

Cluster 29, Christmas 2008

Celebrating the Twelve



Days of Christmas

The Twelve Days of Christmas by Dennis Bratcher

The Twelve Days of Christmas is probably the most misunderstood part of the church year among Christians who are not part of liturgical church traditions. Contrary to much popular belief, these are not the twelve days before Christmas, but in the Western Church are the twelve days from Christmas until the beginning of Epiphany (January 6th; the 12 days count from December 25th until January 5th).

The origin of the Twelve Days is complicated, and is related to differences in calendars, church traditions, and ways to observe this holy day in various cultures. In the Western church, Epiphany is traditionally celebrated as the time the three Wise Men or Magi arrived to present gifts to the young Jesus (Matt. 2:1-12). In some cultures, especially Hispanic and Latin American culture, January 6th is observed as Three Kings Day, or simply the Day of the Kings (Span: la Fiesta de Reyes, el Dia de los Tres Reyes, or el Dia de los Reyes Magos; Dutch: Driekoningendag). Even though December 25th is celebrated as Christmas in these cultures, January 6th is often the day for giving gifts. In some places it is traditional to give Christmas gifts for each of the Twelve Days of Christmas. Since Eastern Orthodox traditions use a different religious calendar, they celebrate Christmas on January 7th and observe Epiphany or Theophany on January 19th.

By the 16th century, some European and Scandinavian cultures had combined the Twelve Days of Christmas with (sometimes pagan) festivals celebrating the changing of the year. These were usually associated with driving away evil spirits for the start of the new year.

The Twelfth Night is January 5th, the last day of the Christmas Season before Epiphany (January 6th), and often included feasting along with the removal of Christmas decorations. French and English celebrations of Twelfth Night included a King's Cake, remembering the visit of the Three Magi, and ale or wine (a King's Cake is part of the observance of Mardi Gras in French Catholic culture of the Southern USA). In some cultures, the King's Cake was part of the celebration of the day of Epiphany. The popular song "The Twelve Days of Christmas" is usually seen as simply a nonsense song for children.

However, some have suggested that it is a song of Christian instruction dating to the 16th century religious wars in England, with hidden references to the basic teachings of the Faith. They contend that it was a mnemonic device to teach the catechism to youngsters. The "true love" mentioned in the song is not an earthly suitor, but refers to God Himself. The "me" who receives the presents refers to every baptized person who is part of the Christian Faith. Each of the "days" represents some aspect of the Christian Faith that was important for children to learn.

However, many have questioned the historical accuracy of this origin of the song The Twelve Days of Christmas. It seems that some have made an issue out of trying to debunk this as an "urban myth," some in the name of historical accuracy and some out of personal agendas. There is little "hard" evidence available either way. Some church historians affirm this account as basically accurate, while others point out apparent historical discrepancies. However, the "evidence" on both sides is mostly in logical deduction and probabilities. One internet site devoted to debunking hoaxes and legends says that, "there is no substantive evidence to demonstrate that the song 'The Twelve Days of Christmas' was created or used as a secret means of preserving tenets of the Catholic faith, or that this claim is anything but a fanciful modern day speculation ..." What is omitted is that there is no "substantive evidence" that will disprove it either.

It is certainly possible that this view of the song is legendary or anecdotal. Without corroboration and in the absence of "substantive evidence," we probably should not take rigid positions on either side and turn the song into a crusade for personal opinions. That would do more to violate the spirit of Christmas than the song is worth. So, for the sake of historical accuracy, we need to acknowledge this uncertainty.

However, on another level, this uncertainty should not prevent us from using the song in celebration of Christmas. Many of the symbols of Christianity were not originally religious, including even the present

date of Christmas, but were appropriated from contemporary culture by the Christian Faith as vehicles of worship and proclamation. Perhaps, when all is said and done, historical accuracy is not really the point. Perhaps more important is that Christians can celebrate their rich heritage, and God's grace, through one more avenue this Christmas. Now, when they hear what they once thought was a secular "nonsense song," they will be reminded in one more way of the grace of God working in transforming ways in their lives and in our world. After all, is that not the meaning of Christmas anyway?

