

# The 12 Days of Christmas

## A CHRISTMAS GREETING



**The 12 Days of Christmas**

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# The 12 Days of Christmas

Now that Christmas Day has come, we get to enjoy the Christmas festivities for another 12 days! Christmas has not ended with Christmas Day, but rather, has only begun! Every day there is something special to remember and celebrate.

You are all familiar with the Christmas song *The Twelve Days of Christmas*. This song was not just a nonsense song written for fun, but instead was written for a much more important reason. Between the years 1558 and 1829, it was a crime to be a Catholic in England – a crime that was punishable by death. *The Twelve Days of Christmas* was written to help young Catholics learn the main points of their Faith, since to be caught with anything in writing that showed that one was a Catholic could very well have meant death.

There are hidden meanings throughout each point of the song. The *True Love* refers to God, our Heavenly Father, Who is Love. *Me* refers to every baptized person.

**December 26** – On the First Day of Christmas, my True Love gave to me....

## **A partridge in a pear tree**

The partridge refers to Jesus Christ, our Redeemer, who died on a wooden cross to save us from our sins and open the gates of Heaven.

## **The Feast of St. Stephen**

The name Stephen means, ‘crown’. St. Stephen was the very first of Christ’s followers to receive the crown of martyrdom. As the number of Christians began to grow, Peter and the other Apostles decided they needed to appoint some people to the care of widows and the poor. St. Stephen is the best known of the seven deacons who were given this duty.

St. Stephen performed many miracles by the grace of God. He spoke with great wisdom and grace so that many people became followers of Christ. This made the enemies of the Christians furious. So, they decided to plot against him. When they couldn’t answer his good arguments, they had men lie about him, saying that he spoke sinfully against God. St. Stephen was not afraid – the Bible says his face looked like that of an angel.

Speaking about Jesus, St. Stephen told the Jews that He was the Saviour God had promised to send. He scolded them for not believing in Jesus. They rose in anger, shouting at him. Looking up to Heaven, he said that he saw the heavens opening and Jesus sitting at

the right hand of God. The hearers plugged their ears and would not listen to another word. Dragging him out of the city, they threw stones at him until he died. Before he died though, he said, “Lord Jesus, receive my spirit”, and falling to his knees he asked God not to punish his enemies for killing him.

*When we are hurt by the words and actions of others, let's remember St. Stephen, and ask him to help us forgive from our heart those who hurt us.*

Today, we can also remember Good King Wenceslaus, who ‘looked out on the Feast of Stephen’ and gave food to a needy person. What better day to sing this Christmas song than today?

**December 27** – On the second day of Christmas my True Love gave to me....

### **Two turtle doves**

The two turtle doves represent the two books of the Bible – the Old Testament and the New Testament. The Old Testament, which is made up of forty-five sacred books, tells the history of the Jews from Creation up until just before the time of Christ. The New Testament, which contains twenty-seven sacred books, tells the stories of Jesus and of His followers.

### **The Feast of St. John the Evangelist**

St. John the Evangelist was the youngest of the twelve Apostles and is the one called “the beloved disciple.” He was the brother to St. James, another Apostle, and these two brothers were given the nickname “sons of thunder” by Jesus Himself.

At the Last Supper, St. John rested his head on the chest of Jesus. He was the only one of the Apostles to stay by Jesus at the foot of the Cross. It was to St. John that Jesus gave His Mother Mary to, saying, “Behold, thy Mother.”

On Easter morning, when Mary Magdalene told the Apostles that Jesus’ body was not in the tomb, St. John raced ahead of St. Peter to the tomb but waited for Peter to go in first. When he saw the neatly folded linens, he understood that Jesus had indeed risen.

St. John wrote the Gospel of John, the fourth book of the New Testament. He died around the year 100 in Ephesus, and is the only Apostle who did not die by martyrdom.

*When you are tempted to something that displeases Jesus, ask St. John for help to remain faithful to Jesus as he was when Jesus was crucified.*

**December 28** – On the third day of Christmas my True Love gave to me.....

### **Three French Hens**

The Three French Hens represent what the Church calls the three theological virtues: Faith, Hope and Charity. They are called theological, from the Greek word *theos*, which means God, because their object is God.

Faith is the virtue by which we firmly believe all the truths which God has revealed simply because He has revealed them, Who can neither deceive nor be deceived. Hebrews 11:6 says, "Without faith, it is impossible to please God." Faith is a gift from God, and we can increase it by prayer.

Hope is the virtue by which we firmly trust that God, Who is all-powerful and faithful to His promises, will mercifully give us eternal happiness and the means to obtain it.

