

Frederick William Dame

THE TWELVE DAYS OF CHRISTMAS



REBUS INTRODUCTION

A rebus is a picture puzzle that is often integrated in a text with the pictures replacing certain words that have been intentionally deleted from the text. The text is converted into a riddle of words composed of syllables shown by pictures that indicate the sound of the words or syllables that they represent.

The term **rebus** first occurs in the English language in approximately 1605. It was borrowed from the French *rébus* and from the Latin *rēbus*, meaning *of things*, *rēbus* being the ablative case plural of *res*, meaning *things*.¹ The use of the **rebus** is based on the *Les rébus de Picardie* (1600) with later explanations provided by the French philologist of the 1600s Gilles Ménage (1613-1692). Perhaps the nomenclature was first used in the terminology *de rebus quae gerunter*, meaning *of things that are going on* as was used in the satires of the clerics of Picardy during the annual carnival in which they satirized politics and the follies of life with pictures and texts.²

In researching the material for this Christmas essay, I accidentally found the following rebus.³ Enjoy it! A short history of *The Twelve Days of Christmas* will follow.




¹ Refer to Julius Pokorny, *Indogermanisches Etymologisches Wörterbuch*, Volume I, A Francke Verlag, Tübingen und Basel: 2005, entry **2, rei-** p. 859.







² <http://www.cosmovisions.com/jeux/rebus.htm>;
<http://gallica.bnf.fr/ark:/12148/btv1b90590615/f15.image>; <http://www.somme.fr/event/rebus-picardie>.









³ The following rebus was found in *A Golden Special Christmas Annual for Boys and Girls*, Western Publishing Company, Inc., New York, New York: 1970, pp. 18-21. The rebus is reprinted as fair use in accordance with Section 107 of the United States Copyright Law, Title 17 U.S.C section 107, <http://www.law.cornell.edu/uscode/17/107/shtml>.













THE 12 DAYS OF CHRISTMAS

Adapted as a rebus by Helen Rebecca Wright






On the first day of **Christmas** My true love gave to me A  in a  .





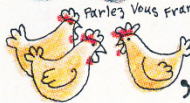





On the second day of **Christmas** My true love gave to me 2    And a  in a  .












On the third day of **Christmas** My true love gave to me 3 **French**   2    And a  in a  .



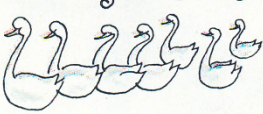

On the fourth day of **Christmas** My true love gave to me 4 colly*     3 **French**   2    And a  in a  .





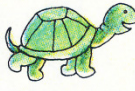




*Colly was used in the original version of this well-known folk song. It is an English common word meaning "black."











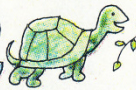




On the fifth day of **Christmas** My true
 love gave to me 5   4 colly
, 3 **French**  Parlez vous Français?, 2 
 And a  in a  .









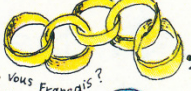







On the sixth day of **Christmas** My true
 love gave to me 6  a-laying,
 5  , 4 colly , 3 **French**
 Parlez vous Français?, 2   And a  in a  .










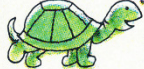



On the seventh day of **Christmas** My true
 love gave to me 7  a-swimming, 6
 a-laying, 5  , 4
 colly , 3 **French**  Parlez vous Français?, 2 
 And a  in a  .
















On the eighth day of **Christmas** My true
 love gave to me 8  a-ing, 7
 a-swimming, 6  a-

laying, 5  , 4 colly , 3
French , 2   And
 a  in a  .

n the ninth day of **Christmas** My true
 love gave to me 9  dancing,
 8  a- ing, 7  a-
 swimming, 6  a-laying, 5 
, 4 colly , 3 **French**
, 2   And a  in a  .

n the tenth day of **Christmas** My true
 love gave to me 10  a-
 leaping, 9  dancing, 8
 a- ing, 7  a-swimming,
 6  a-laying, 5  ,
 4 colly , 3 **French** , 2
  And a  in a  .

On the eleventh day of **Christmas** My true
 love gave to me 11  ing,
 10  a-leaping, 9
 dancing, 8  a-ling,
 7  a-swimming, 6 
 a-laying, 5 , 4 colly , 3
French  Parlez Vous Français?
 2  And a  in a  .

