

Christmas, "The Real Twelve Days"
Sermon by: Rev. Fr. Edward Kusmierczyk

Luke 2
The Birth of Christ
12/25/10

Let us pray: Father it was more than 2,000 years ago that in the city of David, called Bethlehem Your only Son our Savior was born to Mary who wrapped Him in cloths and laid Him in a manger because there was no room in the inn. May we in this Christmas season open our hearts and make room for the indwelling of the Father, the Holy Spirit and the Son, Jesus Christ our Lord. Amen.

Merry Christmas! Those two words set off a flood of images in my mind when I hear them. It gives me thoughts of Christmases past and of what Christmas is all about. And I am sure that all of you have similar images in your mind. As Christians we look at it first and foremost as the day of our Lord's birth. And secondly as a day that brings the joy of giving to someone other than ourselves. It's the joy of seeing their faces light up when they receive a gift. It's the time of year when we look for those special gifts that will help express how much we care for someone. I am not sure when the idea of gift giving was initially started but I would tend to believe that it was on that first Christmas night in a place called Bethlehem. Where the Magi or wise men were being lead by a star to the place where the new born King was to be.

Now we aren't told how many wise men were there. But the early Christian Theologian Tertullian, wrote that there were three wise men because of the number of gifts presented. Now these wise men didn't have to worry about crowds at the mall, or what color or size of gift to buy or even worry about a return policy. They brought gifts that expressed the very essence of who Jesus is. They were coming to honor Him with Gifts fit for a King. Gifts of: **Gold, Frankincense and Myrrh**. Have you ever wondered about the significance of the gifts that the Magi brought for Jesus?

First they brought Him **Gold**, which signifies Royalty and Kingship. And who is Jesus? Revelation 19:16, "**He is King of Kings, and Lord of Lords.**" **Frankincense**, which is a gum resin or spice burned as incense for anointing and signifying of His Priesthood. Psalm 110:4, "**The Lord has sworn and will not change His mind, You are a Priest forever, according to the order of Melchizedek.**"

And finally **Myrrh**, which is a word that comes from the Hebrew word, "**Marrah**" which means bitter. It's an herb or spice used at the time of burial and placed on the body prior to being wrapped in a shroud or burial cloth. Myrrh was to signify, "**The future death and burial of Jesus.**" In John 19:39 we read, "**Nicodemus, who had first come to Him by night, also came, bringing a mixture of myrrh and aloes, about a hundred pounds weight.**" To be used for the burial of Jesus.

Today is a day that the secular world gives thanks, but not so much for the birth of Christ, but because all the hustle and bustle of preparing for this Christmas season is finally over. And now it's time to settle in for the rest of the long gloomy winter season ahead. Let me give you just one example of what I mean. Go up to someone after December 25 and say Merry Christmas. I can almost guarantee that they will get this quizzical look on their face and they will probably respond, **“Christmas; It's Over!”** I would like to ask you a question and you don't have to answer out loud. How many days are there in the Christmas season? For the Christian that's a no brainer. Christmas starts December 25 and goes for twelve days up to January 6 and the Feast of the Epiphany.

What I would like to do now is to kind of change direction slightly and give you what I believe will be a little insight into the twelve days of Christmas. And the way I want to do it is by using what is probably one of the better known songs that we all sing during the Christmas season. You have probably already figured out that the song is, **“The Twelve days of Christmas”**.

But before I get into the song, I want to give you a little historical look at the Christmas season. It was around A. D. 350 that December 25 was proclaimed as the date to commemorate the birth of Jesus. And January 6 the Feast of Epiphany was celebrated as the day the Christ child was presented to the wise men at Bethlehem. In A.D. 567, the council of Tours declared the twelve days between Christmas and Epiphany to be a festive period. The people ended the twelve days festivities on the night of January 5 or January 6 depending on when the counting began.

I also want to give you a little background on why it was written. The origin of the song goes back to the 16th century in England. It was at that time that England proclaimed itself as the official state church. And in doing so, it became strictly forbidden and even outlawed for any and all other religious teaching. This control by the church lasted for 3 centuries. But all it did was to give way to the people to circumvent the authority of the Church and develop ways of teaching religion through hidden and even subversive ways. And what better way to hide a teaching, then to hide it in plain sight. Or should I say in plain hearing? Because what the people did was to use lyrics and song to teach children their religious beliefs.

So I would like to reveal for you the real meaning in the, **“Twelve days of Christmas”**. And since each day starts with the words, **‘My true love gave to me,’** I will go directly to the gift and its meaning along with a scripture verse if applicable.

