

"THE TWELVE DAYS OF CHRISTMAS"

An "Underground Catechism" with a serious origin.

Today we think of this as a delightful nonsense rhyme set to music, but it had a very different purpose when it was written.

During the period 1558 to 1829, Roman Catholics in England were prohibited from ANY practice of their faith by law. "The Twelve Days of Christmas" was written to help young Catholics learn about their faith. The song was a memory aid, because to be caught with anything in writing indicating that one was Roman Catholic could not only get you imprisoned, it could get you killed.

The gifts in the song are hidden meanings to the teachings of the faith.

The "true love" doesn't refer to an earthly suitor, it refers to God Himself.

The "me", who receives the gifts, is every baptized person.

The partridge in a pear tree is Jesus Christ, the Son of God. He is symbolically represented as a mother partridge which sacrificially pretends to be injured to decoy predators from her helpless nestlings. The pear tree was once thought of as the heavenly equivalent of the lowly apple.

The other symbols mean the following:

2 Turtle Doves = The Old and New Testaments.
Turtle doves mate for life and symbolize the close bond between the Old and New Testaments.

3 French Hens = Faith, Hope and Charity, or the gifts of the Wise men, or the Trinity.

4 Calling Birds = the Four Gospels and/or the Four Evangelists.

5 Golden Rings = The first Five Books of the Old Testament, the "Pentateuch". Gold shows their lasting quality.

6 Geese A-laying = the six days of creation, because eggs symbolize new life.

7 Swans A-swimming = the seven gifts of the Holy Spirit. These vary in different sources, but one list might be prophecy, service, teaching, encouragement, giving, leadership and mercy.

8 Maids A-milking = the eight beatitudes - see Matthew 5:3-12

9 Ladies Dancing = the nine Fruits of the Holy Spirit - love, self-control, peace, joy, patience, gentleness, faithfulness, goodness and kindness.

10 Lords A-leaping = leadership and the law shown in the teachings of the ten commandments.

11 Pipers Piping = the eleven faithful apostles i.e. without Judas.

12 Drummers Drumming = the twelve teachings of the Apostle's Creed.

The original meaning of this song would make a great Christmas pageant. Children could sing the modern version at the beginning and end and, with a narrator, act out the meanings given here in the middle. Do you have someone creative in your congregation who would enjoy working on this? If you come up with a script, I would love to share it with everyone! Maybe we could even have a story with some pictures in the NB Anglican for December, 2002.

An additional day for "Building Blocks".

I will be teaching Day 1 of the Building Blocks course at St Andrew's Church Hall in **Newcastle** on Dec 1, from 9:30 a.m. until 3 p.m. This is an opportunity for those in the north of the province to take it without having to travel too desperately far. Also, if anyone in the Moncton area missed the day there, or Doaktown people missed the Fredericton day, this is a good chance to take it. Please call Vicky Richards @ 622-7614 between 9 a.m. and 2 p.m. on weekdays to register. As with the other Building Blocks workshops, please bring a brown bag lunch or plan to eat out during the one hour lunch break. Coffee and muffins will be provided. The **Saint John** Building Blocks 1 Workshop is still to come on November 3 at St Mary and St Bartholomew's. Call Joanne Fitzpatrick, 657-7808 to register.

A Saint Andrew's Day/Mission Theme

In the November Bulletin Insert, the connection between St Andrew's Day and the mission of the church is mentioned, and there is a compass rose symbol. To show children how widespread the links between Christians are, make a network poster. Get the congregation involved also. Use large maps of Canada and of the World. Stick on coloured dots (or use Post-it arrow flags to avoid spoiling your maps) to show all the places to which your church family is connected. If you have photos of the people who live in these places put them round the outside of your maps, maybe with a coloured string to the place they live. Examples: family members, missionaries or mission societies supported, churches attended on holiday, places people were baptized or married, and so on and so on. You'll be amazed!