

The Winter Sabbat

By

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Introduction

What is the real meaning of Christmas? Have you ever wondered what Yule Logs, Fir Trees, Holly, Ivy and Mistletoe have to do with the supposed birth of a boy in the sun-baked Near East? Underneath the Christian layers there is a Pagan secret. Whatismore, it is a secret that Christianity has conspired for centuries to keep you from knowing.

In *The Winter Sabbat* we will discover what this sacred day is all about, how it has been celebrated and how to celebrate it now with special spells, rituals and magical recipes. And we will learn the forbidden truth about Christmas.

L.P. Ruickbie
Blücherstrasse
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The Real Meaning of Christmas

The Facts Christians Would Rather You Did Not Know

We set our clocks by it, we celebrated a Millennium because of it, but the shocking truth is it did not happen. The birth of a boy under remarkable circumstances to humble parents in a stable in Bethlehem did not happen on the 25th December, 1 A.D.



Instead, it was 753 *ab urbe condita*, 'from the foundation of the city' of Rome, and the great annual festival of Saturn, the Saturnalia, had just come to an end. In the Roman territory of Palestine the Jews had celebrated Hanukkah, the anniversary of the recapture of the Temple in Jerusalem, and around the world, from Northern Europe to North America, pagans marked the winter solstice, the longest night of the year, with rituals

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and festivities. Nobody could remember when Jesus was born.

It would be more than three hundred years after the supposed birth of Christ that his followers would decide on December the 25th as his birthday. All the evidence from the Bible was against them, however. Reference in Luke (2:8) to the shepherds tending their flocks would not suggest winter and even the Middle East experiences an inclement winter. Shepherds would bring their flocks under cover by the first rains in October or early November and take

them back out to pasture in Spring when the weather improved. So, unless, the weather was somewhat unusual that year, it would seem unlikely, going by the only evidence we have, that Jesus was born on the 25th of December, or even any time between November and March.

The Day the Sun Stood Still

The winter solstice falls on the 22nd of December and is so-called from the Latin *sol*, sun, *sistit*, stands, because at this day of the year the sun reaches the

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southern extreme in the ecliptic, the imaginary line through the Zodiac caused by the earth's revolution about the sun, and literally seems to stand still before appearing to turn back in its, really the earth's, course.

Dies Natalis Solis Invicti

In theological terms this astronomical phenomenon was interpreted as the re-birth of the solar god. In the fourth century of what we now call *Anno Domini*, thanks to a sixth century monk, the main

religious competition against the struggling cult of Christ was the highly successful cult of Mithras, the god of light, chief deity and ruler of the universe of the ancient Persians, who had been taken up by the Roman legions and carried round the empire. Amongst many other similarities with the Jesus story, the miraculous birth, for instance, Mithras was also believed to be (re-) born on the 25th of December, which was known as *dies natalis solis invicti*, the day of birth of the invincible sun.

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Drawing upon the particular resonances and associations of this time of year and this date the early church fathers officially fixed Jesus' birth as the 25th of December, three hundred and thirty-six years after the alleged event. "The Church arbitrarily chose this December date," says Dr. Charles Odahl, professor of ancient and mediaeval history at Boise State University, "so that Christ, the 'real light of the world' and 'sun of righteousness' according to the Bible, could displace the sun god Sol as the object of special veneration during a winter festival."

The Emperor Constantine's conversion to Christianity boosted the popularity of this hitherto persecuted cult and was undeniably instrumental in its survival and ultimate success. However, the enduring imagery of the festival is forever pagan, from the top of the Christmas tree to the presents at its base, the Druids' mistletoe and the Romans' holly over the fireplace, with a Yule log burning in the grate.

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The Wheel of Yule

Yule, from the Icelandic *jol* via Old English *geol*, is the winter solstice festival of our Nordic ancestors. The word's root meaning is of a wheel, a symbol of the sun and the cyclical nature of the year. It marked a holiday of thirteen nights during which time the goddess Freya would be honoured with the sacrifice of one of her sacred animals, the boar, and food would be left out for Odin, who as the leader of the Wild Hunt would traverse the countryside bestowing

favours on those who honoured him best and as Jolnir, was Lord of the Yule. Santa Claus, with his reindeer and elven train are clearly a pagan survival and St Nicholas only a thin Christian disguise. The Yule log is a cross between sympathetic magic and ritual: a great log is placed on the hearth and lit with a brand from the previous year's log symbolising the return of the sun and ensuring good luck for the household. The same symbolism was conveyed by bringing of evergreen plants into the house, tied in wreaths or as decorated trees.

