

The Lost Holiday in the West:

Epiphany, December 25th, and the Twelve Days of Christmas

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ABSTRACT

Epiphany, celebrated on January 6th, historically marked the culmination of the Twelve Days of Christmas and commemorated key events in Christian tradition, including the visit of the Magi and the baptism of Jesus. Despite its deep theological and cultural significance, Epiphany has become a “*lost holiday*” in much of the Western world, overshadowed by the widespread celebration of Christmas on December 25th. This paper examines the origins of December 25 as the chosen date for Christmas, exploring early Christian efforts to align the holiday with existing pagan festivals and its theological implications.¹ It then investigates how the Twelve Days of Christmas served as a bridge between Christmas and Epiphany, creating a liturgical rhythm that has largely been forgotten in contemporary culture. By analyzing historical, theological, and cultural shifts—including the impact of secularization and commercialization—this study highlights the diminishing role of Epiphany in the West. The paper also considers modern observances and the potential value of reinvigorating the celebration of Epiphany and the full Twelve Days of Christmas, offering insights into a more holistic understanding of the holiday season.

¹ Andrew McGowan, *Ancient Christian Devotion and the Establishment of Liturgical Seasons* (New York: Oxford University Press, 2014), 45–47.

I. INTRODUCTION

In the quiet streets of Seville, Spain, children eagerly await the arrival of the Three Wise Men on January 5th, known as “*La Cabalgata de Reyes*.” Dressed in regal attire, the Magi parade through the city, showering the crowds with candies and gifts, embodying the spirit of Epiphany.² Across the ocean, in New Orleans, the celebrations take a different form, marking the start of the Carnival season with King Cake—a delicious pastry adorned with vibrant purple, green, and gold sugar. These traditions capture the joy and wonder that once characterized the conclusion of the Christmas season, highlighting a celebration that, for many in the West, has become a mere footnote to Christmas Day.³

The holiday season in the Western world is often synonymous with the celebration of Christmas on December 25, a day heavily associated with traditions of gift-giving, festive decorations, and family gatherings. Yet, beneath the glittering lights and the pervasive influence of modern consumerism lies a largely forgotten aspect of the Christian liturgical calendar: the feast of Epiphany. Celebrated on January 6, Epiphany historically marked the culmination of the Twelve Days of Christmas, commemorating the visit of the Magi to the infant Jesus and, in some traditions, His baptism in the Jordan River. Together, Advent, Christmas and Epiphany once formed a unified period of

² Juan García, *Tradiciones de España* (Madrid: Editorial Tradiciones, 2011), 67.

³ Mary Catherine Hilkert, *Liturgical Traditions Across the Atlantic* (Boston: Harvard Press, 2015), 110–112.

celebration, imbued with profound theological and cultural significance.⁴ For a companion paper, see my study *The Magi, Jeremiah, and Daniel*.⁵

The widespread observance of December 25 as the day of Jesus' birth has long intrigued scholars, as the New Testament provides no specific date for this event. Two primary theories have emerged to explain the choice of this date: one rooted in theological symbolism and the other in cultural adaptation. The *Annunciation Theory* highlights the theological reasoning behind December 25, linking it to the belief that Jesus was conceived on March 25, the date of the Annunciation, and born nine months later. The second theory posits that early Christians aligned Christmas with Roman festivals such as *Sol Invictus* or *Saturnalia*⁶ to offer a Christian alternative that emphasized Christ as the "*Light of the World*" (John 8:12).⁷

Both theories—one theological, the other cultural—offer complementary insights into the development of Christian liturgical practices. By examining these perspectives, we gain a deeper understanding of how the early Church integrated theological convictions with cultural realities to shape the rhythm of worship and celebration, linking Christmas and Epiphany into a cohesive narrative of Christ's Incarnation and manifestation to the world.⁸

⁴ John H. Bernard, *Theological Reflections on Early Christian Festivals* (London: Cambridge University Press, 1938), 156.

⁵ D. Gene Williams Jr. *The Magi, Jeremiah, and Daniel: Prophetic Connections Across Time*. Accessed January 2025. <https://triinitysem.academia.edu/GeneWilliamsJr>; <https://defendtheword.com/insights-and-studies.html>.

