

MERRY CHRISTMAS AND WELCOME TO WORSHIP

***CALL TO WORSHIP**

Let us go, in heart and mind, to see what has come to pass.

Let us gather with the shepherds:

Let us go to find the Savior!

Let us journey with the wise ones:

Let us go to find God's promise, born for us!

Let us rejoice with the poor and humble:

Let us go to find our King, born in a lowly manger.

Let us ponder with all the world, with all the peoples of the nations.

Come, let us worship; come, let us adore him:

Christ the Lord!

OPENING PRAYER

God of birth, God of light, reawaken in us the awe of Christmas. In this holy season of prayer and song and laughter, we praise you for the great wonders you have sent us: for shining star and angel's song, for infant's cry in lowly manger. We praise you for the Word made flesh in a little Child. We behold his glory, and are bathed in its radiance. We kneel before you: shepherds, innkeepers, wise men. Help us to rise bigger than we are through your redeeming grace. Amen.

***CAROL**

CELEBRATING THE TWELVE DAYS OF CHRISTMAS

Introduction

Throughout Christian history, symbolism has played an important role discovering how objects or actions can exhibit an inner meaning expressing Christian ideas. Christianity has borrowed from the common stock of significant symbols known to most periods and to all regions of the world. The use of symbols reminds us that not everything we see or hear needs to be taken literally or only seen one way. When we open our minds and use our God given imagination, the experiences and expressions offered by the world around us can contain layers of meaning and a greater richness.

Elemental symbols were widely used by the early Church. Water has specific symbolic significance for Christians. Outside of baptism, water may represent cleansing or purity. Fire, especially in the form of a candle flame, represents both the Holy Spirit and light. The sources of these symbols derive from the Bible; for example from the tongues of fire that symbolized the Holy Spirit at Pentecost, and from Jesus' description of his followers as the light of the world; or God is a consuming fire found in Hebrews 12. The cross, which is today one of the most widely recognised symbols in the world, was used as a symbol from the earliest times. Another area of symbolism comes from the use of and meaning numbers. This we shall explore today as we consider the deeper meanings of numbers one through twelve as they relate to the Christian faith. We shall do this using the carol "The Twelve Days of Christmas" as our guide. In the Christian year, the season of Christmas begins on December 25 and comes to an end twelve days later on January 6th.

On the 1st day of Christmas my true love gave to me...

A Partridge in a Pear Tree

The partridge in a pear tree is Jesus the Christ, the Son of God. 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) Some also relate the number one to the indivisible wholeness of the one true God and our monotheistic faith.

On the 2nd day of Christmas my true love gave to me...

Two Turtle Doves

In the book of Ecclesiastes, attesting to the value of a friend, we read, "Two are better than one, because they have a good reward for their toil. For if they fall, one will lift up the other; but woe to one who is alone and falls and does not have another to help. Again, if two lie together, they keep warm; but how can one keep warm alone? And though one might prevail against another, two will withstand one." (Ecc. 4:9-12). Christians also affirm the two Testaments, old and new, which together bear witness to God's self-revelation in history and the creation of a people to tell the Story of God to the world.

On the 3rd day of Christmas my true love gave to me...

Three French Hens

It has often been said that "three's a crowd." In groups of three, it can often happen that two of the people are apt to find it easier to relate to each other than to the other partner. This can motivate the neglected party to drop out of the group and community to collapse. To understand God as a Trinity, changes the kind of life we live. The three divine persons are forever united with each other in mutual love, they dwell in each other, are known by each other. God reveals the true shape of our intended humanity. Made in the image of God, we aspire to know and love others with our relatedness to others at the very root of who we are.

On the 4th day of Christmas my true love gave to me...

Four Calling Birds

The number four is symbolic of the four gospels included in the Bible. The four in order are Matthew, Mark, Luke, and John. Mark is believed to be the earliest and some scholars say could possibly be the testimony of the disciple Peter. John's gospel is thought to be the latest. These four Gospels are not the same, each one offers a unique testimony and a different voice proclaiming the good news of Christ.

On the 5th day of Christmas my true love gave to me...

Five Gold Rings

The first Five Books of the Old Testament, known as the Torah (or teaching) or the Pentateuch. These books all attributed to Moses are 1) Genesis, 2) Exodus, 3) Leviticus, 4) Numbers, and 5) Deuteronomy. In these five books there are more than just ten commandments. There are believed to be 613 laws. It is said there are 365 negative commandments, one for every day of the year. And 248 positive commands -one for every bone in the body!

On the 6th day of Christmas my true love gave to me...

