

... serving of a braided bread in the shape of the sun called a saffron Lucia and the lighting of candles to announce that light conquers darkness.

The winter solstice, 21st December, is named to St. Thomas the Apostle. It is the shortest day of the week, thus fitting well to the apostle whose faith was weak. Contrarily, the summer solstice, 21st June, is named to St. John the Baptist for just the opposite reasons.



The **snowman** is part of Christmas in the Northern Hemisphere. In the Southern Hemisphere, it is pretty hot at Christmas time.

### Factoids

The Earth orbits the Sun at an average speed of 29.79 km/s (18.51 miles/sec, or 67,000 miles/hour).

It takes light 8 min 20 sec to travel from the sun to the earth. Light travels at a speed of  $3 \times 10^8$  km/sec, or 299 792 km per second (186,281 miles per second).

Evergreens and trees were cherished at solstice as a natural symbol of rebirth and life amid winter whiteness. The annual Tree Festival is still celebrated among nature-based faiths such as Wicca. This tree festival was eventually adopted as use for the Christmas tree.

Many legends survived from the time of pagan solstice celebrations. In Scandinavia, the Julbukk, or Yule goat, was the carrier for the god Thor. Now he carries the Yule elf on the rounds to deliver presents and receive his offering of porridge.