

THE TWELVE DAYS OF CHRISTMAS

by Gail Gaymer Martin



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The Twelve Days of Christmas

A children's
Christmas program

by Gail Gaymer Martin

CAST OF CHARACTERS**JENNY** (*also Child 12*)**BILLY****AMY****CHILD 1****CHILD 2****CHILD 3****CHILD 4****CHILD 5****CHILD 6****CHILD 7****CHILD 8** (*a girl*)**CHILD 9** (*a girl*)**CHILD 10** (*a boy*)**CHILD 11** (*a boy*)

The children's roles may be an individual child or a group of children who join in the singing.

HISTORY

The Twelve Days of Christmas refer to the twelve days from Christmas Day through the day before Epiphany. On that day, Christians celebrate the wise men bringing gifts to the Christ Child and the Good News reaching the Gentiles that God was made flesh and dwelt among us. For this reason, in certain countries and religions, gifts are given on Epiphany, and in some places, a gift is given for each of the Twelve Days of Christmas.

Though the popular song “The Twelve Days of Christmas” seems to be a nonsensical lyric to entertain children, tradition has it that this song contains Christian instruction of the catechism, hidden behind the words. Each gift given relates to some aspect of Christian faith and was used as a device to aid children in remembering these basic teachings. The “True Love” of the song refers to God, and the word “me” refers to all believers in Christ.

As the story goes, this song dates back to the sixteenth-century religious wars in England when certain religious bodies were prohibited by law from any practice of their faith — public or private. Instead of learning their faith by writing and reciting doctrine, biblical truths and Bible verses, the adults, fearing imprisonment or worse, taught children to memorize their catechism by using the song as a mnemonic device.

INTRODUCTION

This Christmas program uses the traditional song, "The Twelve Days of Christmas," to emphasize the great gift God gave the world through the birth of his Son. Beginning with day one — birth of the Christ child — the various hidden meanings of faith are learned by the children of today. The program contains humor, music and an Advent activity, if so desired.

The program may be presented with a cast of fourteen children or expanded by adding more children to each part. Thus, Child One may be one, two or more children as decided by the director. No costumes and only a few props are needed. Microphones will depend upon the size of the audience and program site. This program could easily be presented in a church sanctuary.

Lines may be memorized or written on small note cards and palmed in the children's hands.

LOGISTICS PLANNING

Advent Activity

Twelve flat Christmas packages will be used in the program as gift signs. They may be made from posterboard or cardboard, approximately two feet square, either as an Advent activity or by an adult in preparation for the program.

The front of the square should be covered with Christmas paper of different kinds, including a large bow that may be stuck to the top corner, if desired. Each square will have a large white numeral from one to twelve in the center.

On the back of the squares, the meaning of each gift should be printed in large bold letters so it can be seen by the audience when turned around to face them as follows:

- Gift 1:** God's Son, Jesus Christ
- Gift 2:** Two Testaments
- Gift 3:** Faith, hope and love

- Gift 4:** Four Gospels true
- Gift 5:** Five Books of grace
- Gift 6:** Days of Creation
- Gift 7:** Gifts of the Spirit
- Gift 8:** Eight "Blessed are they"
- Gift 9:** Fruits of the Spirit
- Gift 10:** God's Ten Commandments
- Gift 11:** Faithful Apostles
- Gift 12:** Twelve points of doctrine

Setting and Props

This program may be presented in the church sanctuary, a Sunday school area, or on a stage. No backdrop is necessary. The scene opens with a small table and chair or stool beside it and a partially wrapped Christmas package. This set should be right of Center Stage.

Characters will enter from right or left as indicated in the script. Some will carry the square Christmas package signs as indicated.

Music

The singing of "The Twelve Days of Christmas" in the beginning of the script may be done a cappella. When the song begins using the new set of words, piano music should be used. Music for this familiar tune is readily available.

