



"The Twelve Days of Christmas" is a cumulative song, meaning that each verse is built on top of the previous verses.

There are twelve verses, each describing a gift given by "my true love" on one of the twelve days of Christmas.

The first three verses run, in full, as follows:

- On the First day of Christmas, my true love sent to me:
A Partridge in a Pear Tree.
- On the Second day of Christmas, my true love sent to me:
Two Turtle Doves and a Partridge in a Pear Tree.
- 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.

Subsequent verses follow the same pattern, each adding one new gift and repeating all the earlier given gifts, so that each verse is one line longer than its predecessor:

- 4 Calling Birds.
- 5 Gold Rings.
- 6 Geese a-Laying.
- 7 Swans a-Swimming.
- 8 Maids a-Milking.
- 9 Ladies Dancing.
- 10 Lords a-Leaping.
- 11 Pipers Piping.
- 12 Drummers Drumming.

What are the historical connections of the Twelve Days of Christmas and the Catholic Church?

The Twelve Days of Christmas was created in England, during a time of religious persecution. From 1558 until 1829, Catholics in England were not permitted to practice their faith openly. “*The Twelve Days of Christmas*,” was written as a kind of secret catechism (or code) that could be sung in public, without fear of arrest – a learning or memory aid to Christian Catholics in fact.

Each verse refers to a teaching of Church doctrine — with the partridge being Jesus Christ, who died on a tree, and the “True Love” being God, the Father, who gives us all good gifts.

The twelve days of Christmas are the twelve days between Christmas Day, December 25th (the birth of Jesus) and the Epiphany, January 6th (the day Christians celebrate the arrival of the Magi (Wise Men) to the manger and the revelation of Christ as the “Light of the World”).

Each element of the song was a code word for religious truths:

- The *partridge* in a pear tree is Jesus.
- The *two turtle doves* were the Old and New Testaments.
- The *three French hens* stood for faith, hope and love.
- The *four calling birds* were the four gospels of Matthew, Mark, Luke, and John.
- The *five golden rings* represented the first five books of the Old Testament, which describe man's fall into sin and the great love of God throughout.
- The *six geese a-laying* stood for the six days of creation (Remember: God rested on the seventh day?)
- *Seven swans a-swimming* represented the seven-fold gifts of the Holy Spirit-----Prophecy, Serving, Teaching, Exhortation, Contribution, Leadership, and Mercy.
- The *eight maids a-milking* were the eight beatitudes.
- *Nine ladies dancing* were the nine fruits of the Holy Spirit-----Charity, Joy, Peace, Patience [Forbearance], Goodness [Kindness], Mildness, Fidelity, Modesty, Continency [Chastity].
- The *ten lords a-leaping* were the Ten Commandments.
- *The eleven pipers piping* stood for the eleven faithful Apostles.
- The *twelve drummers drumming* symbolized the twelve points of belief presented in The Apostles' Creed.

(SR: <https://www.catholicnewsagency.com/resources/advent/customs-and-traditions/the-history-of-the-twelve-days-of-christmas>)