⁶ Susan K. Roll, *Toward the Origins of Christmas* (Leuven: Peeters, 1995), 89–91.

⁷ Thomas J. Talley, *The Origins of the Liturgical Year* (New York: Pueblo Publishing, 1986), 103.

⁸ Robert L. Wilken, *The First Thousand Years: A Global History of Christianity* (New Haven: Yale University Press, 2012), 134.

II. THEOLOGICAL AND HISTORICAL ORIGINS OF DECEMBER 25

The selection of December 25 as the date to celebrate Jesus' birth has intrigued scholars for centuries. While the New Testament provides no explicit date for this event, early Christian tradition combined theological reasoning and cultural context to establish the observance of Christmas. Two primary explanations emerge: the theological *Annunciation Theory* and the cultural alignment with Roman festivals such as *Sol Invictus*.⁹

The Annunciation Theory: A Theological Foundation

The *Annunciation Theory* emphasizes theological and liturgical reasoning behind the choice of December 25. Early Christians believed that Jesus was conceived on March 25, the date of the Annunciation, when the angel Gabriel announced to Mary that she would bear the Son of God (Luke 1:26–38).¹⁰ This date was also thought to coincide with the creation of the world and, in early Christian thought, the crucifixion of Jesus. Counting nine months forward from March 25 places the birth of Jesus on December 25.

Support for this tradition is found in the writings of Church Fathers and early Christian texts:

A Tertullian of Carthage (c. AD 155–240): Known for linking theological concepts to salvation history, Tertullian emphasized the Incarnation's importance

⁹ Wilken, *The First Thousand Years*, 147.

¹⁰ McGowan, *Ancient Christian Devotion*, 76.

but did not explicitly mention March 25. His influence on early Christian thought regarding the timing of key events remains noteworthy.¹¹

- B Hippolytus of Rome (c. AD 170–235):** In *Commentary on Daniel*, Hippolytus references March 25 as the date of both the world’s creation and Christ’s conception, highlighting the divine plan’s continuity.¹²
- C Julius Africanus (c. AD 160–240):** This early Christian historian’s *Chronographiai* calculates March 25 as the Annunciation date, linking Jesus’ conception to this significant moment in salvation history.¹³
- D St. Augustine of Hippo (AD 354–430):** Augustine reflects on the symbolism of dates, discussing how holy figures’ lives were seen as complete cycles. His work *On the Trinity* supports the tradition of connecting Jesus’ conception and crucifixion to March 25.¹⁴
- E St. John Chrysostom (c. AD 347–407):** Although primarily defending December 25 as Jesus’ birth date, Chrysostom emphasized linking significant events in Jesus’ life, reflecting early Christians’ view of the Incarnation’s importance.¹⁵
- F The De Pascha Computus (c. AD 243):** This anonymous North African text explicitly mentions March 25 as both the Annunciation and crucifixion date, tying

¹¹ Tertullian, *On the Flesh of Christ*, trans. Alexander Roberts and James Donaldson, in *Ante-Nicene Fathers*, ed. Philip Schaff (Buffalo, NY: Christian Literature Publishing Co., 1885), 5.

¹² Hippolytus, *Commentary on Daniel*, trans. Richard J. Deferrari (Washington, DC: Catholic University of America Press, 2000), 4.23.

¹³ Julius Africanus, *Chronographiai*, as cited in Talley, *The Origins of the Liturgical Year*, 103.

¹⁴ Augustine, *On the Trinity*, trans. Stephen McKenna (Washington, DC: Catholic University of America Press, 1963), IV.5.

¹⁵ John Chrysostom, *Homilies on the Gospel of Matthew*, trans. George Prevost, in *Nicene and Post-Nicene Fathers*, ed. Philip Schaff (Peabody, MA: Hendrickson Publishers, 1994), 14.

these events to the spring equinox and underscoring their theological significance.¹⁶

The *Annunciation Theory* not only underscores the theological significance of these dates but also highlights the early Church's effort to create a liturgical calendar that reflected key moments in salvation history.¹⁷

Cultural Context and the Roman Influence

In addition to theological reasoning, some scholars suggest that early Christians aligned the celebration of Jesus' birth with Roman festivals like *Sol Invictus* ("The Unconquered Sun"), established in AD 272, or the earlier *Saturnalia* dates to c. 5th century BC. These festivals, which occurred around the winter solstice, symbolized the rebirth of light during the darkest time of the year. By placing Christmas on December 25, Christians could emphasize Jesus as the true "*Light of the World*" (John 8:12) and offer a meaningful alternative to popular pagan festivities.