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Possible sources to help the family celebrate this long holiday:

Internet sources/Resource Guide

There are so many sources you could get lost in the search. We have listed some sites that we have checked out before hand and they have served us well.

Google:

12 Days of Christmas/lyrics

Great site with many resources

Mahalo:

12 Days of Christmas/lyrics/ Muppets sing the song

Wikipedia.org taken off the Mahalo site

Good site about the history/ many aspects of the song

Christmas Carnivals.com/12days of Christmas/coloring pages

See our resource section for a few pages

Webcrawler.com scroll down to 12 days of Christmas/

more coloring pages

Dltk-holidays.com/xmas/12/twelve: more for young children

Cresourcei.org/12days

Religious fact sheet, found in our Resource Guide section

What you need to celebrate this holiday and how to do it!



What you need.

A table in your kitchen, living room or den around which everyone can sit,

A candle (to be lit at the beginning of your session),

A small religious Christmas object (manger, statue of the baby Jesus, or a Christmas card with a Manger scene on it), laid flat so that all can see, Mom and/ or Dad will have to do some pre-reading to set up for each day's activity. We have tried to give you sources ready at hand or on the internet to help enrich your celebration and make it easier for you.

How to do it.



All gather and sing the 12 Days of Christmas up to the day which we celebrate.
The song will grow longer and longer each day.

Follow the activity sheet and suggested items for each day. If there is more than one activity, choose the one that best works for your family. You might find some to be hard to do. Don't avoid them. You might be surprised at what you and your children are capable of.

When you finished with the activity, keep a moment of silence and prayer and then recite the Our Father or Hail Mary or both.

Daily Activities for the 12 Days of Christmas

Here are the daily activity suggestions for each of the 12 days. Try to follow them and keep at it until the end. Then celebrate big time!



12 Days of Christmas

Day # 1: Partridge in a pear tree.

Day #1 of the 12 days of Christmas focuses upon Jesus. Jesus the special gift of this season. What are the gifts Jesus has brought us by His birth?

What are the gifts that you have that you can share this season with your family? Can you share one of your Christmas gifts with your brother or sister? Can you find a picture, statue or representation of Jesus in the

manger? Can you draw a picture of Jesus as a baby?

Day #2 Two Turtle Doves:

The second day of Christmas is special because of the two turtle doves. These doves represent the Old and New testaments. This is God's word to us. This is how we know God. Use your bible to show the children what the Old and New Testaments are?

Tell a story about Jesus other than His birth story.

Tell a story about the Old Testament:

Moses and the rushes(Exodus, 2:1-10)

Hannah and Samuel story (I Samuel: 1:1-28. Story of Samuel's birth)

Story of Ruth and faithfulness (Ruth, Chapters 1 to 4. Check the internet, dltk site for the Story of Ruth.)

Day #3: Three French Hens:

Today the Church celebrates the Feast of the Holy Family. Celebrate your family by going to Mass together. Bake a cake (buy one) and celebrate your family in a special way at your main meal. Find a picture album of old photos. Remember the people and tell stories about them.

The three French hens represent the three major virtues: Faith, Hope and Love. (Corinthians 13:13)Talk about these virtues. Who in your family shows the greatest Faith, Hope or Love? Why? Can you find in your Christmas card collection the virtues of Faith, Hope and Love? How does the baby Jesus bring us Hope at Christmas?

#4 Four Calling Birds: The Four Gospels. Matthew, Mark, Luke and John. Use your family bible and show the children where the gospels are located. Point out the difference in the size of the Old Testament and the New Testament. Read one of the Nativity stories from Luke or Matthew. What is your fav about the story. Put yourself in it (Scene it) and describe what you think you might feel. Rent a video of the Nativity story. See if you can find the Nativity story on the internet and watch it. Do a good deed today for someone not in your family.