The First Day: **‘A partridge in a pear tree’**. The partridge is a bird that will fight to the death to defend its young. It's the bird's readiness to die for its young that made it an ancient Christian symbol of Christ. The pear tree represents the cross. John 10:14-15, **“I am the good shepherd; I lay down My life for the sheep.”**

The second Day: **‘Two turtledoves.’** Jewish families used turtledoves as offerings to God. And the gift of two turtledoves is a reminder of the sacrifice offered for Jesus by Mary and Joseph. Luke 2:22, 24, **“Joseph and Mary took him to Jerusalem to**

present Him to the Lord; and to offer a sacrifice in keeping with what is said in the Law of the Lord: ‘a pair of doves or two pigeons’.

The third Day: ‘Three French Hens.’ These were costly birds that symbolized the three valuable gifts that were given to Jesus by the wise men. They were Gifts of Gold, Frankincense, and Myrrh. Matt: 2:10-11, **“When they (wise men) saw the star, they were overjoyed. Oncoming to the house, they saw the child; and they bowed and worshipped Him. Then opening their treasures, they presented to Him gifts of gold, frankincense and myrrh.”**

The Fourth Day: ‘Four Calling Birds.’ The four calling birds are a reminder of the four Gospels. They proclaimed the testimony of Jesus’ life and teachings and are a call to faith in Jesus Christ. John 20:29, **“Because you have seen Me, have you believed? Blessed are they who did not see yet believed.”**

The Fifth Day: ‘Five Golden Rings.’ The five golden rings represent the first five books of the Old Testament. Believed to be written by Moses, they record the creation story and the beginning history of the people of Israel. Deuteronomy 34:10, **“No prophet has risen in Israel like Moses, whom the Lord knew face to face.”**

The Sixth Day: ‘Six Geese A Laying.’ This represents the six days of creation when God by His Word brought forth life. Gen: 1:1-31, **“In the beginning God created the heavens and the earth; God saw all that He had made and said it was good.”**

The Seventh Day: ‘Seven Swans A-Swimming.’ This symbolizes the seven gifts of the Holy Spirit. Romans 12:6, **“Since we have gifts that differ according to the grace given to us, each of us is to exercise them accordingly.”**

The Eighth Day: ‘Eight Maids A Milking.’ This represents eight teachings of Jesus from the Sermon on the Mount called the Beatitudes. These are words that are to nurture and strengthen us in our walk. Matt:5:3-12, **“Blessed are the poor, the meek, the hungry, the thirsty, the merciful, the pure in heart, the peacemakers and the righteous.”**

The Ninth day: ‘Nine Ladies Dancing.’ These ladies remind us of the nine different fruits of the Holy Spirit. Fruits of the Spirit that will change the way we live. Galatians 5:22-23, **“But the fruit of the Spirit is love, joy, peace, patience, kindness, goodness, faithfulness, gentleness and self-control.”**

The Tenth Day: ‘Ten Lords A-Leaping.’ Lords were men with authority who commanded obedience. Ten Lords a-leaping symbolized God’s Ten Commandments. That can be found in Exodus 20:3-17.

The Eleventh Day: ‘Eleven Pipers Piping.’ With the exception of Judas, the pipers represent the eleven Apostles who were chosen by Jesus and remained faithful to Him. Like children who joyfully follow the piper the apostles followed Jesus. Mark 3:16, **“And He appointed the twelve.”**

The Twelfth Day: ‘Twelve Drummers Drumming.’ The twelve drummers represent the twelve vital Christian beliefs that are found in the **Apostle’s Creed**. What a great way for believers to keep God’s Word alive for all to hear and read.

Now as I close I want you to hear the secular view in a story called, **‘Twas the night before Jesus Came’**.

‘Twas the night before Jesus came and all through the house not a creature was Praying, not one in the house. Their Bibles were lain on the shelf without care, in hopes that Jesus would not come there. The children were dressing to crawl into bed, and mom in her rocker with baby on her lap was watching the late show, while I took a nap. When out of the East there arose such a clatter, I sprang to my feet to see what was the matter. Away to the window I flew like a flash, tore open the shutters and threw up the sash! When what to my wondering eyes should appear, but angels proclaiming that Jesus was here. With a light like the sun sending forth a bright ray, I knew in a moment that this must be **THE DAY!**

The light of His face made me cover my head, it was Jesus! Returning just like He said. And though I possessed worldly wisdom and wealth, I cried when I saw Him in spite of myself. In the book of Life which He held in His hand, was written the name of every saved man. He spoke not a word as He searched for my name; when He said, **“It’s not here,”** my head hung in shame.

The people whose names had been written with love, He gathered to take to His Father above. With those who were ready He rose without sound; while all of the rest were left standing around. I fell to my knees, but it was too late; I had waited too long and thus sealed my fate. I stood and cried as they rose out of sight. Oh, if only I had been ready tonight. In the words of this poem the meaning is clear; The coming of Jesus is soon drawing near. There’s only one life, and when comes the last call. We will find that the Bible was true after all!

The question I have for us this morning is, will this Christmas season give us the joy of knowing Jesus as our Lord and Savior? And if not, why not? Amen.

Merry Christmas