

 The   
Twelve Days  
of  
 Christmas 

Devotional Readings for the Christmas Season



# The Twelve Days of Christmas

## Readings for the Christmas Season

I was more excited than I can say the year that I found *Christmas with John Denver and the Muppets* on CD. Having spent many a Christmassy day as a child listening to the cassette tape with my family while baking cookies and singing along loudly with the Muppets, I looked forward to reenacting some of that merriment. The album is full of well-known and much beloved Carols. But the crowning jewel of this album, without a doubt, is track #1: The Twelve Days of Christmas. And the highlight of the song being Miss Piggy who, of course, sings the line, “Five Golden Rings,” with great gusto. It’s really The Best version of that song anywhere out there ... in my opinion, anyway.

Many people don’t know the meaning behind this song. I know that I always thought that it was just a fun little, non-religious song. And there’s nothing wrong with that, of course. I enjoy singing about Rudolph and Frosty, too. It wasn’t until I was an adult that I came to understand the real meaning behind the Twelve Days of Christmas and to understand it’s Christian connections.

If the days leading up to Christmas are *not* the Christmas season, then when *is* the Christmas season? According to Church tradition, it begins on Christmas Day and lasts for 12 days leading up to Epiphany on January 6<sup>th</sup>, when we celebrate the arrival of the Magi. Twelve Days of Christmas! Just think of it this way: I have just given you the perfect excuse to celebrate a little longer, keep your decorations up a little longer, and spread the cheer a little longer.

The song, The Twelve Days of Christmas, has been around for a couple hundred years and was written to celebrate points of God’s Word and the Christian faith. In the pages that follow, you’ll find a daily reading for each verse of the song along with discussion points and a prayer prompt.

I hope that you enjoy this special season and that this helps you to take your celebrations to a whole new level. I also hope that this gives you a new appreciation for this special song.

Merry Christmas!

# A Partridge in a Pear Tree

## Jesus



**December 26, 2021**

On the first day of Christmas, my True Love gave to me, our True Love gave to all of us ... One gift that our beloved Father has given us—The Best gift ever, without question—is the gift of Jesus Christ. Jesus is the literal embodiment of God’s love for us. In the very beginning, when Adam and Eve messed everything up, God stepped in with His love and promised redemption (Genesis 3:15). That redemption was born to a poor couple in a dirty animal stall in a little town. He was born to be one of us, to live among us, to show us God’s love in His own words and actions.

Today we celebrate that birth. Today we celebrate Jesus’ birthday. But instead of bringing presents for the birthday Boy, we exchange gifts with one another as a means of celebration. And that’s totally appropriate! Afterall, Jesus’ greatest desire was that we would love God and love one another. Gift giving is a wonderful means of sharing love. Also, Jesus doesn’t physically need anything from us. In fact He wants to give *us* something. He said in Luke 19:10\*, “The Son of Man came to seek and to save what was lost.” And in John 10:10 He says, “I have come that they may have life, and have it to the full.” It’s His birthday, and yet Jesus comes with the gifts. What a guy!

The only thing that He asks of us in return is that we love Him, trust Him, and live a life that reflects that. Let today be a reminder of His love and let that love be motivation to go out into the world and share that love with others.

As a family, maybe you can take time this Christmas Season to talk about what you’re already doing, and what you can do in the future, to share the love of Jesus with your world. If you need help figuring out what you can do, come talk to Sara or Pastor Sheldon. We’d love to help you see your strengths, the tools you already have at your disposal, and point you in the right direction.

Pray that the Holy Spirit would help you to share Jesus.

\* All Scripture passages are taken from the New International Version, Zondervan, 1984.

# Two Turtle Doves Two Testaments

December 27, 2021



Our Bible is split into two major sections: the Old Testament and the New Testament. However, we must never forget that the Bible is one continual story, laying out God's plan of salvation, all pointing to Jesus.

The Old Testament can be hard to get through sometimes. It can feel irrelevant, God appears harsh at times, and it's easy to say, "I'm not Jewish. I don't really need to know this." But remember that Jesus said in Matthew 5:17-18, "Do not think that I have come to abolish the Law or the Prophets; I have not come to abolish them but to fulfill them. I tell you the truth, until heaven and earth disappear, not the smallest letter, not the least stroke of a pen, will by any means disappear from the Law until everything is accomplished." And speaking to some of His disciples in Luke 24:27 it says, "And beginning with Moses and all the Prophets, he [Jesus] explained to them what was said in all the Scriptures

concerning himself."

