

ON THE TWELVE DAYS OF CHRISTMAS
Christmas Day –December 25, 2011 – Matthew 1: 18-25
The Church of the Covenant

By now most of Christmas for most of the world is cleaned up and forgotten, like so much old useless Christmas wrapping paper set out for the trash. That's the way the world celebrates Christmas but that's not the way Christians are to celebrate Christmas. Everything about today's world is instant – instant messaging, instant pudding, someone texts you from the other side of the globe and expects an instant response, dial up isn't fast enough so we need Fios and Wi-fi, a regular oven isn't fast enough so we have a convection oven that boils water in 90 seconds. Faster and faster and faster we go; but there is no peace; there is no joy; there is no love. In point of fact, most things that are worthwhile take time to develop and require us to focus our attention on them. We bought our gifts that are already forgotten on Black Friday and celebrated Christmas frenetically until, thank God, it is finally over today. That's the way the secular world celebrates the birth of Jesus in Bethlehem. But the way the church always celebrated Christmas is by BEGINNING the celebration on Christmas Day and ending it 12 days later on twelfth night; the way the church historically celebrated Christmas was to start the celebration TODAY (when we think Christmas is OVER) and extend it for twelve days (when even all our Christmas decorations will be taken down and stored away in boxes in the basement). Two ways of celebrating Christmas –the world's way or the church way –the instant version or the 12 day method –the frenetic, stressful, angry way the secular world tells us or the way the church historically has done. In our staff devotions this December a member of staff shared with us a devotion which had a little girl say within it –*“Forgive us our Christmases as we forgive those who Christmas against us”*. Lord, please forgive us the way we celebrate Christmas and move us to a way of celebrating Christmas that truly is reflective of the love, peace and joy you are sending into the world through the birth of your Son, Jesus Christ .

Our scripture, by the way, begins by referencing Christmas by saying this –*“Now the birth of Jesus Christ took place in this way...” (Matthew 1: 18)* This is the way it happened, suggests the text. And this is the way it will happen, suggests the text. You want Christmas? Well, here is the way it happened 2,000 years ago and here is the way it can happen again this year. *(You) shall conceive and bear a son, and his name shall be called Emmanuel (which means, God with us) (Matthew 1: 23)* You shall conceive and bear a son...*“and you shall call his name Jesus (meaning salvation) for he will save his people from their sins.” (Matthew 1: 21)* There are things that take time. There are important matters that cannot be hurried. Jesus being born into the world is one of them. It takes 9 months to conceive and bear a son. Conception, gestation and birth take 9 months. Can't hurry it up. Cannot text it instantly. There's no FIOS to quicken the process. Same with spiritual matters. It takes time for Jesus to be formed within the human heart. It takes time for Him to be born within. It takes time for Him to be born anew within the human heart. There's a gestation period. It takes time and prayer and focus. Jesus will not be born out into the world until HE is first born and reborn into the human heart. He will not be our Emmanuel, our *“God with us”*, if we do not take time to have him become fully formed within our heart and soul. He will not be Jesus, meaning *“salvation”*, He will not be our salvation nor the world's salvation unless we take the time for Him to be born within us. He will not be able to *“save His people from their sins.”* If the church won't take the time for Him to be born in us. Yo, Christian, what part of this don't you get?

The way we celebrate Christmas is designed NOT to have a baby that takes time to develop and be born to be actually formed and actually born in us. In our minds Christmas is already over but the Christ Child hasn't been born in us yet, the very thing that makes Christmas, Christmas. Lord, forgive us our Christmases as we forgive those who Christmas against us! So if that's the problem then what's the remedy?

The Twelve Days of Christmas is the remedy. The song “The Twelve Days of Christmas” is actually a Christian allegory. We don’t understand the concept of allegory in today’s world; it is basically a story that represents something else and conveys a truth that is hidden unless we spend time to unlock it and understand it. Its like a word puzzle you need to figure out in order to understand. Its like a code that takes time to break in order to understand the message behind it. The song “The Twelve Days of Christmas” begins with a partridge in a pear tree and means the birth of Jesus in Bethlehem; HE is the gift given on each of the 12 days of Christmas or its not Christmas. The two turtle doves are the Old and New Testaments –focus your Christmas on the Bible and you’ll receive the perfect gift. Three French hens are the only thing that abides in life –*“Faith, Hope and Love, and the greatest of these is LOVE”* found in I Corinthians 13 –love is born and shared at Christmas or its not Christmas. Four calling birds are the four Gospels –you have to read the Word of God in order to understand the Word that God is sending into the world at Christmas –the written Word points to the Word made flesh in Jesus. 5 gold rings are the five Old Testament books of the Pentateuch, pointing to the LAW which convicts us of our sin –you don’t understand a Savior if you don’t understand the awfulness of sin for which there is no atonement. 6 geese a laying are the six days of creation –Christmas is also about God’s world and how we have been given dominion of it, for good or ill. 7 swans a swimming means the 7 gifts of the Holy Spirit mentioned in Romans 12: 6-8 --prophecy, ministry, teaching, exhortation, giving, leading and compassion –there will be no birth of Jesus into the world if His Church does not personally exercise their spiritual giftedness. 8 Maids a Milking points to the 8 Beatitudes mentioned in Matthew 5: 3-10, *“Blessed are those”*whom the world might not consider blessed but whom God will bless in the middle of the trials of life. 9 Ladies Dancing point to the fruit of the Spirit mentioned in Galatians 5: 22-23 You don’t have Christmas without *“Love, joy, peace, patience, kindness, generosity, faithfulness, gentleness, and self-control”* How many of us experienced Christmas through those fruit of the spirit? Or was the fruit of Christmas more like –stress, frustration, lack of peace, impatience, rudeness, avarice, cowardice, anger and lack of self-control? 10 Lords a Leaping means the 10 Commandments –you can’t claim you love God if you do not love your neighbor who you have seen. 11 Pipers piping means the 11 faithful Apostles (minus Judas, of course) –where did we betray Christ this Christmas and where were we faithful? 12 Drummers Drumming points to the 12 points of doctrine in the Apostle’s Creed from #1 *“I believe in God the Father Almighty”* to #12 *“I believe in the life everlasting”*. The true celebration of Christmas always leads us to a deeper level of faith and belief.

Think about your Christmas this way. If it really is all about Jesus then it ought to be His way not our culture’s way. Maybe on the second and fourth and fifth days of Christmas we should gather as families around the Word of God. Maybe on the second day –faith, hope and love—we should make a covenant with one another and with God to celebrate Christmas with these three things as paramount. Maybe on the day it points to creation we should take time to do a project that benefits the environment. Maybe on the Beatitude Day of Christmas we focus on *“Blessed are those who mourn...”* and we do something nice for someone who has lost a loved one. Maybe on the day when it’s the 10 Commandments you do something nice for a neighbor? What would Christmas be like if we celebrated it like the 12 Days of Christmas? How would our Christmas be different? What might be born through us? Who might be born in us were we to take the 12 Days of Christmas seriously? Think back over the way we celebrated Christmas this year. We still have time. Today is just the first day of Christmas. There are eleven more. How would we feel if by the end of Christmas this year we sang...*“On the twelfth day of Christmas my true love, Jesus Christ, gave to me...”* O what a gift that Christmas would be! Amen.

*By: The Reverend Dr. Stuart D. Broberg, The Church of the Covenant, Washington, PA
IF THIS HAS BLESSED YOU, PLEASE PASS IT ALONG TO A FRIEND!*