History and Meaning:
The winter solstice (Yule) is the longest night of the year. It marks the beginning of the dark half surrendering to the light half—each following day the sun stays out a little longer. Upon sunrise of the longest night of the year, the sun is said to be reborn. A common practice is the burning of a Yule log. This tradition dates back to when the Norsemen believed the sun was a ball of fire that rolled back to Earth around the winter solstice. Once the log was burned, the ashes were spread around the house to protect the family.

Relevant Observances:
- Devotees use bold, cold colors, symbols of the sun and evergreens to decorate the Yule altar.
- Various rituals and ceremonies celebrate the sun, cleansing/renewal and the Yule log.

Tips for Supporting Patients:
- Special foods and drinks may be requested and should be allowed if medically appropriate.
- The winter solstice is a time for reflection and therefore a time for prayer.

Tips for Supporting Staff and Faculty Members and Students:
- Employees, faculty members and students may request this time off. This should be allowed.

For More Information
Please contact the Office of Diversity and Cultural Competence at diversity@jhmi.edu or Paula Teague, senior director of the Department of Spiritual Care and Chaplaincy, at pteague1@jhmi.edu.