Charity is the virtue by which we love God above all things for His own sake, and our neighbour as ourselves, for the love of God.

### **The Feast of the Holy Innocents**

Herod was the ruler at the time of Jesus' birth. When the Wise Men from the Orient followed the star to Judea, they stopped and asked Herod where the Messiah, the Newborn King, was to be born. Now, Herod was a very jealous and cruel man. When the Wise Men spoke of a King, he was afraid of losing his own throne and kingdom. He did not realize that this new King was the King of kings, and not an earthly leader. So, calling his chief priests together, he found out that the Messiah was to be born in Bethlehem. He told the Wise Men to go to Bethlehem, and when they had found Him, to come back and tell him where He was, so that he, too, could go and adore this new King.

The Wise Men found the Newborn Babe and worshipped Him, offering Him their gifts of gold, frankincense and myrrh. When they were ready to leave, they were warned in a dream not to go back to Herod, but to return to their own land a different way.

When Herod discovered that the Magi had returned to their own land, he was furious. He ordered all the little baby boys in Bethlehem under two years of age to be killed. In this way, he thought that the Messiah would be among those killed.

These little boys are called the Holy Innocents. They are the protectors of all little children, and we can pray to them to protect all children who are in danger of being hurt. We can also ask them to change the hearts of those who would be seeking to hurt little children.

**December 29** – On the fourth day of Christmas my True Love gave to me....

### **Four Calling Birds**

The Four Calling Birds are the four Gospels and/or the four Evangelists, namely, Matthew, Mark, Luke and John.

St. Matthew was a tax collector before becoming one of the twelve Apostles at Our Lord's calling. He was the first one to write the Gospel about six years after the Ascension of Jesus into Heaven. He first wrote it in Hebrew for the Jews in Palestine, and it was later translated into Greek at the time of the Apostles. Matthew's Gospel shows how Jesus proved Himself to be the Messiah.

St. Mark was a disciple of St. Peter. He wrote his Gospel based on what St. Peter told him. His writings were for the Christians of Rome, and were written about ten years after Christ's Ascension.

St. Luke was converted by St. Paul, and became one of St. Paul's disciples. His Gospel was written for a well-known citizen of Rome about twenty-four years after Jesus' Ascension. St. Luke's Gospel contains many details about the Blessed Virgin Mary.

St. John, whom we read about yesterday, was Christ's Beloved Disciple. He wrote his Gospel about sixty-three years after Christ's Ascension. His Gospel was written to show that Jesus Christ is true God and to testify against certain heretics who had arisen.

### **St. Thomas Becket**

St. Thomas Becket was born in London, England, in 1118. He accepted a position in the Archbishop of Canterbury's house after his parents died, and studied for the priesthood. King Henry II and he soon became such very close friends that people said they were of one heart and mind.

Thomas was made the Chancellor to King Henry II when he was thirty-six. Upon the death of the Archbishop of Canterbury, Henry asked the Pope to make Thomas the new Archbishop. Thomas did not want to be Archbishop because he knew this would cause many problems between Henry II and himself. He forewarned the king that he would begin to hate Thomas. Ignoring this warning, Henry persisted, and Thomas was consequently made a priest and a bishop in 1162.

Things went well at first. Taking his responsibility very seriously, Thomas offered up many sacrifices and became more prayerful. Soon, however, things went bad. The king demanded money from the Church, and Thomas knew he couldn't rightfully give it. This made the king furious and he treated Thomas very harshly. Thomas was tempted to give in a little,

but when he realized how much Henry wanted to control the Church, he immediately repented and became even stronger in defending it.

Enraged, the king asked if there was no way he could be rid of the Archbishop of Canterbury. Taking him seriously, four of his knights rode off to the Archbishop's Cathedral, and rushing inside, they murdered him on the 29<sup>th</sup> of December in 1170.

The Christian people were horrified at this crime. Pope Alexander III made King Henry II responsible, and bade him do public penance for his crime. Many miracles began to occur at the tomb of St. Thomas. He was proclaimed a Saint by Pope Alexander III in 1173.

*We can learn from St. Thomas Becket, to always stand in defense of the True Faith, no matter how hard it might be, even if we have to die for it.*

**December 30** – On the fifth day of Christmas my True Love gave to me...

### **Five Golden Rings**

The Five Golden Rings represent the first five books in the Old Testament. They are called "The Pentateuch", and are believed to have been written by Moses. These five books are: Genesis, Exodus, Numbers, Leviticus and Deuteronomy.

