

A Winter Solstice Story

By Jay Steele

Characters

Winter Solstice Fairy (character dressed in white)

Child 1 (child)

Child 2 (slightly younger child)

Person holding holly branches (dressed in dark brown-green clothes), non-speaking role

Person holding oak branches (dressed in dark brown-green clothes), non-speaking role

Elf (pointy ears, small size)

Holly King (dressed in red, wears a sprig of holly in his tangled hair, wears foam sword)

Oak King (dressed in green, with oak leaves in hair, wears foam sword)

Goddess (dressed in dark clothes with hood or mask obscuring face)

Celtic revelers (dressed in bright, colorful clothing)

Earth (child wearing or carrying earth globe at tilt. Globe should make it obvious when

Northern Hemisphere vs Southern Hemisphere is closer to Sun). Costume should make it easy for the globe to be tilted, rotate about its axis, and also rotate in an elliptical orbit around the Sun.

Sun (child wearing or carrying larger yellow ball)

Children holding stars (cardboard star shapes with sparkling wrap)

Baby

Father of baby

Mother of baby

Shepherds, one holding a rose

Sheep

Settings & props

- Scene 1: A childrens' bedroom
- Scene 2: Northern European Forest
- Scene 3: Outer space
- Scene 4: Manger in Bethelam, 0 CE. Sheep and shepherds outside, cradle with baby, mom, and dad inside the manger.
- Scene 5: A childrens' bedroom

Introduction

[Enter all children of cast on stage]

[Children sing with audience]

One, each person is worthwhile

Two, be kind in all we do
Three, we help each other learn
Four, and search for what is true
Five, all people have a say
Six, the web of life is the way
Seven, work for a peaceful world
That will bring us back to me and UU

[Children leave stage]

Scene One

[Child 1 and Child 2 enter from left, sit down on sleeping bags]

Child 1: **[in loud voice]** Good night parents. **[in softer voice]** It sure is dark tonight. I heard our parents say something about winter solstice occurring today, I wonder what that is.

Child 2: Winter toltice?

Child 1: No, I think it was "winter solstice", whatever that is. I'm going to sleep now. Good night.

Child 2: Good night.

[Winter Solstice Fairy enters from right with light]

Child 1: Hey, are you awake, do you see that light?

Child 2: I was sleeping. What is that light?

Winter Solstice Fairy: Hello kids, I'm the Winter Solstice Fairy. Do you not know what winter solstice is?

Child 1: No, we don't. But we are just kids.

Winter Solstice Fairy: Well, since each person, including kids, is worthwhile, how would you like to find out about winter solstice?

[Child 1 and Child 2 look at each other]

Child 2: *[speaking to Child 1]* This feels like magic and adventure.

Child 1 and Child 2 together: *[speaking to Winter Solstice Fairy]* Sure.

Winter Solstice Fairy: Take my hands then.

Child 2: I'll just grab some bread for later. *[Child 2 grabs a piece of bread]*

[Child 1 and Child 2 take Winter Solstice Fairy's hands, then all three swoop around the stage and leave on the right]

Scene Two

[Person holding holly branches is standing up at back of center stage; person holding oak branches is lying down at back of center stage; Child 1, Child 2, and Winter Solstice Fairy enter on left of stage]

Child 1: This looks like an enchanted forest. Look at the beautiful red holly berries!

[Elf enters, weeping]

Child 2: *[speaking to Child 1]* What is that creature?

Elf: I'm an elf!

Child 2: *[speaking to Elf]* Are you okay?

Elf: I'm so hungry. It's been a tough winter this year with not much to eat. But we are half way through tonight.

Child 2: *[speaking to Elf]* Here's some bread I brought from home.

Elf: *[accepting the bread]* Thank you so much. You are very kind and a real Elf friend. Would you young ones like to see the wheel of the year turning tonight? Yule is here.

Child 1: What is the wheel of the year?

Elf: We elves, and some of you humans, believe that time is circular, and the year passes by rotating like a big wheel *[makes hand gestures indicating a big wheel turning]*. The Celtic people celebrate the winter solstice time as Yule. Did you children celebrate Sah-Win by remembering your loved ones who passed away?

Child 1: Sah-Win? What is that? We went trick-or-treating on Halloween and visited our Grandmother's grave on the next day.

Elf: That sounds like Sah-Win. Sah-Win was the previous festival time of the year when the veil between this world and the afterlife was at its thinnest point of the whole year. Sah-Win is full of possibilities. Now it's Yule when the Oak King challenges the Holly King for the favor of the Goddess. Yule is also the longest night of the year.

Elf: *[speaking to Children]* Are you ready now for Yule?

Child 1 and Child 2 together: *[speaking to Elf]* Sure.

