

The holiday season is upon us, and while family gatherings and expectations can be stressful, many of us also get a lot of joy out of the faith traditions that fill the short days and long nights. Whether you're going to be celebrating with friends, family, or by yourself, it's a great time to think about the practices that bring you comfort and joy. And because we live in a diverse world with many different traditions, it might feel like a good time to learn about the faith of your neighbors, too! Here's a little bit of information about the four major holidays celebrated in December, some stories from the LGBTQ+ people who celebrate them, and a few ideas on how you can enjoy a gender-inclusive holiday season.

Hanukkah - December 2nd to 10th, 2018

Hanukkah is the Jewish festival of lights, which lasts eight days and remembers the rededication of the temple in Jerusalem after a small band of Jewish rebels took it back from the army of the Greco-Syrian King Antiochus IV. Some of the most-loved traditions associated with Hanukkah include eating foods fried in oil (to remember the oil that burned in the lamp in the temple), playing dreidel games, and the lighting of the candles in the *hanukkiah* or menorah.

In his reflection "[How the Story of Hanukkah Guides My Queer Activism](#)," Adam Eli says,

"Because Hanukkah celebrates the passionate resistance of the Jewish Maccabees against the evil King Antiochus and their victory over his corrupt government, it reminds me of what I and my community must fight for. As terrifying events continue to unfold on a national scale and Jews around the world continue to light our menorahs, a clear and powerful parallel emerges... By lighting the menorah, I summon the strength of those who lit the candles before me. By lighting the menorah, we choose to fight darkness with light."

For more thoughts on how you and your family might celebrate Hanukkah in ways that honor the gender-diverse people in your life, check out the following articles.

- [Queering the Jewish Holidays: How I Celebrate Hanukkah](#)
- [Hanukkah Blessings with Gender Inclusive God Language](#)
- [Keshet's Hanukkah Resource Page](#)

Yule/Winter Solstice - December 21st, 2018

The Winter Solstice, also known as Yule, is the observance of the longest night of the year in the Northern hemisphere, and marks the point where days start to lengthen again. This holiday has been celebrated for thousands of years all over the world, and has many different traditions associated with it. In the United States this holiday is primarily celebrated by people who identify as Pagan, Wiccan, humanist, or Unitarian Universalist, but is sometimes adopted by those who just want to celebrate a non-denominational winter holiday. Traditions associated with Yule include decorating with holly and ivy, the burning of the Yule Log, feasting, and staying awake throughout the longest night.

In her book "[Casting a Queer Circle: Non-binary Witchcraft](#)," Thista Minai says,

“For some Pagans, Yule is first and foremost a celebration of community. At a time of year that is (at least for some of us) cold, dark, and (for a great many of us) tremendously stressful, we create an oasis of support and social warmth. In particular, many Queer Pagans find themselves struggling with exclusion from their blood family’s celebrations, or, if they’re not openly Queer, having to hide their true selves through holiday gatherings. Giving each other even just one night to gather and celebrate in an open and accepting space can make a tremendous difference in how we tolerate the literally and often metaphorically darkest part of the year. Yule is an opportunity to find comfort in chosen family, strengthen the bonds between yourself and those you love, and know that you are not alone.”

If you want to learn more about Yule/the Winter Solstice, check out the following links.

- [All About Yule](#)
- [Celebrating Winter Solstice/Yule from the Unitarian Universalist Association](#)
- [4 Winter Solstice Rituals From Around the World](#)

Christmas - December 25th, 2018

Christmas celebrates the birth of Jesus in Christian traditions, and some Christian denominations also celebrate Advent, the four weeks of storytelling and anticipation leading up to the big day. Some Christians celebrate Advent by lighting one candle on each of the four Sundays on the way to Christmas, while others wait and celebrate Christmas itself, and then the twelve days of celebration leading up to Epiphany, also known as Dia de los Reyes or Three Kings Day, on January 6th.

In her reflection “[Saying Yes to God’s Call in Advent](#),” Grace Cox-Johnson says,

“Mary is the most powerful image for me personally in the Advent/Christmas/Epiphany story. Mary’s willingness to serve God transcends a resignation of her plight; her willingness to accept God’s will was a ‘yes’ spoken in Mary’s heart to be who she really is and to say yes to fully be who God created her to be... I know all trans persons stories are different but when I made space in my heart to speak the question of gender it was one of those moments of surrender to God, a moment filled both with terror and delight.”

For more stories about Christmas, and for resources to help you celebrate the Christmas season, check out the following links.

- [5 Ways to Make Your Christmas Eve Service Inclusive of Transgender Persons](#)
- [Season Of Waiting: A Queer Catholic Advent](#)
- [A Queer Blue Christmas](#)
- (video) [Going Home When There’s No Room at the Inn](#)

Kwanzaa - December 26th to January 1st, 2018

Kwanzaa is a celebration of African-American culture, community, and history that takes place over seven days. Each day is dedicated to a core principle of African heritage, including Umoja (unity), Kujichagulia (self-determination), Ujima (collective work and responsibility), Ujamaa (cooperative economics), Nia (purpose), Kuumba (creativity), and Imani (faith). The holiday is considered pan-African, honoring languages and traditions from all over the African continent in order to recognize the different heritages of the African-American people living in the United States today, and it is often celebrated in addition to other holidays like Christmas. Kwanzaa is typically celebrated with music, art, food, storytelling, and the lighting of seven candles in the kinara, or candle holder.

In her article "[Celebrating Kwanzaa in the Black Lesbian and Gay Community](#)," Imani Rashid says,

"When my wife and I attended the Kwanzaa celebration with our son's classmates and their families, we were the only lesbian couple in the room. For many attendees, we were the first lesbians they had ever met. Yet we were welcomed into that room. This was a life-changing event for me. It was one of the first times I felt accepted by a straight black community. At the same time, through the principles of Kwanzaa, I could understand other people's children as children I was responsible for, and I felt that I was part of a community where previously I had not... Many of us have been deeply influenced by the principles of Kwanzaa and the way of life they dictate to become the responsible, cultural, and political elders that we are today. And we recognize that we walk with our ancestors, who constantly remind us to connect with family. That is who we are. That is our African heritage. Kwanzaa in the LGBT family is our legacy, and we can pass it on to our children and to our children's children."

To learn more about the African values of Kwanzaa, and to see how LGBTQ+ folks participate in this holiday, check out the links below.

- [Why LGBT African-Americans Embrace Kwanzaa](#)
- [Happy Kwanzaa Black Trans Style](#)
- (video) [Queer Kwanzaa: A MobileHomecoming PSA](#)