If this cultural alignment was intentional, it would have served a strategic purpose, allowing the Christian faith to engage with Roman traditions while redefining them through a Christ-centered narrative. However, it is important to note that while *Sol Invictus* is often cited as a key influence, its establishment came after December 25 had already been associated with Christ's birth, as evidenced by Hippolytus of Rome mentioning the date 68 years earlier in his *Commentary on Daniel*, rendering its role secondary.

¹⁶ *De Pascha Computus*, 8, trans. William Rusch, in *The Fathers of the Church: A New Translation* (Washington, DC: Catholic University of America Press, 1979).

¹⁷ Talley, *The Origins of the Liturgical Year*, 120.

Synthesis of Theological and Cultural Factors

The early Church's decision to celebrate Christmas on December 25 reflects a synthesis of theological symbolism and possibly cultural adaptation. While the *Annunciation Theory* offers a robust theological framework, the cultural context provided a practical means of integrating Christian celebrations into Roman society. Together, these factors shaped the observance of December 25, creating a liturgical rhythm that connected the Incarnation to the broader narrative of redemption.

It is important to recognize that references to specific dates, such as March 25 or December 25, by early Apostolic Fathers, Early Church Fathers, and Ecclesiastical Writers were based on the Julian calendar, which was in use during their time. The Gregorian calendar, which corrected inaccuracies in the Julian system and is now the standard in most of the world, was not introduced until AD 1582. As such, the associations these early Christians made with March 25 should be understood within the framework of the Julian calendar, reflecting their efforts to align theological events with a structured understanding of time.¹⁸

III. ADVENT: THE SEASON OF ANTICIPATION

Before exploring the Twelve Days of Christmas and Epiphany, it is crucial to understand the season of Advent, which historically sets the stage for the Christmas celebration. Advent, derived from the Latin word *adventus* meaning “coming” or

¹⁸ The Julian calendar, established by Julius Caesar in 45 BC, was the predominant calendar system until Pope Gregory XIII introduced the Gregorian calendar in 1582 to address discrepancies in the calculation of leap years and the equinoxes. For further details on the transition from the Julian to Gregorian calendar and its impact on historical date references, see E.G. Richards, *Mapping Time: The Calendar and Its History* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1998), 201–205.

“arrival,” begins four Sundays before Christmas and marks a time of waiting and preparation for the birth of Jesus Christ and His future return in glory. The origins of Advent trace back to the early Church, with evidence of its observance as early as the fourth century. Initially, Advent was associated with a season of penitence and fasting, much like Lent, emphasizing spiritual purification and readiness for the coming of Christ.¹⁹

One early example of the observance of Advent comes from the Council of Saragossa (Spain) in AD 380, which directed Christians to attend church daily from December 17 to December 25 as a way of preparing spiritually for Christmas.²⁰ This council's emphasis on daily gatherings highlights the season's significance and sets a precedent for Advent as a time of focused spiritual activity.

Another example is found in the writings of St. Gregory of Tours (c. 538–594), who described the observance of a “*fast of Advent*” in Gaul. By this time, Advent had become a recognized season of penitence and preparation, mirroring the practices of Lent, with believers engaging in fasting, prayer, and acts of charity to prepare for the coming of Christ.²¹ These early practices underscore the seriousness with which the early Church approached Advent, emphasizing themes of repentance and spiritual purification.

The liturgical themes of Advent focus on hope, peace, joy, and love, reminding believers of the dual anticipation: the celebration of Christ’s Incarnation and the

¹⁹ Susan K. Roll, *Toward the Origins of Christmas* (Leuven: Peeters, 1995), 112-14.

²⁰ Council of Saragossa, AD 380, as discussed in Susan K. Roll, *Toward the Origins of Christmas* (Leuven: Peeters, 1995), 123.