Elf: Then sit here with me and wait.

[Holly King enters from stage right slowly and sits down in chair. Goddess also enters from stage right and puts hand on chair next to Holly King]

Holly King: Oh, I'm feeling tired today.

Goddess: Hello children, you are welcome here.

[Oak King enters from stage left and strides in]

Oak King: *[speaking towards Holly King]* There you are! I've been looking for you. It's my turn to rule.

Holly King: *[speaking towards Oak King]* What already! But I like this chair and the way things are.

Oak King: *[speaking towards Holly King]* Life never sits still. I challenge you for the chair and the favor of the Goddess *[pointing to the Goddess]*.

[Holly King gets up with sword. Oak King and Holly King exchange several sword blows. Oak King stabs Holly King. Holly King falls down dramatically.]

Holly King: *[speaking towards Oak King]* All right. I give up for now. But I'll be back at Summer Solstice!

[Holly King slowly exits to stage left, limping slightly]

[Person holding holly branches drops the branches to the floor dramatically; person lays down.]

Child 1: Look, the holly branches fell!

[Oak King triumphantly strides over to chair and sits down]

[Person holding oak branches stands up slowly but dramatically]

Child 2: And look, the oak tree is growing!

Oak King: Let the party begin!

[Celtic Revelers enter from stage left carrying small, decorated log, dancing slightly, being joyous. Revelers place the log on the center of the stage and form a circle by holding crossed hands around the log. Revelers rotate around the log once. Revelers turn around still holding hands to face outside of the circle. Revelers break the circle to form a line facing the audience.]

[Winter Solstice Fairy enters from stage left and stands next to Child 1 and Child 2]

[All sing "Deck the Halls" from hymnal #235 with audience]

[Celtic Revelers break the circle, grab the log, and exit to stage left.]

Child 1: That was cool. *[speaking to Winter Solstice Fairy]* There you are.

Winter Solstice Fairy: I didn't think you needed me for this one. Friend Elf helped you learn this time. Now do you understand what is winter solstice?

Child 1: Well, winter solstice appears to be the day when winter is halfway over. Also, in this forest, the holly berries are starting to fall and the oaks are starting to grow again. *[turning to Elf]* Thanks for showing us that, Elf. *[turning to Winter Solstice Fairy again]* But how do we know that this is caused by the two old guys fighting over who gets to sit in that chair? I want to know what is true.

Winter Solstice Fairy: Ahhhhh. Mortals are never satisfied, but this makes you precious and interesting. Alright, can I show you another aspect of winter solstice as part of your search for truth?

[Child 1 and Child 2 look at each other]

Child 1 and Child 2 together: Sure.

Winter Solstice Fairy: Since you both have a say, and agree, then take my hands.

Child 1 and Child 2 together: Goodbye, elf.

Elf: Goodbye, young ones.

[Child 1 and Child 2 take Winter Solstice Fairy's hands, then all three swoop around the stage and leave on the right]

Scene Three

[Winter Solstice Fairy, Child 1 and Child 2 enter on stage left, floating around with arms out]

Child 1: Are we in outer space?

Child 2: This is cool. We are flying!

[actor holding Earth walks in from stage right, followed by actor holding Sun. Earth starts rotating about Sun in a circle. Earth should be tilted, such that at 0 and 180 degrees of the orbit, the northern hemisphere is tilted closer to the Sun, and at 90 and 270 degrees, the southern hemisphere is tilted closer to the Sun. The Earth continuously rotates around the Sun in an elliptical orbit during this scene.]

Child 2: Look at that beautiful blue ball!

Child 1: And what is that big yellow ball?

Winter Solstice Fairy: The blue ball is your precious earth home, and the yellow ball is your sun that provides warmth and energy to all living things on earth.

Child 1 and Child 2 together: Wow.

Child 1: Look at the beautiful stars.

[children with stars enter the stage from left and right]

Winter Solstice Fairy: Do you see how the earth rotates? As the different parts of the earth face the sun, it is daylight and warm. As the different parts face away from the sun, it is nighttime and colder.

Child 1: What about winter solstice?

Winter Solstice Fairy: Do you see how the Earth is tilted? As the Earth rotates about the Sun, the top half, or Northern Hemisphere, is closer to the sun sometimes, and the bottom half, or Southern Hemisphere, is closer to the sun at other times. This makes summer at different times for the Northern and Southern Hemispheres when they are closer to the Sun.

Child 2: What about winter when it gets cold?

Winter Solstice Fairy: Winter comes to one half when the other half has summer. When one half is closer to the Sun, the other half is farther away.

[Winter Solstice Fairy waits until the Earth reaches the narrowest point of the ellipse around the Sun.]