Genesis is the first book of the Bible, and means, 'the Beginnings'. It contains stories that were told for hundreds of years before anyone wrote them down. Genesis begins by telling about the creation of the world, and continues on with telling about the Fall, Cain and Abel, Noah and the Flood, Abraham, Isaac, Jacob and Esau, and Joseph and his brothers.

Exodus is the second book of the Bible, and means 'going out'. This book tells about some of the most important events in the history of Abraham's children, including God's rescuing of the Israelites from slavery in Egypt, the parting of the Red Sea, the Ten Commandments, and more.

Leviticus is the third book of the Bible, and is named after the tribe of Levi. It was the tribe of Levi to which the priests and their helpers belonged. Leviticus contains laws for the people as well as some rules for the priests and their helpers.

Numbers is the fourth book of the Bible, and it was given this name because at both the beginning and end of the book, a census of the Hebrews is described. Numbers also contains various laws, and tells of the wanderings of the Israelites in the desert for forty years.

Deuteronomy is the fifth book of the Bible, and the last book of the Pentateuch. Deuteronomy means 'second law'. This book restates some of the laws and events told in the other books of the Pentateuch, while adding to these laws and events, bringing them more up to date for the people of that time. The end of Deuteronomy tells us that Joshua was

chosen to lead the people into the Promised Land, and that Moses saw the Promised Land before he died.

## **St. Sabinus**

The true story of Saint Sabinus is not known to us for sure, only God knows what really happened. But there was a legend begun in the fifth or sixth century that went like this:

Sabinus, a bishop of Assisi, had been imprisoned for being a Christian, along with several of his clergy. Because he broke a statue of Jupiter, one of the false gods of the time, his punishment was to have his hands cut off. He was then sent back to his prison cell while more tortures were prepared for him. While he recovered somewhat, he was visited by a Christian widow named Serena and her blind son. Sabinus raised his handless arms to bless the child, and the child was cured. After this miracle, many of his fellow prisoners began begging Sabinus to baptize them. Upon hearing of this miracle, Venustian, the governor who ordered Sabinus' hands to be cut off and his imprisonment, also converted to Christianity. Soon, Venustian, his wife, and his children followed Sabinus in martyrdom.

**December 31** – On the sixth day of Christmas, my True Love gave to me...

## **Six Geese a-laying**

The six geese a-laying represent the six days of creation.

Day 1 – God said, 'Be light made', and light was made. He divided the light from the darkness and called the light Day and the darkness Night.

Day 2 – God created the sky and divided the waters.

Day 3 – God made the dry land to appear and bring forth grass, trees and other plants.

Day 4 – God made the sun, moon and stars. The stronger light, the sun, was to rule over the day, and the weaker light, the moon, was to rule over the night.

Day 5 – God made the birds, the fishes and all the creeping things.

Day 6 – God made the beasts and the cattle. Then He made man and woman in His own image, and told them to be fruitful and multiply.



## **St. Catherine Laboure**

St. Catherine was born in 1806 in France. Her mother died when she was only nine years old, and because of this, Catherine was left in charge of managing the whole household. From a young age, she sincerely desired to become a nun, but her father would not hear of it, since two of his daughters were already nuns. She did not get to fulfill God's calling with her father's permission until she was twenty-four years old.

In the convent, she appeared as a very ordinary sister. No one thought anything was very special about her. It wasn't until after her death that her fellow sisters realized what precious gift had been bestowed upon her. She was visited by Our Lady herself numerous times. In the most well known of these visions, November 27, 1830, Our Lady showed herself in an oval light, with rays streaming from her hands. She was standing on a globe, representing the earth. Above her head, the words, "O Mary, conceived without sin, pray for us who have recourse to thee." On the other side, was the letter 'M', a cross and the hearts of Jesus and Mary. Our Lady asked Catherine to have a medal made showing what she had just seen in the vision.

After many trials, permission was granted for the medal to be made. Once it began getting distributed, many miracles began to occur. There were many conversions and physical and spiritual healings, just to name a few.

**Sometime in the evening of the last day of the year, kneel before a picture of the Sacred Heart together as a family and pray:**

**(From an old book of Sunday Sermons)**

*"Dear Heavenly Father, we thank Thee for all the gifts, the blessings, and yes, even for the sufferings of this past year. We beg of Thee to forgive us for all of our sins and failings of this past year. We consecrate ourselves and our family to Thee once again. We offer Thee this New Year to come, and beg of Thee Thy blessing on the year and on every member of our family. We entrust our family to Thy keeping. Please watch over us and guide us in the way of Thy Truth. Above all, please fulfill those two great promises in our family: That Thou wilt establish peace in our home, and pour abundant blessings on all our undertakings. Most Sacred Heart of Jesus, have mercy on us. Sorrowful and Immaculate Heart of Mary, pray for us. St. Joseph, pray for us. Amen."*

**January 1** – On the seventh day of Christmas, my True Love gave to me...

### **Seven Swans a-Swimming**

The seven swans a-swimming represent the seven Sacraments. A Sacrament is an outward sign instituted by Christ to give grace. There are no more and no less than seven for the simple reason that Our Lord instituted seven.

