

Christ in the Christmas Crunch  
The 12 Days of Christmas

Let us Pray

O God, you make us glad by the yearly festival of the birth of your only Son Jesus Christ: Grant that we, who joyfully receive him as our Redeemer, may with sure confidence behold him when he comes to be our Judge; who lives and reigns with you and the Holy Spirit, one God, now and for ever. *Amen.*

Each year we have a new theme:

1. General Christmas Things
2. Candy Canes
3. Nutcrackers
4. Snowflakes

This year Mary Margaret and Elizabeth knowing it was our fifth year, thought of five golden rings, which led them to the 12 Days of Christmas.

The topic has become something of a challenge in the last few years. I know the Nutcracker theme almost “crunched” me.

And this year’s theme was also a tough one.

I had no ideas at all (although 5 gold rings did go on my Christmas list)

But as to this talk – not a clue.

How was I possibly going to relate 5 gold rings to the birth of Jesus, let alone 9 ladies dancing and 12 drummers drumming.

Small panic.

So I started going through what I know about the actual 12 days of Christmas.

First of all, in spite of the early Christmas creep – with Jingle Bells being played in malls somewhere in October, the 12 days of Christmas are not Christmas minus 12, but Christmas Day plus 12.

Advent, the season before Christmas Day is the time of preparation to remember Jesus' birth (and to look for His return in glory), but the real time of celebration is Christmas and the following 12 days – days that take us to the Feast of Epiphany.

The Epiphany (which means manifestation or appearance) is the day that we celebrate the arrival of the three wise men (from the Greek *magoi* which means sage) in Bethlehem to worship the one “who has been born king of the Jews.” (Matthew 2:2)

Matthew 2 records this event:

In the time of King Herod, after Jesus was born in Bethlehem of Judea, wise men from the East came to Jerusalem, asking, "Where is the child who has been born king of the Jews? For we observed his star at its rising, and have come to pay him homage." When King Herod heard this, he was frightened, and all Jerusalem with him; and calling together all the chief priests and scribes of the people, he inquired of them where the Messiah was to be born. They told him, "In Bethlehem of Judea; for so it has been written by the prophet: 'And you, Bethlehem, in the land of Judah, are by no means least among the rulers of Judah; for from you shall come a ruler who is to shepherd my people Israel.'" Then Herod secretly called for the wise men and learned from them the exact time when the star had appeared. Then he sent them to Bethlehem, saying, "Go and search diligently for the child; and when you have found him, bring me word so that I may also go and pay him homage."

When they had heard the king, they set out; and there, ahead of them, went the star that they had seen at its rising, until it stopped over the place where the child was. When they saw that the star had stopped, they were overwhelmed with joy. On entering the house, they saw the child with Mary his mother; and they knelt down and paid him homage. Then, opening their treasure chests, they offered him gifts of gold, frankincense, and myrrh. And having been warned in a dream not to return to Herod, they left for their own country by another road.

Who were these wise men, or magi?

Well they were the educated, well-read, elite of their nations. They were a sort of mix of university professor, astrologer, astronomer, philosopher, and religious leader.

They were most likely from the area of Iran and Iraq. Areas where the Jews had been in captivity and where they later settled.

Their predecessors would have studied the Old Testament and listened to the Jewish religious leaders tell of the Messiah and the prophecies that pointed to Him.

So, when they saw a unique star in the sky, they studied their books and determined that it was the star that had been foretold in Numbers 24:17, and they realized that it heralded the birth of the Messiah, the anointed "king of the Jews."

And off they went to see the fulfillment of what they had heard and to see this King.

It was a remarkable journey; a journey that would have taken weeks if not months along dangerous roads and through desolate areas.

But they keep following that star – all the way to Bethlehem. Carrying all the while their gifts – gold, frankincense and myrrh. Strange gifts. In fact in the delightful book, "The Best Christmas Pageant Ever" we read of the dreadful Herdman children being sort of disgusted that the wise men brought such inappropriate baby gifts. And so on the night of the big pageant, their three wise men show up with a ham! Much more sensible, although a massive violation of kosher rules, so perhaps a nice lamb with mint sauce would have been better.

This started me thinking about Christmas gifts in general. Which brought me back again to the theme – the song the 12 Days of Christmas. So I "Googled" around a little more I came across this correspondence:

**December 14, 2003**

Dearest Dave,

I went to the door today, and the postman delivered a partridge in a pear tree. This was a delightful gift! I couldn't have been more surprised or pleased darling!

