THE TWELVE DAYS *J* CHRISTMAS *Family Quide*

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The Twelve Days of Christmas: Family Guide

part of 'Tis the Season: A Family Empowered Event for the Advent and Christmas Seasons

> Published by David C Cook 4050 Lee Vance View Colorado Springs, CO 80918 U.S.A.

David C Cook U.K., Kingsway Communications Eastbourne, East Sussex BN23 6NT, England

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Inspire

Years ago while serving as an American missionary in Europe, I discovered many cultural differences in how Christmas is celebrated. I found that gift giving happens on December 6th, not Christmas Day as it does in most English-speaking countries. Historically, on this day, most nations honor St. Nicholas, a man who gave his life and treasures to Jesus. Unfortunately, time and tradition have morphed him into a gift-giving magician.

When my wife and I began our family, we decided to make this European tradition of gift giving our own. Each year on the sixth of December, we take our kids out of school. We enjoy a special breakfast together and brainstorm ideas to share an act of kindness with those who may need a dose of random joy and care. We leave only a clue that says, "You've been St. Nicked" for the recipients. The day ends with a grand dinner and an evening of opening presents by the fireplace.

Then when we find ourselves one week into the Advent season, the hustle and bustle of shopping and gift giving is complete. The rest of the season can be filled with worship services, concerts, and shared time with family and friends. After Christmas Eve services on December 24th, we sleep under the tree and wake to read the Christmas story and have breakfast with family.

Once at a party with friends, everyone was asked which family traditions they loved the most. My 14-year-old daughter said that celebrating St. Nicholas Day helped her to be more intentional about Jesus' birthday. She was able to give gifts to others and focus her attention on celebrating the arrival of the promised Messiah. Our hope is for your family to embrace new traditions that will allow you to experience the joy of giving and sharing like never before.

Ric Olsen Lead Pastor, The Beacon Orange, California

Equip

The Old Testament is full of traditions of feasts and festivals commanded by God in order to help His people remember the good things He had done for them. The early church brilliantly realized that we as a people need to be intentional, to mark the time, or else we lose opportunities to teach and celebrate. They created a calendar of spiritual seasons based on the significant events in Christ's life that allowed His followers time to pause. Unlike the natural calendar with four seasons, there are six seasons on the

Christian calendar. Two such seasons are Advent and Christmas. They're distinct and hold unique roles in the life of a Christ follower.

Advent means "arrival." As a holiday, it begins the Christian year and includes the four Sundays prior to Christmas Day. In some countries, Christmas begins December 25th and continues for 12 days, ending on Epiphany (or Three Kings Day), giving us "The Twelve Days of Christmas." Regardless of the actual dates, this is a season of celebration for the birth of Jesus and the fulfillment of God's promises. Combined, Advent (preparation) and Christmas (celebration) help us measure out the time so we may intentionally remember the fulfillment of God's promise to send the Savior and celebrate with anticipation the fulfillment of His promises still to come.

While the exact meaning and the historical background of the song "The Twelve Days of Christmas" varies, we've chosen to use this song, along with some simple symbols for each day, to help us remember some of the key aspects of our Christian faith, the hope we have in Christ, and the season that celebrates His birth.



Support

As children of God, we've been blessed: Blessed to have been adopted into His family; blessed to have received the gift of eternal life; blessed with the Holy Spirit of God dwelling within us. We've been blessed to be a blessing. This busy Christmas season, pause as a family for a few minutes for 12 days to add meaning to your celebration.

To accompany this family guide, create a Family Celebration Box that contains the items listed below. Then decide when you want to begin—on Christmas day (to use during the traditional Twelve Days of Christmas, ending on January 6 which will be Epiphany); 12 days before Christmas (as a countdown); or spread your celebration out in the month of December. Feel free to modify The Twelve Days of Christmas Family Guide to fit the needs of your family. Whenever you decide to begin, your family can use this guide along with the simple supplies found in your Celebration Box to create missional opportunities to connect with family and neighbors about the true meaning of the season.