The Bible is not two stories that are loosely connected. It is not the old and dead as opposed to the new and needed. They go hand in hand. It is all relevant. It is all needed. The Old Testament is all about showing us why we needed Jesus to come and preparing us for His coming. It's like The Old Testament is Advent (getting us ready), and the New Testament is Christmas (He's here!). You're not going to fully understand everything that is happening and being said in the New Testament unless you know what happened and what was said in the Old Testament.

This Christmas season, consider your current Bible reading schedule, if you have one. Do you spend time in both Testaments? Or do you skim over or maybe even completely ignore the Old Testament? If you don't currently have a daily Bible reading schedule, or if you didn't already know it exists, I would recommend downloading the YouVersion Bible app. It's free and it has hundreds of reading plans, big and small, that can help you break down the Bible into daily bite-sized pieces. Both Testaments. Perhaps your family can do daily readings together.

Pray that God would help you to understand what you are reading and to remember to read at least a little bit everyday.

# Three French Hens

## Faith, Hope, and Love



December 28, 2021

In the book of 1 Corinthians, Paul wrote that oh-so-famous section often known as “the love chapter.” Chapter 13. He explains that nothing matters without love, because love is the root of all good and Godly things, the root of good and Godly character. Even “good” actions done without love are meaningless because they are missing their root. And ultimately, while everything on this earth will eventually fade away, Paul says in verse 13, “... these three remain: faith, hope and love. But the greatest of these is love.”

Faith, hope, and love stand out as values that can outlast anything. It is our faith in God and our hope in His Son, Jesus Christ, that allows us to outlast anything that this broken world can throw at us. However, in the end, when we’re in heaven, faith will be made complete by sight (we will live with God, seeing His presence on a daily basis), and hope will cease because we will have reached everything we could have hoped for. At that time, faith and hope will cease because they will be made complete, but love will endure. God is love. So, love is the one that will last for all eternity. Love is the one thing that will not cease when it is completed. It grows!

Try reading through the list at the beginning of chapter 13 of all the things that “love is.” Instead of reading “Love is ...,” insert the name of each of your family members in turn. For example, I would read, “Sara is kind. Sara is patient.” etc. And then, as a family, talk about whether that is really true. Are you kind to one another and to others outside of your family? Are you patient with one another? And so on. How can you help one another to do a better job of truly embracing what it is to be loving?

sPray that God would help you to be more loving with one another and with others outside of your family.

# Four Calling Birds

## The Four Gospels

December 29, 2021



We should thank God often for the fact that He inspired the writing of four different Gospels: (1) Matthew, (2) Mark, (3) Luke, and (4) John. And they *are* different. Which is why, when we can read all of them, we get a more complete picture of Jesus' earthly ministry.

Each Gospel, even though they're each telling the same story, is different because each human author was different and had a different reason for telling the story of Jesus. Of course, the larger purpose of wanting others to know about Jesus motivated each of them. However, there were other factors motivating them individually. On top of that, they each had their own life experiences and personality that influenced their story telling.

Mark was likely the first Gospel written. Tradition tells us that Mark was telling the story of Jesus from Peter's point of view; like a reporter writing an article after talking with an eyewitness.

Matthew was likely influenced by Mark's Gospel. Matthew was a Jewish man, a tax collector, who had been one of Jesus' disciples. He wrote his Gospel to appeal to other Jews.

Luke was a physician, a Gentile believer, who wrote his Gospel to appeal to other non-Jewish people. Luke interviewed many eyewitnesses to be able to tell Jesus' story.

John was another of Jesus' disciples, a Jewish man. However, John was clearly trying to appeal to everyone, Jew and non-Jew alike. Likely, John's Gospel was the last one written, also likely nearer the end of his life. This might explain many of the differences between his Gospel and the others, as well as his extensive creative use of imagery.

Have you read through the entirety of all 4 Gospels? Perhaps you could read through each one as a family. As you read, think about which of the Gospels is your favorite and why. Or, perhaps, what parts are your favorite and why. Or which of the Gospel writers tells a familiar story in your favorite way. I would bet that there are parts, if not a whole Gospel, that will appeal to you more than the others.