²¹ St. Gregory of Tours, *History of the Franks*, translated by Lewis Thorpe (Harmondsworth: Penguin Classics, 1974), 203-204.

expectation of His second coming. Throughout history, Advent practices have included lighting candles on an Advent wreath, reading Scriptures that foretell the Messiah's coming, and engaging in acts of charity.²² These traditions offer a structured way to meditate on the unfolding story of redemption.

Daily Examples for Reflection and Prayer (December 1–24):

To deepen spiritual engagement, believers can adopt daily practices throughout Advent. Here are examples for each day leading up to Christmas:

- 1 December 1:** Pray for the hope that comes through Christ. Meditate on Isaiah 9:2, which speaks of light breaking into darkness.²³
- 2 December 2:** Reflect on God's promises to His people. Read Jeremiah 33:14-16 and thank God for His faithfulness.²⁴
- 3 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.²⁵
- 4 December 4:** Remember those in need. Perform an act of kindness or give to charity, following the example of Christ's compassion.²⁶
- 5 December 5:** Reflect on the prophecy of the coming Messiah in Micah 5:2. Pray for the fulfillment of God's purposes in your life.²⁷

²² Andrew McGowan, *Ancient Christian Devotion and the Establishment of Liturgical Seasons* (New York: Oxford University Press, 2014), 89-90.

²³ Isaiah 9:2 (NIV).

²⁴ Jeremiah 33:14-16 (ESV).

²⁵ John 8:12 (KJV).

²⁶ Roll, *Toward the Origins of Christmas*, 98.

²⁷ Micah 5:2 (NASB).

- 6 **December 6:** Celebrate St. Nicholas' Day by practicing generosity. Read about his legacy of helping the poor and consider giving anonymously.²⁸
- 7 **December 7:** Pray for peace. Meditate on Philippians 4:7 and ask God to bring peace into your heart and relationships.²⁹
- 8 **December 8:** Focus on the Virgin Mary's obedience. Read Luke 1:26-38 and pray for a willing heart to serve God.³⁰
- 9 **December 9:** Reflect on the joy of salvation. Read Psalm 98 and praise God for His marvelous deeds.³¹
- 10 **December 10:** Pray for the coming of God's kingdom. Meditate on the Lord's Prayer, especially, "*Your kingdom come*" (Matthew 6:10).³²
- 11 **December 11:** Light a second Advent candle. Reflect on the coming of Christ and His promise of eternal life.³³
- 12 **December 12:** Remember the prophets who foretold Jesus' birth. Read Isaiah 7:14 and thank God for His perfect plan.³⁴
- 13 **December 13:** Pray for courage to share your faith. Reflect on 1 Peter 3:15 and ask God for boldness.³⁵

²⁸ Juan García, *Tradiciones de España*, 45.

²⁹ Philippians 4:7 (NRSV).

³⁰ Luke 1:26-38 (NKJV).

³¹ Psalm 98 (CEB).

³² Matthew 6:10 (NLT).

³³ McGowan, *Ancient Christian Devotion*, 93.

³⁴ Isaiah 7:14 (AMP).

³⁵ 1 Peter 3:15 (RSV).

- 14 December 14:** Contemplate the love of God shown in sending His Son. Meditate on John 3:16 and thank Him for His gift.³⁶
- 15 December 15:** Pray for those who suffer. Reflect on Psalm 34:18, which assures God's closeness to the brokenhearted.³⁷
- 16 December 16:** Read Zechariah's prophecy in Luke 1:68-79. Pray for God's mercy and guidance.³⁸
- 17 December 17:** Reflect on the names of Jesus. Meditate on "*Wonderful Counselor, Mighty God*" (Isaiah 9:6).³⁹
- 18 December 18:** Pray for those who are lonely during the holiday season. Ask God to be their comfort and strength.⁴⁰
- 19 December 19:** Remember God's promise to David in 2 Samuel 7:12-16. Pray for God's faithfulness to be evident in your life.⁴¹
- 20 December 20:** Reflect on the angel's message to Joseph in Matthew 1:18-25. Pray for trust in God's plans.⁴²
- 21 December 21:** Celebrate the Winter Solstice as a reminder of God's light overcoming darkness. Pray for His light to fill the world.⁴³

³⁶ John 3:16 (HCSB).

