



At 18.35 hours on 21st December 2005 the sun reaches its maximum negative declination of $-23^{\circ} 26' 27''$ as it enters the zodiacal sign of Capricorn.



Winter Solstice Celebration Wednesday 21st December 2005



*Again did the earth shift
Again did the nights grow short
And the days long
And the people of the earth were glad
and celebrated each in their own ways*

Diane Lee Moomey

It is our quiet time. We do not speak because the voices are within us.
It is our quiet time. We do not walk, because the earth is all within us.
It is our quiet time. We do not dance, because the music has lifted us to a place
where the spirit is. It is our quiet time.
We rest with all of nature.

Nancy Wood.

Personal Meditation

Friends! Let us be mindful here of the presence of God.
Since we have neither bread, nor wine, nor altar, we will raise ourselves
beyond these symbols, up to the pure majesty of the real itself. We, your
people will make the whole earth our altar and we will climb up in spirit to
the high places, bearing with us the hopes and labours of our mother, the
earth.

There is communion with God, and a communion with earth, and there is
a communion with God through earth.

Pierre Teilhard de Chardin

Why Are We Here?

The winter solstice is the solar new year. The axis of the earth's rotation is
inclined away from the sun giving short days and long nights and generally
colder weather. This year the actual moment of the solstice is at 6.35 this
evening, when the sun enters the sign of Capricorn, hence the choice of the
picture on the back page.

Each generation and almost every culture celebrates the turning point
of the Earth's orbit, commonly involving the image of rebirth. The massive
burial chambers of Maeshowe on Orkney and New Grange in Ireland,
two of the oldest built structures in the British Isles, have entrance
tunnels aligned to sunrise at the winter solstice. The birth of Jesus was
long for-shadowed, in ancient Egypt by the birth of Horus by the virgin
Goddess Isis, and in ancient Greece by the violent death and rebirth of
the year God Dionysus.

So as we continue our own celebration, let us remember all those
who have marked this special time in their ways, their times and their
places.

Celebration of the Directions *Turn to look outwards and say together.*

Hear me, four quarters of the world – a relative I am! Give me the eyes to
see and the strength to walk the soft earth, a relative to all that is!

Black Elk

Say together. All our relations!

But we have only begun to love the earth.
We have only begun to imagine the fulness of life.
How could we tire of hope?
-so much is in the bud.
How can desire fail?
-we have only begun to imagine justice and mercy
only begun to envision how it might be
to live as siblings with beast and flower,
not as oppressors.
Surely our river cannot already be hastening
into the sea of non-being?

Surely it cannot drag, in the silt, all that is innocent?
Not yet, not yet - there is too much broken
that must be mended,
too much hurt we have done to each other
that cannot yet be forgiven.
I have only begun to know
the power that is in us if we would join
our solitudes in the communion of struggle.
So much is unfolding that must complete its gesture,
so much is in bud.

Denise Levertov.

Say Together

Spirit of the solstice, on this day of briefest light, help us to be at home with the
treasures of the dark. As the days have drawn in, help us to flow with the ebb tides of
life. At the turning of the year, help us to welcome the renewal of the light.

Good people,
Most royal greening verdancy,
Rooted in the sun,
You shine with radiant light.
In this circle of earthly existence
You shine so finely,
It surpasses understanding.
God hugs you.
You are encircled by the arms
of the mystery of God.

Hildegard of Bingen

Poem: Starlings in Winter

Chunky and noisy,
but with stars in their black feathers,
they spring from the telephone wire
and instantly,

they are acrobats
in the freezing wind.
And now, in the theater of air,
they swing over buildings,

dipping and rising;
they float like one stippled star
that opens,
becomes for a moment fragmented,

then closes again;
and you watch
and you try
but you simply can't imagine

how they do it
with no articulated instruction, no pause,
only the silent confirmation
that they are this notable thing,

this wheel of many parts, that can rise and spin
over and over again,
full of gorgeous life.

Ah, world, what lessons you prepare for us,

even in the leafless winter,
even in the ashy city.
I am thinking now
of grief, and of getting past it;

I feel my boots trying
to leave the ground,
I feel my heart
pumping hard. I want

to think again of dangerous and noble things.
I want to be light and frolicsome.
I want to be improbably beautiful and afraid of nothing,
as though I had wings.

Mary Oliver

Turn to the respective direction:

We look to the East, place of beginnings and of hope
– and give our thanks.