#5 Here comes Five Golden Rings: This is a reference to the Pentateuch, the first five books of the Old Testament. The Jews held them in great regard. So much so that they called them the Law. Find the first five books of the Old Testament and read their names. (Try to use a Bible for this. The names will be found in the religious fact section of our Resource Guide.*)

Remember, Jesus, Joseph and Mary kept the Law and revered it. They, like our Jewish brothers, celebrated the feast of Hannukkah. (Read the reference in 1 Maccabees , 4:56-59, to find out what the celebration was all about. Check out the Wikipedia site for Hannukkah and learn even more. Very interesting) What was the miracle? How is it that Jesus brings us light at this time of year? What is the Hope that He brings us as well?

#6 Six Geese a Laying: This refers to the six days of creation. Find the creation story at the beginning of the bible in Genesis (Genesis 1) and read it. Pick one day and draw it. What is it that you have to thank God for in His Creation? Why do you think that at the end of each day the bible says " He thought it was good?" What do you think that means? Why was it so?

7 Seven Lords a Leaping: Depending on the interpretation, these could be the seven Sacraments or the seven gifts of the Holy Spirit. We have two activities for you to choose from here.

Name the seven Sacraments of the Church . We would like to concentrate on Reconciliation for this activity. Jesus brings the gift of Peace this Christmas time. Pick one person in your family that you need to ask forgiveness of or whom you need to forgive. (Take the time for this activity. Allow people in your family to ask and give forgiveness.) Try to make this reconciliation stick. Bring Peace to your family today. Now consider making your peace with God...perhaps by going to confession!

The seven gifts of the Holy Spirit are found in the Resource Guide.*You will find it on the parish websites. Listed in this packet.

Read them. Pick one that is unknown or seems unknown. Look it up in the Wikipedia and see if you can imagine what it would look like if you did it in your life.

After you have finished, gather your family. Today is January 1, New Year's Day. We have brought "peace" to our family and have learned a new gift we have from the Holy Spirit. In the French Canadian tradition, today is the day for a family blessing. We would ask an adult (Usually the Dad) to give the family a blessing. If you don't have a blessing of your own you may use this one:

Heavenly Father, bless our family and keep us safe from worry, harm and evil. Help us to keep the gift of unity that we share. Help us to get beyond the little things that get in our way each day. Help us to bring "Light, Love and Peace" to our family. Amen.

#8 Eight Maids a Milking: This is the reference to the eight BE-ATTITUDES. Find the sermon on the mount in Mathew (5:3-10). Read it. It has been said that these have been given to us. We have them from Jesus already. We just need to "be" them. Think about the one that you need to "BE" the most. Try to carry it out today. Tell what your

fav is and why?

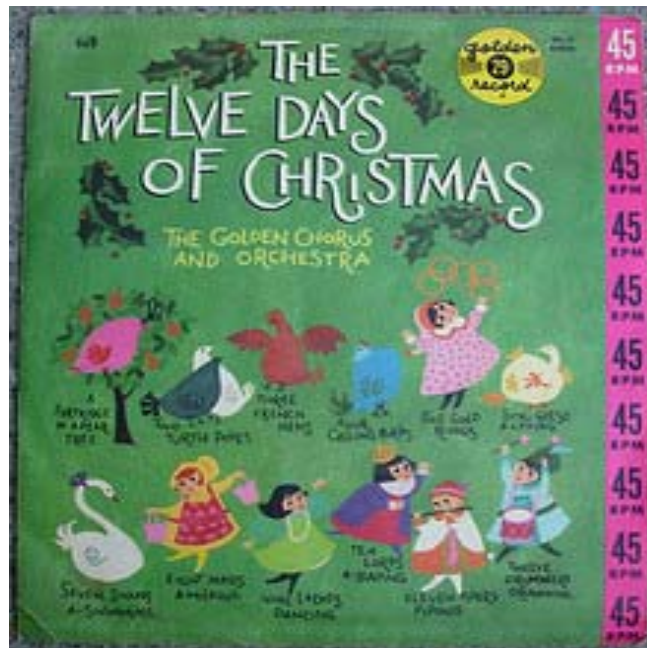
#9 Nine Ladies Dancing: These ladies are said to represent the fruits of the Holy Spirit. You will find them in Galatians (5:22). Read the passage. Find the works sheet entitled 9th Day of Christmas and do the word scrambles. Look for them on the parish websites found in the Internet Resource Guide*Can you choose one and share an example of what it would look like in action?