On the twelfth day of **Christmas** My true
 love gave to me 12 
 ming, 11  ing, 10
 a-leaping, 9 
 dancing, 8  a-ling, 7 
 a-swimming, 6  a-laying, 5 
, 4 colly , 3 **French**
 Parlez Vous Français?
 2  And a  in a  .

A SHORT HISTORY OF *THE TWELVE DAYS OF CHRISTMAS*

Just as many people from different cultures and backgrounds from all over the world celebrate the holiday season in different ways, so do many people from the same or similar cultures and backgrounds from all over the world celebrate Christmas in the same ways. With their celebrations, people often sing songs called Christmas carols. Probably most everyone has listened to this most popular Christmas carol: *The Twelve Days of Christmas*. It is heard all over the world during the Holiday Season. Most people probably think of the song as just another clever rhyme to entertain children around the Christmas Holiday. Some even think of it as a *nonsense song* that is fun to sing like *99 Bottles of Beer on the Wall*. This is because the song seems like a fairy-tale-fantasy-type tune that has a lot of quirks and tells an unusual story about receiving strange gifts from a loved one at Christmas time. Although this is basically what the song conveys, this particular Christmas carol has a more serious history behind it and a much deeper meaning than just being a fun song to sing. *The Twelve Days of Christmas* originated in the 16th century when the song was composed and texted by anonymous authors.⁴

The history surrounding *The Twelve Days of Christmas* states that it was written as a puzzle to teach children about their religious heritage during the age of the persecution of the Roman Catholics in England from 1558 to 1829. This was a very troubled time for these believers, thereby making the purpose of the song a serious one when written, which means it was not just a nonsensical song to amuse children.⁵ It was actually a coded message for believers of the Roman Catholic faith. *The Twelve Days of Christmas* was probably written by 16th century English Jesuits as a catechetical device with symbolism as a means of hiding the true meaning of the song to get by those who were persecuting Roman Catholics. They were forced to hide the song's meaning because it was illegal to practice their faith.

⁴ Father Edward T. Dowling, *The Real Meaning of The Twelve Days of Christmas*, Catholics on the Net at <http://www.catholic.net/index.php?option=dedestaca&id=3465#>. There are good, comprehensive presentations of *The Twelve Days of Christmas* at http://www.hymnsandcarolsofchristmas.com/Hymns_and_Carols/Notes_On_Carols/twelve_days_of_christmas.htm, <http://www.snopes.com/holidays/christmas/music/12days.asp>, and https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/The_Twelve_Days_of_Christmas_%28song%29.

⁵ Fr. Hal Stockert, *Catholic Activity: Origin of the Twelve Days of Christmas*. December 17, 1995 at <https://www.catholicculture.org/culture/liturgicalyear/activities/view.cfm?id=540>.

ROMAN CATHOLICISM IN 16TH CENTURY ENGLAND

Basically, there was no separation of church and government during the years when Roman Catholics were persecuted. Everyone in England was subject to mandatory religious loyalty to the kingdom's official church, the Church of England. The conflicts between church and politics was in large part the result of Henry VIII (1491-1547, ruled 1509-1547) declaring himself as the head of the Church of England because Pope Clement VII (1478-1534, Pope from 1523) did not allow Henry's marriage annulment from Catherine of Aragon (1485-1536, Queen of England 1509-1533). Therefore, Henry took matters into his own hands and forced the Pope into religious impotence in England. He effectively eliminated the influence of the Pope and all who worked under him. During this time, Henry VIII made harsh demands that all people swear allegiance to him. When the Chancellor of the Realm, Sir Thomas More (1478-1535, Lord Chancellor 1529-1532), refused to support or take the oath of allegiance to Henry VIII because he believed in the authority of the Pope, Henry VIII had him beheaded in full view of the public and closed Roman Catholic monasteries and convents, which were also looted and destroyed. Edward VI (1537-1553, King of England and Ireland 1547-1553) then carried this torch of religious separation from Rome further by instituting Protestantism.

