

Sarah Kretzmann
Christmas Day 2013

I was listening to the radio the other day, and the lady said, “Get all your Christmas music here for just three more days, because the day after Christmas, everything goes back to normal.” I thought about this comment for a while. Is this really true? After so much careful planning and preparation, does everything go back to the way it was the very next day? Is Christmas only a day? Or is it a season? Is it all year round?

I suppose ideally, it is all year round, in that the Christ child who comes to us at Christmas is the one who grows into the man who dies willingly to take away your sins and mine. But, more specifically, Christmas is twelve specific days, beginning—not ending with—Christmas Day. It’s what that song “The Twelve Days of Christmas” is all about.

Tradition holds that the song “The Twelve Days of Christmas” is a coded

message about the basic teachings of Christianity. These messages were hidden in code due to the religious wars in England in the 16th century. While on the surface this song might sound like a bunch of nonsense, it contains the wisdom of the Christian faith. In my house, we have been singing this song at the breakfast, lunch and supper table, and so I am eager to share with you, or at the very least remind you, of what it's all about.

So, we begin at the end.

Twelve drummers drumming refer to the twelve points of doctrine made in the Apostle's Creed. This creed is the summation of the Christian faith.

Eleven pipers piping are the disciples after Judas left the group. Who were these eleven? Simon Peter, Andrew, James son of Alphaeus, John,

Philip, Bartholomew, Matthew, Thomas, James, Simon the Zealot, and Judas son of James.

Who or what are the ten lords a-leaping? They are the Ten Commandments!

You shall have no other gods before you. You shall not take the name of the Lord your God in vain. Honor the Sabbath day to keep it holy. Honor your parents. Do not kill. Do not cheat on your spouse. Do not steal. Do not gossip about your neighbor. Do not want anything that others have.

What about the nine ladies dancing? These are the fruits of the Spirit: love, joy, peace, patience, kindness, generosity, faithfulness, gentleness and self-control.

And the eight maids a-milking? These are the eight Beatitudes. Blessed are the poor in spirit, those who mourn, the meek, those who hunger and

thirst for righteousness, the merciful, the pure in heart, the
peacemakers and the persecuted.

What are the seven swans a-swimming? These are the seven gifts of
the

Holy Spirit: 1) prophecy, 2) ministry, 3) teaching, 4) exhortation, 5)
giving, 6) leading, and 7) compassion.

Six geese a-laying. These are the six days of creation.

Five Golden Rings! These are the Five Books of the Old Testament
referred to as the Torah, or the books of the law. These are: Genesis,
Exodus, Numbers, Leviticus and Deuteronomy. These books give the history
of humanity's sinful failure and God's response of grace in the creation
of a people to be a light to the world.

Four calling birds are the four Gospels: Matthew, Mark, Luke and
John.

These books of the Bible proclaim the Good News of God's reconciliation of the world to Himself in Jesus Christ.

Three French Hens are the three virtues of faith, hope and love, and the greatest of these is love, according to St. Paul in the 13th chapter of Corinthians.

What are the two turtle doves? These are the Old and New Testaments of the Bible.

And finally, drum roll please, the partridge in a pear tree... This of course is Jesus Christ, the One whose birth we celebrate today. In the song, Christ is symbolically presented as a mother partridge that feigns injury to decoy predators from her helpless nestlings, recalling the expression of Christ's sadness over the fate of Jerusalem:

"Jerusalem! Jerusalem! How often would I have sheltered you under my wings, as a hen does her chicks, but you would not have it so"

(Luke 13:34)

So, there it is, the entire song. Now you know what it means and perhaps have even learned something along the way, or at least, been reminded of things you already knew. What we discover is that Christmas does not end today, it begins...it begins a twelve day celebration of a God who loves us so much that he gives to us the greatest gift ever given.

So I don't think everything goes back to normal tomorrow. At least I hope it doesn't. Today is the celebration of the arrival of a newborn baby, and we all know that after a baby is born, nothing goes back to normal. As with all joyous occasions in life, the joy begins today, it doesn't

end....nobody says on the day their first baby is born or on their wedding day, “Well, tomorrow everything will go back to normal.”

No, such joyful things change our lives and begin a new chapter. Jesus is born, and this means that there is a great big God in this great big universe who cares enough about you to walk with you all the days of your life. The love that God has for you is not just for a day, it doesn't expire tonight at midnight...and it isn't even just for twelve days, but for all days, until time as we know it ends, and God begins again.