Consider inviting friends or neighbors to join you as you celebrate The Twelve Days of Christmas. You'll have an opportunity to bless someone in your neighborhood or community with a small gift each of the 12 days.

The Family Celebration Box Supplies

- Gift Tags (12; see Resources)
- Three Kings Cake Recipe (see Resources)
- candle
- "The Twelve Days of Christmas" lyrics (1 copy per family member)
- apple cider or chocolate (4 packets)
- artificial pear
- miniature plastic baby or almond

PREPARE AHEAD

Print a set of the Gift Tags and cut apart. Print the recipe for the Three Kings Cake to make at the end of the 12 days. Search online and print a copy of "The Twelve Days of Christmas" lyrics for each family member.

RELATE

For each of the 12 days, a missional gift idea is given. When you prepare your gift and address the tag, be sure to add on your note a reference to the Scripture for the day so your recipient will know why your gift was chosen. Also add a brief mention of the day from the song "The Twelve Days of Christmas" to tie it all together.



Gather your family together and light the candle. Explain the reason for the candle. Each time we light the candle, it can help us remember that this time is set aside and special. Remember Jesus' birth by reading your favorite version of the Christmas Story to your family from Luke 2:1-20 or Matthew 1:18—2:15. Encourage your children to read it to the family together. They may choose to do a dramatic reading or create costumes to wear as they read. However your children choose to present this part of Scripture, encourage them to be creative.

After you've spent time in God's Word, discuss the various ways each person has seen God work in the life of your family over the past year. During the next 12 days, invite your children to decorate the Celebration Box and collect remembrances from some of those wonderful moments to place inside.

Celebrate together by singing the song "The Twelve Days of Christmas." Talk about the meaning of "my true love," and the symbolic meaning of the first verse.

On the first day of Christmas, my true love gave to me, a partridge in a pear tree.

"My true love" Symbolic of: God the Father A partridge in a pear tree Symbolic of: Jesus Christ Passage: John 3:16

Read John 3:16 aloud.

For God so loved the world that he gave his one and only Son, that whoever believes in him shall not perish but have eternal life.

Ask: Who loves the people of the world? What did He give to the world? Why did He send His Son to earth? How does this make you feel?

Spend some time as a family praying and asking God to show you the person or family who needs to experience a dose of love on the first day of Christmas.

Missional ideas for the first day gift: Give a neighbor a pear with a tag on it including a note or Scripture verse. Or give a gift to a global neighbor by gifting a chicken through a charitable organization like Compassion International. (www.compassion.com/catalog/goc-category-income-generation.htm)

Once you've decided who will receive the gift, attach a gift tag with a Bible verse and an anonymous note saying he's loved. Then, quietly deliver the package to the recipient's home and knock before leaving.



Gather your family and light the candle. Sing only the first two verses of "The Twelve Days of Christmas."

On the second day of Christmas, my true love gave to me two turtledoves Symbolic of: Mary and Joseph's Worship Passage: Luke 2:22-24

Review the meaning of "my true love" from the first verse and talk about the meaning of two turtledoves.

Read Luke 2:22-24 aloud.

When the time came for the purification rites required by the Law of Moses, Joseph and Mary took him to Jerusalem to present him to the Lord (as it is written in the Law of the Lord, "Every firstborn male is to be consecrated to the Lord"), and to offer a sacrifice in keeping with what is said in the Law of the Lord: "a pair of doves or two young pigeons."

Ask: Who is "my true love?" What is a partridge in a pear tree? What do the two turtledoves have to do with Jesus' birth?

Discuss various ways your family can make the remaining days of Christmas come alive for your neighbors. Spend some time planning the last 10 days.

Missional ideas for second day gift: Give homemade chocolate turtles or a bar of Dove soap. Wrap the item simply and attach a gift tag with a note. Deliver the gift as you did on the first day.

