



Exquisite Darkness: A Winter Solstice Meditation

Adapted from original *Exquisite Darkness: A Winter Solstice Liturgy*

Leader Instructions:

This guided meditation is offered to be led via Zoom or other virtual gathering. You may suggest participants bring a small votive candle to light or turn on; paper and pencils on which to write their own promises of rest and renewal—and marshmallows, just for fun—the Holy in the everyday!

The Winter Solstice marks the longest night of the calendar year. This meditation invites you individually or in small household group, into a time of rest and reflection that counters the frenetic pace of the secular Christmas season. It encourages us to experience the creative, natural cycle of light and darkness put forth to us as Christians in the Genesis creation stories.

If you are guiding others through the meditation you may want to use a small bell or chime to indicate times of silent reflection.

Leader: Invite participants into the meditation, explain you will use a bell to signify time for silent reflection. Read the following:

Sit comfortably with your feet on the floor, close your eyes if you are comfortable and begin by taking slow deep breaths to center your thoughts, pay attention to your breathing, in... and out slowly.

Begin by visualizing you are outside in the dark, around a fire; there is a path lit with luminaries; a compost pile sits next to the garden empty of its harvest, resting.

To experience light, the transformative nature of exquisite darkness and to invoke images of the fire of the Easter Vigil, imagine you are outside your personal sanctuary, or sacred space with a fire pit and roasting of marshmallows. The roasting of marshmallows symbolizes a transformation happening in front of your eyes—the fire taking the marshmallow from one state to another.

Leader (Read the meditation slowly) Allow pauses between sentences when it seems appropriate.

Listen to these words as you gather around the imaginary fire:

For millennia, people have held festivities at this time of year to celebrate the end of the dark time and a return to the light. This reliable movement of the sun gave ancient peoples comfort as they went into the harsh winter, all the while anticipating and trusting that spring and the increase of light would emerge on schedule.

Ring a meditation bell as a sign of a time of silence and reflection (allow approximately 30 sec.)

During Advent, we are called to settle into the exquisite darkness, to hibernate, rest and restore.

This cycle was given to us at the time of Creation.

We are invited to face the darkness in our own lives and in the world around us.

The prophets assure us that the darkness will not overcome us.

They call us to watch for the light, notice the Light, and be warmed by its rays.

We are called to wait, to hope, to trust in promises made.

As we make this Advent journey, we claim we come alive in both the light and the darkness.

(Pause for a few moments)

Imagine luminaries lit on the path you will take into your sacred space. It is dark all around you except for the path into your heart and your spirit.

Imagine you are walking silently into your Sanctuary, or sacred space feeling the presence of God. As you visualize walking this path pause for a few moments of gentle deep breaths, pay attention to breathing out your worries and breathing in the peace of God.

Ring a meditation bell as a sign of a time of silence and reflection.

Invite participants to light/turn on their candles:

Signify your sacred place/personal sanctuary by lighting or turning on your candles.

Read the Scripture: Genesis 1:14 ¹⁴ And God said, "Let there be lights in the dome of the sky to separate the day from the night; and let them be for signs and for seasons and for days and years,"

Pause to consider where you *have* experienced light and darkness during this season.

Ring a meditation bell as a sign of a time of silence and reflection. (1-2 min)

Read the Scripture Matthew 11:28-29 ²⁸“Come to me, all you that are weary and are carrying heavy burdens, and I will give you rest. ²⁹Take my yoke upon you and learn from me; for I am gentle and humble in heart, and you will find rest for your souls.

Let us enter into the Scripture passage:

Imagine yourself being “yoked” to Jesus.

What does that yoke look and feel like?

Ring a meditation bell as a sign of a time of silence and reflection. (1-2 min)

Consider these questions:

As we enter into this season of exquisite darkness, a time of hibernation for so many plants, trees, animals, what needs to settle and rest within you?

Ring a meditation bell as a sign of a time of silence and reflection. (1-2 min)

The compost pile by the garden path is a mound of soil that is teeming with little bugs and bacteria. When you look at the soil, it looks static as if nothing is happening. But those little bugs and bacteria are hard at work, almost invisible to the human eye, creating soil that will nourish and sustain new life when spring comes, and more light is around us.

What needs some tender rest in your life? What needs to hibernate, what needs to be surrounded by exquisite darkness in order to be released, ride out the winter and maybe, in the spring with more light around us, come back to you in a new way?

Imagine placing the list you have compiled in the compost soil, symbolizing that what needs rest is still yoked to Jesus, still connected to his ways during this time of rest and hibernation.

Ring a meditation bell as a sign of a time of silence and reflection. (2-3 min)

Read the following as a litany pausing at the end of each sentence to allow participants to reflect on how they would be affected. Choose to use “me” or “us” as you read.

From the rising of the midwinter moon, may darkness and light dance together, O Shining One.

In this season, make me/us short on grumpy thoughts,
long on sharing of words of gentleness.

Make me/us short on being rushed,
long on attentiveness.

Make me/us short on seeing what’s right before us,
long on peering into the horizon.

Make me/us short on out-of-control to-do lists,
long on savoring kindness.

Make me/us short on overlooking the dark sky,
long on gazing at the twinkling stars.

Make me/us short on tradition as a habit,
long on re-owning and re-creating.

Make me/us short on ignoring the hungry,
long on making a delicious meal.

Make me/us short on rushing,
long on wondering and pondering.

Make me/us short on walking past those sleeping in the cold,
long on sharing blankets and hot tea.

Make me/us short on longing for what's next,
and long on savoring the darkness.

Let us pray together the Lord's Prayer.

Benediction May the sun, moon and stars glow on you like a great fire. May you rest and hibernate in the exquisite darkness. May you and the whole of the planet be yoked to new life through God's holy promise and find rest for your souls. *(Pause for a few moments)*
Return to your breathing, slowly open your eyes, silently extinguish your candles. Amen

Exquisite Darkness: Winter Solstice Service was created by Ashley Goff (UCC), Minister for Spiritual Formation, and Rob Passow, Director of Music, at Church of the Pilgrims (PCUSA) in Washington, D.C. They created this liturgy for Church of the Pilgrims' first winter solstice service in 2012.

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