

## **MIDWINTER SOLSTICE**

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Our cosy heaters and pot belly stoves make modern life pleasant and comfortable. Not so for our ancestors, who prepared for the coming of winter long in advance, knowing the challenges of finding food and keeping warm. For them, the midwinter solstice was a vital turning point in the seasonal calendar, marking the longest night of the year. From midwinter to the summer solstice in December, the nights would grow shorter and the days longer. Many of the customs associated with the winter solstice (and with other midwinter festivals such as St Lucy's Day, Saturnalia, Hanukkah, New Year and Twelfth Night) originate from stories of a fierce battle between the dark and the light, where the light finally conquers the darkness. Other traditions record this as the time that a saviour or sun-child is born to a virgin mother.

In Australia, our winter solstice is marked by the passage of the sun into Cancer on the 21st June. If you note the point at which the sun rises from the 21st-23rd June, you will see that it is in exactly the same place over these three days. Solstice means "sun standing still". The weekend of the solstice (19<sup>th</sup>-21st) is the perfect time for a ritual to cleanse and release old energy and honour winter, the season of death and decay. The desire to slow down and go within is further intensified by the solstice falling during the darkest phase of the lunar cycle - less than two days before the new moon. And as the sun rises on the shortest day of

the year, mighty Pluto, ruler of the underworld and collective unconscious, sets on the eastern horizon taking us down into the depths of existence.

## ***WINTER SOLSTICE RITUAL***



Decorate a room with winter greenery. Place a large bowl of water and a lighted candle in the centre of the room. Have some golden glitter and scented oil nearby and a candle for each person. Sit in a circle with a lighted candle in front of you and talk about what you wish to release at this dark time of the year, blowing out your candle once you have finished speaking. Once everyone has had their turn, blow out the central candle and sit in the darkness reflecting on what you are leaving behind. After a long silence, relight the central candle, which represents the sun, and sprinkle golden glitter on the water. Then each of you light a candle from the central candle and place it by the water so you can watch the glitter sparkling. Pass around a glass of wine and offer a toast to the sun, the bringer of new light. Then go round the circle again, each of you talking about a dream for the future or a new attitude you wish to embrace. Finally sprinkle scented oil on the water and choose someone to anoint each person with sunshine by dipping their hand into the sparkling, scented water and sprinkling it over each person's hair. Hold hands and offer thanks.