With truly the deepest love, Agnes

**December 15, 2003**

Dearest Dave,

Today the postman brought me yet another of your sweet gifts. The two turtle doves that arrived today are adorable, and I'm delighted by your thoughtful and generous ways.

With all of my love, Your Agnes

**December 16, 2003**

Dearest Dave,

You've truly been too kind! I must protest; I don't deserve such generosity. The thought of getting three French hens amazes me. Yet, I am not surprised--what more should I expect from such a nice person.

Love, Agnes

**December 17, 2003**

Dear Dave,

Four calling birds arrived in the mail today. They are truly nice but don't you think that enough is enough? You are being too romantic.

Affectionately, Agnes

### **December 18, 2003**

Dearest darling Dave,

It was a surprise to get five golden rings! I now have one for every finger. You truly are impossible darling, yet oh how I love it! Quite frankly, all of those squawking birds from the previous days were starting to get on my nerves. Yet, you managed to come through with a beautiful valuable gift!

All my love, Agnes

### **December 19, 2003**

Dear Dave,

When I opened my door, there were actually six geese a-laying on my front steps. So you're back to the birds again, huh? Those geese are dear, but where will I keep them? The neighbors are complaining, and I am unable to sleep with all the racket. Please stop dear.

Cordially, Agnes

### **December 20, 2003**

Dave,

What is with you and those stupid birds!? Seven swans a-swimming!! What kind of sick joke is this!!?? There are bird droppings everywhere! They never shut up, and I don't get any sleep!!! I'm a nervous wreck! It's not funny you weirdo, so stop with the birds.

Sincerely, Agnes

**December 21, 2003**

O.K. wise guy, The birds were bad enough. Now what do you expect me to do with eight maids a-milking? If that's not bad enough, they had to bring their cows!! The front lawn was completely ruined by them, and I can't move in my own house! Just lay off me or you'll be sorry! Agnes

**December 22, 2003**

Hey loser,

What are you? You must be some kind of sadist!! Now there are nine pipers playing, and they certainly do play! They haven't stopped chasing those maids since they got here! The cows are getting upset, and they're stepping all over those screeching birds. The neighbors are getting up a petition to evict me, and I'm going out of my mind! You'll get yours! Agnes

**December 23, 2003**

You rotten scum!!!

There are now ten ladies dancing! There is only one problem with that! They're dancing twenty-four hours a day all around me with the pipers upsetting the cows and the maids. The cows can't sleep, and they are going to the bathroom everywhere! The building

commissioner has subpoenaed me to give cause as to why the house shouldn't be condemned! I can't even think of a reason! You creep! I'm sicking the police on you!  
One who means it!

### **December 24, 2003**

Listen you evil, sadistic, maniac!

What's with the eleven lords-a-leaping?!? They are leaping across the rooms breaking everything and even injuring some of the maids! The place smells, is an absolute mad house, and is about to be condemned! At least the birds are quiet; they were trampled to death by the cows. I hope you are satisfied--you rotten vicious worthless piece of garbage!

Your sworn enemy, Agnes

### **December 25, 2003**

The Law Offices of Badger, Rees, and Yorker

Dear sir,

This is to acknowledge your latest gift of twelve fiddlers-fiddling which you have seen fit to inflict on our client, one Agnes Smith. The destruction of course was total. If you attempt to reach Ms. Smith at Happy Daze Sanitarium, the attendants have instructions to shoot

you on site.

Please direct all correspondence to this office in the future. With this letter, please find attached a warrant for your arrest.

Cordially, Badger, Rees, and Yorker

Oh boy. I'm sure you have all received some odd gifts, and probably given some too.

And what sort of woman would lead this poor man to go from "Maybe a nice pair of gloves or a scarf" to "I've got it. I know what she would really love: a bunch of birds and some circus folk!"?

As I was contemplating what this woman might have been like (and thinking that I'm glad whoever she was, she wasn't my mother in law who I had a hard enough time shopping for anyway, without having to go to the local zoo or dance academy) the Holy Spirit intervened (for which we are all thankful)– in the form of Mary Margaret and Elizabeth who told me that they had found a Bible Connection to the 12 Days of Christmas.

There is some indication that the 12 Days of Christmas began during a period of persecution to help children learn and remember biblical truths covertly.