The seven Sacraments are:

Baptism – the Sacrament by which Original Sin is washed away from our souls.

Confirmation – the Sacrament through which the Holy Ghost comes to us in a special way and makes us stronger in the Faith and soldiers of Jesus Christ

Holy Eucharist – the Sacrament of the Body and Blood of Our Lord under the appearances of bread and wine

Penance – by which the sins we commit after Baptism are forgiven

Extreme Unction – the Sacrament which gives strength to the soul, and sometimes to the body, when we are in danger of death from sickness, accident or old age

Holy Orders – the Sacrament that makes priests

Matrimony – the Sacrament that unites a man and a woman, and gives them the graces they need to raise a family and help each other save their souls

### **The Circumcision of Jesus**

Circumcision was a sacrament of the Old Law. It was the beginning of entering into the service of God, and a promise to believe and act as God had shown and instructed. This law remained a law until the death of Christ. Jesus wanted to teach us obedience to God's law, so He Himself was circumcised, since He was born under that law.

**January 2** – On the eighth day of Christmas, my True Love gave to me....

### **Eight Maids a-Milking**

The eight maids a-milking represent the Eight Beatitudes found in the Gospel of Matthew.

Matthew Chapter 5:

“And seeing the multitudes, he went up into a mountain, and when he was set down, his disciples came unto him. And opening his mouth, he taught them, saying:

- 1) Blessed are the poor in spirit: for theirs is the kingdom of heaven.
- 2) Blessed are the meek: for they shall possess the land.
- 3) Blessed are they that mourn: for they shall be comforted.
- 4) Blessed are they that hunger and thirst after justice: for they shall have their fill.
- 5) Blessed are the merciful: for they shall obtain mercy.
- 6) Blessed are the clean of heart: for they shall see God.
- 7) Blessed are the peacemakers: for they shall be called children of God.
- 8) Blessed are they that suffer persecution for justice' sake: for theirs is the kingdom of heaven.

Blessed are ye when they shall revile you, and persecute you, and speak all that is evil against you, untruly, for my sake: Be glad and rejoice, for your reward is very great in heaven. For so they persecuted the prophets that were before you.”

### **The Holy Name of Jesus**

At the same time of the circumcision, Jesus was given His Name, which means “Saviour”, which had been given to Him by the angel at the Annunciation. There are many indulgences attached to saying the Holy Name of Jesus lovingly and reverently. Try to get in the habit to say many times each day:

**January 3** – On the ninth day of Christmas, my True Love gave to me...

### **Nine Ladies Dancing**

The nine ladies dancing refer to the nine choirs of angels:

- 1) Seraphim
- 2) Cherubim
- 3) Thrones
- 4) Dominations

- 5) Virtues
- 6) Powers
- 7) Principalities
- 8) Archangels
- 9) Angels

## **St. Genevieve**

St. Genevieve was born around the year 420 in a little village called Nanterre. When St. Germanus passed through Nanterre on his way to Britain, he noticed a young girl, and predicted her future holiness. That girl was Genevieve. At seven years of age, she made a vow of chastity.

When Paris was attacked, she convinced Childeric, the leader of the attackers, to spare the lives of many prisoners. When Attila and his Huns were on their way to attack, the people, by Genevieve's instructions, began to pray and make sacrifices rather than run away, and this spared their city. When King Clovis was converted to Christianity by his wife, Clotilda, Genevieve was chosen as his main advisor.

Genevieve died at the age of 89.

**January 4** – On the tenth day of Christmas, my True Love gave to me...

## **Ten Lords a-Leaping**

The ten lords a-leaping refers to the Ten Commandments.

- 1) I am the Lord thy God, who brought thee out of the land of Egypt, out of the house of bondage. Thou shalt not have strange gods before me.
- 2) Thou shalt not take the name of the Lord thy God in vain.
- 3) Remember thou keep holy the Lord's day.
- 4) Honour thy father and thy mother.
- 5) Thou shalt not kill.
- 6) Thou shalt not commit adultery.
- 7) Thou shalt not steal.
- 8) Thou shalt not bear false witness against thy neighbour.
- 9) Thou shalt not covet thy neighbour's wife.
- 10) Thou shalt not covet thy neighbour's goods.