Simple Chocolate Turtle recipe:

Place a chocolate-covered caramel candy and a nut on a small pretzel. Heat in the microwave for a few seconds. Remove and allow to cool completely. Wrap candies in wax or parchment paper.



Gather your family and light the candle. Sing only the first three verses of "The Twelve Days of Christmas."

On the third day of Christmas, my true love gave to me three French hens Symbolic of: Gifts of the Magi Passage: Matthew 2:10-11

Review the meaning of the symbols from each day. Discuss the meaning of the three French hens.

Read Matthew 2:10-11 aloud.

When they saw the star, they were overjoyed. On coming to the house, they saw the child with his mother Mary, and they bowed down and worshiped him. Then they opened their treasures and presented him with gifts of gold, frankincense and myrrh.

Ask: What did the magi do when they saw Jesus? How did they respond in worship to Him? How can you respond to Jesus in worship? What does this part of The Big God Story tell you about God?

Missional idea for the third day gift: Give gold-wrapped, cinnamon-flavored candy and/or incense. Wrap the candy, attach a gift tag with a note, and deliver the gift.





Gather your family and light the candle. Sing only the first four verses of "The Twelve Days of Christmas."

On the fourth day of Christmas, my true love gave to me four calling birds Symbolic of: The Four Gospel Writers (Matthew, Mark, Luke, and John) Passage: John 20:31

Review the meaning of the symbols from each day. Discuss the meaning of the four calling birds.

Read John 20:31 aloud.

But these are written that you may believe that Jesus is the Messiah, the Son of God, and that by believing you may have life in his name.

Ask: Why were the stories of Jesus' life and ministry written? Who is Jesus? What does He offer all people who choose to believe? How does that make you feel?

Missional idea for the fourth day gift: Give a neighbor a box of marshmallow bird candies (they can be easily found at Christmastime). Wrap the candy, attach a gift tag with a note, and deliver the gift.





Gather your family and light the candle. Sing only the first five verses of "The Twelve Days of Christmas."

On the fifth day of Christmas, my true love gave to me five golden rings Symbolic of: The Five Books of Moses (The Law/Pentateuch) Passage: Psalm 19:9-10

Review the meaning of the symbols from each day. Discuss the meaning of the five golden rings.

Read Psalm 19:9-10 aloud.

The fear of the LORD is pure, enduring forever. The decrees of the LORD are firm, and all of them are righteous. They are more precious than gold, than much pure gold; they are sweeter than honey, than honey from the honeycomb.

Definition of terms:

Fear of the Lord: To have deep respect for God. For younger children: To know that God is more important than anyone or anything. There is no one like Him. He has power over everything. **Righteous:** To be fair, right, and perfect.

Ask: How does it make you feel to know that God's rules are fair, right, and perfect? Why do you think they're more valuable than gold and sweeter than honey? What is one thing you like about God's Word? Why?

Missional idea for the fifth day gift: The sweetness of cinnamon rolls are a fun way to communicate the sweetness of God's Word for the fifth day. When baked, they're a gooey symbol of the five golden rings. Cinnamon rolls can be purchased in a small can of five rolls. Share the can or bake them first. Wrap the gift, attach a gift tag with a note, and deliver it. Your neighbors are sure to enjoy those five golden rings!





Gather your family and light the candle. Sing only the first six verses of "The Twelve Days of Christmas."

On the sixth day of Christmas, my true love gave to me six geese-a-laying Symbolic of: Six Days of Creation Passage: Genesis 1:31

Review the meaning of the symbols from each day. Discuss the meaning of the six geese-a-laying.

Read Genesis 1:31 aloud.

God saw all that he had made, and it was very good. And there was evening, and there was morning the sixth day.

Ask: For six days God created the world and everything in it. Do you remember what God made each day? What did God say after He created something? Who made you? What does God say about making you?

Missional idea for the sixth day gift: Give six chocolate candy eggs, or even six real ones. Wrap the eggs, attach a gift tag with a note, and deliver the gift.