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reserved.*

1 (*JENNY sits on a stool or chair beside a small table wrapping*
 2 *a Christmas package. She concentrates on her task as CHILD*
 3 *1 enters.*)

4 **CHILD 1:** (*Enters Stage Left carrying Gift 1 and singing.*) **On**
 5 **the first day of Christmas, my true love gave to me —**
 6 **A partridge in a pear tree.** (*JENNY looks up and groans,*
 7 *then goes back to her task.*)

8 **CHILD 2:** (*Enters Stage Right carrying Gift 2 and singing.*) **On**
 9 **the second day of Christmas, my true love gave to me**
 10 **—**

11 **Two turtledoves.** (*CHILD 2 moves beside CHILD 1.*)

12 **CHILD 1:** (*Singing*) **And a partridge in a pear tree.**

13 **JENNY:** (*Shakes her head.*) **Silly!** (*JENNY continues wrapping*
 14 *her package.*)

15 **CHILD 3:** (*Enters Stage Left with Gift 3 and stands beside*
 16 *CHILD 2, singing.*) **On the third day of Christmas, my**
 17 **true love gave to me —**
 18 **Three French hens.**

19 **CHILD 2:** (*Singing*) **Two turtledoves.**

20 **CHILD 1:** (*Singing*) **And a partridge in a pear tree.**

21 **JENNY:** **That song is for the birds.** (*CHILDREN laugh.*)

22 **CHILD 4:** (*Enters from the right carrying Gift 4 and singing.*)
 23 **On the fourth day of Christmas, my true love gave to**
 24 **me —**

25 **Four calling birds.**

26 **CHILD 3:** (*Singing*) **Three French hens.**

27 **CHILD 2:** (*Singing*) **Two turtledoves.**

28 **CHILD 1:** (*Singing*) **And a partridge in a pear tree.** (*JENNY*
 29 *risks and puts her hands on her hips.*)

30 **JENNY:** **Who'd want a house filled with birds as a**
 31 **Christmas gift? This song makes no sense at all.** (*CHILD*
 32 *5 enters from stage Left carrying Gift 5.*)

33 **CHILD 5:** (*Singing*) **On the fifth day of Christmas, my true**
 34 **love gave to me —**
 35 **Five golden rings.**

1 **JENNY:** Now you're talking. Girls like rings. I could have
 2 **one on each finger.** (*JENNY pretends she is putting a ring*
 3 *on each finger of her hand.*) But ... you can forget those
 4 birds.

5 **CHILD 2:** No you can't. We still have geese a-laying and
 6 swans a-swimming. (*CHILD 6 carrying Gift 6 and CHILD*
 7 *7 carrying Gift 7 enter from Stage Right.*)

8 **CHILD 4:** What would you do if someone gave you all those
 9 maids a-milking and ladies dancing? (*CHILD 8 and*
 10 *CHILD 9 [girls] twirl across the stage from left to right and*
 11 *exit, but return Stage Right, carrying Gifts 8 and 9.*)

12 **CHILD 1:** Or lords a-leaping? (*CHILD 10 and CHILD 11 [boys]*
 13 *leap across the stage from right to left and exit. CHILD 10*
 14 *enters from Stage Left carrying Gift 10.*)

15 **JENNY:** (*Holds up her hand like a police officer, wrist flexed*
 16 *upward and palm flat.*) Hold it! Or before you know it,
 17 we'll have pipers piping and drummers drumming.
 18 (*BILLY enters from Stage Right. CHILD 11 comes from the*
 19 *left carrying Gift 11 and 12 and gives Gift 12 to JENNY*
 20 *[who becomes CHILD 12]. CHILD 11 and CHILD 12 join the*
 21 *others.*)

22 **BILLY:** What's going on? (*BILLY looks at the group with the gift*
 23 *posters.*) What are those gifts?

24 **CHILD 3:** We're singing about the gifts in "The Twelve Days
 25 of Christmas."

26 **BILLY:** That song never made sense to me before.

27 **CHILD 5:** You mean it makes sense now?

28 **BILLY:** It does ... now that I know the *real* meaning of the
 29 gifts. (*AMY enters and joins BILLY.*)

30 **AMY:** Let's tell them what we learned. Many years ago,
 31 some Christians were persecuted and not allowed to
 32 witness their faith in public or private. So they learned
 33 about the Bible and their faith by singing "The Twelve
 34 Days of Christmas."

