



The Twelve Days of Christmas

When I was a child, the Christmas season began in December as the first snow fell and Christmas music began to flood the radio stations. Now into my middle years, I am startled to see Christmas creeping in sooner and sooner. This year, I even saw Christmas decorations displayed mid-October next to the Halloween costumes! Paradoxically, at least in my experience, the earlier the season begins the quicker it seems to fly. The excitement for Christmas builds suddenly—in a flash the day has passed and by Boxing Day we have the post-Christmas blues.

As Christians, we are called to a different way, by a pattern that moulds our lives to God's story and God's time. Christians wait faithfully for the birth of Christ with both expectation and longing during the four weeks of Advent. On December 25, the day of Christ's birth is celebrated and we begin the twelve days of Christmas, which end on January 6 with Epiphany.

Our patterns of worship and church life have done well at focusing our attention on the meaning and significance of the season of Advent and Christmas but could stand to do better at lifting up the meaning of the twelve days of Christmas. After all, Christmas commemorates the amazing historic event—God taking on human flesh and residing with humanity—but the twelve days helps us to understand this event and to work out its significance for us as followers of Christ. These twelve days are opportunities for us reflect on the meaning of the Incarnation in our lives and in our time.

Perhaps a good place to turn during the season of Christmas is the familiar Christmas carol, The Twelve Days of Christmas. Some historians believe this song was actually a tool for catechesis and served to teach children the central beliefs of Christianity. Whether or not this is true, looking at this festive carol through the lens of faith helps us to recall the transformative presence of God in the world and the guideposts we have been given to help us live as disciples.



A Partridge in a Pear Tree

On the 1st day of Christmas my true love gave to me... A Partridge in a Pear

Tree The partridge in a pear tree is Jesus the Christ, the Son of God.

Christ's depiction as a partridge recalls the Jesus' heartfelt cry over Jerusalem in Luke's gospel. "Jerusalem! Jerusalem! How often would I have sheltered you under my wings, as a hen does her chicks..." (Luke 13:34)



On the 2nd day of Christmas my true love gave to me... Two Turtle Doves

The two turtle doves represent the Old and New Testaments, which together bear witness to God's self-revelation in history.



On the 3rd day of Christmas my true love gave to me... Three French Hens

The three French hens represent the three theological virtues of: 1) Faith, 2) Hope, and 3) Love. (1 Corinthians 13:13)



On the 4th day of Christmas my true love gave to me... Four Calling Birds

The four calling birds are the four gospels: 1) Matthew, 2) Mark, 3) Luke, and 4) John, which proclaim the Good News of Jesus Christ.



On the 5th day of Christmas my true love gave to me... Five Gold Rings

The five gold rings represent the first five books of the Old Testament: 1) Genesis, 2) Exodus, 3) Leviticus, 4) Numbers, and 5) Deuteronomy, which tell the story of God establishing the people of Israel as a holy nation called to be a light and a blessing unto the world.



On the 6th day of Christmas my true love gave to me... Six Geese A-laying

The six geese represent the six days of creation that reveal God as creator and sustainer of all. (Genesis 1).



On the 7th day of Christmas my true love gave to me... Seven Swans A-

swimming. The seven swans represent the seven gifts of the Holy Spirit: 1) prophecy, 2) ministry, 3) teaching, 4) exhortation, 5) generosity, 6) leading, and 7) compassion. (Romans 12:6-8)



On the 8th day of Christmas my true love gave to me... Eight Maids A-Milking

The eight maids represent the eight Beatitudes: 1) Blessed are the poor in spirit, 2) those who mourn, 3) the meek, 4) those who hunger and thirst for righteousness, 5) the merciful, 6) the pure in heart, 7) the peacemakers, 8) those who are persecuted for righteousness' sake. (Matthew 5:3-10)



On the 9th day of Christmas my true love gave to me... Nine Ladies Dancing

The nine ladies recall the nine fruit of the Holy Spirit: 1) love, 2) joy, 3) peace, 4) patience, 5) kindness, 6) generosity, 7) faithfulness, 8) gentleness, and 9) self-control. (Galatians 5:22-23)



On the 10th day of Christmas my true love gave to me... Ten Lords A-leaping

The ten lords point to the ten commandments: 1) You shall have no other gods before me; 2) Do not make an idol; 3) Do not take God's name in vain; 4) Remember the Sabbath Day; 5) honour your father and mother; 6) Do not murder; 7) Do not commit adultery; 8) Do not steal; 9) Do not bear false witness; 10) Do not covet. (Exodus 20:1-17)



On the 11th day of Christmas my true love gave to me... Eleven Pipers Piping

The eleven pipers piping represent the eleven faithful Apostles: 1) Simon Peter, 2) Andrew, 3) James, 4) John, 5) Philip, 6) Bartholomew, 7) Matthew, 8) Thomas, 9) James, 10) Simon the Zealot, 11) Judas son James. (Luke 6:14-16). Note this list does not include the twelfth disciple who betrayed Jesus.



On the 12th day of Christmas my true love gave to me... Twelve Drummers

Drumming The twelve drummers drumming represent the twelve points of doctrine in the Apostles' Creed: 1) I believe in God, the Father almighty, creator of heaven and earth. 2) I believe in Jesus Christ, his only Son, our Lord. 3) Who was conceived by the power of the Holy Spirit and born of the Virgin Mary. 4) He suffered under Pontius Pilate, was crucified, died and was buried; he descended to hell. 5) On the third day he rose again from the dead. He ascended into heaven, and is seated at the right hand of God the Father almighty. 6) From there he will come again to judge the living and the dead. 7) I believe in the Holy Spirit, 8) the holy Catholic Church, 9) the communion of saints, 10) the forgiveness of sins, 11) the resurrection of the body, 12) and the life everlasting.