is the antiphon the Church prays during Evening Prayer on December 21, the longest night of the year)***O come, O Dayspring, come and cheer;
O Sun of justice, now draw near.
Disperse the gloomy clouds of night,
and death’s dark shadows put to flight.
Rejoice! Rejoice! Emmanuel shall come to you, O Israel.**

The Solstice is a time of quietude, of firelight, and dreaming, when seeds germinate in the cold earth, and the cold notes of church bells mingle with the chimes of icicles. Rivers are stilled and the land lies waiting beneath a coverlet of snow. We watch the cold sunlight and the bright stars, maybe go for walks in the quiet land. . . . All around us the season seems to reach a standstill — a point of repose.
(John Matthews, *The Winter Solstice: The Sacred Traditions of Christmas*)

The energies of the winter solstice and those of all the festivals associated with this time of year are connected to humanity’s life of healing, new birth, and creativity… The energies affecting humanity are most appropriate for awakening the Divine Feminine within at this time. And this is reflected most profoundly in Nature, for it is when seeds germinate. (Ted Andrews, *Nature Speak: Signs, Omens and Messages in Nature)*

 **Black Can Be Beautiful**
O God, black can be beautiful!
Let us be aware of black blessings:
Blessed be the black night that nurtures dreams.
Blessed be the black hole out of which creation sprang.
Blessed be the black cave of imagination that births creativity.
Blessed be dark wombs that cradle us.
Blessed be black loam that produces nourishing food for our bodies.
Blessed be black jazz that nourishes our souls.
Blessed be black energy that swirls into gracefulness.
Blessed be black coal that heats us.
Blessed be black boiling clouds hurling down lightning and cleansing rain.
Blessed be even our own darkness, our raw, undeveloped cave of shadows.
O God, help us to befriend black and not deny its power.
Help us not to cover over the dark with fear but to open to it with your grace and to be open to your life within the dark.
May we discover the blessings that lie deep within our holy dark so that we may freely affirm that
Black is beautiful indeed!
(William John Fitzgerald)

**Winter's Cloak**
This year I do not want
the dark to leave me.
I need its wrap
of silent stillness,
its cloak
of long lasting embrace.
Too much light
has pulled me away
from the chamber
of gestation.

Let the dawns
come late,
let the sunsets
arrive early,
let the evenings
extend themselves
while I lean into
the abyss of my being.
Let me lie in the cave
of my soul,
for too much light
blinds me,
steals the source
of revelation.

Let me seek solace
in the empty places
of winter's passage,
those vast dark nights
that never fail to shelter me.
(Joyce Rupp, Macrina Wiederkehr)

**Winter Grace**

It is autumn again and our anxiety blows

With the wind, breaking the heart of the rose.

Petals and leaves fall down and everything goes.

All but the seed, all but the hard bright berry

And the bulbs we kneel on the earth to bury

And lay away with our anguish and our worry.

It is time we learned again the winter grace

To put the nerves to sleep in a dark place

And smooth the lines in the self-tortured face.

For we are at the end of our endurance nearly

And we shall have to die this winter surely,

For this is the end of more than a season clearly.

Now we shall have to be poor, to yield up all,

With the leaves wither, with the petals fall,

Now we shall have to die, once and for all.

Before the seed of faith so deep and still

Pushes up gently through the frozen will

And the joyless wake and learn to be joyful.

Before this buried love leaps up from sorrow

And doubt and violence and pity follow

To greet the radiant morning and the swallow.

May Sarton, from *Collected Poems 1930-1993*

**A Litany for the Winter Solstice**For the return of the sun…
**blessing and praise!**For the gifts we give and receive …
For children everywhere …
For sunsets and starlights ….
For fabulous feast days ….
For evergreens and trees with lights ….
For fire and warmth …
For candles burning brightly ….
For the gift of friendship ….
For animals everywhere ….
For seeds in the dark earth …
For the gifts of winter ….
For the coming of Light …
For things coming to birth …
(please add other lines)

**Blessing for the Longest Night**All throughout these months
as the shadows
have lengthened,
this blessing has been
gathering itself,
making ready,
preparing for
this night.

It has practiced
walking in the dark,
traveling with
its eyes closed,
feeling its way
by memory
by touch
by the pull of the moon
even as it wanes.

So believe me
when I tell you
this blessing will
reach you
even if you
have not light enough
to read it;
it will find you
even though you cannot
see it coming.

You will know
the moment of its
arriving
by your release
of the breath
you have held
so long;
a loosening
of the clenching
in your hands,
of the clutch
around your heart;
a thinning
of the darkness
that had drawn itself
around you.

This blessing
does not mean
to take the night away
but it knows
its hidden roads,
knows the resting spots
along the path,
knows what it means
to travel
in the company
of a friend.

So when
this blessing comes,
take its hand.
Get up.
Set out on the road
you cannot see.

This is the night
when you can trust
that any direction
you go,
you will be walking
toward the dawn.

—Jan Richardson

*all sing:***Rejoice, rejoice, believers, and let your lights appear;
the evening is advancing and darker night is near.
The bridegroom is arising and soon is drawing nigh.
Up, pray and watch and wrestle; at midnight come the cry.

Our hope and expectation, O Jesus, now appear;
arise, O Sun so longed for, o’er this benighted sphere,
With hearts and hands uplifted, we plead, O Lord to see,
the day of earth’s redemption that sets your people free.**

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**A Winter Solstice Prayer**
The dark shadow of space leans over us. . . . .
We are mindful that the darkness of greed, exploitation, and hatred
also lengthens its shadow over our small planet Earth.
As our ancestors feared death and evil and all the dark powers of winter,
we fear that the darkness of war, discrimination, and selfishness
may doom us and our planet to an eternal winter.

May we find hope in the lights we have kindled on this sacred night,
hope in one another and in all who form the web-work of peace and justice
that spans the world.

In the heart of every person on this Earth
burns the spark of luminous goodness;
in no heart is there total darkness.
May we who have celebrated this winter solstice,
by our lives and service, by our prayers and love,
call forth from one another the light and the love
that is hidden in every heart.
Amen.
(Ed Hays)