Six Geese A-laying

Six geese a-laying are geese at work! The number six also represents the six “days” that God worked to bring about creation -a creation that God declared to be good. Although we know the six days are symbolic, acknowledging the days that God created express a theological truth that affirms God as Creator and Sustainer of the world. We are also reminded that after the six days, God rested and declared a day of rest given as a gift for all humankind.

On the 7th day of Christmas my true love gave to me...

Seven Swans A-swimming

When we sing of the seven swans a-swimming. We can bring to mind the seven gifts of the Holy Spirit which are: 1) prophecy, 2) ministry, 3) teaching, 4) exhortation, 5) giving, 6) leading, and 7) compassion. Each gift attests to the humble service we give and receive to one another. We can hear these listed by the apostle Paul in his letter to the Romans Chapter 12, verses 3-8: “For by the grace given to me I say to everyone among you not to think of yourself more highly than you ought to think, but to think with sober judgment, each according to the measure of faith that God has assigned. 4 For as in one body we have many members, and not all the members have the same function, 5 so we, who are many, are one body in Christ, and individually we are members one of another. 6 We have gifts that differ according to the grace given to us: prophecy, in proportion to faith; 7 ministry, in ministering; the teacher, in teaching; 8 the exhorter, in exhortation; the giver, in generosity; the leader, in diligence; the compassionate, in cheerfulness.”

On the 8th day of Christmas my true love gave to me...

Eight Maids A-milking

Here we bring to mind the eight Beatitudes that are the beginning or introduction to a longer discourse given by Jesus known as “The Sermon on the Mount.” We will now read them from Matthew Chapter 5, verses 1-11:

When Jesus saw the crowds, he went up the mountain; and after he sat down, his disciples came to him. 2 Then he began to speak, and taught them, saying:
3 “Blessed are the poor in spirit, for theirs is the kingdom of heaven.
4 “Blessed are those who mourn, for they will be comforted.
5 “Blessed are the meek, for they will inherit the earth.
6 “Blessed are those who hunger and thirst for righteousness, for they will be filled.
7 “Blessed are the merciful, for they will receive mercy.
8 “Blessed are the pure in heart, for they will see God.
9 “Blessed are the peacemakers, for they will be called children of God.
10 “Blessed are those who are persecuted for righteousness’ sake, for theirs is the kingdom of heaven

On the 9th day of Christmas my true love gave to me...

Nine Ladies Dancing

The number nine can be symbolic of the nine fruits of the spirit which the apostle Paul uses as a prescription for the early church. In his letter to the Galatians, Paul has this to say, “the fruit of the Spirit is love, joy, peace, patience, kindness, generosity, faithfulness, gentleness, and self-control. There is no law against such

things. And those who belong to Christ Jesus have crucified the flesh with its passions and desires. If we live by the Spirit, let us also be guided by the Spirit. Let us not become conceited, competing against one another, envying one another."

On the 10th day of Christmas my true love gave to me...

Ten Lords A-leaping

The ten commandments, given to the prophet Moses by God on Mount Sinai can be found in Exodus 20 and Deuteronomy 5. They represent the covenant between God and the Hebrews after their flight from Egypt. God seeks to have us live as a covenant people and reestablishes his covenant with his people time and again, even offering a new covenant in Christ. Let us read responsively "The Ten Commandments" found on page 877 of Voices United.

On the 11th day of Christmas my true love gave to me...

Eleven Pipers Piping

The number eleven are meant to bring to mind the eleven faithful apostles: 1) Simon Peter, 2) Andrew, 3) James, 4) John, 5) Philip, 6) Bartholomew, 7) Matthew, 8) Thomas, 9) James son of Alphaeus, 10) Simon the Zealot, 11) Judas son of James. (Luke 6:14-16). The list, which does not include Judas Iscariot, also reminds us that Jesus had one of his closest friends betray him for a price.

On the 12th day of Christmas my love gave to me...

Twelve Drummers Drumming

Some relate the number twelve to the number of Jacobs sons that gave way to the twelve tribes of Israel. Others see this twelves as symbolic to the original twelve disciples of Jesus that were seen to represent the new Israel and the new covenant found in him echoing the twelve sons of Jacob.

In the Apostle's Creed we discover twelves points of teaching: 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) He suffered under Pontius Pilate, was crucified, died, and was buried. He descended into hell [the grave]. 5) On the third day he rose again. He ascended into heaven, and is seated at the right hand of the Father. 6) He will come again to judge the living and the dead. 7) I believe in the Holy Spirit, 8) the holy catholic Church, 9) the communion of saints, 10) the forgiveness of sins, 11) the resurrection of the body, 12) and life eternal

***CAROL**

OFFERING

PASTORAL PRAYER & LORD'S PRAYER

***CAROL**

BLESSING

BLESSINGS TO YOU IN THE NEW YEAR!

You are invited to stay for refreshments in the hall following the service.