35 **CHILD 6:** How did that song help them? (*CHILD 6 shakes*

- 1 *his/her head.*) Six geese a-laying? What does that have to
 2 do with the Bible?
- 3 BILLY: Because it has a hidden meaning — like a code. The
 4 six geese reminded the children of the six days of
 5 creation.
- 6 CHILD 7: Hmmm? So seven must be ... seven days in a
 7 week?
- 8 CHILD 8: That doesn't have anything to do with the Bible.
- 9 CHILD 9: Let's start from the beginning. On the first day of
 10 Christmas, my true love gave to me ...
- 11 AMY: First, stop there. Can you guess who the "true love"
 12 is? (*The CHILDREN look from one to another while AMY*
 13 *waits.*)
- 14 CHILD 10: Is it God?
- 15 BILLY: That's right. God is our True Love. The truest love
 16 we'll ever have. He is our Heavenly Father who gives
 17 us every gift. Now, what about the word "me"?
- 18 CHILD 11: Let me guess. Me ... is *me*. (*CHILD 11 points to his*
 19 *chest.*)
- 20 CHILD 12: And *me*. (*CHILD 12 points to her chest.*) So I
 21 suppose it means all of God's children.
- 22 AMY: That's right. Me stands for all believers. So now, let's
 23 get to the song.
- 24 CHILD 1: Good idea, because I want to understand. Are you
 25 saying that instead of a partridge in a pear tree, the gift
 26 is really God's Son, Jesus, on the cross?
- 27 BILLY: That's it, and the second day of Christmas reminds
 28 us of the Old and New Testaments.
- 29 AMY: The three French hens are three virtues from God.
 30 Remember First Corinthians thirteen? It says, "And
 31 now these three remain: faith, hope and love." Those
 32 are the qualities we should strive for: faith, hope and
 33 love.
- 34 CHILD 4: Let me guess what four calling birds means. The
 35 four Evangelists: Matthew, Mark, Luke and John.

- 1 **BILLY:** Yes, that's it. The Evangelists tell us the true story
 2 of Jesus' life. We call them the Gospels, because gospel
 3 means "true."
- 4 **CHILD 5:** So if the fourth gift is the four books of the New
 5 Testament, I'll guess the fifth gift stands for the first
 6 five books of the Old Testament: Genesis, Exodus,
 7 Leviticus, Numbers and Deuteronomy.
- 8 **AMY:** You're right. Those books are called the Pentateuch.
 9 They tell the history of God's people. They explain how
 10 people sinned, yet how they were forgiven by God's
 11 grace ... just like God still forgives us for our sins. They
 12 are the Books of Grace.
- 13 **CHILD 7:** You already told us the sixth gift was the days of
 14 creation. What's seven swans a-swimming?
- 15 **BILLY:** It's the seven gifts of the Holy Spirit. We read about
 16 them in Romans Twelve and First Corinthians Twelve
 17 when Jesus said, "The body is a unit, though it is made
 18 up of many parts; and though all its parts are many,
 19 they form one body. So it is with Christ." Each person
 20 on earth has a special talent, a gift from God: prophecy,
 21 ministry, teaching, exhortation — that means making
 22 speeches, giving, leading and compassion, which means
 23 sympathy.
- 24 **CHILD 8:** What does eight maids a-milking mean?
- 25 **AMY:** That comes from Jesus' sermon on a mountainside
 26 when a large crowd of people gathered and he said,
 27 "Blessed are the poor in spirit, for theirs is the kingdom
 28 of heaven" (Matthew 5:3).
- 29 **CHILD 8:** I remember: Blessed are those who mourn,
 30 blessed are the meek, blessed are the pure in heart.
- 31 **CHILD 3:** And the peacemakers and the persecuted for
 32 God's sake.
- 33 **AMY:** Yes, there are eight, and they are called the
 34 Beatitudes.
- 35 **CHILD 9:** I have no idea what nine lords a-leaping stands

1 for. Do you?

2 BILLY: Yes. It represents the Fruits of the Spirit from
3 Galatians 5:22 — love, joy, peace, patience, kindness,
4 generosity, faithfulness, gentleness and self-control. At
5 Christmas, when we think of gifts from God, we usually
6 think of the baby Jesus. But look how many gifts God
7 has given us.

8 CHILD 10: Like the Ten Commandments.

9 CHILD 11: And the eleven faithful disciples. The ones who
10 didn't betray him.

11 CHILD 12: Those two were easy. But what about the twelfth
12 day?

13 AMY: You'd never guess that one. It represents the twelve
14 points in the Apostle's Creed. When we say the Creed,
15 we state our faith in God the Father, God the Son and
16 God the Holy Spirit, and it reminds us of the greatest
17 gift of all, Jesus, who was born and died to give each
18 of us forgiveness of sins, resurrection of our bodies and
19 life everlasting.

20 BILLY: So when we think about presents and the Twelve
21 Days of Christmas, let's think of all God's gifts as we
22 celebrate the birth of Jesus.

