

Joy To The World

Joy to the world! The Lord is come:
let earth receive her King!
Let every heart prepare Him room,
and heaven and nature sing.

Joy to the earth! The Saviour reigns:
let men their songs employ,
while fields and floods, rocks, hills and plains
repeat the sounding joy.

No more let sins and sorrows grow,
nor thorns infest the ground:
He comes to make His blessings flow
far as the curse is found.

He rules the earth with truth and grace,
and makes the nations prove
the glories of His righteousness
and wonders of His love.

'12 Days of Christmas' has 12 hidden meanings

If you asked most people if they knew all 12 verses of "The 12 Days of Christmas," chances are only a few could recite them all. Frequently played and sung, it's likely also that few know the meaning of the song and how it was used as a code for Catholics in England.

Though many assume the 12 days refers to the days prior to December 25 (when those in the Western hemisphere celebrate Christmas), it actually refers to the days between December 25 and the beginning of the Epiphany on January 6. The Epiphany (also known as "Little Christmas") is recognized as the day the Three Magi arrived with gifts for Baby Jesus.

As for each individual day and what each gift symbolizes, the largely cryptic connotation of each gift dates back to the times when Catholics were not allowed to openly or even privately celebrate their religion in England. As a means to both celebrate and pass on their religious beliefs to their children, Catholics began singing "The 12 Days of Christmas," with each gift bearing some religious significance.

According to Catholic Online, a Web site devoted to providing Catholics with information pertaining to the origins, practices and issues regarding their faith.

- * A Partridge in a Pear Tree: Jesus Christ, the son of God
- * Two Turtle Doves: the Old and the New Testament.
- * Three French Hens: the

theological virtues of Faith, Hope and Charity

- * Four Calling Birds: the four Gospels
- * Five Golden Rings: the Pentateuch, or the first five books of the Old Testament, all of which dealt with man's fall from grace
- * Six Geese A-laying: the six days of creation
- * Seven Swans A-swimming: the seven Sacraments

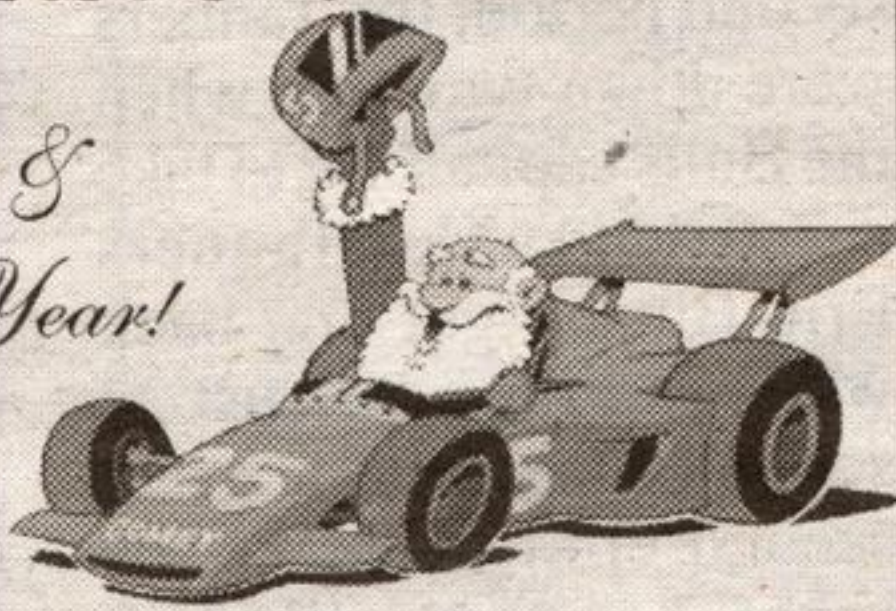
* Eight Maids A-milking: the eight Beatitudes

- * Nine Ladies Dancing: the nine fruits of the Holy Spirit
- * Ten Lords A-Leaping: the Ten Commandments
- * Eleven Pipers Piping: the 11 faithful apostles (excluding Judas)
- * Twelve Drummers Drumming: the 12 points of doctrine in the Apostle's Creed

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Christmas tree introduced to Canada in 18th century

The practice of setting up a Christmas tree at Christmas is generally credited to Martin Luther, a fomenter of the Protestant Reformation but it's likely it had antecedents.

The first Christmas tree, as we know it, appeared in that part of France known as Alsace in 1521. It was introduced to France by the Princess Helene de Mecklenbourg, who brought one to Paris, after her marriage to the Duke of Orleans.

Of course, decorated trees have been part of pagan festivities for centuries, but it wasn't until the 11th century they had a Christmas basis, history tells us.

During Advent in the 11th century, scenes called mysteries, including one about Paradise, were very popular. A tree decorated with red apples symbolized the tree of Paradise.

During the 15th century, Christians began to put up trees in their own houses on December 24, the feast day of Adam and Eve.

In the 18th century, the custom of decorating a Christmas tree was well established in Germany, France and Austria.

In 1841, Prince Albert (originally from Germany) husband of Queen Victoria, set up a Christmas tree at Windsor Castle in England. From the royal court, the custom of Christmas trees spread

quickly to the middle class and then to working people.

For Victorians, a good Christmas tree had to be six branches tall and be placed on a table covered with a white damask tablecloth. It was decorated with garlands, candles and paper flowers.

The Christmas tree was introduced to Canada around the end of the 18th century before it became a common practice in England. The various ornaments in which it was decorated were first made at

home before being commercially produced. In the middle of the 17th century Christmas trees were illuminated with little candles. These were replaced at the beginning of the 20th century by electric light bulbs, much safer than lighted candles.

Other variations like outdoor and artificial Christmas trees started to appear around the beginning of the 20th century and the custom is gaining acceptance in other parts of the world.

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