**True Love refers to God**

**Twelve drummers drumming the twelve points of doctrine in the Apostles' Creed**

**Eleven pipers piping stood for the eleven faithful apostles**

**Ten Lords a-leaping were the Ten Commandments**

**Nine Ladies dancing were the nine Fruit of the Holy Spirit.**

**Eight Maids a-milking were the eight Beatitudes**

**Seven Swans a-swimming represented the Seven Gifts of the Holy Spirit/ the Seven Sacraments (RC)**

**Six Geese a-laying stood for the 6 days in which God created the world**

**Five Gold Rings recalled the Pentateuch, the first five books of the Bible**

**Four Calling Birds were the four gospels of Mark, Matthew, Luke and John – singing the Gospel good news.**

**Three French Hens stood for the three theological virtues of Faith, Hope and Love or the three gifts of the Magi brought to the baby Jesus**

**Two turtle doves was the Old and New Testaments**

**And last, but certainly not least**

**Partridge in a Pear Tree was Jesus reigning from the cross**

These are much better gifts!

And from our one really true love – God Himself.

A true love who has been chasing us through history helping us to see that we need Him and seeking to bring us home.

We see the truth of this in all of those meanings behind the gifts of the song.

In the Bible and the doctrines of the faith, we find that God is our true love:

Who was faithful to us always, even when we were faithless.

Who has sought us all over the world, even when we ran away and despised Him.

Who loves us so much that He sent us His only begotten Son, to take our human nature, to live with us, to bear our sin, and to die so that we could be forgiven and made new and have abundant life.

And that last, the gift of Jesus is the real reason for celebrating and is the only truly perfect gift that has ever or will ever be given.

And what is so amazing is that God gave this wonderful gift of His Son and His Redeeming work, not just to Mary and Joseph, not just to the Shepherds who were tending their flocks by night, but to 3 Gentile Wise Men, and to you, and to me.

That is what we celebrate on the 12 day of Christmas – that God’s grace in and through His Son, was revealed to the Gentiles, to us all. Jesus is the gift freely given to all those who accept Him.

And what the wise men received was not just a glimpse of an infant, but so much more.

In fact the seemingly odd gifts they brought help us understand the greatness of the gift of Jesus. For their gifts were prophesied hundreds of years earlier in Isaiah (60) and point to who Jesus really is and what He was born to do:

Gold – The gift for a king. For Jesus is the Messiah, the king from the line of David. But more than that He is King of kings and Lord of lords, and God’s Kingdom is the only kingdom that shall endure forever.

Frankincense – A gift for a priest. But not a priest from the Levitical priesthood, but Jesus is a priest like Melchizidek, a priest forever. And Jesus has interceded for us not in a sanctuary made by human hands, but He has gone into the throne room of heaven itself to intercede for us. He is the ultimate priest.

Myrrh – A spice used to prepare a body for burial. This gift points us to the Cross, a sign that His death was there even at His birth. For that is what He became Incarnate to do, to give His life as a ransom

for many (Matt 20:28), so that our sins could be forgiven and we could be set free from sin and death and have abundant life.

So you see, those odd gifts weren't odd, they were an important part of the "Greatest Story Ever Told" and they point us to the wonderful truth of the Gospel – that that baby, whose birth we celebrate at Christmas, died for us so that we can live in God's Kingdom forever.

And the gifts of the 12 days, well on the surface they are pretty odd (and annoying), but they point to greater things – God's word in Scripture and God's Word, Jesus.

Which brings me to a few thoughts to take into the busy-ness of this year Christmas crunch.

1. I hope that when you hear the song, the 12 days of Christmas, you will remember that the real 'True Love' is God, and that the 'Partridge in the Pear Tree' reminds us of Jesus and the Cross. He is the real gift of Christmas.
2. I also hope that when you hear the song, you think of the actual 12 days of Christmas and remember that Epiphany celebrates

the days when God's gift of Jesus who will bring us salvation is offered to the Magi too, and so to all Gentiles who call Him Lord.

3. I hope that when you are shopping, and completely stressed trying to find the perfect gift for someone who is impossible to buy for, that you will remember that our gifts won't be and don't have to be perfect, because God has already given the perfect gift, and that is all that really matters.
4. I hope that when you get gift that you think is odd (like 8 maids a milking), or you don't get the thing you had hoped for, instead of being upset, remember that you have already received the greatest Christmas present ever – salvation in Jesus Christ. That is the gift that gives life and hope not just for a day or a year, but always.

May God so fill our hearts with joy over the true gift of Christmas, Jesus, that we shall dance and rejoice with all those dancing ladies and leaping lords and pipes and drums.

I'd like to close then with the Collect appointed for Epiphany, that twelfth day of Christmas.

Let us pray.

O God, by the leading of a star you manifested your only Son to the Peoples of the earth: Lead us, who know you now by faith, to your presence, where we may see your glory face to

face; through Jesus Christ our Lord, who lives and reigns with you and the Holy Spirit, one God, now and for ever. *Amen.*

Merry Christmas!