The situation fared a bit better for the Roman Catholics under the reign of Mary Tudor [Mary I] 1516-1568, Queen of England and Ireland 1553-1558) who has gone down in history as Bloody Mary because she persecuted and killed the Protestants. She was succeeded by her half-sister Elizabeth I (1533-1603, Queen of England and Ireland 1558-1603), a dedicated Protestant who banned the Roman Catholic faith and consequently the persecution of the Roman Catholics began again under the rule of Elizabeth I. Priests were forbidden to perform sacraments, exiled from the country and forbidden to return to the kingdom to minister to the believers. Many Catholic clergy and supporters were killed.

Despite these reprisals many returned to England and risked their lives to minister to the people and other Roman Catholic, who attended mass, took communion, and had the priests baptize their children. Upon returning to England, priests were hidden in the homes of the wealthy in what were called *priest holes*, but these places were often raided by Elizabeth's secret police.

Often, these holes and homes were burned to the ground, killing priests and others.⁶

Elizabeth's reign has the by-names the Elizabethan Period or Elizabethan England. She was the head and ruler of the Church of England and she was also its supreme governor. Additionally, she was a principal member of Parliament who demanded by law that everyone be present at the church liturgical services every Sunday, once a week, twice in one day, and also at holy days. These services were an appendix to the Act of Uniformity of 1558, which was mandated by Parliament. The act established by law the order of prayer used in the *English Book of Common Prayer*. If anyone missed any of the services they had to pay a twelve pence fine or were dealt with accordingly because:

"Absence from church, and any deviation from the forms and rubrics of that book, were statutory offences and attracted the secular penalties of fine and imprisonment, penalties sharply increased by a further act of parliament in 1581."⁷

Other religious violations under Elizabeth's rule meant that people faced excommunication and social exclusion in the country. Religion during this time was not voluntary or private and people were burned to death for having beliefs contrary to orthodox English Christianity and for practicing Roman Catholicism, which was a legal offense. Other punishments besides imprisonment included hangings, beheadings, being drawn and quartered (torn into parts by being tied to and pulled apart by horses), being disemboweled, and being stomped on by the police – all for believing in and practicing Roman Catholicism.

⁶ Dowling, *The Real Meaning of The Twelve Days of Christmas*, op. cit.

⁷ Patrick Collinson, *The Politics of Religion and the Religion of Politics in Elizabethan England in Historical Research*, 82 (215), p 75.

"The violent separation of the Church of England from communion with Rome in the 16th century led to the redefinition of English identity in terms of a Protestant nationalism opposed to the nation's two great enemies, Catholic Spain and France, and to the rebellious colony of Catholic Ireland."⁸

This only added fuel to the fire of the persecution situation that was so widespread at the time.

ROMAN CATHOLIC TEACHINGS

The Christmas carol, *The Twelve Days of Christmas* was reportedly written because the need for secrecy abounded due to the persecutions. It has been mentioned that the song was written to educate the children about the Roman Catholic faith. However, it was also for the sake of educating any of the faithful in the way of Roman Catholic doctrines so as not to alert the persecutors to what it meant. The song's text was written in a way that would make it easy for people to remember facts about the Roman Catholic religion and its doctrine.

Aside from the Christmas carol, the actual meaning of *The Twelve Days of Christmas* involves a 12-day long celebration during the Christmas season. It begins on the second Christmas day and lasts to the Feast of the Epiphany, twelve days later, January 6. The days and their titles are very special:

- **First Day:** December 26: **Saint Stephen's Day** is a day of handing out alms boxes to the needy. These are gifts that people gathered during the Advent Season. Additionally, this is a day set aside for giving to charity and service workers.
- **Second Day:** December 27: **Saint John's Day** is a day to recognize one of the 12 apostles, John and his faith that Jesus rose from his tomb on Easter.

⁸ *Bridges Built and Burnt: Canterbury and Rome, The Times*, at <http://www.thetimes.co.uk/tto/faith/article2727511.ece>.

- **Third, Fourth, Fifth Days:** December 28–30: **Holy Innocents' Days** are meant to recognize the innocence of children and bless them.
- **Sixth Day:** December 31: **Saint Sylvester's Day** is a commemoration of the 4th century Pope Sylvester (Pope 314-335), who declared all days were holy days. He believed and taught that every day can be a feast if we keep our eyes on eternity. This is a day to forget the negative and do good will toward people.
- **Seventh, Eighth, Ninth, Tenth, Eleventh Days:** January 1–5: The **New Year's Beginnings** are days for treasuring our blessings and focusing on the family by filling the house with music, singing and candles, nowadays colorful lights.
- **Twelfth Day:** January 6: The **Epiphany of the Lord** is a day of appearing, manifesting, and revelation. This is a day to be hospitable, generous, imaginative, and to recognize Christ in everyone. It ushers in a new year of grace.