23 CHILD 1: Can we sing now?

24 CHILD 2: Sing what?

25 CHILD 1: "The Twelve Days of Christmas" ... the right way?

26 ALL: The *right* way?

27 CHILD 1: Sure. (*CHILD 1 turns around his gift sign. As the*
28 *song begins, other children may join the group. As each*
29 *CHILD introduces a day of Christmas in song, the CHILD*
30 *will turn his gift sign around to face the audience.)*

31

32 SONG: "The Real Twelve Days of Christmas" (*Sung to the tune*
33 *of "The Twelve Days of Christmas."*)

34 CHILD 1: On the first day of Christmas, my True Love gave
35 to me —

- 1 **God's Son born to set us all free.**
 2 **CHILD 2:** *(Turns gift sign around.)* **On the second day of**
 3 **Christmas, my True Love gave to me —**
 4 **Two Testaments.**
 5 **CHILD 1:** **And God's Son born to set us all free.**
 6 **CHILD 3:** *(Turns gift sign around.)* **On the third day of**
 7 **Christmas, my True Love gave to me —**
 8 **Faith, hope and love.**
 9 **CHILD 2:** **Two Testaments.**
 10 **CHILD 1:** **And God's Son born to set us all free.**
 11 **CHILD 4:** *(Turns gift sign around.)* **On the fourth day of**
 12 **Christmas, my True Love gave to me —**
 13 **Four Gospels true.**
 14 **CHILD 3:** **Faith, hope and love.**
 15 **CHILD 2:** **Two Testaments.**
 16 **CHILD 1:** **And God's Son born to set us all free.**
 17 **CHILD 5:** *(Turns gift sign around.)* **On the fifth day of**
 18 **Christmas, my True Love gave to me —**
 19 **Five books of grace.**
 20 **CHILD 4:** **Four Gospels true.**
 21 **CHILD 3:** **Faith, hope and love.**
 22 **CHILD 2:** **Two Testaments.**
 23 **CHILD 1:** **And God's Son born to set us all free.**
 24 **CHILD 6:** *(Turns gift sign around.)* **On the sixth day of**
 25 **Christmas, my True Love gave to me —**
 26 **Days of Creation.**
 27 **CHILD 5:** **Five books of grace.**
 28 **CHILD 4:** **Four Gospels true.**
 29 **CHILD 3:** **Faith, hope and love.**
 30 **CHILD 2:** **Two Testaments.**
 31 **CHILD 1:** **And God's Son born to set us all free.**
 32 **CHILD 7:** *(Turns gift sign around.)* **On the seventh day of**
 33 **Christmas, my True Love gave to me —**
 34 **Gifts of the Spirit.**
 35 **CHILD 6:** **Days of Creation.**

- 1 CHILD 5: Five books of grace.
- 2 CHILD 4: Four Gospels true.
- 3 CHILD 3: Faith, hope and love.
- 4 CHILD 2: Two Testaments.
- 5 CHILD 1: And God's Son born to set us all free.
- 6 CHILD 8: (*Turns gift sign around.*) On the eighth day of
- 7 Christmas, my True Love gave to me —
- 8 Eight "Blessed are they."
- 9 CHILD 7: Gifts of the Spirit.
- 10 CHILD 6: Days of Creation.
- 11 CHILD 5: Five books of grace.
- 12 CHILD 4: Four Gospels true.
- 13 CHILD 3: Faith, hope and love.
- 14 CHILD 2: Two Testaments.
- 15 CHILD 1: And God's Son born to set us all free.
- 16 CHILD 9: (*Turns gift sign around.*) On the ninth day of
- 17 Christmas, my True Love gave to me —
- 18 Fruits of the Spirit.
- 19 CHILD 8: Eight "Blessed are they."
- 20 CHILD 7: Gifts of the Spirit.
- 21 CHILD 6: Days of Creation.
- 22 CHILD 5: Five books of grace.
- 23 CHILD 4: Four Gospels true.
- 24 CHILD 3: Faith, hope and love.
- 25 CHILD 2: Two Testaments.
- 26 CHILD 1: And God's Son born to set us all free.
- 27 CHILD 10: (*Turns gift sign around.*) On the tenth day of
- 28 Christmas, my True Love gave to me —
- 29 God's Ten Commandments.
- 30 CHILD 9: Fruits of the Spirit.
- 31 CHILD 8: Eight "Blessed are they."
- 32 CHILD 7: Gifts of the Spirit.
- 33 CHILD 6: Days of Creation.
- 34 CHILD 5: Five books of grace.
- 35 CHILD 4: Four Gospels true.



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