#10 Ten Lords a Leaping: These are the ten Commandments. Find them in Exodus 20:1-7. Read them aloud. Discuss the ones that are unclear. How does Jesus summarize them and connect the 10 Commandments with His two commands to Love God and Love your neighbor? See the story of the Good young man in Luke's Gospel. (Lk. 10:25-37) Today is an opportunity to do a good deed for someone outside your family. Bring a canned good to Mass and place it in the St. Vincent de Paul box, for food for the poor.

#11 Eleven Pipers Piping: They are the eleven faithful Apostles. Who were they? (Lk .6:14-16) There were twelve. Who is missing and why?

#12: Twelve Drummers Drumming: These are the doctrines of the Apostle's Creed. The Apostle's creed is a condensed version of the Creed we say at Mass. Find it in the Resource Guide* and read it aloud with your family. Can you break the Creed into its two parts? The part that talks about the Trinity and the part that talks about the Church? See if you can separate the Creed into its parts. What does the word CREED mean? Today is the Epiphany in actual time. Please take time to make a Jesus cake to Celebrate the Magi's visit. Offer very small gifts for the little ones to open. Give the gift of your love and faith and hope to your family today in a special way.

Resources Guide/ Internet Sources



1. dltk-holidays.com: {Examples of coloring pages(2)}; bible reference as well.

2. [Cresourcei.org/ 12days](http://Cresourcei.org/12days) :(Religious information packet that contains many of the answers you may not have available.)
3. BBC-Jersey-Faith-Talking Faith -12 days of Christmas:
A short history and other helpful info.

Notes and Comments:



[Dltk holidays.com](http://Dltk.holidays.com) Full content if you go to the internet site-

The Twelve Days of Christmas

Click the links to the right of the song to find the poster or coloring page to go with that verse!

I originally made all the pages with the proper number of characters, but it's tough to fit 12 drummers drumming on one piece of paper.

The pages with more characters will be time consuming for younger kids to color. SO, I made an alternate coloring page with just one character (B&W - 1) for each set.

The single character pages can also be used as puppets (cut them out and glue them onto a craft stick or unsharpened pencil).

Or they can be used on the flannel board (cut them out and glue a small piece of sandpaper or Velcro hook side to the back).

[These links below](#) may not give you the coloring pages as indicated. You may have to go to the website itself.

On the first day of Christmas,
My true love gave to me:
A partridge in a pear tree.

[\(color\)](#) [\(B&W\)](#)

[\(B&W - 1\)](#)

On the second day of Christmas,
My true love gave to me:
Two turtle doves...etc.

[\(color\)](#) [\(B&W\)](#)

[\(B&W - 1\)](#)

On the third day of Christmas,
My true love gave to me:
Three french hens...etc.

[\(color\)](#) [\(B&W\)](#)

[\(B&W - 1\)](#)

On the fourth day of Christmas,
My true love gave to me:
Four calling birds...etc.

[\(color\)](#) [\(B&W\)](#)

[\(B&W - 1\)](#)

On the fifth day of Christmas,
My true love gave to me:
Five golden rings...etc.

[\(color\)](#) [\(B&W\)](#)

[\(B&W - 1\)](#)

On the sixth day of Christmas,
My true love gave to me:
Six geese a-laying...etc.

[\(color\)](#) [\(B&W\)](#)

[\(B&W - 1\)](#)

On the seventh day of Christmas,
My true love gave to me:
Seven swans a-swimming...etc.

[\(color\)](#) [\(B&W\)](#)

[\(B&W - 1\)](#)

On the eighth day of Christmas,
My true love gave to me:
Eight maids a-milking...etc.

[\(color\)](#) [\(B&W\)](#)

[\(B&W - 1\)](#)

On the ninth day of Christmas,
My true love gave to me:
Nine ladies dancing...etc.