YouVersion has Bible reading plans that allow you to read all 4 Gospels together. Just search for chronological plans.

Pray that God would give you new understanding as you look at all four Gospels to paint a more complete picture of the life, death, and resurrection of Jesus.



# Five Golden Rings

## Five Books of Moses

December 30, 2021



Moses is traditionally referred to as the author of the first five books of the Bible, sometimes referred to as the Law (Torah in Hebrew), sometimes referred to as the Pentateuch (which simply means five books): (1) Genesis, (2) Exodus, (3) Leviticus, (4) Numbers, and (5) Deuteronomy.

The five books of Moses set up the entirety of the rest of the Bible story. We see that God made the world, and then humans messed up the world when they chose not to trust God. We see God promise Jesus who will come to set us free (Genesis 3:15). We see God choose Abraham and make a covenant with him, a covenant that would not be fully fulfilled until the birth of Jesus Christ. We see God lay out His ways for living the kind of life that He desires for His people to live. The kind of life that leads to blessing. We see God lay out practices and celebrations that point to Jesus. We see story after story that show us more and more about Who God is: that He is loving, that He is patient, that He is generous, that He is just, and that He desires His people to reflect Him to the rest of the world.

Without at least a basic understand of the five books of Moses, there is no way that we could understand the rest of the Old Testament, or fully understand many of Jesus' teachings. Again, remember that Jesus said that He came "to fulfill" the Law and the Prophets (Matthew 5:17-18). He came to fulfill everything that Moses was speaking about in those first five books of the Bible. Understanding the Law helps us to understand Jesus better.

The five books of Moses can be very intimidating to some people, or even boring. Have you read through all of them before? Perhaps after you finish the Gospels as a family, you could attempt to tackle the Pentateuch. I promise that there are many great and worthwhile stories there to read. They're already laid out chronologically in your Bible, or you could look for a Bible reading plan in YouVersion.

Pray that God would help you to persevere through the difficult passages and that He would give you new and deeper understanding as you read.

# Six Geese a Laying Six Days of Creation

December 31, 2021



Pop quiz: how many days of creation are there? Don't think too hard about it, just answer quickly!

If you said seven, I'm sorry but you are incorrect. But don't feel bad. It's a common mistake. God created for six days, and on the seventh day He rested. There are six days of creation: Day 1, light and darkness; Day 2, sky; Day 3, dry land and plants; Day 4, sun, moon, and stars; Day 5, sea creatures and birds; and Day 6, animals and people.

Our Scriptures are rather unique as compared to the scriptures of other religions in the fact that ours do *not* begin with the creation story of our God. Instead, the Bible begins with the fact that God exists and moves straight into His creation of, well, everything. And more than that, His creation of everything out of nothing. Another unique factor.

Have you thought about the fact that God created vegetation before He created the sun? Yet, on the first day of creation, the Bible tells us that God created light and separated it from the darkness. God, as the source of light and life, was the life-giving force for the earth before He created the sun.

Have you thought about the implications of the fact that the Bible tells us that God created the sun, moon, and stars? God created more than just the earth. Our planet is not the only heavenly body that God created. He created all of it! He is more than the God of earth; He is the God of the entire universe! Of everything!

Take time as a family to talk about how you see God reflected in His creation. What are your favorite parts of creation? The mountains? A certain animal? Flowers and their lovely scents?

Pray together to thank God for everything that He has made and all that it means to your family and to all of humanity.



# Seven Swans a Swimming Seven Gifts of the Spirit



January 1, 2022

The gifts of the Holy Spirit are mentioned several times in the Scriptures. You can read about them in Romans 12:6-8, 1 Corinthians 12:7-11, and 1 Peter 4:10-11. And the fact is that there are more than seven gifts of the Spirit.

This particular reference is sometimes connected to Romans 12. Beginning in v.6 we can read about seven gifts of the Holy Spirit: (1) prophecy, (2) service, (3) teaching, (4) encouraging, (5) giving, (6) leadership, and (7) mercy.

This reference is also sometimes connected to the Old Testament. In the Book of Isaiah, we can read: “The Spirit of the LORD will rest on him—the Spirit of wisdom and of understanding, the Spirit of counsel and of power, the Spirit of knowledge and of the fear of the LORD—and he will delight in the fear of the LORD” (Isaiah 11:2-3a). This is generally interpreted to refer to the following seven gifts: (1) wisdom, (2) understanding, (3) counsel, (4) power, (5) knowledge, (6) fear of the LORD, and (7) delight in the LORD.

