

The 12 Days of Christmas

On the 1st day of Christmas, my true love gave to me a partridge in a pear tree
(Jesus Christ)

On the 2nd day of Christmas, my true love gave to me two turtle doves
(Old and New Testament)

On the 3rd day of Christmas, my true love gave to me three French hens
(The 3 Virtues - Faith, Hope, and Charity)

On the 4th day of Christmas, my true love gave to me four calling birds
(The 4 Gospels - Matthew, Mark, Luke, and John)

On the 5th day of Christmas my true love gave to me five golden rings
(The Pentateuch - the 1st five books of the Bible)

On the 6th day of Christmas my true love gave to me six geese a-laying
(The 6 days of creation)

On the 7th day of Christmas my true love gave to me seven swans a-swimming
(The 7 sacraments and the 7 gifts of the Holy Spirit)

On the 8th day of Christmas my true love gave to me eight maids a-milking
(The 8 beatitudes)

On the 9th day of Christmas my true love gave to me nine ladies dancing
(The nine Fruits of the Holy Spirit)

On the 10th day of Christmas my true love gave to me ten lords a-leaping
(The 10 Commandments)

On the 11th day of Christmas my true love gave to me eleven pipers piping
(The 11 faithful apostles)

On the 12th day of Christmas my true love gave to me twelve drummers
drumming
(The 12 points of doctrine in the Apostle's Creed)

Origin of 'The Twelve Days of Christmas'

Author: Fr. Hal Stockert

ORIGIN OF "THE TWELVE DAYS OF CHRISTMAS" An Underground Catechism

You're all familiar with the Christmas song, "The Twelve Days of Christmas" I think. To most it's a delightful nonsense rhyme set to music. But it had a quite serious purpose when it was written.

It is a good deal more than just a repetitious melody with pretty phrases and a list of strange gifts.

Catholics in England during the period 1558 to 1829, when Parliament finally emancipated Catholics in England, were prohibited from ANY practice of their faith by law - private OR public. It was a crime to BE a Catholic.

"The Twelve Days of Christmas" was written in England as one of the "catechism songs" to help young Catholics learn the tenets of their faith - a memory aid, when to be caught with anything in *writing* indicating adherence to the Catholic faith could not only get you imprisoned, it could get you hanged, or shortened by a head - or hanged, drawn and quartered, a rather peculiar and ghastly punishment I'm not aware was ever practiced anywhere else. Hanging, drawing and quartering involved hanging a person by the neck until they had almost, but not quite, suffocated to death; then the party was taken down from the gallows, and disemboweled while still alive; and while the entrails were still lying on the street, where the executioners stomped all over them, the victim was tied to four large farm horses, and literally torn into five parts - one to each limb and the remaining torso.

The songs gifts are hidden meanings to the teachings of the faith. The "true love" mentioned in the song doesn't refer to an earthly suitor, it refers to God Himself. The "me" who receives the presents refers to every baptized person. The partridge in a pear tree is Jesus Christ, the Son of God. In the song, Christ is symbolically presented as a mother partridge which feigns injury to decoy predators from her helpless nestlings, much in memory of the expression of Christ's sadness over the fate of Jerusalem: "Jerusalem! Jerusalem! How often would I have sheltered thee under my wings, as a hen does her chicks, but thou wouldst not have it so..."

The other symbols mean the following:

2 Turtle Doves = The Old and New Testaments
3 French Hens = Faith, Hope and Charity, the Theological Virtues
4 Calling Birds = the Four Gospels and/or the Four Evangelists
5 Golden Rings = The first Five Books of the Old Testament, the "Pentateuch", which gives the history of man's fall from grace.
6 Geese A-laying = the six days of creation
7 Swans A-swimming = the seven gifts of the Holy Spirit, the seven sacraments
8 Maids A-milking = the eight beatitudes
9 Ladies Dancing = the nine Fruits of the Holy Spirit
10 Lords A-leaping = the ten commandments
11 Pipers Piping = the eleven faithful apostles
12 Drummers Drumming = the twelve points of doctrine in the Apostle's Creed

--Fr. Hal Stockert, Fishnet

The 12 Days of Christmas was written as a memory aid in England in the 16th century due to persecutions of Catholics after the reformation.