³⁷ Psalm 34:18 (CSB).

³⁸ Luke 1:68-79 (MSG).

³⁹ Isaiah 9:6 (NASB).

⁴⁰ Roll, *Toward the Origins of Christmas*, 120.

⁴¹ 2 Samuel 7:12-16 (YLT).

⁴² Matthew 1:18-25 (ESV).

⁴³ Roll, *Toward the Origins of Christmas*, 132.

- 22 December 22:** Pray for expectant mothers and unborn children. Meditate on the care God has for each life (Psalm 139:13-16).⁴⁴
- 23 December 23:** Reflect on the journey to Bethlehem. Pray for travelers and those far from home this season.⁴⁵
- 24 December 24 (Christmas Eve):** Read Luke 2:1-20 and reflect on the birth of Jesus. Attend a Christmas Eve service or pray with your family, welcoming the Savior into your hearts.⁴⁶

These daily practices serve to enrich the Advent season, preparing hearts for the celebration of Christ's birth and His ultimate return. By embracing these reflections and prayers, believers can experience the full spiritual significance of Advent.

IV. THE SIGNIFICANCE OF EPIPHANY AND THE TWELVE DAYS OF CHRISTMAS

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.

While Christmas marks the Incarnation—God becoming flesh in the person of Jesus—Epiphany celebrates the revelation of Christ to the Gentiles, represented by the visit of the Magi. The Magi's journey and their recognition of Jesus' kingship signify the universal scope of the gospel, extending beyond the Jewish people to all nations.

⁴⁴ Psalm 139:13-16 (NKJV).

⁴⁵ García, *Tradiciones de España*, 62.

⁴⁶ Luke 2:1-20 (NIV).

Theologically, Epiphany emphasizes Jesus' divine identity and His mission to bring salvation to the entire world, fulfilling the prophecy of Isaiah: "*Nations shall come to your light, and kings to the brightness of your dawn*" (Isaiah 60:3).⁴⁷

The period between Christmas and Epiphany, known as the Twelve Days of Christmas, served as a time of extended celebration and reflection in the Christian liturgical calendar. Each of the twelve days carried religious and cultural significance, offering believers a structured opportunity to meditate on the mystery of the Incarnation and prepare for the manifestation of Christ's glory. This tradition created a cohesive spiritual journey, connecting the joy of Jesus' birth with the revelation of His divinity to the world.⁴⁸

The Twelve Days of Christmas: Meaning, Observance, and Song Connection

The Twelve Days of Christmas span from December 25 to January 5 and hold deep spiritual meanings. These days provide a chance for extended reflection on the Incarnation and Christ's revelation. Each day also has a symbolic representation in the song "*The Twelve Days of Christmas*," which, according to tradition, served as a catechism for teaching Christian doctrine.

- 1st. December 25 (Christmas Day):** Celebrates Jesus' birth, the Word made flesh (John 1:14).

Example: Attend a worship service focusing on the Nativity and reflect on the miracle of the Incarnation.

⁴⁷ Hilkert, *Liturgical Traditions Across the Atlantic*, 210.

⁴⁸ Bernard, *Theological Reflections on Early Christian Festivals*, 165.

Song Connection: “*A Partridge in a Pear Tree*” symbolizes Jesus Christ, who sacrificed Himself for humanity.⁴⁹

2nd. December 26 (Feast of St. Stephen): Honors the first Christian martyr (Acts 7).

Example: Perform acts of charity, remembering Stephen’s example of love and forgiveness.

Song Connection: “*Two Turtle Doves*” represent the Old and New Testaments, reminding believers of God’s covenant.⁵⁰

3rd. December 27 (Feast of St. John the Evangelist): Celebrates the apostle who wrote about Jesus as the Light of the World.

Example: Light a candle and read passages from the Gospel of John, reflecting on Christ’s divinity and love.

Song Connection: “*Three French Hens*” symbolize faith, hope, and love (1 Corinthians 13:13).⁵¹

4th. December 28 (Feast of the Holy Innocents): Remembers the children killed by King Herod (Matthew 2:16-18).

