

Twelve Days of Christmas: *Epiphany & December 25th*

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INTRODUCTION

When we think about the holiday season, most of us picture Christmas on December 25th: family gatherings, festive decorations, and the exchange of gifts. However, many people are unfamiliar with an equally significant Christian holiday, Epiphany, celebrated on January 6th. This day marks the visit of the Three Wise Men, Magi, to the baby Jesus and, in some traditions, also commemorates His baptism. Historically, Epiphany was the grand finale of the Twelve Days of Christmas—a time of joy and deep spiritual meaning. For a companion paper, see my study *The Magi, Jeremiah, and Daniel*.

WHAT IS ADVENT?

Before we even get to the Twelve Days of Christmas, it's important to talk about Advent. Advent comes from the Latin word *adventus*, meaning "to come" or "arrival." It begins four Sundays before Christmas and is a season of anticipation and preparation, both for Jesus' birth and His future return.

In the early Church, Advent was more than lighting candles or opening calendar doors. It was a time for serious spiritual reflection, much like Lent. For example, in AD 380, the Council of Saragossa in Spain urged Christians to attend church daily from December 17th to December 25th. By the sixth century, St. Gregory of Tours described a

in Gaul, emphasizing the need for spiritual purification through fasting, prayer, and good deeds.

Today, Advent traditions often include lighting candles on an Advent wreath, focusing on themes like hope, peace, joy, and love. Each week, believers can reflect on these themes as they prepare their hearts for the celebration of Jesus' birth and remember His promise to come again.

DAILY EXAMPLES FOR ADVENT REFLECTION AND PRAYER (DECEMBER 1–24)

Advent provides a meaningful way to prepare spiritually for Christmas. Here are some simple daily practices to engage in from December 1st to Christmas Eve:

December 1: Pray for the hope that comes through Christ. Meditate on Isaiah 9:², which speaks of light breaking into darkness.

December 2: Reflect on God's promises. Read Jeremiah 33:14-16 and thank Him for His faithfulness.

December 3: Light a candle and contemplate Jesus as the Light of the World (John 8:12). Pray for His light to shine in your life.

December 4: Remember those in need. Perform an act of kindness or give to charity.

December 5: Reflect on the prophecy of the coming Messiah in Micah 5:2. Pray for God's purposes to be fulfilled.

December 6 (St. Nicholas' Day): Practice generosity in honor of St. Nicholas. Give anonymously to someone in need.

December 7: Pray for peace in your life and the world. Meditate on Philippians 4:7.

December 8: Reflect on Mary's obedience to God's will. Read Luke 1:26-38 and ask for a willing heart to serve Him.

December 9: Rejoice in the joy of salvation. Read Psalm 98 and praise God for His works.

December 10: Pray for God's kingdom to come. Reflect on the Lord's Prayer (Matthew 6:10).

December 11: Light a second Advent candle and reflect on the hope of eternal life.

December 12: Remember the prophets who foretold Jesus' birth. Read Isaiah 7:14 and thank God for His plan.

December 13: Pray for courage to share your faith. Reflect on 1 Peter 3:15.

December 14: Contemplate God's love in sending His Son. Meditate on John 3:16.

December 15: Pray for those who are suffering. Read Psalm 34:18 and remember God's nearness to the brokenhearted.

December 16: Reflect on Zechariah's prophecy in Luke 1:68-79. Pray for God's mercy and guidance.

December 17: Focus on the names of Jesus, like and (Isaiah 9:6).

December 18: Pray for those who are lonely during the holidays. Ask God to comfort them.

December 19: Remember God's promise to David in 2 Samuel 7:12-16. Pray for His faithfulness to be evident.

December 20: Reflect on the angel's message to Joseph in Matthew 1:18-25. Pray for trust in God's plans.

December 21: Celebrate the Winter Solstice as a reminder of Jesus as the Light overcoming darkness.

December 22: Pray for expectant mothers and unborn children. Meditate on Psalm 139:13-16.

December 23: Reflect on the journey to Bethlehem. Pray for travelers and those far from home.

December 24 (Christmas Eve): Read Luke 2:1-20 and welcome the Savior into your heart. Attend a Christmas Eve service.

WHAT ARE THE TWELVE DAYS OF CHRISTMAS?

The Twelve Days of Christmas aren't just a catchy song but a rich tradition that spans from Christmas Day (December 25th) to Epiphany (January 6th). These twelve days were a time of extended celebration and reflection on the significance of Jesus' birth.

Each day holds a special meaning, and the song itself is said to have symbolic Christian references.

Here's a fun breakdown of the Twelve Days and how you might celebrate them in a way that keeps the focus on Jesus:

First Day of Christmas - December 25 (Christmas Day): Celebrate the birth of Jesus, the Word made flesh. *Song meaning:* The partridge in a pear tree represents Jesus, who gave His life for us.

Second Day of Christmas - December 26 (Feast of St. Stephen): Honor the first Christian martyr by doing something kind for someone in need. *Song meaning:* The two turtle doves symbolize the Old and New Testaments.

Third Day of Christmas - December 27 (Feast of St. John the Evangelist): Read the Gospel of John and think about Jesus as the Light of the World. *Song meaning:* The three French hens stand for faith, hope, and love.

