

## The Twelve Days of Christmas for 2020

Do you know the old Christmas song, “The Twelve Days of Christmas”?

On the first day of Christmas my true love gave to me  
A Partridge in a pear tree.  
On the second day of Christmas my true love gave to me  
Two turtle doves and a partridge in a pear tree.  
On the third day of Christmas my true love gave to me  
Three French hens, two turtle doves, and a partridge in a pear tree...

...and so on until the twelfth night:

On the twelfth day of Christmas, my true love gave to me:  
Twelve drummers drumming,  
Eleven pipers piping,  
Ten Lords a-leaping,  
Nine Ladies dancing,  
Eight maids a-milking,  
Seven swans a-swimming,  
Six geese a-laying,  
Five golden rings,  
Four calling birds,  
Three French hens, two turtle doves, and a partridge in a pear tree.

My favourite verse was always, “Five golden rings!” Later when I learned what this song was for, it stopped being silly. Each verse was connected to the corresponding day after Christmas—the First day of Christmas is December 25, the second December 26, and so on. I am writing to you on the fifth day of Christmas, December 29<sup>th</sup>, my favourite day: “Five Golden Rings!” Then I learned that part of the history of this song was to give the gifts mentioned in the song on each day of Christmas to someone you love... I had a friend who did that for his new bride the first year they were married! I have forgotten what he did for “Five Golden Rings!” They had a pretty big house, but by the end of the twelve days wouldn’t there be a menagerie in the back yard?—12 partridges in a pear tree orchard with twenty-four turtle doves perched on the roof and thirty-six French hens in the back corner, forty-eight songbirds around the feeder, sixty golden rings! And he would have had to buy an apartment building for all the maids, ladies, lords, not to forget barracks for the pipers and the drummers! Then I learned from one of my kids that it was repeated just to help you remember it, a memory castle, dad, like Sherlock Holmes, don’t be so silly...

And then came the big revelation: each verse was a code for something in the Bible. The partridge is Jesus, the pear tree the cross, the turtle doves the sacrifice Mary and Joseph made in the temple on his dedication day; the three French hens represented the gifts of the Magi; the four calling birds the Major Prophets and the Four Gospels; Five Golden Rings are the five

wise bridesmaids who brought extra oil for their lamps; the six geese are the six good deeds in Matthew 25; the seven swans are the seven gifts of the spirit in 1 Corinthians 12; the eight milking women are the beatitudes in Matthew 5; the nine dancing ladies are the fruits of the spirit in Galatians 5; The ten leaping Lords are the ten commandments (Exodus 19); the eleven bagpipers are the eleven apostles of the early church; and the twelve drummers are the twelve gates into the Heavenly Jerusalem, the twelve tribes of Israel, and the twelve articles of the Lord's Prayer and the Apostles' Creed. But that leaves a question: WHO IS YOUR TRUE LOVE??

And I began to wonder, why? "Just for fun" was good enough for me for a long time, and then I learned about how persecuted Christians today passed on their faith to new believers, and their own children, by means of memory devices like The Twelve Days of Christmas, and how this very song was possibly first written exactly for that reason. For a long time, The Twelve Days of Christmas has been part of our Christmas Culture. But as our culture changes and the song is requested less and less, I have a new question: how will we pass on details of our faith to new believers, and our own children, in our culture today? We might use a pelican and a sour cherry tree instead of a partridge and a pear tree, for starters. The biblical references haven't lost their value—two turtle doves, five golden rings--and we might even keep the pipes and drums! Geese we see in the fall, and swans in some parks, but leaping lords, milking maids and dancing ladies take a lot of explaining, no matter which culture you think they are from. We could have fun re-writing those verses, as long as we remember the reason: to share our faith in Jesus Christ as fully God and fully human, our Saviour.

Thanks be to God for the Twelve Days of Christmas, and especially for the Five Golden Rings!  
Joy in Jesus, Pastor Ron