

JANUARY

The Gifts of Winter Dormancy
Wendy Janzen

OVERVIEW

Winter is a season of dormancy: of patience, stillness, resting, darkness, and mystery. As we learn to accept the gifts of winter, we learn to observe and appreciate the beauty, wonder, and solace of a slower time.

“Because of the uncomfortable conditions of winter, it is natural to underestimate the positive value of this season. The same is true for our interior winters. Few consider their inner wintertime something to enjoy, yet this season is vital for spiritual growth. The human spirit needs dormancy and rest, silence and solitude. Winter provides this opportunity so we can slow down and refocus....” Joyce Rupp & Macrina Wiederkehr

The liturgical season of Epiphany starts on January 6th (twelve days after Christmas). As an alternative to this worship outline, you might choose to focus on this holy day by having a star-light service in the evening and reflecting on the heavens declaring the glory of God and what kinds of epiphanies we might watch for. Epiphany celebrates journeys, sharing gifts, seeking Christ, and following stars and dreams.

When planning for an outdoor service in a cold climate, you will want to ensure that people can dress adequately for the conditions, including proper footwear and a warm hat. You may also want to consider having some blankets on hand, gathering around a fire, and/or offering hot drinks in reusable mugs. If possible, also plan to meet somewhere sheltered from the wind, like among trees.

See the [Introduction](#) to this series of worship services for further background and insights into planning this kind of outdoor worship service.

GATHERING & GROUNDING

Offer words of invocation and welcome, including introductions if necessary, and a land acknowledgement.

May this worship gathering be a balm for our bodies and souls. I invite us to ground ourselves by first taking a good look around. Let our eyes take in the uniqueness of this place and this season...

Now close your eyes and have a listen - notice the sounds around us, both nearby and in the distance, mechanical sounds and natural sounds...

Take some time now for a few deep breaths. Feel how the colder air enters your nose and lungs, and see if you can notice any smells in the air...

Finally, attune yourself to the feel of the sun/breeze/snow/rain on your face, and the ground beneath your feet. Remember the physical nature of your body, its vulnerability and its strength, and remember how it connects you to the community of creation.

As we ground ourselves here physically, let's also become aware of God's sacred, immanent presence here among us. As we engage body, mind, and soul in worship, let's pray:

God, our constant companion and guide, here in this season of stark beauty, make your sacred presence felt among us. Open our senses and our full awareness to your mystery, and help us to listen to the seeds buried in the earth, to the interplay between water and ice, to the cold wind in the bare branches, to the rootedness of the trees, to the brilliance of the sky, to prayers without words. Amen.

READINGS & REFLECTIONS

Read any of the following scriptures, or others of your choosing:

Genesis 8:22; Psalm 46:1 & 10; Psalm 74:16-17

Despite its challenges, winter is a season of recovery and reflection, dreaming and preparation. Winter is a good teacher - leading us into our innermost depths and resources, inviting us to slow down, to be patient, to watch and wait, to relinquish control, to exercise caution, to be prepared, and to offer ourselves and others kindness and compassion.

Offer a few words for reflection, possibly incorporating the following quotes.

Quote from Joyce Rupp in [*The Circle of Life: The Heart's Journey through the Seasons*](#) "It takes immense trust and hope to see new life waiting beneath the frozen, barren land."

Quote from Katherine May in *Wintering: The Power of Rest and Retreat in Difficult Times*
"Wintering brings about some of the most profound and insightful moments in our human experience, and wisdom resides in those who have wintered. In our relentlessly busy contemporary world, we are forever trying to defer the onset of winter... An occasional sharp wintering would do us good... We must learn to invite winter in. We may never choose winter, but we can choose how."

WANDERING & WONDERING

Invite participants into 20 minutes of silent wandering & wondering; of opening our intention and attention to how God might approach us in this time. Wander slowly and see what you notice. What insights or wisdom is being offered you? Reflect on your own need for quiet, protection, solace, or stillness, or on what you find difficult about winter and why.

Return here in 20 minutes (at____) for a time of sharing. Consider having a small bell you can ring after 20 minutes, so people don't have to look at their phones or watches for the time.

SHARING

Share with one (or two) people beside you. What did you observe, experience, notice, feel, wonder about, or reflect on?

Open for those who wish to share in the larger circle.

SENDING

God, bless the season of winter
around us and within us.

As we go from here,
may we know God's presence
in the midst of hard times,
God's love in the stillness,
and God's hope in the promise of
warmer days to come.

Amen.

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