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Sacred Evergreen



The mistletoe was sacred to both the Celtic and Nordic peoples of ancient Europe. Amongst the Celts it was harvested by the Druids for use in fertility rites and amongst the Norse it was sacred to Thor. Pale imitation of the Druids' rites is still preserved in the custom of kissing under the mistletoe. Holly and ivy protected the house from evil spirits and with their unseasonal greenness symbolised that life in death aspect so precious on

the longest night of the year. The pagan Romans exchanged gifts at this time, long before the Magi handed over their gold, frankincense and myrrh.

And, of course, there is also the inevitable excessive consumption of food and drink. It would seem that little has changed since Seneca the Younger's day, circa 50 CE:

It is now the month of December, when the greatest part of the city is in a bustle. Loose reins are given to public dissipation; everywhere you may hear the sound of great preparations, as if there were some real difference between the days devoted to Saturn and those for transacting business... Were you here, I would willingly confer with you as to the plan of our conduct;

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whether we should eve in our usual way, or, to avoid singularity, both take a better supper and throw off the toga.

- Seneca the Younger, *Epistolae*

These obviously pagan elements sit uncomfortably with Christianity. In the seventeenth century the Puritans tried, unsuccessfully, to ban Christmas and even today the feeling is just as strong.

The Abominable Santa Claus

One Christian website rants against the 'abominable' Santa Claus: "Far from adding to the 'joy of

Christmas,' the Santa Claus legends actually turn away souls from Jesus Christ, risking for them an eternity in Hell!!," says Greg Makeham, an Australian Charismatic Revivalist, adding that, "No true Christian should ever involve themselves in this abominational legend of Santa Claus nomatter [sic] how good it may seem for the children at the time!! God says, 'There is a way that seemeth right to a man, but the end thereof are the ways of DEATH!!'" Makeham, who does not put up decorations or attend a Christmas service, concludes that, "Worshipping Christ through honoring His birthday

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on a day which is NOT His birthday, borrowing many Pagan customs in the process, is NOT worshipping Him 'in Spirit and in Truth'" (John, 4:24).

The Real Meaning

So, as you sit down to your Christmas dinner, having left a mince pie out for Santa and his elves, and given each other gifts, perhaps even kissed under the mistletoe, reflect upon the real meaning of Christmas: the return of the pagan sun.

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Winter Sabbat Magic

The Pear Tree Divination Spell

It is said that if a girl goes out on the evening of the 24th of December and walks backwards to a pear tree and then backwards round it nine times she will see a vision of her future husband.

The Hen House Divination Spell

Go to a hen house and rap sharply on the roof. If a hen cackles inside you will not marry in the coming year, but if the cockerel replies, then you will wed.

The Sage Leaf Divination Spell

Pick twelve sage leaves and throw them to the wind. A shadowy image of the one you will marry is said to then appear.

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The True Love Spell

Pick a rose on Midsummer's Day and put it somewhere safe until the Winter Solstice. If on this day the rose is found to still be fresh, then the love between the one who plucked the flower and her intended will be true and flourish.

Christmas Pudding Wishing Spell

Stirring the Christmas Pudding confers good luck on all who take part. But take care to stir the mixture in the direction of the sun (i.e., clockwise). Everyone who stirs the pudding is allowed to make one wish.

Mince Pie Magic

Each mince pie that you eat is said to presage a month's good fortune, but you should only eat one pie on each of the twelve days of Christmas. If you eat more than one, then the effect is cancelled out. In the South of England they say that for the very best good luck you should eat each mince pie in a different house.

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Protection Against Evil Spirits

Put holly and mistletoe around the house. Of especial importance are thresholds and fireplaces, so always hang a sprig of holly over your doorway. But be warned, it is bad luck to keep these guardian plants beyond Twelfth Night (the 6th of January, which was the date of Old Christmas Day). Carefully burn all your holly and mistletoe, or, it is believed, a death will occur in your family.

At midnight on Christmas Day open all your doors to let out any evil spirits that might be lurking in dark corners.

