

TWELVE DAYS-- TWELVE LESSONS

by Lawrence H. Balleine



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A reader's program on "The Twelve Days of Christmas"

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SYNOPSIS: "The Twelve Days of Christmas," a seemingly nonsensical secular song, was supposedly used by Catholics in England to teach their children when they couldn't openly practice their faith. Each gift presented by the "True Love" (God) represents an important theological concept. Did this really occur? No one knows for sure. The gifts' "legendary meanings" remain instructive, however. This easy-to-present reader's program with no memorization, costumes, or props may take the place of a choir anthem and/or sermon. Although ideal for the Sunday after Christmas when choirs and pastors appreciate time off, it may be used throughout Advent/Christmas. A children's choir or the congregation sings the carol. A thought-provoking resource.

CAST OF CHARACTERS

(1-13 either; extras)

NARRATOR (m/f).....	(2 lines)
SPEAKER 1 (m/f).....	(1 line)
SPEAKER 2 (m/f).....	(1 line)
SPEAKER 3 (m/f).....	(1 line)
SPEAKER 4 (m/f).....	(1 line)
SPEAKER 5 (m/f).....	(1 line)
SPEAKER 6 (m/f).....	(1 line)
SPEAKER 7 (m/f).....	(1 line)
SPEAKER 8 (m/f).....	(1 line)
SPEAKER 9 (m/f).....	(1 line)
SPEAKER 10 (m/f).....	(1 line)
SPEAKER 11 (m/f).....	(1 line)
SPEAKER 12 (m/f).....	(1 line)
CHOIR (m/f).....	May be comprised of children or teens, or the congregation may serve as the choir.

DURATION: 20 minutes

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PRODUCTION NOTES

Twelve Days–Twelve Lessons is a worship resource that may take the place of a choir anthem and/or sermon. It was designed for use on the Sunday following Christmas Day—often a day when many church choirs and pastors appreciate time off. It involves a cast of up to thirteen (one narrator and twelve speakers) who are supported by a youth or children's choir, or even congregational singing. (Speakers may present more than one part and therefore, the presentation may be performed with fewer cast members. The speakers may also be members of the youth or children's choir.) No costuming or props are required. Time of the presentation is approximately twenty minutes.

SCRIPTURE: Unless otherwise marked, Scripture quotations are from the New Revised Standard Version Bible, copyright © 1989 National Council of the Churches of Christ in the United States of America. Used by permission. All rights reserved.

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1 **AT START:** *NARRATOR* is in place behind the podium. If using a
2 youth choir, the members may stand on risers. *SPEAKERS 1-12*
3 may be seated on the front row if they are not doubling as choir
4 members, coming to the podium when it is their turn to speak.

5

6 **NARRATOR:** Legend indicates that the Christmas carol “The
7 Twelve Days of Christmas” was used by Roman Catholics in
8 England as a means of teaching their children the catechism.
9 Each gift presented by the “true love” in the song is said to have
10 been representative of an important component of their faith.
11 This practice was to have occurred from the mid-sixteenth until
12 the early nineteenth century. This is the time when English
13 Catholics were prohibited from openly practicing their faith.

14

15 Some critics, however, say that such instruction never
16 happened. Whether or not it really occurred, the “legendary
17 meanings” attached to each of the gifts named in the song
18 remain instructive.

19

20 We are pleased to present the song “The Twelve Days of
21 Christmas” (*Or “We ask you to join us in singing...”*) and to share
22 with you the meanings of the gifts offered in the song. We trust
23 that you will see how this song continues to point us to set
24 teachings that are basic to our faith.

25

26 *NARRATOR* sits on the front row or joins the choir. *SPEAKER 1*
27 steps up to the podium.

28

29 **SPEAKER 1:** “On the first day of Christmas”—December twenty-
30 fifth—“my true love gave to me a partridge in a pear tree.” The
31 phrase “my true love” is repeated in each of the verses of the
32 song. It is indicative of God—the One who offers us the gifts
33 listed in the song.

34

35 The first gift—a partridge in a pear tree—is a symbol for Jesus,
36 whose birth we celebrate at Christmas. We frequently ascribe
37 other names or phrases to Jesus. These help to describe the
38 wonderful gift we have received in Jesus. Among them are

1 Savior, Messiah, Christ, Son of God, Redeemer, King of Kings,
2 Lord of Lords, Prince of Peace, Emmanuel, Incarnate Word, and
3 the Alpha and the Omega. In addition, there is Paul's beautiful
4 and powerful description of Jesus in his letter to the Colossians:
5 "In him (Jesus) all the fullness of God was pleased to dwell"
6 (*Colossians 1:19*).

