

I HAVE NEWS (from 9th century Irish)

I have news for you:
The stag bells, winter snows,
Summer has gone
Wind high and cold,
The sun low, short its course
The sea running high.
Deep red the bracken;
Its shape is lost;
The wild goose has raised its accustomed cry,
Cold has seized the birds' wings;
Season of ice, this is my news.

Winter Solstice Blessing

With faithful progress,
The Great Sun has traveled,
From north to south again,
And on this day pauses.

So we also stand still,
With the whole Earth,
In quiet thankfulness,
To the Source of Blessing,
The Giver of All Light.

–Eric Williams



The Maine singer/songwriter Gordon Bok has always been a favorite of mine; we'd see him whenever he came to town. This song—though it's addressed to a friend with a broken heart—also feels right at Winter Solstice, especially in what's been such a hard year for so many.

<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=xU1FUgcv1Lc>

Ornithography

The legendary Cang Jie was said to have invented writing after observing the tracks of birds.

A light snow last night,
and now the earth falls open to a fresh page.

A high wind is breaking up the clouds.
Children wait for the yellow bus in a huddle,

and under the feeder, some birds
are busy writing short stories,

poems, and letters to their mothers.
A crow is working on an editorial.

That chickadee is etching a list,
and that robin walks back and forth

composing the opening to her autobiography.
All so prolific this morning,

these expressive little creatures,
and each with an alphabet of only two letters.

–Billy Collins

The Shortest Day

And so the Shortest Day came and the year died
And everywhere down the centuries of the snow-white world
Came people singing, dancing,
To drive the dark away.
They lighted candles in the winter trees;
They hung their homes with evergreen;
They burned beseeching fires all night long
To keep the year alive.
And when the new year's sunshine blazed awake
They shouted, reveling.
Through all the frosty ages you can hear them
Echoing behind us - listen!
All the long echoes, sing the same delight,
This Shortest Day,
As promise wakens in the sleeping land:
They carol, feast, give thanks,
And dearly love their friends,
And hope for peace.
And now so do we, here, now,
This year and every year.
Welcome Yule!

--by Susan Cooper for *The Christmas Revels*

A Celtic Yule Blessing

The food is put away for the winter,
the crops are set aside to feed us,
the cattle are come down from their fields,
and the sheep are in from the pasture.
The land is cold, the sea is stormy, the sky is gray.
The nights are dark, but we have our family,
kin and clan around the hearth,
staying warm in the midst of darkness,
our spirit and love a flame
a beacon burning brightly
in the night.

Song to the Pleiades

Look as they rise, rise
over the line where sky meets the earth;
Pleiades!
Lo! They ascending, come to guide us,
Leading us safely, keeping us one;
Pleiades,
Teach us to be, like you, united.

From the Hako, a Pawnee ceremony
trans. by Alice Fletcher

Note:

The Pleiades are a cluster of 7 stars, most easily seen in winter. Info is here:

<https://earthsky.org/favorite-star-patterns/pleiades-star-cluster-enjoys-worldwide-renown>

Only Music Keeps Us Here

Within the circle of our lives
we dance the circle of the years,
the circles of the seasons
within the circles of the years,
the cycles of the moon
within the circles of the season,
the circles of our reasons
within the cycles of the moon.

Again, again we come and go,
changed, changing. Hands
join, unjoin in love and fear,
grief and joy. The circles turn,
each giving into each, into all.
Only music keeps us here,

each by all the others held.
In the hold of hands and eyes
we turn in pairs, that joining
joining each to all again.

And then we turn aside, alone,
out of the sunlight gone

into the darker circles of return.

-Wendell Berry

Here is *Out of the Deep* from John Rutter's ***Requiem***. The words come from Psalm 130. It is an incredibly beautiful work, if you don't know it. This is just one movement of the *Requiem*, in which the darkness is as strong as the light...
<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=JoOPG4eloPs>