The First Foot

An ancient custom holds that a dark-haired man must be the first to enter the home on Christmas morning to ensure luck and good fortune. However, if by mischance a woman should be the first to cross the threshold, then disaster will follow.

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Reading the Winter Omens

Omens of Good Harvest

Light Christmas

Light Wheatsheaf

Dark Christmas

Heavy Wheatsheaf

This rhyme from Huntingdonshire means that if the sun shines on Christmas Day, then the harvest will

be a poor one, and conversely if it does not, then it will be a good harvest.

Omens of Death

Snow Fall Omen. A white Christmas is an omen of fewer deaths in the coming year. Conversely, an absence of snow indicates more deaths.

Fire Shadow Omen. The shadows thrown by fire-light are also omens of life and death. If anyone casts a shadow that appears to be without a head it is an omen of their imminent death.

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The Wiccan Winter Solstice Sabbat

Introduction

The following ritual is taken from Gerald Gardner's original Book of Shadows. It is a revised form of the original published in 1951 and it dates from circa 1957. It was not included in the original four-fold Sabbat structure that Gardner first used circa 1949 as recorded in his Book of Shadows prototype, 'Ye Bok of ye Art Magical.' The solar celebrations of

Solstice and Equinox did not form part of Gardner's original schema. It is now, however, an essential component of the eight-fold Sabbat structure observed almost universally amongst modern neo-Pagans.

It should be noted that where the instructions call for purification, that scourging was the method employed by Gardner's coven. Most derivative groups have since abandoned this practice, although more for reasons of taste than effectiveness.

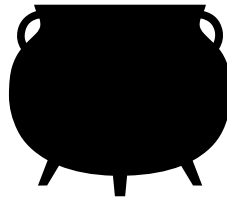
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“The Winter Solstice, Dec. 22nd”

Form the circle in the usual manner.

Invoke the Mighty Ones.

Place the Cauldron of Cerridwen at the south, wreath it in holly, ivy and mistletoe. Kindle a fire within.



Light altar candles and candles at the points of the circle. Extinguish all other lights.

All are purified.

The Moon is drawn down.

The High Priestess stands behind the cauldron in the pentacle position, symbolising the re-birth of the

sun. The coven stands round the circle, arranged alternately, man and woman. The Magus faces the High Priestess. He holds a bundle of unlit torches, or candles in one hand, the book of incantations in the other. An officer of the coven stands by his side with a candle to illuminate the book.

The coven walks sun-wise round the circle. As each one passes, the Magus lights a torch or candle from the cauldron fire and hands it to him. When all have a lighted torch they dance slowly round the circle. The Magus reads the invocation.

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Winter Sabbat Invocation

Queen of the Moon, Queen of the Sun

Queen of the Heavens, Queen of the Stars.

Queen of the Waters, Queen of the Earth.

Who ordained to us the child of promise:

It is the Great Mother who gives birth to him,

He is the Lord of Life who is born again,

Darkness and tears are set behind,

And the star of guidance comes up early.

Golden sun of hill and mountain

Illumine the land, illumine the world

Illumine the seas, illumine the rivers,

Grief be laid and joy be raised.

Blessed be the Great Mother

Without beginning, without ending,

To everlasting, to eternity,

I O Evohe, Blessed be.

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The dancers take up the refrain of “I O Evohe, Blessed be.” The High Priestess joins the dancers and quickens the pace. The dancers in couples leap over the cauldron. Whichever couple leaps over it as it goes out are thrice purified and must pay the High Priestess’ forfeit [of her own devising]. The fire should be re-lighted.

Before the closing of the circle it is usual for the coven to celebrate the ceremony of the Cakes and Wine, a communal feasting with ritual blessing and religious overtones.

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Dianic Witchcraft Winter Ritual

Ritual for Coven or Small Group

The directions call for at least four people: High Priest, High Priestess, Priestess and Covener.

High Priestess: This is the night of the solstice, the longest night of the year. Now darkness triumphs; and yet, gives way and changes into light. The breath of nature is suspended: all

waits while within the Cauldron, the Dark King is transformed into the Infant Light. We watch for the coming of dawn, when the Great Mother again gives birth to the Divine Child Sun, who is the bringer of hope and the promise of summer. This is the stillness behind motion, when time itself stops; the centre is also the circumference of all. We are awake in the night. We turn the Wheel to bring the light. We call the sun from the womb of night. Blessed Be!