The Melody of *The Twelve Days of Christmas*

1. On the First day of Christ - mas my true love sent to me a Par - tridge in a Pear Tree.

2. On the Se - cond day of Christ - mas my true love sent to me Two Tur - tle Doves and a Par - tridge in a Pear Tree.

3. On the Third day of Christmas my true love sent to me Three French Hens, Two Turtle Doves and a Partridge in a Pear Tree.

4. Fourth Four Calling birds,

5. On the Fifth day of Christ - mas my true love sent to me, Five Gold Rings, Four Call - ing birds, Three French Hens, Two Tur - tle Doves and a Par - tridge in a Pear Tree.

6. On the Sixth day of Christ - mas my true love sent to me Six Geese a - lay - ing, Five Gold
 7. Seventh Seven Swans a - swim - ming,
 8. Eighth Eight Maids a - milk - ing,
 9. Ninth Nine La - dies danc - ing,
 10. Tenth Ten Lords a - leap - ing,
 11. E - le - venth E - le - ven Pi - pers pi - ping,
 12. Twelfth Twelve Drum - mers drum - ming,

Rings, Four Call - ing birds, Three French Hens, Two Tur - tle Doves and a Par - tridge in a Pear Tree.

Source: https://commons.wikimedia.org/wiki/File:12_days_melody.png#/media/File:12_days_melody.png.
 "12 days melody" from Frederic Austin's 1909 arrangement.

THE TWELVE DAYS OF CHRISTMAS.

THE first day of Christmas,
My true love sent to me
A partridge in a pear tree.

The second day of Christmas,
My true love sent to me
Two turtle doves, and
A partridge in a pear tree.

The third day of Christmas,
My true love sent to me
Three French hens,
Two turtle doves, and
A partridge in a pear tree.

The fourth day of Christmas,
My true love sent to me
Four colly birds,
Three French hens,
Two turtle doves, and
A partridge in a pear tree.

The fifth day of Christmas,
My true love sent to me
Five gold rings,
Four colly birds,
Three French hens,
Two turtle doves, and
A partridge in a pear tree.

The sixth day of Christmas,
My true love sent to me
Six geese a laying,
Five gold rings,
Four colly birds,
Three French hens,
Two turtle doves, and
A partridge in a pear tree.

The seventh day of Christmas,
My true love sent to me
Seven swans a swimming,
Six geese a laying,
Five gold rings,
Four colly birds,
Three French hens,
Two turtle doves, and
A partridge in a pear tree.

The eighth day of Christmas,
My true love sent to me
Eight maids a milking,
Seven swans a swimming,
Six geese a laying,
Five gold rings,
Four colly birds,

Three French hens,
Two turtle doves, and
A partridge in a pear tree.

The ninth day of Christmas,
My true love sent to me
Nine drummers drumming,
Eight maids a milking,
Seven swans a swimming,
Six geese a laying,
Five gold rings,
Four colly birds,
Three French hens,
Two turtle doves, and
A partridge in a pear tree.

The tenth day of Christmas,
My true love sent to me
Ten pipers piping,
Nine drummers drumming,
Eight maids a milking,
Seven swans a swimming,
Six geese a laying,
Five gold rings,
Four colly birds,
Three French hens,
Two turtle doves, and
A partridge in a pear tree.

The eleventh day of Christmas,
My true love sent to me
Eleven ladies dancing,
Ten pipers piping,
Nine drummers drumming,
Eight maids a milking,
Seven swans a swimming,
Six geese a laying,
Five gold rings,
Four colly birds,
Three French hens,
Two turtle doves, and
A partridge in a pear tree.

The twelfth day of Christmas,
My true love sent to me
Twelve lords a leaping,
Eleven ladies dancing,
Ten pipers piping,
Nine drummers drumming,
Eight maids a milking,
Seven swans a swimming,
Six geese a laying,
Five gold rings,
Four colly birds,
Three French hens,
Two turtle doves, and
A partridge in a pear tree.