Fourth Day of Christmas - December 28 (Feast of the Holy Innocents): Remember the children killed by Herod. Pray for children suffering worldwide. *Song meaning:* The four calling birds are the four Gospels.

Fifth Day of Christmas - December 29: Reflect on God's faithfulness and protection. *Song meaning:* The five golden rings represent the first five books of the Bible.

Sixth Day of Christmas - December 30: Honor heroes of faith. *Song meaning:* The six geese a-laying recall the six days of creation.

Seventh Day of Christmas - December 31 (New Year's Eve): Reflect on the year and seek God's guidance for the next. *Song meaning:* The seven swans represent the seven gifts of the Holy Spirit.

Eighth Day of Christmas - January 1: Reflect on humility and new beginnings. *Song meaning:* The eight maids a-milking are the eight Beatitudes.

Ninth Day of Christmas - January 2: Seek wisdom. *Song meaning:* The nine ladies dancing signify the nine fruits of the Spirit.

Tenth Day of Christmas - January 3: Celebrate God's law. *Song meaning:* The ten lords a-leaping represent the Ten Commandments.

Eleventh Day of Christmas - January 4: Pray for the Church and Christian unity. *Song meaning:* The eleven pipers are the eleven faithful apostles.

Twelfth Day of Christmas - January 5: Prepare for Epiphany and global mission. *Song meaning:* The twelve drummers represent the twelve points of the Apostles' Creed.

JANUARY 6- THE MEANING OF EPIPHANY

The word Epiphany means appearance, manifestation, or revealing. This day celebrates when Jesus was revealed as the Savior—not just to Israel, but to the whole world, starting with the Wise Men from the East. These Magi traveled a long way, guided by a star, to honor Jesus as the King of Kings. In a way, their journey symbolizes that Jesus came for everyone—not just for the Jewish people but for all nations.

WHY DECEMBER 25TH FOR CHRISTMAS?

Interestingly, the Bible doesn't tell us when Jesus was born. So, why do we celebrate on December 25th?

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One theory is that early Christians chose this date to align with Roman festivals like Sol Invictus (the "Unconquered Sun"), using the symbolism to declare that Jesus is the true Light of the World, rising victoriously to dispel spiritual darkness (cf. John 8:12). However, modern scholarship increasingly recognizes that Sol Invictus may have been a Roman reaction to the growing influence of Christianity, not the other way around. The festival's formal institution under Emperor Aurelian in AD 274 came after Christians had already begun celebrating Christ's birth near this time, suggesting that Rome was co-opting Christian themes to reassert pagan imperial identity.

Another view, called the Annunciation Theory, suggests that early believers held March 25th as the date of Jesus' conception (also believed to be the date of the crucifixion), making December 25th exactly nine months later—a theological celebration of the incarnation rather than a borrowing from paganism. But there's yet another layer of theological richness that often gets overlooked: Hanukkah, the Jewish Feast of Dedication. According to 1 Maccabees 4:52, the Temple was rededicated on Kislev 25, which in 165 B.C. aligned with December 25 on the Julian calendar. Hanukkah celebrated the restoration of God's light and presence in the Temple after a time of desecration. Remarkably, the Gospel of John tells us that Jesus Himself observed Hanukkah (John 10:22–23), walking in Solomon's Colonnade during the feast. As the true Light of the World and the ultimate Temple of God in human flesh (John 2:19–21), Jesus fulfills the very heart of Hanukkah's message.

In this way, December 25th does not merely reflect a response to pagan customs—it may also represent a providential convergence of light, rededication, and divine presence, uniting Hanukkah's prophetic shadow with Christ's incarnational fulfillment.

WHY HAS EPIPHANY BEEN FORGOTTEN?

Over time, as our culture has become more commercialized, the spiritual significance of Epiphany and even the Twelve Days of Christmas has faded. The focus has shifted almost entirely to Christmas Day. By reclaiming these traditions, we can bring back the deep meaning of the holiday season and remind ourselves of the incredible gift of Jesus' coming.

CONCLUSION: BRINGING IT BACK TO JESUS

Imagine if we used the Twelve Days of Christmas to celebrate not just with gifts and fun but with intentional time spent reflecting on Jesus. By honoring each day with meaning, we can deepen our faith and make the season more about Christ and less about consumerism. As Christians, this approach offers a powerful, countercultural way to celebrate: one that brings joy, meaning, and a renewed sense of God's love.

APPENDIX A: EPIPHANY AND THE TWELVE DAYS OF CHRISTMAS: A CELEBRATION OF DIVINE REVELATION



This image captures the profound theological and spiritual themes of Epiphany and the Twelve Days of Christmas. At the heart of the scene, the Magi present their gifts to the infant Jesus under the radiant light of a guiding star, symbolizing the manifestation of Christ to the Gentiles. Surrounding the manger are symbolic elements: an Advent wreath with glowing candles, an open Bible, and a crown, highlighting the kingship and divine nature of Jesus.

The serene backdrop includes subtle references to Jesus' baptism at the Jordan River and the seasonal beauty of a winter night. Candles and festive decor evoke the joy and reverence of the season, tying together the celebration of Christ's birth and the revelation of His mission to all nations. This evocative composition invites reflection on the interconnectedness of Christmas and Epiphany, inspiring worship and deeper engagement with the gospel narrative.

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