[\(color\)](#) [\(B&W\)](#)

[\(B&W - 1\)](#)

On the tenth day of Christmas,
My true love gave to me:
Ten lords a-leaping...etc.

[\(color\)](#) [\(B&W\)](#)

[\(B&W - 1\)](#)

On the eleventh day of Christmas,
My true love gave to me:
Eleven pipers piping...etc.

[\(color\)](#) [\(B&W\)](#)

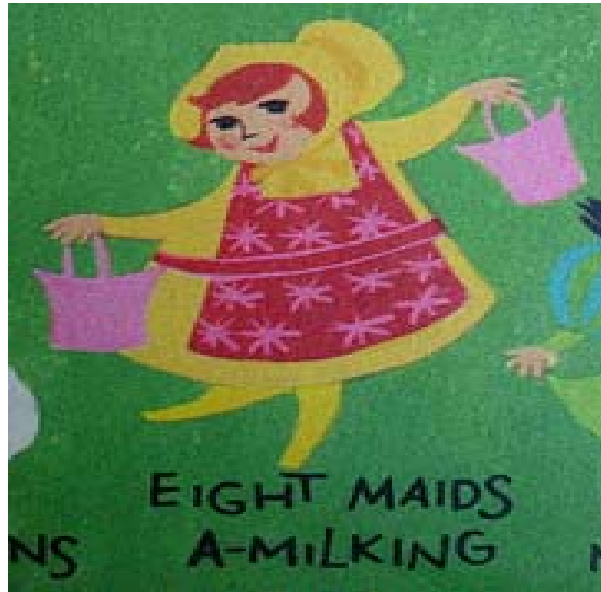
[\(B&W - 1\)](#)

On the Twelfth day of Christmas,

[\(color\)](#) [\(B&W\)](#)

My true love gave to me:
Twelve drummers drumming...etc.

[\(B&W - 1\)](#)



The Twelve Days of Christmas Answer Sheet

The items that follow are answers to the questions you have in the 12 Day of Christmas Activity pages