Source: *The twelve days of Christmas*. Angus is the name of the Newcastle, England printer.
Roud Number: [68](#), printed sometime between 1774 and 1825. References: ESTC: N71362
<http://ballads.bodleian.ox.ac.uk/view/sheet/15750>.

The Christmas carol came about to remind and teach those of the faith the importance of the religion and the necessity of keeping the history of it alive.

The Twelve Days of Christmas song is broken down with symbolic meaning as follows:

- **On the first day of Christmas my true love gave to me, a partridge in a pear tree:** This line is actually the day after Christmas, celebrated on December 26. The phrase *my true love* represents God. The mother partridge has the responsibility of luring enemies from the nest to protect the chicks. She puts her life on the line for the chicks. The partridge symbolizes Christ who laid down His life for His sheep. The pear tree symbolizes the cross upon which He was crucified, which gives the believer everlasting strength.
- **Two turtle doves:** This represents the Old and New testaments in the Bible. These can also represent Jesus' two natures, which are human and divine.
- **Three French hens:** The French hens are symbolic of the three gifts that the wise men set before Jesus at the manger: gold, frankincense, and myrrh. These were very expensive gifts. The three French hens could also represent the three personifications of God in One (God Father, God Son, and God Holy Spirit), or the Trinity.
- **Four calling birds:** These birds represent the four Gospels: Matthew, Mark, Luke, and John.
- **Five golden rings:** These stand for the Torah, which are the first five books of the Old Testament. They are considered the most sacred books of the Bible.
- **Six geese a-laying:** This stands for the six days that God needed to complete creation.
- **Seven swans a-swimming:** The swans are symbols of the seven sacraments.

The Seven Sacraments of the Roman Catholic Church are:⁹

Baptism



For Catholics, the Sacrament of Baptism is the first step in a lifelong journey of commitment and discipleship. Whether Catholics are baptized as infants or adults, Baptism is the Church's way of celebrating and enacting the embrace of God.

Eucharist



Catholics believe the Eucharist, or Communion, is both a sacrifice and a meal. Catholics believe in the real presence of Jesus, who died for our sins. As Catholics receive Christ's Body and Blood, they also are nourished spiritually and brought closer to God.

Reconciliation



The Catholic Sacrament of Reconciliation (also known as Penance, or Penance and Reconciliation) has three elements: conversion, confession, and celebration. In Reconciliation Catholics find God's unconditional forgiveness. As a result Catholics are called to forgive others.

Confirmation



Confirmation is a Catholic Sacrament of mature Christian commitment and a deepening of baptismal gifts. It is one of the three Sacraments of Initiation for Catholics. It is most often associated with the gifts of the Holy Spirit.

Marriage



For Catholics, the Sacrament of Marriage, or Holy Matrimony, is a public sign that one gives oneself totally to this other person. It is also a public statement about God: the loving union of husband and wife speaks of family values and also God's values.

Holy Orders



In the Sacrament of Holy Orders, or Ordination, the priest being ordained vows to bring Catholics the sacraments by proclaiming the Gospel and by providing other means to holiness.

⁹ <http://www.americancatholic.org/features/special/default.aspx?id=29>.

Anointing of the Sick



The Catholic Sacrament of Anointing of the Sick, formerly known as Last Rites or Extreme Unction, is a ritual of healing appropriate not only for physical but also for mental and spiritual sickness.

- **Eight maids a-milking**: This symbolizes the eight beatitudes. The eight beatitudes are in the Gospel of Saint Matthew 5:3-10.

***"Blessed are the poor in spirit,
for theirs is the kingdom of heaven.***

***Blessed are they who mourn,
for they shall be comforted.***

***Blessed are the meek,
for they shall inherit the earth.***

***Blessed are they who hunger and thirst for righteousness,
for they shall be satisfied.***

***Blessed are the merciful,
for they shall obtain mercy.***

***Blessed are the pure of heart,
for they shall see God.***

***Blessed are the peacemakers,
for they shall be called children of God.***

***Blessed are they who are persecuted for the sake of righteousness,
for theirs is the kingdom of heaven."***

Nine ladies dancing: This represents nine choirs of angels in the Bible as well as the nine fruits of the Spirit. The nine choirs are: The Seraphim Choir, The Cherubim Choir, The Thrones Choir, The Dominions Choir, The Virtues Choir, The Powers Choir, The Archangels Choir, The Principalities Choir, and The Angels Choir.¹⁰

¹⁰ The source of the choirs is <http://www.catholic.org/saints/angels/angelchoir.php>. The source of the fruits on the following page is <http://hizkidz.net/category/fruit-of-the-spirit/>.