Gather your family and light the candle. Sing only the first seven verses of "The Twelve Days of Christmas."

On the seventh day of Christmas, my true love gave to me seven swans-a-swimming Symbolic of: Gifts of the Holy Spirit Passage: Romans 12:6-8

Review the meaning of the symbols from each day. Discuss the meaning of the seven swans-a-swimming.

Read Romans 12:6-8 aloud.

We have different gifts, according to the grace given to each of us. If your gift is prophesying, then prophesy in accordance with your faith; if it is serving, then serve; if it is teaching, then teach; if it is to encourage, then give encouragement; if it is giving, then give generously; if it is to lead, do it diligently; if it is to show mercy, do it cheerfully.

Ask: What gifts of the Holy Spirit do you see in the members of your family? In yourself? How have you seen God use these gifts in your family this year?

Missional idea for the seventh day gift: Give sugar cookies shaped like swans. Wrap the cookies, attach a gift tag with a note, and deliver the gift.





Gather your family and light the candle. Sing only the first eight verses of "The Twelve Days of Christmas."

On the eighth day of Christmas, my true love gave to me eight maids-a-milking Symbolic of: Eight Beatitudes Passage: Matthew 5:3-10

Review the meaning of the symbols from each day. Discuss the meaning of the eight maids-a-milking.

Read Matthew 5:3-10 aloud. Blessed are the poor in spirit, for theirs is the kingdom of heaven. Blessed are those who mourn, for they will be comforted. Blessed are the meek, for they will inherit the earth. Blessed are those who hunger and thirst for righteousness, for they will be filled. Blessed are the merciful, for they will be shown mercy. Blessed are the pure in heart, for they will see God. Blessed are the peacemakers, for they will be called children of God. Blessed are those who are persecuted because of righteousness, for theirs is the kingdom of heaven.

Ask: Was there a portion of the Scripture that stood out to you? Read this portion of Scripture again if needed. What part? Why did it stand out to you? Allow your family time to discuss their observations from Scripture. Close this time with prayer.

Missional idea for the eighth day gift: Give a pint of milk. Wrap the milk, attach a gift tag with a note, and deliver the gift.





Gather your family and light the candle. Sing only the first nine verses of "The Twelve Days of Christmas."

On the ninth day of Christmas, my true love gave to me nine ladies dancing Symbolic of: Nine Fruits of the Holy Spirit in the Life of a Christ Follower Passage: Galatians 5:22-23

Review the meaning of the symbols from each day. Discuss the meaning of the nine ladies dancing.

Read Galatians 5:22-23 aloud.

The fruit of the Spirit is love, joy, peace, forbearance, kindness, goodness, faithfulness, gentleness and self-control. Against such things there is no law.

Encourage each person in your family to share how he or she has seen a particular fruit of the Spirit shown in the life of another family member. Allow time for family affirmations.

Missional idea for the ninth day gift: Give mandarin oranges, lemons, or apples. Wrap the fruit, attach a gift tag with a note, and deliver the gift.



Gather your family and light the candle. Sing only the first 10 verses of "The Twelve Days of Christmas."

On the tenth day of Christmas, my true love gave to me ten lords-a-leaping Symbolic of: Ten Commandments Passage: Exodus 20:2-17

Review the meaning of the symbols from each day. Before you discuss the meaning of the 10 lords-aleaping, share this with your family: Many years ago when the Israelites fled from Egypt, they didn't know how to worship the Lord God. The people had been in a culture that worshipped thousands of gods. Our God is good and kind. He gave His people the Ten Commandments to teach them how to live in relationship with Him—the one true God—and other people.

Read Exodus 20:2-17 aloud.

"I am the Lord your God, who brought you out of Egypt, out of the land of slavery. You shall have no other gods before me.

You shall not make for yourself an image in the form of anything in heaven above or on the earth beneath or in the waters below. You shall not bow down to them or worship them; for I, the LORD your God, am a jealous God, punishing the children for the sin of the parents to the third and fourth generation of those who hate me, but showing love to a thousand generations of those who love me and keep my commandments.