Example: Pray for children around the world, especially those who suffer from violence and injustice.

Song Connection: “*Four Calling Birds*” represent the four Gospels: Matthew, Mark, Luke, and John, proclaiming the good news.⁵²

⁴⁹ Susan K. Roll, *Toward the Origins of Christmas*, 120–123.

⁵⁰ Talley, *The Origins of the Liturgical Year*, 97–99.

⁵¹ Hilbert, *Liturgical Traditions Across the Atlantic*, 84–86.

⁵² Brown, *The Rise of Western Christendom*, 142–145.

5th. December 29: A day of reflection on God’s protection and providence.

Example: Spend time in prayer, thanking God for His faithfulness throughout the year.

Song Connection: “*Five Gold Rings*” symbolize the first five books of the Old Testament (the Pentateuch), the foundation of Scripture.⁵³

6th. December 30: A time to honor those who have shown great faith.

Example: Read stories of faith from Hebrews 11, reflecting on the “*cloud of witnesses*.”

Song Connection: “*Six Geese A-Laying*” represent the six days of creation, reminding believers of God’s creative work (Genesis 1).⁵⁴

7th. December 31 (New Year’s Eve): A day for reflection and new beginnings.

Example: Join a prayer service or spend time journaling about God’s guidance in the past year and hopes for the next.

Song Connection: “*Seven Swans A-Swimming*” symbolize the seven gifts of the Holy Spirit (Isaiah 11:2-3).⁵⁵

8th. January 1 (Solemnity of Mary, Mother of God): While this day honors Mary in some traditions, a *prima scriptura* approach focuses on God’s redemptive work through the humble.⁵⁶

Example: Read and meditate on Mary’s song of praise, the Magnificat (Luke

⁵³ García, *Tradiciones de España*, 156–158.

⁵⁴ Bray, *The Doctrine of God*, 210–213.

⁵⁵ Talley, *The Origins of the Liturgical Year*, 97–99.

⁵⁶ D. Gene Williams Jr., *Prima Scriptura*, Defend the Word Ministries, accessed November 11, 2024, <https://triinitysem.academia.edu/GeneWilliamsJr>; <https://defendtheword.com/insights-and-studies.html>.

1:46-55).

Song Connection: “*Eight Maids A-Milking*” symbolize the eight Beatitudes (Matthew 5:3-10).⁵⁷

9th. January 2: A day to reflect on wisdom and guidance.

Example: Study Proverbs or James, seeking godly wisdom for the new year.

Song Connection: “*Nine Ladies Dancing*” represent the nine fruits of the Spirit (Galatians 5:22-23).⁵⁸

10th. January 3: A day to give thanks for God’s name and His character.

Example: Reflect on the many names of God and their meanings, praising His faithfulness.

Song Connection: “*Ten Lords A-Leaping*” symbolize the Ten Commandments, emphasizing God’s holy standards (Exodus 20:1-17).⁵⁹

11th. January 4: A time to pray for the Church and its mission in the world.

Example: Pray for the global Church and for unity among believers.

Song Connection: “*Eleven Pipers Piping*” represent the eleven faithful apostles who spread the gospel.⁶⁰

12th. January 5: Reflect on Christ as the light to the Gentiles, preparing for Epiphany.

Example: Light a candle and pray for missions and evangelism efforts.

⁵⁷ Hilkert, *Liturgical Traditions Across the Atlantic*, 84–86.

⁵⁸ Brown, *The Rise of Western Christendom*, 142–145.

⁵⁹ Philip Schaff and Henry Wace, eds., *Nicene and Post-Nicene Fathers*, series 1 & 2 (Peabody: Hendrickson Publishers, 1994), 275–278.

⁶⁰ McGowan, *Ancient Christian Devotion*, 133–135.