- **Ten lords a-leaping:** This stands for the Ten Commandments given to the people by God through Moses. The Ten Commandments are in Exodus 20: 2-17 and Deuteronomy 6-21. The short listing is as follows:

1. You shall have no other gods before Me.
2. You shall not make idols.
3. You shall not take the name of the LORD your God in vain.
4. Remember the Sabbath day, to keep it holy.
5. Honor your father and your mother.
6. You shall not murder.
7. You shall not commit adultery.
8. You shall not steal.
9. You shall not bear false witness against your neighbor.
10. You shall not covet.

- **Eleven pipers piping:** These stand for the eleven original apostles who remained faithful to Jesus after Judas Iscariot betrayed Him. The eleven original apostles are:

1. Simon Peter (brother of Andrew)
2. James (son of Zebedee and older brother of John) also called James the Greater
3. John (son of Zebedee and brother of James)
4. Andrew (brother of Simon Peter)
5. Philip of Bethsaida
6. Thomas (Didymus)
7. Bartholomew (Nathaniel)
8. Matthew (Levi) of Capernaum
9. James (son of Alphaeus) also called James the Lesser
10. Simon the Zealot (the Canaanite)
11. Thaddaeus-Judas (Lebbaeus), brother of James the Lesser and brother of Matthew (Levi) of Capernaum.

➤ **Twelve drummers drumming:** This represents the Creed of the Apostles, also known as the Roman Catholic Church's twelve basic beliefs. The Creed is:

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. Under Pontius Pilate, He was crucified, died, and was buried.
5. He descended to the dead. On the third day he rose again.
6. He ascended into heaven and is seated at the right hand of the Father.
7. He will come again to judge the living and the dead.
8. I believe in the Holy Spirit,
9. the holy Catholic Church, the communion of saints,
10. the forgiveness of sins,
11. the resurrection of the body,
12. and the life everlasting.

Amen

History records that,

"Despite persecution, an English Roman Catholic minority survived, especially in Lancashire, and increasing toleration in the 18th century climaxed in the three Catholic Relief Acts which restored civil rights to Catholics by 1829. The fortunes of the Roman Catholic Church in England were then transformed by a huge influx of pauper Irish immigrants in midcentury, many of them refugees from the great Irish famine of 1846-49, but their experience left them with no liking for the Church of England. The exclusiveness of the Roman Catholic Church was confirmed by a new enthusiasm for papal authority among English Roman Catholics, led by Henry Edward Manning, the former Anglican Cardinal Archbishop of Westminster, which was sealed by the definition of papal infallibility at the First Vatican Council in 1870."¹¹

In other words, the persecution of the Roman Catholics was eventually outlawed with the eventual decline of Protestant nationalism in England. "Conventional wisdom would have it that ecclesiastical repression provoked organized nonconformity and political agitation for change."¹²

THE FEAST OF EPIPHANY

The twelfth day of Christmas is the Feast of Epiphany. The word *epiphany* is Greek and means *to reveal*. The Epiphany is the celebration of revelation events, including Christ's nativity when the three Wise Men (the Magi) visited baby Jesus, His baptism, and His turning water into wine, which was His first miracle. The celebration day is January 6 and dates back to ancient times. Many cultures celebrate this feast day in their own ways. The Eastern Orthodox churches highlight the day as a shining forth of Jesus at his baptism and they also reveal that Jesus Christ is the Messiah and the second person belonging to

¹¹ Henry Edward Manning (1808-1892), Cardinal and Archbishop of Westminster 1865-1892. *Bridges Built and Burnt: Canterbury and Rome*, *The Times*, at <http://www.thetimes.co.uk/tto/faith/article2727511.ece>.