- #1 On the first day of Christmas...a partridge in a pear tree.** The partridge in a pear tree is Jesus the Christ, Son of God, whose birthday we celebrate on Dec. 25, the first day of Christmas. In the song Christ is symbolically represented as a mother partridge that feigns injury to decoy predators from her young. This recalls to mind Jesus' sadness of the fate of Jerusalem: "Jerusalem! Jerusalem! How often I would I have sheltered you under my wings, as a hen does her chicks, but you would not...."(Luke 13:34)
- #2 On the 2nd day of Christmas.....two turtle doves.** The Old and New Testaments, which give witness to God's self revelation in history and in creation of His love for a people that makes this celebration possible.
- #3 On the 3rd day of Christmas...Three French hens** are the three theological virtues: 1. Faith, 2) Hope and 3) Love (1 Corinthians 13:13)
- #4 On the 4th day of Christmas...Four Calling Birds** are the four Gospels: Matthew, Mark, Luke and John, which proclaim the Good News of God's reconciliation with the world to Himself through His Son, Jesus the Christ. God never gives up.
- #5 On the 5th Day of Christmas...Five Gold Rings.** These are the first five books of the Old Testament. Known as the Torah in Hebrew and the Pentateuch in Greek:1) Genesis, 2) Exodus, 3) Leviticus, 4) Numbers, and 5) Deuteronomy .The story here is o man's sinful failure and God's response of grace and love in the creation of a people to be the light of the world.
- #6 On the 6th day of Christmas...Six Geese A-laying.** These are the six days of Creation that testifies to God's handy work as Creator and Sustainer of the World.
- #7 On the 7th day of Christmas...Seven Swans A-swimming.** Depending on your interpretation these seven swans could be the seven sacraments or the seven gifts of the Holy Spirit. The seven sacraments are: Baptism, Eucharist, Confirmation, Reconciliation, Marriage, Holy Orders (Priesthood) and Sacraments of the Sick and Dying. The seven gifts of the Holy Spirit are: 1) Wisdom, 2) Understanding, 3) Knowledge, 4) Right judgment, 5) Reverence, 6) Counsel, and 7) Wonder and awe in the presence of God. (Romans 12: 6-8; also 1 Corinthians 12:8-11.) See also CCC 1831, 1845
- #8 On the 8th day of Christmas...Eight Maids a-milking.** These are the eight beatitudes that Jeus mentions in the Sermon on the mount.
1) Blessed are the poor in spirit, 2) those who mourn, 3)the meek, 4)those who hunger and thirst for righteousness(holiness), 5) the merciful, 6) the pure of heart, 7) the peacemakers, 8) those who are persecuted for righteousness's sake (Matthew 5:3-10)
- #9 On the 9th day of Christmas...Nine Ladies Dancing.** These nine ladies are the fruits of the Holy Spirit:1) love, 2) joy, 3)peace, 4)patience, 5)kindness, 6) generosity, 7)faithfulness, 8) gentleness, and 9)self-control. (Galatians 5:22)
- #10 On the 10th day of Christmas my true love gave to me... Ten Lords A-leaping** The ten commandments: 1) You shall have no other gods before me; 2) Do not make an idol; 3) Do not take God's name in vain; 4) Remember the Sabbath Day; 5) Honor your father and mother; 6) Do not murder; 7) Do not commit adultery; 8) Do not steal; 9) Do not bear false witness; 10) Do not covet. (Exodus 20:1-17)
- #11 On the 11th day of Christmas my true love gave to me... Eleven Pipers Piping** The eleven Faithful Apostles: 1) Simon Peter, 2) Andrew, 3) James, 4) John, 5) Philip, 6) Bartholomew, 7) Matthew, 8) Thomas, 9) James bar Alpheus, 10) Simon the Zealot, 11) Judas bar James. (Luke 6:14-16). The list does not include the twelfth disciple, Judas Iscariot who betrayed Jesus to the religious leaders and the Romans
- #12 On the 12th day of Christmas my true love gave to me... Twelve Drummers Drumming** The twelve points of doctrine 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 was conceived by the power of the Holy Spirit 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 Spirit, 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. (Cf. CCC iv-vi Part I the Apostles' Creed)

You are in: [Jersey](#) > [Faith](#) > [Talking Faith](#) > 12 Days of Christmas Talking Faith

Talking Faith

12 Days of Christmas

Another four and you've got creation!

Everyone knows the 12 Days of Christmas song but not many people know that there could be a

hidden meaning behind all those gifts that my true love sent to me. What do you think;
hidden Christian meaning or nonsense festive fun?

The 12 days of Christmas begin on Christmas night and end on 5th January. Traditionally in the Middle Ages this period was one of continuous feasting and merrymaking (judging by most Christmases in my family very little has changed since then!), although the climax of the festivities in those days was on Twelfth Night; the official end of the Christmas season.

During this Christmas season roles were generally much more relaxed, you could find masters waiting on their servants, men dressed as women and women dressing like men! Echos of this role reversal can still be found in today's pantomimes when conventional authority is mocked by the lead male being played by a female and the old 'dame' being played by a man.

For many the phrase 'Twelve Days of Christmas' will immediately conjure up images of school carol services and congregations blue in the face trying to make it from 12 drummers drumming all the way down to a partridge in a pear tree all in one breathe.

It is most widely believed that this song, which dates back as far as the 16th century was originally a sort of memory game played at Christmas (I bit like 'I went shopping and bought...'). However, some Christians believe that the gifts are symbolic and have Christian meanings assigned to them.

This interpretation of the song generally is taught with the story that the English Catholics, who suffered persecution in the 16th century wrote the song with the concealed meanings to avoid detection.

However this theory does have a flaw in the fact that in the 16th century Catholics were being persecuted by other denominations of Christianity, and as far as anyone can tell none of the doctrines that the song is supposedly concealing were points of controversy.

The commonest versions of the meanings behind the lyrics are as follows:

The 'partridge in a pear tree' is Jesus. By all accounts identified as such from Luke 13:34 where Jesus says "How often would I have gathered thy children together, even as a hen gathered her own brood under her wings".

