

Twelve Days of Christmas

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Christmas is a season of the Christian Year that lasts for the twelve days beginning December 25 and lasting until January 6 — the Day of Epiphany, when the church celebrates the revelation of Christ as the Light of the world and recalls the journey of the Magi.

From 1558 until 1829 Roman Catholics in England were not allowed to practice their faith openly. During that era someone wrote *The Twelve Days of Christmas* as a kind of secret catechism that could be sung in public without the risk of persecution. The song has two levels of interpretation: the surface meaning plus a hidden meaning known only to members of the church. Each element in the carol is a code word for a religious reality.

The partridge in a pear tree is Jesus Christ.

The two turtledoves are the older and newer testaments. (Hebrews 8:6-13)

But now hath he obtained a more excellent ministry, by how much also he is the mediator of a better covenant, which was established upon better promises. For if that first covenant had been faultless, then should no place have been sought for the second. For finding fault with them, he saith, Behold, the days come, saith the Lord, when I will make a new covenant with the house of Israel and with the house of Judah: Not according to the covenant that I made with their fathers in the day when I took them by the hand to lead them out of the land of Egypt; because they continued not in My covenant, and I regarded them not, saith the Lord. For this is the covenant that I will make with the house of Israel after those days, saith the Lord; I will put My laws into their mind, and write them in their hearts: and I will be to them a God, and they shall be to Me a people: And they shall not teach every man his neighbour, and every man his brother, saying, Know the Lord: for all shall know Me, from the least to the greatest. For I will be merciful to their unrighteousness, and their sins and their iniquities will I remember no more. In that he saith, A new covenant, he hath made the first old. Now that which decayeth and waxeth old is ready to vanish away. — Hebrews 8:6-13

Three French hens stand for faith, hope and love. (1 Corinthians 13:13; 1 Thess. 5:8)

And now abideth faith, hope, charity, these three; but the greatest of these is charity.
— 1 Corinthians 13:13

But let us, who are of the day, be sober, putting on the breastplate of faith and love; and for an helmet, the hope of salvation. — 1 Thessalonians 5:8

The four calling birds are the four Gospels.

The five gold rings recall the Torah (Law), the first five books of the older testament.

The six geese a-laying stand for the six days of creation. (Genesis 1)

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Seven swans a-swimming represent the sevenfold gifts of the Spirit. (1 Corinthians 12:8-10)

For to one is given by the Spirit the word of wisdom; to another the word of knowledge by the same Spirit; To another faith by the same Spirit; to another the gifts of healing by the same Spirit; To another the working of miracles; to another prophecy; to another discerning of spirits; to another divers kinds of tongues; to another the interpretation of tongues:
— 1 Corinthians 12:8-10

The eight maids a-milking are the eight beatitudes. (Matthew 5:3:-11)

Blessed are the poor in spirit: for theirs is the kingdom of heaven.
Blessed are they that mourn: for they shall be comforted.
Blessed are the meek: for they shall inherit the earth.
Blessed are they which do hunger and thirst after righteousness: for they shall be filled.
Blessed are the merciful: for they shall obtain mercy.
Blessed are the pure in heart: for they shall see God.
Blessed are the peacemakers: for they shall be called the children of God.
Blessed are they which are persecuted for righteousness' sake: for theirs is the kingdom of heaven.
Blessed are ye, when men shall revile you, and persecute you, and shall say all manner of evil against you falsely, for My sake. — Matthew 5:3:-11

Nine ladies dancing? These are the nine fruits of the Spirit (Galatians 5:22,23).

But the fruit of the Spirit is love, joy, peace, longsuffering, gentleness, goodness, faith, Meekness, temperance: against such there is no law. — Galatians 5:22,23

The ten lords a-leaping are the Ten Commandments (Exodus 20; Deuteronomy 5:6-21).

Eleven pipers piping stand for the eleven faithful disciples.

Twelve drummers drumming symbolize the twelve points of belief in the Apostles' Creed.