7

8 *During the following singing, SPEAKER 1 returns to seat or choir*
9 *and SPEAKER 2 moves to the podium. YOUTH CHOIR or*
10 *CONGREGATION sings verse 1 of "The Twelve Days of Christmas."*

11

12 **SPEAKER 2:** "On the second day of Christmas," or December
13 twenty-sixth, "my true love gave to me two turtledoves." The two
14 turtledoves represent the two testaments found in the Bible. The
15 Old and New Testaments are sometimes called the old and new
16 covenants. The Old Testament is frequently referred to as the
17 "Hebrew Scriptures" and the New Testament is called the
18 "Christian Scriptures." The Hebrew Scriptures contain thirty-nine
19 books, and the New Testament has twenty-seven. The Bible is
20 sometimes described as a library, for not only does it contain
21 sixty-six books, but several classifications of writing, including
22 law, history, prophesy, poetry, biography, and letters. The Bible
23 is a book of faith, written by people of faith, for people of faith
24 addressing the ongoing relationship between God and
25 humankind.

26

27 *During the following singing, SPEAKER 2 returns to seat or choir*
28 *and SPEAKER 3 moves to the podium. YOUTH CHOIR or*
29 *CONGREGATION sings verse 2 of "The Twelve Days of Christmas,"*
30 *repeating the gift given in verse 1.*

31

32 **SPEAKER 3:** "On the third day of Christmas," which would be
33 December twenty-seventh, "my true love gave to me three
34 French hens." The three French hens may be a reminder of the
35 Christian virtues that Paul speaks of in his first letter to the
36 Corinthians: faith, hope, and love. But the three French hens
37 may also be a symbol of the Trinity, wherein God comes to us
38 as God the Father, God the Son, and God the Holy Spirit.

1

2 *During the following singing, SPEAKER 3 returns to seat or choir*
3 *and SPEAKER 4 moves to the podium. YOUTH CHOIR or*
4 *CONGREGATION sings verse 3 of “The Twelve Days of Christmas,”*
5 *repeating in reverse order the gifts mentioned in verses 1 and 2.*

6

7 **SPEAKER 4:** “On the fourth day of Christmas”—December twenty-
8 eighth—“my true love gave to me four calling birds.” The four
9 calling birds are the four gospels: Matthew, Mark, Luke, and
10 John. Each is a compilation of the life and ministry of Jesus.
11 These writings are more than biographies of Jesus, however.
12 They are also theologies of Jesus, with each gospel writer giving
13 his readers his unique interpretation.

14

15 Matthew, originally written to a formerly Jewish community,
16 portrays Jesus as one who comes in the tradition of Moses and
17 Elijah. He is the fulfillment of the law and the prophets and is the
18 long-awaited Messiah

19

20 Mark is the first gospel to be written, about thirty-five to forty
21 years after Jesus' ministry. He gives his reader a rather basic
22 account of Jesus' life and ministry, death, and resurrection.

23

24 Luke, the physician, frequently shows the compassionate side
25 of Jesus and records many of Jesus' healings. He is the only
26 gospel writer to include the Bethlehem birth narrative. Placed
27 near the center of his gospel are Jesus' three “lost and found”
28 parables.

29

30 John sees Jesus as the pre-existent Word that was with God at
31 the very beginning and refers to Jesus “as the Word that became
32 flesh” (*John 1:14*). John seeks to convey to his readers that
33 Jesus' fundamental message is love, and that Jesus is the
34 embodiment of God's self-giving love. Throughout his gospel he
35 uses a variety of terms to describe Jesus, such as the Bread of
36 Life, the Light of the World, and the Good Shepherd. His whole
37 gospel moves toward Thomas's declaration upon seeing the
38 risen Christ: “My Lord and my God!” (*John 20:28*).

1

2 *During the following singing, SPEAKER 4 returns to seat or choir*
3 *and SPEAKER 5 moves to the podium. YOUTH CHOIR or*
4 *CONGREGATION sings verse 4 of “The Twelve Days of Christmas,”*
5 *repeating in reverse order the gifts mentioned in verses 1-3.*

6

7 **SPEAKER 5:** “On the fifth day of Christmas,” meaning December
8 twenty-ninth, “my true love gave to me five golden rings.” The
9 five gold rings symbolize the first five books of the Hebrew
10 scripture. They are often called Torah or the Law and include
11 Genesis, Exodus, Leviticus, Numbers, and Deuteronomy. These
12 remain at the heart of Jewish life and practice. The Torah is
13 inscribed on scrolls that are kept in a special location called the
14 ark in Jewish synagogues. A scroll is removed from the ark and
15 a selected section of it is read as a part of worship.