We look to the South, place of warmth and connectedness
– and give our thanks.

We look to the West, place of the heart and of intuition
– and give our thanks.

We look to the North, place of being and of wisdom
– and give our thanks.

We look down to the earth, place of life and human compassion
– and give our thanks.

We look up to the sky, place of clean air and freedom
– and give our thanks.

Sing

To every thing - turn - turn - turn
There is a season - turn - turn - turn
And a time for every purpose under heaven....

Say

A time to be born, and a time to die
A time to plant, and a time to reap
A time to kill, and a time to heal
A time to laugh, and a time to weep

Sing

To every thing - turn - turn - turn
There is a season - turn - turn - turn
And a time for every purpose under heaven....

Say

A time to build up, and a time to break down
A time to dance, and a time to mourn
A time to cast away stones,
And a time to gather stones together

Sing

To every thing - turn - turn - turn
There is a season - turn - turn - turn
And a time for every purpose under heaven....

Say

A time of love, and a time of hate
A time of war, and a time of peace
A time you may embrace
And a time to refrain from embracing

Sing

To every thing - turn - turn - turn
 There is a season - turn - turn - turn
 And a time for every purpose under heaven....

Say

A time to gain, and a time to loose
 A time to rend, and a time to sew
 A time of love, and a time of hate
 A time of peace, I swear it's not too late.

Sing

To every thing - turn - turn - turn
 There is a season - turn - turn - turn
 And a time for every purpose under heaven
 To every thing - turn - turn - turn
 There is a season - turn - turn - turn
 And a time for every purpose under heaven.

Ecclesiastes 3:1-8, adapted by Pete Seeger

Poems

For Winter came; the wind was his whip;
 One choppy finger was on his lip;
 He had torn the cataracts from the hills
 And they clanked at his girdle like manacles;

 His breath was a chain which without a sound
 The earth, and the air, and the water bound;
 He came, fiercely driven, in his chariot-throne,
 By the ten-fold blasts of the Arctic zone.

Percy Bysshe Shelley

Though nothing can bring back the hour
 Of splendour in the grass, of glory in the flower;
 We will grieve not, rather find
 Strength in what remains behind;
 In the primal sympathy
 Which having been must ever be;
 In the soothing thoughts that spring
 Out of human suffering;
 In the faith that looks through death,
 In years that bring the philosophic mind.
 The Clouds that gather round the setting sun
 Do take a sober colouring from an eye
 That hath kept watch o'er man's mortality;

Another race hath been, and other palms are won.
 Thanks to the human heart by which we live,
 Thanks to its tenderness, its joys, and fears,
 To me the meanest flower that blows can give
 Thoughts that do often lie too deep for tears

William Wordsworth

Story From *A Pilgrim at Tinker Creek* by Annie Dillard

At dusk every evening an extended flock of starlings appears out of the northern sky and winds towards the setting sun. It is the winter day's major event. Late yesterday, I climbed across the creek, through the steers' pasture, beyond the grassy island where I had seen the giant water bug sip a frog, and up a high hill.

On my right a woods thickly overgrown with creeper descended the hill's slope to Tinker Creek. On my left was a planting of large shade trees on the ridge of the hill. Before me the grassy hill pitched abruptly and gave way to a large, level field fringed in trees where it bordered the creek.

Out of the dimming sky a speck appeared, then another, and another. It was the starlings going to roost. They gathered deep in the distance, flock sifting into flock, and strayed towards me, transparent and whirling, like smoke. They seemed to unravel as they flew, lengthening in curves, like a loosened skein. I didn't move; they flew directly over my head for half an hour. The flight extended like a fluttering banner, an unfurled oriflamme, in either direction as far as I could see. Each individual bird bobbed and knitted up and down in the flight at apparent random, for no known reason except that that's how starlings fly, yet all remained perfectly spaced. The flocks each tapered at either end from a rounded middle, like an eye. Over my head I heard a sound of beaten air, like a million shook rugs, a muffled whuff. Into the woods they sifted without shifting a twig, right through the crowns of trees, intricate and rushing, like wind.

After half an hour, the last of the stragglers had vanished into the trees. I stood with difficulty, bashed by the unexpectedness of this beauty, and my spread lungs roared. My eyes pricked from the effort of trying to trace a feathered dot's passage through a weft of limbs. Could tiny birds be sifting through me right now, birds wing-ing through the gaps between my cells, touching nothing, but quickening in my tissues?