The 'two turtles doves' are the Old and New Testaments

The 'three French hens' are faith, hope and love; the three virtues.

The 'four calling birds' are the Gospels of Matthew, Mark, Luke and John.

The 'five gold rings' are the Pentateuch; the first five books of the Bible, traditionally ascribed to Moses.

The 'six geese a-laying' refer to the six days of creation.

The 'seven swans a-swimming' are the seven gifts of the Holy Spirit; Wisdom, Understanding, Counsel, Fortitude, Knowledge, Piety, and Fear of the Lord.

The 'eight maids a-milking' are the eight Beatitudes; the qualities of the citizens of heaven as described in the most famous section of the Sermon on the Mount.

The 'nine ladies dancing' are the nine fruits of the Holy Spirit which are the nine attributes of a Christian life; love, joy, peace, longsuffering, gentleness, goodness, faith,

meekness and temperance.

The 'ten lords a-leaping' are the Ten Commandments.

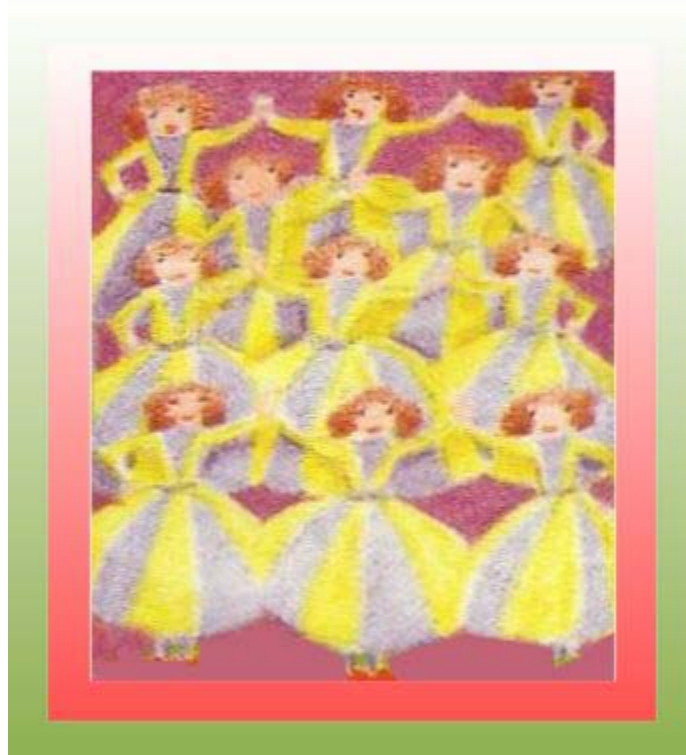
The 'eleven pipers piping' are the eleven faithful disciples.

The 'twelve drummers drumming' are the twelve points of belief in the Apostles Creed.

Let us know whether you think that the 'Twelve Days of Christmas' song is a hidden vehicle for remembering Christian doctrines or whether it is just a bit of old nonsense that people enjoy singing at Christmas by taking part in our vote.

last updated: 23/12/05

BBC Jersey website, 18 Parade Road, St Helier, JE2 3PL
phone: 01534 870000 | e-mail: jersey@bbc.co.uk | text: 07786 202888



Word scrambles for Days 7 and 9

The following is possible game word scramble for the seven sacraments.

SSYNGIKCIDEHTFCMNTTEARAODAN

SODRETLOHY

IMBTSAP

EIAARRGM

CCTNLIONOEIAR

FMANOITRINOC

TUHRAECSI

The following is the possible word scramble for the seven gifts of the Holy Spirit.

RUGOAEC

EEEERRNCV

NDWDRNOEAWEA

GTRHDUIEETMNGJ

GNEOELDWK

DRSUNEAIGNDNT

OISMWD

The following is the possible word scramble for the nine fruits of the Holy Spirit

EOVL

EACEP

CEENTPIEA

YOJ

YTNRGEEOSI

NKSSDNI

FFSHTLNUAIE

SSELTGNENE

-LRSFLENOOL

