



December 23, 2025

MESSENGER

MERRY CHRISTMAS

Quote of the Week

Joseph was a man of loving action, not loving words."

Pastor George In this week's sermon

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GIVING MEANINGFUL GIFTS

I'm a notoriously poor gift-giver. However, we all have our moments. Sometime in the mid-1980s, I came up with the bright idea of giving my wife Judy a memorable gift of twelve Christmas presents, representing the "Twelve Days of Christmas." Under the tree there were twelve separately wrapped small packages for her, each marked with the date it was to be opened. A card explained it all.

I said this was "memorable," but none of the individual gifts were. I've asked Judy and daughter Laura, and they can't identify any specifics. Most were small and inexpensive, like a scarf, a pin, a knick-knack for the coffee table, etc. A couple, labeled to be opened near the end, were more serious --- I think there was a kind-of-nice bracelet. I can say, with confidence, that there were no partridges, French hens or Lords-a-leapin'.

What did this accomplish? Well, it was a little different, a change of pace. It involved a lot of creative forethought on my part, and it kept our marriage together another twelve days. The following Christmas I was back to boring, and I've been there ever since.

The Twelve Days concept arose from the reality that the Early Church couldn't settle on an actual date to commemorate Jesus' birth. December 25 became the accepted birthday celebration because local customs had already established a midwinter tradition to cheer people up through the darkest, coldest time of the year. Other Church leaders thought it was more important to celebrate the day Jesus was recognized as Savior by the whole world, represented by the Wise Men coming from foreign lands. This became known as "Epiphany," and was celebrated on January 6. Between December 25 and January 6 there are **twelve days**. Let's celebrate all of them!

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The poem/song that is now part of our Christmas tradition developed gradually through the Middle Ages. The earliest published version scholars have been able to find was printed in 1780. There had been a religious battle in England for the past 250 years, and the Protestants had won. In the Eighteenth Century it was still illegal to identify publicly as a Catholic; this was not changed until the “Catholic Emancipation Acts of 1829.” Modern Roman Catholic historians report that the words we sing were originally used as a coded way of teaching the Catechism to young children when it was illegal to instruct them directly:

Day 1 gift – One Partridge in a pear tree – Christ on the Cross

Day 2 gift – Two Testaments, Old and New

Day 3 gift – Three Virtues – Faith, Hope and Love

Day 4 gift – Four Gospels

Day 12 gift – Twelve points of Doctrine in the Apostles’ Creed.¹

I get that the Gospel has many dimensions; twelve is just the beginning. But the attempt to **enhance Christmas, from one day to twelve, from one truth to multiple truths, from the simplicity of the Gospel to the complexity of life applications, really confuses the message.**² **The Baby tells one story: The God of the Universe Loves You Unconditionally.**

Forget about the lights, the tinsel, the Ho-Ho -Hos, the other eleven gifts you may receive. Open your arms of faith and accept the one Gift of Christmas that matters.

Pastor George Van Alstine

¹ The full twelve days’ gifts are explained in these two different sources: <https://www.catholicnewsagency.com/resource/55904/the-history-of-the-twelve-days-of-christmas> and https://www.dynamiccatholic.com/advent/twelve-days-of-christmas.html?srsid=AfmBOoqEOMnFCC0Rscd3ILMJCFj6b4YFzIZGI dw8QjAzmhbL26Mj_2Jv

² This comedic version of the song by L.A.s Angel City Chorale shows how confusing this can get. https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=gtXq5Y0CMkE&list=RDgtXq5Y0CMkE&start_radio=1