## **St. Angela of Foligno**

Angela was born around the year 1249, in Foligno, Italy. She came from a very rich family, married, and had a large household of children and servants. In some of her writings, she said that she had led a very sinful life for over thirty years, and the fear of her place in Hell led her to confess her sins. Afraid to tell some of her biggest sins, she made a bad confession, and followed this confession with a sacrilegious Communion. This made her even sorer than she had ever been before. Her soul bothered her very much, and she prayed to St. Francis of Assisi who soon after appeared to her in a vision. She made a good Confession the very next day.

When one by one her family members died, she became a Franciscan tertiary – that is, she dressed like a nun, lived like a nun, but lived in her own home rather than a convent with other nuns. She was also a beggar, and completely depended on the kindness of others to give her food. She died in 1309.

**January 5** – On the eleventh day of Christmas, my True Love gave to me...

### **Eleven Pipers Piping**

The Eleven pipers piping refers to the eleven Apostles who were faithful to Jesus.

- 1) Simon Peter
- 2) Andrew
- 3) James
- 4) John
- 5) Philip
- 6) Bartholomew
- 7) Matthew
- 8) Thomas
- 9) James bar Alphaeus
- 10) Simon the Zealot
- 11) Judas bar James

### **St. Simeon Stylites**

As a child, St. Simeon Stylites heard the Beatitudes being read in Church. He asked someone how he might obtain these blessings. He was told about the way monks lived. From a young age, he desired and practiced that type of life. For example, he ate only once a week and gave the rest of his food to the poor until God called him to live alone. Then, he fasted for forty days at a time. He tied a rope about his waist so tight that the skin grew

over it. For thirty-seven years he lived on top of a pillar in all sorts of weather, and adored God. Some men who lived similar lives in Egypt questioned such a strange way of living. They sent one man to go and tell Simeon to come down and live again a normal life. St. Simeon started to come down to show his obedience. The man told Simeon to stay where he was, that his way of life was from God.

What is especially saint-like in all this is that Simeon remained cheerful and humble and obedient in all his severe penances. We can learn two things from St. Simeon's way of living. First, we must always try and desire to be as perfect as God wants us to be, and second, we must be faithful and courageous in using the graces God gives us to help us on our way to Heaven.

**January 6** – On the twelfth day of Christmas my True Love gave to me...

### **Twelve Drummers Drumming**

The Twelve Drummers Drumming refers to the twelve points of doctrine listed in the Apostle's 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) He conceived of the Holy Ghost and born of the Virgin Mary.
- 4) He suffered under Pontius Pilate, was crucified, died, and was buried. He descended into hell (the grave).
- 5) On the third day He rose again. He ascended into heaven, and is seated at the right hand of the Father.
- 6) He will come again to judge the living and the dead.
- 7) I believe in the Holy Ghost,
- 8) the holy catholic Church,
- 9) the communion of saints,
- 10) the forgiveness of sins
- 11) the resurrection of the body,
- 12) and life everlasting.

### **Epiphany – The Visit of the Magi**

We have now come to the last day of the twelve days of Christmas. What a joyous season it has been! Today we remember and celebrate the coming of the Wise Men to Bethlehem. The Wise Men travelled on camels from the Orient following a bright star. The Wise Men are also known as The Magi and their names are Melchior, Balthasar and Gaspar. These three Kings brought gifts of gold, frankincense and myrrh to give to the Baby King – Jesus.

As you put the Wise Men statues into your Nativity set, sing “We Three Kings of Orient Are”. Just as the Magi gave gold, frankincense and myrrh, so you, too, can give gifts to the Baby Jesus. Have someone write down, or write it down yourself if you can, what gift(s) you plan to give, and lay them at Baby Jesus’ feet.

The gold means love. What gift of love can you give?

Perhaps you can share a toy, or give one of your favourite candies to a sibling.

Maybe you can get a drink for a sibling.

If you notice someone left a mess, you can tidy it up without complaining.

The frankincense means prayer. What can you pray for?

Perhaps a Hail Mary every day for a week for an Asian (or any nationality) child who has never heard about Jesus.

Maybe for the conversion of a Jew or a heretic.

It is well to also remember all those who do not have homes, or food, or people to love them, as well as unborn babies and their parents.

The myrrh means suffering and mortification.

You could eat less food at a meal, or more of what you do not like and less of what you do like.

Go without a drink or snack between meals.

Give up candies or desserts for a day.

These are simply suggestions. Say a little prayer asking Jesus to help you know what He would best like you to give, and then make your decision.

Truly all these little gifts you offer to Our Lord will help make a very fruitful Christmas season for yourselves and your loved ones. God bless you!