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**STONEHENGE:** The remnants of the last in a sequence of circular monuments built between 3000 B.C. and 1600 B.C. are one of Britain's most popular tourist attractions and a spiritual home for thousands of druids and mystics. It has become a traditional gathering place during the solstices. Exactly how and why Stonehenge was built remains a mystery. Some experts believe it is aligned with the sun because its builders came from a sun-worshipping culture, while others believe the site was part of a huge astronomical calendar.

# Darkest of the dark days

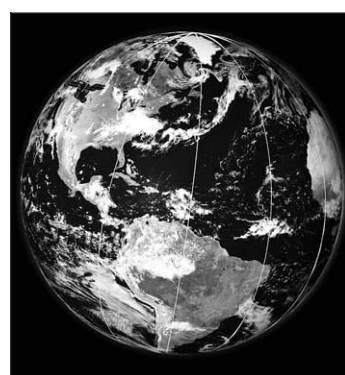
Today marks the beginning of the winter solstice, despite all the rain we've already had and the chilly morning temperatures. Dec. 21 (and sometimes Dec. 22) are the shortest days of the year in North America, and the solstice, which means "when the sun stands still," occurs when the vertical rays of the sun are striking the Tropic of Capricorn (the sun is then at

its southernmost point). The day is also the beginning of yule, which according to Webster's was originally the name of a heathen festival at the winter's solstice and has come to mean Christmas or the Christmas season.

We'll take a look at the science and the spirit of this day, of which the poet William Wordsworth wrote, "Life's autumn past, I stand on winter's verge."

**SCIENCE**

Our 24-hour day is based on the average speed of the Earth in its orbit around the sun. But the actual speed is fastest at this time of year, because the Earth's oval-shaped orbit takes it closest to the sun.



**EARTH SUN-DRENCHED** in this enhanced satellite photo released by NASA. Related solstice story on Local 1.

That makes the sun's gravitational pull stronger and the Earth gains speed, traveling slightly faster than its annual average of around 64,000 mph. The Earth moves at its slowest in June and July, around the time of the summer solstice, when it is 3 million miles farther from the sun.

At the summer solstice, the sun rises earliest around June 21 - a mirror-image of what happens in winter.

The Earth spins around its axis, an imaginary line going through the planet between the North and South poles. Thanks to this tilt, we enjoy the four seasons. For several months of the year, one half of the Earth receives more direct rays of the sun than the other.

When the axis points away from the sun - from December to March - the Southern Hemisphere enjoys the direct rays of the sun during their summer months. Alternatively, when the axis tilts towards the sun, as it does between June and September, it is summer in the Northern Hemisphere but winter in the Southern Hemisphere.

On the first days of winter and summer, the tilt change briefly becomes zero. Then the direction of the tilt moves the other way.

Today the sun rose at 6:53 a.m. PST. It sets at 4:47 p.m. PST.

**SPIRIT**

Religious people worldwide have observed the winter solstice in a number of ways.

**Ancient Egypt:** The god-man/savior Osiris died and was entombed on Dec. 21.

**Ancient Rome:** Saturnalia began as a feast day for Saturn on Dec. 17 and went through Dec. 23.

**Druidism:** Druids formed the professional class in ancient Celtic society, performing the functions of priests, teachers, philosophers and musicians. The solstice for them was the time of the death of the old sun and the birth of the dark half of the year.

**American Indians:** The Pueblo tribe looked forward to spring and rebirth with prayer sticks, retreats and altars at the solstice.

**Neopaganism:** The winter solstice is called yule. The most common practitioners are called Wiccans. It is a time for introspection and planning. They might celebrate on the evening before, at sunrise on the morning of the solstice or at the exact time of the astronomical event.

**Christianity:** Many symbols and practices associated with Christmas are of pagan origin: holly, ivy, mistletoe, the yule log, the giving of gifts, the decorated evergreen tree, magical reindeer and more. In Massachusetts, Puritans unsuccessfully tried to banish Christmas during the 17th century because of its heathen influences.



"**RUDOLPH** the Red-nosed Reindeer" is one of the longest-running holiday specials on television.

Compiled by Michael Doss, Register Research. Sources include The Associated Press and [religioustolerance.org](http://religioustolerance.org).

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42"x21" **\$166<sup>50</sup> ea.**

48"x21" **\$175<sup>50</sup> ea.**

In Stock finished Light Oak Color, 2 Drawers, wood veneer side panels, fully Assembled

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Wall 30X15	\$76.50	Wall 30X30	\$111.00	Sink Base 42	\$139.50	Roto Susan 36	\$226.50
Wall 33X15	\$77.00	Wall 33X30	\$114.00	Sink Base 60	\$226.50	Broom 18x84	\$213.50
Wall 36X15	\$81.00	Wall 36X30	\$124.00	Sink Base 72	\$247.00	Broom 24x84	\$306.50
Wall 39X15	\$82.00	Base 9	\$84.00	Drawer Base 15	\$132.50	Pantry 18x84	\$252.50
Wall 42X21	\$100.00	Base 12	\$94.00	Drawer Base 18	\$140.50	Pantry 24x84	\$359.50
Wall 9X30	\$62.00	Base 15	\$100.50	Drawer Base 24	\$156.50	Oven 27x84	\$343.50
Wall 12X30	\$71.50	Base 18	\$107.00	Wall Corner 24X30	\$124.00		
Wall 15X30	\$74.00	Base 21	\$111.00	Wall Corner 30X18	\$73.50		
Wall 18X30	\$77.00	Base 24	\$117.00				
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- 30" X 80" X 1 3/8" X 80" X 1 3/8" in stock

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**Crystal 3 Piece Entry Set**

- Mahogany
- Triple glazed brass glass work

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**Monterey 3 Piece Entry Set**

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- Triple glazed brass glass work

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- Solid Mahogany
- 36" X 80" X 1 3/4" In stock

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## Tuesday Morning

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