16

17 *During the following singing, SPEAKER 5 returns to seat or choir*
18 *and SPEAKER 6 moves to the podium. YOUTH CHOIR or*
19 *CONGREGATION sings verse 5 of “The Twelve Days of Christmas,”*
20 *repeating in reverse order the gifts mentioned in verses 1-4.*

21

22 **SPEAKER 6:** “On the sixth day of Christmas,” meaning December
23 thirtieth, “my true love gave to me six geese a-laying.” The six
24 geese a-laying represent the six days of creation. From the first
25 chapter of Genesis we read that on day one God separated the
26 light from the darkness, calling the light day and the darkness
27 night. On the second day the sky was created. The third day
28 included the creation of the dry land that God called the earth
29 and gathering the waters together and calling them seas. God
30 also created plant life. The sun and the moon came into being
31 on the fourth day. On the fifth day fish and birds were created.
32 On the sixth day God made not only the animal kingdom, but
33 also created humankind in his own image.

34

35 *During the following singing, SPEAKER 6 returns to seat or choir*
36 *and SPEAKER 7 moves to the podium. YOUTH CHOIR or*
37 *CONGREGATION sings verse 6 of “The Twelve Days of Christmas,”*
38 *repeating in reverse order the gifts mentioned in verses 1-5.*

1

2 **SPEAKER 7:** “On the seventh day of Christmas,” which would be
3 December thirty-first, “my true love gave to me seven swans a-
4 swimming:” The seven swans a-swimming remind us of the
5 seven gifts of the Holy Spirit. They are listed by Paul in the
6 twelfth chapter of his letter to the church at Rome and include
7 prophecy, ministry, teaching, exhorting, giving, leading, and
8 demonstrating compassion.

9

10 *During the following singing, SPEAKER 7 returns to seat or choir*
11 *and SPEAKER 8 moves to the podium. YOUTH CHOIR or*
12 *CONGREGATION sings verse 7 of “The Twelve Days of Christmas,”*
13 *repeating in reverse order the gifts mentioned in verses 1-6.*

14

15 **SPEAKER 8:** “On the eighth day of Christmas,” or New Year’s Day,
16 January first, “my true love gave to me eight maids a-milking.”
17 The eight maids a-milking symbolize the eight beatitudes given
18 by Jesus and recorded by Matthew as the opening words of
19 Jesus’ “Sermon on the Mount.” The New Living Translation of
20 the Bible records the Beatitudes in this way:

21

22 God blesses those who are poor and realize their need for him,
23 for the Kingdom of Heaven is theirs.

24 God blesses those who mourn, for they will be comforted.

25 God blesses those who are humble, for they will inherit the whole
26 earth.

27 God blesses those who hunger and thirst for justice, for they will
28 be satisfied.

29 God blesses those who are merciful, for they will be shown
30 mercy.

31 God blesses those whose hearts are pure, for they will see God.

32 God blesses those who work for peace, for they will be called
33 the children of God.

34 God blesses those who are persecuted for doing right, for the
35 Kingdom of Heaven is theirs (*Matthew 5:3-10, NLT*).

1 *During the following singing, SPEAKER 8 returns to seat or choir*
2 *and SPEAKER 9 moves to the podium. YOUTH CHOIR or*
3 *CONGREGATION sings verse 8 of “The Twelve Days of Christmas,”*
4 *repeating in reverse order the gifts mentioned in verses 1-7.*

5

6 **SPEAKER 9:** “On the ninth day of Christmas,” or January second,
7 “my true love gave to me nine ladies dancing.” The nine ladies
8 dancing are meant to remind us of the nine fruits of the Holy
9 Spirit listed by Paul in Galatians 5:22-23: love, joy, peace,
10 patience, kindness, generosity, faithfulness, gentleness, and
11 self-control. These are the attributes of a person or group living
12 in accord with the Holy Spirit. Let’s explore these attributes:

13

14 Love is knowing and acknowledging the high esteem God has
15 for us by which we, in turn, have for God and each other.

16 Joy is a state of mind and indication of the heart wherein we feel
17 contentment, pleasure, and delight.

18 Peace is the experience or feeling of being at one with or living
19 in harmony with God, others, and ourselves.

20 Patience is a non-complaining perseverance and endurance.

21 Kindness is demonstrating a gentle, considerate nature.

22 Generosity is a willingness to share ourselves and our resources
23 for the good of all.

24 Faithfulness is demonstrating loyalty and commitment to God
25 and being fully trustworthy in all our relationships.

26 Gentleness is possessing a kind, tender, and mild-mannered
27 character.

28 Self-control is demonstrating restraint in our speech and actions.

29

30 *During the following singing, SPEAKER 9 returns to seat or choir*
31 *and SPEAKER 10 moves to the podium. YOUTH CHOIR or*
32 *CONGREGATION sings verse 9 of “The Twelve Days of Christmas,”*
33 *repeating in reverse order the gifts mentioned in verses 1-8.*



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