¹² Patrick Collinson, *The Politics of Religion and the Religion of Politics in Elizabethan England* in *Historical Research*, 82 (215), p. 92.

the Holy Trinity. Eastern Orthodox tradition calls this feast the Feast of the Theophany, which means *shining forth* in Greek.

The Irish call the Feast of Epiphany *Little Christmas* and it is known in Spain, Cuba and Latin American countries as *El Dia de Reyes*, which translates into *The Day of the Kings*. The Italians celebrate this day with *La Befana* who is an old woman who brings children gifts on the Eve of Epiphany, January 5, similar to Santa Claus bringing gifts on Christmas Eve.¹³

CONFLICTING VIEWS

Although many believe in Christmas and the historical accounts of the meaning behind the Christmas carol, *The Twelve Days of Christmas*, there are some who have strong opposing viewpoints about the historical accounts of this tune and its text. It is admitted that the origin of this chorale is a bit complicated and involved because of cultural, religious, and calendar differences among various countries. In addition, there have even been cultures such as those of European and Scandinavian origin that have mixed the twelve days of Christmas with festival celebrations for the changing of the year. Some of these celebrations are of pagan origin. Indeed, this may be one reason why there has been opposition and questioning of the validity and historical accuracy of the origin of the Christmas carol, *The Twelve Days of Christmas*. Critics argue that the availability of substantial evidence to support the claims of the song's meaning and historical accounts do not exist, although many religious historians account for the accuracy of the history behind the song. Still, others highlight both logical and historical inconsistencies in the story. Indeed, many Christian celebrations were previous pagan celebrations. This is supported by the fact

¹³ In Western Christian countries Saint Nicholas brings gifts to the children on December 6, Saint Nicholas Day. In Eastern Christian countries Saint Nicholas Day is on December 19. "In Europe, especially in 'Germany and Poland, boys would dress as bishops begging alms for the poor.' In Ukraine, children wait for St. Nicholas to come and to put a present under their pillows provided that the children were good during the year. Children who behaved badly may expect to find a twig or a piece of coal under their pillows. In the Netherlands, 'Dutch children put out a clog filled with hay and a carrot for Saint Nicholas' horse. On Saint Nicholas' Day, gifts are tagged with personal humorous rhymes written by the sender.' In the United States, one custom associated with Saint Nicholas Day is children leaving their shoes in the foyer on Saint Nicholas Eve in hope that Saint Nicholas will place some coins on the soles, for them to awake to." (https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/St_Nicholas_Day) The Christ Child brings the gifts on Christmas Eve, particularly in German-speaking countries.

that Christian celebrations supplanted pagan celebrations with the supremacy of Christ over paganism that will prohibit the resurgence of paganism.

QUINTESSENCE

In light of acknowledging any nay-sayer views on the subject of whether or not the historical accounts of the origin and meaning of the Christmas carol *The Twelve Days of Christmas* is true, perhaps it is prudent to take it all in stride. As is, the breakdown of the song's lyrics and how they tie in with biblical accounts certainly seems plausible. Even if it is not completely accurate, the meanings still apply for believers. It is probably safe to say that the accounts revealed through this research have accurately depicted what certainly could have well been a true account of a religious culture's attempt to preserve its belief system through secrecy and symbolism hidden within songs such as this Christmas carol. The fact that questions exist should not hold one back from marveling in the creativity of the symbolism in the song, if for nothing more than to use it as a tool for acknowledgement and proclamation for those who seek those things in exercising their faith, even in light of a so-called nonsense song.

"The view of the song as a secret catechism is most likely legendary or anecdotal. Without corroboration and in the absence of 'substantive evidence,' we probably should not take overly rigid positions from either perspective. It is all too easy to 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 the likelihood that the song had secular origins...Perhaps, when all is said and done, historical accuracy, as important as that might be on one level, is not really the point."¹⁴

¹⁴ Dennis Bratcher, *The Twelve Days of Christmas* at <http://www.crivoice.org/cy12days.html>.

The point should be: those who choose to celebrate the history and the heritage that this song represents are free to do so.

“Now, when they hear what they once thought was only 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?”

A believer in God surely agrees!

That is the truth!



I WISH EVERYONE A MEANINGFUL CHRISTMAS!

Frederick William Dame
Patriotic, Steadfast, and True
December 15, 2015