Here is the meaning...

The “gifts” in the song are hidden meanings to the teachings of the faith.

“True Love” = God

“Me” = the baptised

“A Partridge in a Pear Tree” = Jesus Christ, the Son of God

A partridge feigns injury to decoy predators from helpless nestlings

“2 Turtle Doves” = The Old Testament and New Testament

“3 French Hens” = The 3 Theological Virtues - Faith, Hope, and Charity

“4 Calling Birds” = The 4 Gospels, Matthew, Mark, Luke, and John

“5 Golden Rings” = The Pentateuch (1st five books of the Bible) Genesis, Exodus, Leviticus, Numbers, and Deuteronomy

“6 Geese A-Laying” = The 6 days of creation

1. Creation of time, light, heavens and earth
2. Sky and seas
3. Land and plants
4. Sun, moon, stars and planets
5. Fish and birds
6. Man and animals

“7 Swans A-Swimming” = The 7 Gifts of the Holy Spirit and the 7 Sacraments

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| 1. Wisdom | 1. Baptism |
| 2. Understanding | 2. Confirmation |
| 3. Knowledge | 3. Eucharist |
| 4. Counsel | 4. Reconciliation |
| 5. Fortitude | 5. Anointing of the Sick |
| 6. Piety | 6. Matrimony |
| 7. Fear of the Lord | 7. Holy Orders |

“8 Maids A-Milking” = The 8 Beatitudes

1. Blessed are the poor in spirit, for theirs is the kingdom of heaven.
2. Blessed are they who mourn, for they will be comforted.
3. Blessed are the meek, for they will inherit the land.
4. Blessed are they who hunger and thirst for righteousness, for they will be satisfied.
5. Blessed are the merciful, for they will be shown mercy.
6. Blessed are the clean of heart, for they will see God.
7. Blessed are the peacemakers, for they will be called children of God.
8. Blessed are they who are persecuted for the sake of righteousness, for theirs is the kingdom of heaven.
Blessed are you when they insult you and persecute you and utter every kind of evil against you because of me. Rejoice and be glad, for your reward will be great in heaven.

“9 Ladies Dancing” = The 9 Fruits of the Holy Spirit

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| 1. Love | 6. Generosity |
| 2. Joy | 7. Faithfulness |
| 3. Peace | 8. Gentleness |
| 4. Patience | 9. Self-control |
| 5. Kindness | |

“10 Lords A-Leaping” = The 10 Commandments

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| 1. I AM the Lord your God: You shall not have strange gods before me. | 6. You shall not commit adultery |
| 2. You shall not take the name of the Lord your God in vain | 7. You shall not steal |
| 3. Keep the Sabbath (Sunday) Holy | 8. You shall not bear false witness against your neighbor |
| 4. Honor your father and your mother | 9. You shall not covet your neighbor's wife |
| 5. You shall not kill | 10. You shall not covet your neighbor's goods |

“11 Pipers Piping” = the 11 faithful Apostles

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| 1. Peter (Simon) | 7. Thomas |
| 2. Andrew | 8. Matthew the tax collector |
| 3. James the son of Zebedee | 9. James son of Alphaeus |
| 4. John | 10. Thaddaeus |
| 5. Philip | 11. Simon the Zealot |
| 6. Bartholomew | |

“12 Drummers Drumming” = The 12 points of doctrine in the Apostle's Creed

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| 1. I believe in God, the Father Almighty, Creator of heaven and earth | 7. Jesus will come again to judge the living and the dead |
| 2. I believe in Jesus Christ, Gods only Son, our Lord | 8. I believe in the Holy Spirit |
| 3. Jesus was conceived by the power of the Holy Spirit and born of the Virgin Mary | 9. I believe in the holy catholic Church, the Communion of Saints |
| 4. Jesus suffered under Pontius Pilate, was crucified, died, and was buried | 10. I believe in the forgiveness of sins |
| 5. Jesus descended into hell. The third day he arose again from the dead | 11. I believe in the resurrection of the body |
| 6. Jesus ascended into heaven and is seated at the right hand of God the Father Almighty | 12. I believe in life everlasting |