Song Connection: “*Twelve Drummers Drumming*” symbolize the twelve points of the Apostles’ Creed, affirming core Christian beliefs.⁶¹

V. THE APOSTLES’ CREED AND THE TWELVE DRUMMERS DRUMMING

The song *The Twelve Days of Christmas* concludes with “*twelve drummers drumming*,” which is traditionally interpreted as representing the twelve points of belief expressed in the Apostles’ Creed. This early Christian statement of faith succinctly summarizes core doctrines that have united believers across centuries and various Christian traditions.⁶²

The Apostles’ Creed, believed to have been formalized by the 4th century, has its origins in earlier creedal statements and baptismal formulas used by the early Church. Theological concepts and phrases from the Apostles’ Creed can be traced back to writings by early Church Fathers, such as Tertullian (c. 200 AD)⁶³ and Hippolytus (c. 215 AD),⁶⁴ who referenced elements of these early creeds. By the late 4th century, the Apostles’ Creed had become widely recognized and used in the Western Church, serving as both a tool for instructing new believers and a concise summary of essential Christian beliefs.⁶⁵

⁶¹ Holmes, *The Apostolic Fathers*, 215–218.

⁶² McGowan, *Ancient Christian Devotion*, 45–47.

⁶³ Tertullian, *On the Flesh of Christ*, 5, in Wilken, *The First Thousand Years*, 134.

⁶⁴ Hippolytus, *Commentary on Daniel*, 4.23, trans. William Rusch.

⁶⁵ Talley, *The Origins of the Liturgical Year*, 103.

The Twelve Traditional Points of the Apostles' Creed:

- 1st.** I believe in God, the Father Almighty, Creator of heaven and earth.
- 2nd.** I believe in Jesus Christ, His only Son, our Lord.
- 3rd.** He was conceived by the Holy Spirit and born of the Virgin Mary.
- 4th.** He suffered under Pontius Pilate, was crucified, died, and was buried.
- 5th.** He descended to the dead. On the third day, He rose again.
- 6th.** He ascended into heaven and is seated at the right hand of God the Father Almighty.
- 7th.** He will come again to judge the living and the dead.
- 8th.** I believe in the Holy Spirit.
- 9th.** I believe in the holy catholic Church, the communion of saints.
- 10th.** I believe in the forgiveness of sins.
- 11th.** I believe in the resurrection of the body.
- 12th.** I believe in life everlasting. Amen.

This creed provided a concise and comprehensive summary of Christian doctrine.⁶⁶ When connected to *The Twelve Days of Christmas*, the “*twelve drummers drumming*” serve as a symbolic reminder to uphold and proclaim these foundational beliefs. The association reinforces the spiritual depth of the Christmas season and the enduring significance of the Incarnation, reminding believers of the transformative impact of Christ’s coming and the importance of living out these truths.⁶⁷

The symbolism of the “*twelve drummers drumming*” underscores the call to proclaim the faith with unity and conviction. Just as drummers keep rhythm and unite

⁶⁶ Wilken, *The First Thousand Years*, 147.

⁶⁷ Bernard, *Theological Reflections on Early Christian Festivals*, 156

musicians, the Apostles' Creed unites Christians in a shared confession of faith, emphasizing the communal and universal nature of Christian doctrine. Reflecting on these points during the Twelve Days of Christmas invites believers to deepen their understanding of the Incarnation and commit to sharing the redemptive message of Christ.⁶⁸

VI. LITURGICAL AND THEOLOGICAL REFLECTION ON THE APOSTLES' CREED

The Apostles' Creed has long held a central place in Christian worship and catechesis⁶⁹, serving as both a declaration of faith and a foundation for Christian doctrine. Its use in the context of the Twelve Days of Christmas, symbolized by the “*twelve drummers drumming*,” emphasizes the importance of theological reflection during this sacred season.⁷⁰ Each line of the Creed encapsulates key aspects of Christian belief, from the nature of God as Creator to the hope of life everlasting.

The theological weight of the Apostles' Creed lies in its comprehensive outline of the Christian narrative, starting with the creation of the world and culminating in the promise of eternal life. This narrative reflects the unity of God's redemptive plan and underscores the interconnectedness of Jesus' birth, life, death, resurrection, and eventual

⁶⁸ Roll, *Toward the Origins of Christmas*, 89-91.

⁶⁹ Oxford Dictionary of the Christian Church, 3rd ed., s.v. “catechesis.”