You shall not misuse the name of the Lord your God, for the Lord will not hold anyone guiltless who misuses his name.

Remember the Sabbath day by keeping it holy. Six days you shall labor and do all your work, but the seventh day is a sabbath to the LORD your God. On it you shall not do any work, neither you, nor your son or daughter, nor your male or female servant, nor your animals, nor any foreigner residing in your towns. For in six days the LORD made the heavens and the earth, the sea, and all that is in them, but he rested on the seventh day. Therefore the LORD blessed the Sabbath day and made it holy.

Honor your father and your mother, so that you may live long in the land the LORD your God is giving vou.

You shall not murder.

You shall not commit adultery.

You shall not steal.

You shall not give false testimony against your neighbor.

You shall not covet your neighbor's house.

You shall not covet your neighbor's wife, or his male or female servant, his ox or donkey, or anything that belongs to your neighbor."

Missional idea for the tenth day gift: Jesus said that the Ten Commandments were summed up in loving God and loving others. What way can you love your neighbors? (For example: wash their cars, shovel their driveways, or pick up their yards)



Gather your family and light the candle. Sing all but the last verse of "The Twelve Days of Christmas."

On the eleventh day of Christmas, my true love gave to me eleven pipers piping Symbolic of: The Apostles Passage: Mark 3:16-19

Review the meaning of the symbols from each day. Discuss the meaning of the 11 pipers piping.

Read Mark 3:16-19 aloud.

These are the twelve he appointed: Simon (to whom he gave the name Peter), James son of Zebedee and his brother John (to them he gave the name Boanerges, which means "sons of thunder"), Andrew, Philip, Bartholomew, Matthew, Thomas, James son of Alphaeus, Thaddaeus, Simon the Zealot and Judas Iscariot, who betrayed him.

Ask: How did the apostles live their lives that showed they followed and worshipped Jesus? What are some of the ways we worship with our lives in response to Him?

Missional idea for the eleventh day gift: Give your neighbor a paperback or digital version of the New Testament. Wrap the book or card. Attach a gift tag and deliver the gift.



This is the twelth day! Plan a special time for your family to celebrate. (If you began on Christmas Day, it's now Epiphany and the arrival of the magi to visit the Christ child.)

Consider baking a cake (either a simple sheet cake or the Three Kings Cake with the provided recipe) and place a miniature plastic baby or almond in the cake as it bakes. Whoever finds the "baby" in her piece of cake pretends to be king or queen for the day.

Discuss the things your family enjoyed most when learning about The Twelve Days of Christmas. Are there any changes they would like to make for next year?

As part of your celebration, sing all 12 verses of "The Twelve Days of Christmas."

On the twelfth day of Christmas, my true love gave to me twelve drummers drumming

Symbolic of: 12 Points in the Apostles' Creed

Review the meaning of the symbols from each day.

Read the Apostles' Creed together as a family and then discuss the meaning of the 12 points.

THE APOSTLES' CREED*

I believe in God, the Father almighty, creator of heaven and earth. And in Jesus Christ, his only Son, our Lord, who was conceived by the Holy Spirit, born of the virgin Mary, suffered under Pontius Pilate, was crucified, died, and was buried. He descended into hell. On the third day He rose again from the dead. He ascended into heaven and sits at the right hand of God the Father Almighty. From thence He will come to judge the living and the dead. I believe in the Holy Spirit, the holy Christian* church, the communion of saints, the forgiveness of sins, the resurrection of the body, and the life everlasting. Amen.

Missional idea for the twelfth day gift: Create an invitation inviting your neighbor to your home to share the Three Kings Cake. Deliver the invitation.

*The Apostles Creed mentions "the holy Catholic church," in this case Catholic meaning "universal" not Roman Catholic. We have changed this to say "Christian church" to clearly communicate the original meaning in reference to the Church.