Whichever list you choose, or even if you read multiple passages dealing with various gifts of the Spirit, the important thing to remember about them is that they are a gift. The Holy Spirit chooses who will receive what gift. And everyone who is a believer has gifts of one kind or another. All of the gifts are meant to help us build one another up and the Church as a whole; no one is given a gift for selfish purposes.

As a family, discuss what gifts you see in one another.

Pray that God would give you better understanding of your gifts and how God desires for you to use them.

# Eight Maids a Milking Eight Beatitudes

January 2, 2022



Whether you're reading it in the Book of Matthew (5:1-10) or the Book of Luke (6:20-23), Jesus begins His sermon on the mount with a list of blessings that we refer to as the Beatitudes (the word is taken from the Latin translation of the Bible). However, it's only in Matthew's account that we have eight: (1) blessed are the poor in spirit; (2) blessed are those who mourn; (3) blessed are the meek; (4) blessed are those who hunger and thirst for righteousness; (5) blessed are the merciful; (6) blessed are the pure in heart; (7) blessed are the peacemakers; and (8) blessed are those who are persecuted because of righteousness.

There's a lot to unpack in those eight blessings. Not the least of which being the fact that several of them don't seem much like blessings. And it complicates it a bit more when you learn that the Greek word that is originally used there is more literally translated as "happy."

Happy are the poor in spirit?

Happy are those who mourn?

Happy are those who are persecuted?

Jesus' words are definitely confusing. But we should remember that a lot of what Jesus came to teach us was that we needed to take what the world has taught us and turn it upside down to understand what God really wants us to know.

The beatitudes are pointing to a reality that is only made so through faith. As we place our faith in Jesus, then we are blessed, we find happiness, even in situations that the world would label as cursed and miserable. And we can see it better when we read the full passage: "those who mourn will be comforted, and that's how they are blessed and will find happiness" (Matt 5:4, in my own words). The world looks at a situation and only sees what's on the surface. Faith helps us to see God in the middle of the weird, the uncomfortable, the sad, and the dismal. And then we're blessed. We are happy.

Read the beatitudes in their entirety. Which of them stands out to you and why? Have you personally experienced any of them, as an individual or as a family?

Pray that God would always help you to see Him no matter what situation you find yourself in.

# Nine Ladies Dancing

# Nine Fruit of the Spirit

January 3, 2022



In his letter to the church in Galatia, Paul challenges the church with a list of character qualities and habits that humanity has picked up that are rooted in darkness, not the Spirit. Thankfully, he immediately follows that list with a list of nine good things that come to us when we lean in and let the Spirit reign: (1) love, (2) joy, (3) peace, (4) patience, (5) kindness, (6) goodness, (7) faithfulness, (8) gentleness and (9) self-control (5:22-23).

Fruit of the Spirit is such a great name for these qualities. Just like an apple or an orange, these fruit grow; they aren't just naturally there. And they will only grow in the right conditions; in this case, in the presence and through the power of the Holy Spirit. Just like you can't force a tree to produce an apple, you can't force the Holy Spirit to give you peace. There are no short cuts, and equally, there is no way to get this fruit without the Holy Spirit.

The really great news in all of that is that finding love, or peace, or joy, is dependent on the Holy Spirit, not on your circumstances. So, you can have peace even when things are crazy. You can have joy even when things are sad. The Holy Spirit may choose to give you fruit in the face of the world's shortages. In fact, that's usually a good indication of the fact that you *are* experiencing the fruit of the Spirit.

Just like the owner of an orchard does things to ensure that their trees produce fruit, there are things that we can do. You can make sure your soil is good. Are you rooted in the Word? Are you spending time in prayer? Are you doing activities and spending time with people that point you to God?

As a family, try to think of times when you've experienced the fruit of the Spirit. Can you think of examples for different fruit?

Pray that God would guide you in making sure that your soil is good so that you will be ready to receive the fruit of the Spirit.

# Ten Lords a Leaping

# The Ten Commandments

January 4, 2022



The Ten Commandments are one of the most iconic points of our faith. Even those who aren't Christian or Jewish, who have never read the Bible, still have heard of Moses and the Ten Commandments.

