

## Decoding A Christmas Carol

The 12 days of Christmas mentioned in the carol by this name refer to the 12 days of feasting and celebration originally designated in the sixth century as a time to commemorate the incarnation of Christ. The 12-day period began on December 25 and ended January 5.

The carol dates to the 16<sup>th</sup> century when Roman Catholics were experiencing religious persecution in England. From 1558 until 1829 it was illegal for them to practice or express their faith in any form in public.

In fact, to be caught in public with any material about the Christian faith brought imprisonment and death. Out of this intense persecution, “The 12 Days of Christmas” emerged as a kind of coded message affirming belief in Christ and in the Bible.

Each of the 12 days represents some important aspect of the Christian faith that the disciple was to learn and adhere to. Below is the hidden meaning behind this clever Christmas carol.

**First day:** The “*partridge in a pear tree*” represents the birth of Christ on Christmas day. Christ is portrayed as a partridge because of the instinctual habit of mother partridges to pretend to be injured in order to decoy predators away from their helpless young.

**Second day:** “*Two turtle doves*” refers to the Old Testament and the New Testament.

**Third day:** “*Three French hens*” stands for the three virtues written about in 1 Corinthians 13:13: faith, hope and love.

**Forth day:** “*Four calling birds*” symbolizes the four Gospels: Matthew, Mark, Luke and John.

**Fifth day:** “*Five golden rings*” points to the first five books of the Old Testament: Genesis, Exodus, Leviticus, Numbers and Deuteronomy.

**Sixth day:** “*Six geese a-laying*” stands for the six days of creation and the affirmation that almighty God is the creator and sustainer of all things.

**Seventh day:** “*Seven swans a-swimming*” represents the seven gifts of the Holy Spirit mentioned in Romans 11: prophecy, ministry, teaching, exhortation, giving and generosity, leadership, and compassion and mercy.

**Eighth day:** “*Eight maids a-milking*” stands for the eight beatitudes Jesus taught in the Sermon on the Mount (see Matthew 5), each beginning with “Blessed are”: (1) the poor in spirit; (2) those who mourn; (3) the meek; (4) those who hunger and thirst for righteousness; (5) the merciful; (6) the pure in heart; (7) the peacemakers; and (8) those who are persecuted for righteousness’ sake.

**Ninth day:** “*Nine ladies dancing*” represents the nine fruits of the Holy Spirit listed in Galatians 5:22-23: love, joy, peace, longsuffering, kindness, goodness, faithfulness, gentleness, and self-control.

**Tenth day:** “*Ten lords a-leaping*” symbolize the Ten Commandments (Exodus 20:1-17).

**Eleventh day:** “*Eleven pipers piping*” refers to the 11 faithful disciples. Because Judas Iscariot, the 12<sup>th</sup> disciple, betrayed Jesus, he is not included among the faithful.

**Twelfth day:** “*Twelve drummers drumming*” emphasizes the 12 doctrinal points of the Apostles’ Creed, which outlines the core beliefs of the Christian faith.