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Purify, cast the circle, but do not light the candles.

Invoke the Goddess and God. All sit down, and begin an antiphonal chant.

All: To die and be reborn,
The Wheel is turning,
What must you lose to the night?
[repeat]

Covener: Fear.

All: Fear is lost to the night.

Fear is lost to the night.

To die and be reborn,

The Wheel is turning,

What must you lose to the night?

Continue interjecting lines and echoing each other, until the energy dies away. Stand up and link hands. The High Priest stands before the altar, holding an animal skull filled with salt. The High Priestess leads a slow, spiral procession that first snakes outward so that each member is brought to face the High Priest. Everyone chants.

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All: The light was born,
And the light has died.
[repeat]

A Priestess [whisper]: Everything passes,
All fades away.
[repeat]

The High Priest places a pinch of salt on each member's tongue, and says:

My body is salt,
Taste the breath of death.

The High Priestess leads the spiral inward, until the members are huddled together. She leads an improvised trance induction, slowly suggesting that they crumble to the Earth and sleep. As all lie down, they are sent into a deeper trance with a multi-voiced induction. As it fades out, they are told,

You are entering a space of perfect freedom.

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Time is allowed for trance in the state of suspension before birth.

The High Priestess approaches one of the coveners, stands by her head with her legs apart, and pulls her through, symbolically giving her birth. She becomes part of the birth canal; they continue the process with the other coveners, the birth canal growing longer. The men of the coven take the new-borns one by one and lay them back down to sleep, telling them:

Sleep the sleep of the new-born.

As all sink back into trance, they are guided into a visualisation of their hopes for their new life to come. Priestess smear honey on their tongues, one by one, saying:

Taste the sweetness of life.

A new chant begins softly, builds in power as it gradually wakes the sleepers, who join in on repeating lines:

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Set sail, set sail,
Follow the twilight to the West,
Where you may rest.

Set sail, set sail,
Turn your face where the sun grows dim,
Beyond the rim, beyond the rim.

Set sail, set sail,
One thing becomes another,
In the Mother, in the Mother.

Set sail, set sail,
Make of your heart a burning fire,
Build it higher, Build it higher.

Set sail, set sail,
Pass in an instant through the open gate,
It will not wait, it will not wait.

Set sail, set sail,
Over the dark of the sunless sea,
You are free, you are free.

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Set sail, set sail,
Guiding the ship of the rising sun,
You are the one, you are the one.

Set sail, set sail,
Into the raging wind and storm,
To be reborn, to be reborn.

Set sail, set sail,
Over the waves where the spray blows white,
To bring the light, to bring the light.

All: We are awake in the night!
We turn the Wheel, to bring the light!
We call the sun from the womb of night!”

High Priestess: He sets his face to the West, but in
the East arises!

All: Who is he?

HPs: He who goes down in darkness.

All: Who is he?

HPs: He who sails.

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All: Who is he?

HPs: The Renewer.

All: Who is he?

HPs: He who brings the golden fruit.

All: Who is he?

HPs: He who is without stain.

All: Who is he?

HPs: He whose hands are open.

All: Who is he?

HPs: He whose eyes are bright?

All: Who is he?

HPs: He whose face is shining

All: Who is he?

HPs: The Hope of the Morning.

All: Who is that?

HPs: He who passes the gate.

All: Who is he?

HPs: He who returns in light?

All: Who is he?

HPs: A glow between twin pillars.

All: Who is he?

HPs: A cry between thighs.

All: Io! Evohe! Io! Evohe!

High Priestess: [leading, repeated by all]

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Queen of the sun!

Queen of the Moon!

Queen of the horns!

Queen of the fires!

Bring to us the Child of Promise!

It is the Great Mother

Who gives birth to Him,

It is the Lord of Life,

Who is born again!

Darkness and tears

Are set aside,

When the sun comes up again!

THE CHILD OF
PROMISE

Golden sun,

Of hill and field,

Light the earth!

Light the skies!

Light the waters!

Light the fires!

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All: Io! Evohe! Io! Evohe!”

WINTERBORN KING

The High Priest lights the fire and candles. All begin chanting.

All: I who have died am alive again today,
And this is the sun’s birthday!
[repeat]

This is the birthday of life and love and wings,
And the great, joyous, illimitable earth.

We are born again, we shall live again!
[repeat]

The Sun Child, the Winterborn King!