We can find the list twice in the Law. First, in Exodus 20:2-17 as Moses came down with the tablets from Mount Sinai. The second record is in Deuteronomy 5:6-21, as Moses is reminding Israel of everything that they need to remember and carry with them into the Promised Land.

The Ten Commandments are: (1) do not place any other gods before God, (2) do not make idols, (3) do not misuse God's Name, (4) keep the Sabbath day, (5) honor your parents, (6) do not murder, (7) do not commit adultery, (8) do not steal, (9) do not lie about your neighbor, and (10) do not covet what does not belong to you.

Notice that all ten Commandments have to do with loving God and loving others. They deal with love, and respect, and justice, and kindness. They are to our own benefit, of course, but the driving force behind each Commandment is ultimately not for self; it's about love and relationship with God and with our fellow humans. And if we follow the Commandments, then we will be blessed (see Deuteronomy 6:1-3). Our relationship with the Lord and with others will be healthy, which will bring more peace, and joy, and satisfaction with life.

Does any one of the Ten Commandments seem more difficult than the others? Or perhaps a couple? Why do you think that it feels that way?

Pray that God would help you to follow His Commandments everyday, and to be aware when you break one so that you can ask for forgiveness.

# Eleven Pipers Piping Eleven Faithful Disciples

January 5, 2022



Jesus called twelve disciples to follow Him and learn from Him during His earthly ministry. Of those twelve, we all know that while Judas Iscariot followed Jesus, he also betrayed Jesus in the end. With his absence, there were left eleven faithful disciples: (1) Simon Peter, (2) Andrew, (3) James, (4) John, (5) Philip, (6) Bartholomew, (7) Matthew, (8) Thomas, (9) James son of Alphaeus, (10) Simon who was called the Zealot, and (11) Judas son of James.

Jesus had many more than just twelve followers, but these twelve were singled out to be His inner circle. To observe and participate up close. Not only did they learn a great deal from Jesus, but because of the record of the Gospels we can learn a great deal from *them*. Even Judas Iscariot.

As we read the Gospels, we see that all 12 men had good days and bad days. There were things that they understood and things that they did not. They said wise things revealed to them by the Holy Spirit and silly things that they clearly didn't think through.

The humanity of all 12, and the faithfulness of the 11, should stand out as a shining example to us. God can and does use any and all types of people. We do not have to be perfect, do not have to be at our very best every single day, to be a part of God's plans for this world. If that were the case, then He would never be able to use anyone. Instead, Jesus chose to work with humans. To invest in humans. To build humans up. To accept human weaknesses while still encouraging and helping us to be better everyday. After all, we are only at our best when He is working in and through us.

As you read through the Gospels, pay attention to times when specific disciples are noted. You'll notice that a few disciples (like Peter) are mentioned more than others. Are there any stories/lessons that really stand out to you? And why?

Pray that God would help you to learn from the example of Jesus' disciples.

# Twelve Drummers Drumming Twelve Points of the Apostle's Creed

January 6, 2022



The Apostle's Creed is an ancient document that contains twelve major points of the Christian faith. These are points of faith that are generally agreed upon by Catholic and Evangelical Christians. While it is not taken straight out of a Bible passage, everything in the Creed is based on what we learn from reading the Scriptures.

The Apostle's Creed says: (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) who was conceived by the Holy Spirit and born of the virgin Mary. (4) He suffered under Pontius Pilate, was crucified, died, and was buried; (5) he descended to hell. The third day he rose again from the dead. (6) He ascended to heaven and is seated at the right hand of God the Father almighty. (7) From there he will come to judge the living and the dead. (8) I believe in the Holy Spirit, (9) the holy catholic\* church, the communion of saints, (10) the forgiveness of sins, (11) the resurrection of the body, (12) and the life everlasting. Amen.

Go through the Creed again slowly and consider all of the points one by one. Talk about them as a family. Do you agree with all of them? Do you have questions about any of them? Pastor Sheldon or Sara would be happy to talk with you about any of the points.

Pray that God would bring you to a deeper understanding of all 12 points.

\* The word "Catholic" means "universal." This is not specifically a statement of faith in the Roman Catholic Church but in the Church—whole, universal, Body of Christ, Church.