⁷⁰ Hilkert, *Liturgical Traditions Across the Atlantic*, 110-112.

return. During the Twelve Days of Christmas, believers are invited to meditate on this narrative, recognizing how each event contributes to the overarching story of salvation.⁷¹

VII. CONTEMPORARY REFLECTIONS ON THE APOSTLES' CREED

In modern Christian practice, the Apostles' Creed continues to be recited in liturgical settings, affirming the faith of congregations worldwide. Its relevance remains, as it provides a concise yet profound summary of beliefs that have guided the Christian community for centuries. By linking the Creed to the symbolism of the "*twelve drummers drumming*," the Twelve Days of Christmas offer an opportunity to reaffirm and celebrate these core doctrines.⁷²

Furthermore, the Creed's emphasis on communal faith highlights the importance of unity within the Body of Christ. Just as the drummers in the song maintain a cohesive rhythm, the Apostles' Creed unites believers across denominational lines, reminding them of the shared truths that form the foundation of their faith. This unity is particularly meaningful during the Christmas season, as Christians around the world reflect on the Incarnation and the hope it brings.⁷³

The Apostles' Creed thus serves as both a theological anchor and a call to action. It invites believers to live out their faith in the world, proclaiming the good news of Jesus Christ and embodying the love and grace that His coming represents. In this way, the

⁷¹ Talley, *The Origins of the Liturgical Year*, 120.

⁷² Roll, *Toward the Origins of Christmas*, 94.

⁷³ Juan García, *Tradiciones de España*, 67.

Twelve Days of Christmas become more than just a festive interlude; they are a time for deep spiritual engagement and a renewed commitment to the gospel.⁷⁴

VIII. CONCLUSION: RECLAIMING EPIPHANY AND THE TWELVE DAYS OF CHRISTMAS

Rediscovering Epiphany and the Twelve Days of Christmas offers Christians today a unique opportunity to deepen their spiritual engagement during the holiday season. By reviving these traditions, believers can move beyond the consumer-driven focus on December 25 and cultivate a rhythm of worship that encompasses both the joy of Christ's birth and the revelation of His divine mission.⁷⁵ Embracing the full liturgical arc from Christmas to Epiphany allows for a more holistic experience, one that emphasizes the Incarnation's global significance and challenges believers to embody Christ's light in a darkened world.⁷⁶

This paper has examined the historical, theological, and cultural dimensions of Epiphany, the Twelve Days of Christmas, and the Apostles' Creed, emphasizing the interconnectedness of these observances within the Christian tradition. Through this analysis, we see that early Christians designed the Christmas season not as an isolated celebration but as part of a broader liturgical framework that reinforced key doctrines and encouraged extended reflection.⁷⁷

⁷⁴ McGowan, *Ancient Christian Devotion*, 85.

⁷⁵ Ibid.

⁷⁶ Wilken, *The First Thousand Years*, 152.

⁷⁷ Hilbert, *Liturgical Traditions Across the Atlantic*, 110-112.

Reclaiming Epiphany as a meaningful holiday invites Christians to engage deeply with the gospel narrative, to reflect on God's redemptive plan, and to respond to the call to be Christ's light in the world. Through this renewed emphasis on the Twelve Days of Christmas and Epiphany, believers may find themselves drawn into a richer, more intentional observance of the holiday season. Such a transformation has the potential to restore the spiritual depth and cultural significance of Epiphany, ultimately enriching both individual and communal expressions of faith.⁷⁸

In conclusion, as Christians navigate the challenges of secularization and commercialization, returning to these ancient traditions offers a countercultural witness to the enduring power of the Incarnation. By reclaiming Epiphany and the Twelve Days of Christmas, believers can not only enrich their worship but also bear witness to the transformative love of Christ that continues to impact lives today. Throughout history, the Church has often struggled when it strayed too far into cultural accommodation, resulting in a loss of distinctiveness and spiritual vitality.⁷⁹ By renewing a focus on practices that emphasize the central truths of the faith, Christians can resist cultural pressures and maintain a robust, incarnational theology that transforms both individuals and communities.⁸⁰

⁷⁸ Thomas J. Talley, *The Origins of the Liturgical Year*, 120.

⁷⁹ H. Richard Niebuhr, *Christ and Culture* (New York: Harper & Row, 1951), 116–121.

⁸⁰ Wilken, *The Spirit of Early Christian Thought*, 234–239.

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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