Winter Solstice Fairy: Stop Earth! *[Earth stops in its orbit]* Winter solstice for the Northern Hemisphere comes when the Earth's orbit takes the Earth's Northern Hemisphere farthest away from the sun. This makes the longest night for the Northern Hemisphere. *[Winter Solstice Fairy moves the Earth a little along in its orbit and rotates it].* The next day morning breaks through with the sun once again, and the next night is a little shorter for the Northern Hemisphere. *[speaking to the Earth]* You can move along now, Earth. Thanks.

Child 1: Oh, I see now.

[stars and everybody sings song "Morning Has Broken" from hymnal #38]

Child 2: But what does winter solstice mean?

Winter Solstice Fairy: As the earth's orbit makes winter and summer, life cycles between winter and summer. Do you remember the Holly King and Oak King?

Child 1 and Child 2: Yes.

Winter Solstice Fairy: They represent that as winter starts going away at Winter Solstice, the web of life changes, but stays intact. The beautiful red berries of holly plants start dropping, and oak trees start growing again until winter comes again.

Child 1: Okay. But what does winter solstice mean for us?

Winter Solstice Fairy: Some of you mortals believe that winter solstice is a time for renewal, for a fresh start to a new year or new world. Take my hands and I'll show you one more thing.

[Child 1 and Child 2 take Winter Solstice Fairy's hands and they fly off to stage left]

Scene Four

[Winter Solstice Fairy, Child 1 and Child 2 enter on stage left. Winter Solstice Fairy stays back a little.]

Child 2: What nice sheep! *[Speaking to shepherd 1]* Can I pet your sheep?

Shepherd 1: Sure.

[Child 2 pets one sheep]

Winter Solstice Fairy: Children, welcome to Bethlehem, year 0 of the Common Era.

Child 1: Is this a manger? Wait, I know where we are. Is baby Jesus inside?

Winter Solstice Fairy: Go say hello and take a look for yourselves.

[Child 1 and Child 2 move towards manger]

Child 1: *[speaking to Mother and Father]* Hello.

Child 2: *speaking to Mother and Father]* Hello.

Father: *[speaking to Children]* Well hello.

Mother: Hello children. Would you like to meet our new baby?

[Child 1 and Child 2 move towards cradle]

Child 2: What a beautiful baby!

Child 1: *[speaking to Child 2 in a hushed tone]* This must be baby Jesus!

Child 2: Oh.

Child 1: *[speaking to Father and Mother]* Did you see angels who told you about your baby and his miraculous birth? Is this baby Jesus who will bring peace to the world?

Father: I saw Mother being as strong and brave as an angel during childbirth, and sweet as an angel when she looks at our baby.

Mother: I saw an angel in the nice inn-keeper who let us stay at this manger when all of the rooms were full. And I see *[pausing, looking towards Father]* an angel in Father who is taking care of us.

Father: This is certainly a miraculous birth because it is our precious baby.

Child 1: What about peace coming to the world?

Mother: We could certainly use some peace in the world, war and fighting has been so destructive lately. Can you work for peace in the world for our precious baby?

Child 1 and Child 2: We will try.

Mother: Thanks.

Shepherd 2 (with rose): *[speaking to Child 2 and holding out a rose]* Would you like a rose?

Child 2: Sure. *[accepts the rose]* Thanks. It's too bad that it is raining and a little cold today.

[Shepherds, Mother, Father gather together facing audience, sing song "Come, Sing a Song with Me" from hymnal #346]

Child 1: Oh thanks for the lovely invitation, but *[yawning]* we need to go to bed now. It was nice meeting you all. Goodbye.

Father and Mother and Shepherds: Goodbye children.

[Child 1 and Child 2 walk away from the cradle towards Winter Solstice Fairy]

Child 1: *[speaking to Winter Solstice Fairy]* This seems like the first Christmas.

Winter Solstice Fairy: Christmas can be viewed as another aspect of Winter Solstice. The world is born anew with the birth of the Christ child, just as the web of life begins anew with the Winter Solstice.

Child 2: I'm tired. *[Child 2 yawns]*

Child 1: *[speaking to Winter Solstice Fairy]* Thanks for showing us everything. We are tired. Can we go home now?

Winter Solstice Fairy: Certainly. Take my hands again.

[Child 1 and Child 2 take Winter Solstice Fairy's hands. They all exit at stage left]

Scene Five

[Child 1 and Child 2 enter on stage right, lie down on sleeping bags]

Voice from offstage: Time to get up, kids. Let's try to get to church on time this morning.

Child 1: *[gets up, stretches]* Wow, I just had the coolest dream.

Child 2: *[gets up, stretches]* Me too.

Child 1: Let's go have breakfast.

[Child 1 and Child 2 exit stage left]