Build a Power Chant, focused on re-awakening life. Share feasting and friendship, ideally until dawn. Before the end of the ritual, and especially as the sun rises, the High Priestess says:

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The Dark God has passed the Gate,
He has been reborn through the Mother,
With Him we are each reborn!

All: The tide has turned!
The light will come again!
In a new dawn, in a new day,
The sun is rising!

Io! Evohe! Blessed Be!

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Winter Sabbat Recipes

The Wassail Cup

Serves 8 approximately.

Ingredients

3 red apples

3 oz brown sugar

2 pints brown ale, apple cider, or hard cider

½ pint dry sherry or dry white wine

¼ tsp cinnamon

¼ teaspoon ginger

strips of lemon peel

Directions

Core and heat apples with brown sugar and some of the ale or cider in an oven for 30 minutes. Put in large pan and add rest of spices and lemon peel, simmer on stove top of 5 minutes. Add most of the alcohol at the last minute so it heats up but does not evaporate. Burgundy and brandy can be substituted to the ale and sherry. White sugar and halved oranges may also be added to taste.

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Traditional Plum Pudding

Ingredients

¼ lb. flour

¼ lb. currants

1 tsp. salt

¼ lb. sultanas

1 tsp. allspice

2 cooking apples, peeled, cored and chopped

1 tsp. ginger

1 ounce mixed citrus peel

1 tsp. cinnamon

2 oz. shredded almonds

A pinch freshly grated nutmeg

Juice and grated rind of 1 orange and 1 lemon

¼ lb. fresh breadcrumbs

¼ lb. molasses (treacle)

½ lb. shredded suet

4 large eggs

¼ lb. brown sugar

2 tbsp. brandy

¼ lb. dried chopped apricots

¼ lb. prunes

¼ lb. dates

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Directions

Sift the flour, salt and spices into a large bowl. Stir in the breadcrumbs, suet and sugar. Add the fruit, peel and rind. Beat lemon and orange juice, molasses and eggs together and add to other ingredients. Steam for 6 hours—a coffee tin filled with the mixture and placed in a steamer in a covered pan does well. A dash of vinegar and lemon juice in the water will prevent the pan from discolouring. After steaming, cover and leave in a cool place to mature. The maturation process should be given 5-6 weeks. To serve, re-steam for another

3 hours. Finally, remove from the tin, liberally douse with warmed brandy and set ablaze.

Winter Sabbat Essentials

Greenery

Evergreen plants symbolise the promise of life to come even in the dark of mid-winter.

Mistletoe

Mistletoe is believed to hold the life of the host tree when the tree itself appears to die during the winter season.

Holly

Its name comes from the word 'holy,' Holly is a traditional Yuletide decoration. You must pick it before Christmas Eve or else you will be open to the evil intentions of an enemy in this world, or the one beyond. The prickly leaves are male and are lucky for men, whilst the smooth leaves are female and lucky for women. Make sure you have both types in your decorations.

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Ivy

Ivy is associated with the Roman god Bacchus. It brings good luck.

Carols

The Wassail Carols date back to the Viking invasions of England, circa 700 CE, when the greeting was *Ves heill*. By Anglo-Saxon times, the greeting had evolved into *Waes thu hal*, meaning “be whole” or “good health.” The response was “drink hail,” meaning “I drink and good luck be to you.” People would go from house to house in the

village bringing good wishes and carrying an empty bowl. The master of the house being wassailed was expected to fill the bowl with a hot, spicy ale and pass it round the carollers

Feasting

Midwinter is traditionally a time for feasting. The prominence of the turkey dates to the 1900’s. Formerly boar, geese, capons, swans, and pheasants were much more common. Mince pies were originally made with meat, but with the coming of

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spices to England during the Crusades, they evolved into their current form.

Many Witches use plum pudding as the dish for the cakes and wine ceremony during the Winter Solstice rite. Served in flaming brandy it is particularly effective.

The Rune of Months (Traditional)

January By this fire I warm my hands

February And with my spade I delve my lands

March Here I set my seeds to spring

April And here I hear the birds to sing

May I am as light as bird in the treetop

June And I take pains to weed my crop

July With my scythe my mead I mow

August And here I shear my corn full low

September With my flail I earn my bread

October And here I sow my wheat so red

November At Martinmas I kill my swine

December And at Yule I drink red wine

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