



TWELVE DAYS OF CHRISTMAS

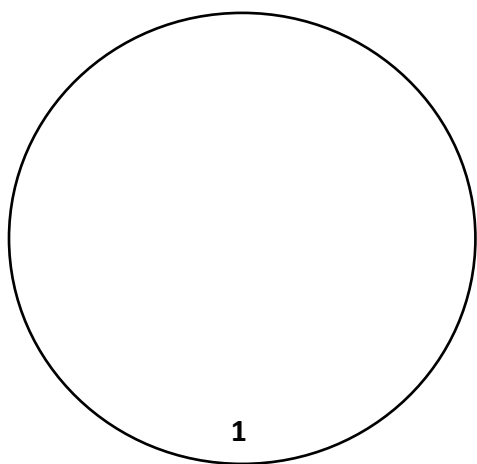
THE MEANING BEHIND THE SONG

The "true love" mentioned in each stanza does not refer to an earthly suitor, but to Almighty God. The "me" to whom the gifts are presented refers to any baptized Catholic. The purpose of the repetition is not only for the sake of pedagogy, but also emphasizes God's continual renewal of His gifts to mankind.

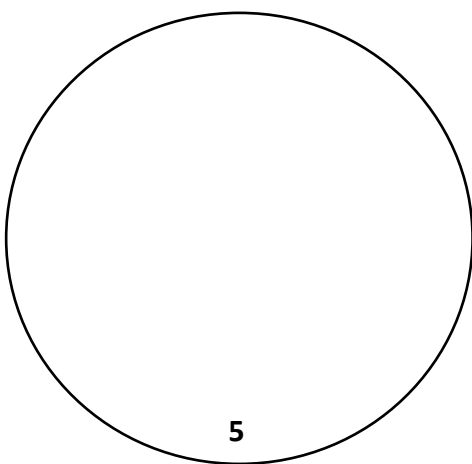
1. The partridge in a pear tree is **Christ**. In nature, a mother partridge will feign injury to lure predators away from her defenseless nestlings. In the same way, our Lord protects us, vulnerable human beings, from Satan. The pear tree symbolizes the **salvation** of mankind, just as the apple tree symbolizes Adam and Eve's Fall from Grace.
2. Two turtle doves represent the **Old and New Testaments**. Also, Jewish couples of modest income offered two turtle doves instead of the customary lamb as a sacrifice to God when they presented their newborn child in the Temple. Interestingly, our Blessed Mother Mary and St. Joseph offered a **sacrifice** of two turtle doves for the presentation of our Lord (cf. Luke 2:22-24).
3. Known for their beauty and rarity, the three French hens signify both the **gifts** of the Magi (gold, frankincense, myrrh), and the three theological **virtues** of faith, hope, and charity.
4. The four calling birds are associated with both the four evangelists and their **gospels**, Saints Matthew, Mark, Luke, John; and the four major **prophets**, Isaiah, Jeremiah, Ezekiel, Daniel.
5. Five golden rings has a two-fold significance. A ring, or a circle, has no beginning or end but is continuous. Thereby, the ring reminds us of both **God's eternity**, His permanent, faithful, and continuous **love** for us and the circle of faith God's love for us, our love for Him, and our love for our neighbors. The number five also signifies the first five books of the Old Testament the **Pentateuch** or Torah (the books of law for the Jewish people): Genesis, Exodus, Leviticus, Numbers, Deuteronomy.
6. The six geese a-laying represent the six days of **creative work** recounted in Genesis.
7. In Judaism, seven was a number of **perfection**. The seven swans a-swimming continues the Genesis theme, reminding us that God's plan included not just the six days of creating but also the seventh **day of rest**; we in turn must not forget to make Sunday a holy day by worshipping God at Mass, spending time with our loved ones, and relaxing. Moreover, the seven swans a-swimming refers to:
 - The seven **gifts of the Holy Spirit**: Wisdom, Understanding, Counsel, Fortitude, Knowledge, Piety, and Fear of the Lord.
 - The seven **corporal works of mercy**: Feed the hungry, Give drink to the thirsty, Clothe the naked. Shelter the homeless. Visit the sick, Visit the imprisoned, Bury the dead.
 - The seven **spiritual works of mercy**: Counsel the doubtful, Instruct the ignorant, Admonish the sinner, Comfort the sorrowful, Forgive all injuries, Bear wrongs patiently, Pray for the living and the dead, and
 - The **seven deadly sins**: Lust, Gluttony, Greed, Sloth, Wrath, Envy, Pride.

8. The eight maids a-milking signifies the eight **beatitudes** (and, at that time in our Church, the eight times during the year prescribed for the faithful to receive Holy Communion).
- Blessed are the poor in spirit, for theirs is the kingdom of heaven.
 - Blessed are those who mourn, for they shall be comforted.
 - Blessed are the meek, for they shall inherit the earth.
 - Blessed are those who hunger and thirst for righteousness, for they shall be satisfied.
 - Blessed are the merciful, for they shall obtain mercy.
 - Blessed are the pure in heart, for they shall see God.
 - Blessed are the peacemakers, for they shall be called children of God.
 - Blessed are those who are persecuted for the sake of righteousness, for theirs is the kingdom of heaven.
9. The nine ladies dancing are the nine **fruits of the Holy Spirit**: Love, Joy, Peace, Patience, Kindness, Generosity, Faithfulness, Gentleness, and Self-Control, and the nine **choirs of angels**: Seraphim, Cherubim, Thrones, Dominions, Virtues, Powers, Archangels, Principalities, Angels.
10. The **Ten Commandments** are represented by the ten lords a-leaping.
1. I am the Lord your God: You shall not have strange gods before me.
 2. You shall not take the name of the Lord God in vain.
 3. Remember to keep holy the Lord's day.
 4. Honor your father and your mother.
 5. You shall not kill.
 6. You shall not commit adultery.
 7. You shall not steal.
 8. You shall not bear false witness against your neighbor.
 9. You shall not covet your neighbor's wife.
 10. You shall not covet your neighbor's goods.
11. Eleven pipers piping are the eleven faithful **apostles** at the time of the resurrection and ascension: Peter, Andrew, James the Elder, John, Philip, Bartholomew, Matthew, Thomas, James the Younger, Simon, and Jude.
12. Finally, the number twelve for the Jewish people represented completion and fullness. Therefore, the twelve drummers drumming are the twelve minor **prophets**, the twelve **precepts** of the Apostles Creed (still the structure of the first part of the Catechism), the twelve **apostles** (particularly the original 11 plus St. Matthias who replaced Judas), and the twelve **tribes** of Israel. Twelve Points of Doctrine in the Apostles' Creed:
- I believe in God, the Father almighty, creator of heaven and earth.
 - I believe in Jesus Christ, his only Son, our Lord.
 - He was conceived by the power of the Holy Spirit and born of the virgin Mary.
 - He suffered under Pontius Pilate, was crucified, died, and was buried. He descended into hell.
 - On the third day he rose again. He ascended into heaven, and is seated at the right hand of the Father.
 - He will come again to judge the living and the dead.
 - I believe in the Holy Spirit,
 - the holy catholic Church,
 - the communion of saints,
 - the forgiveness of sins,
 - the resurrection of the body,
 - and life everlasting. Amen.

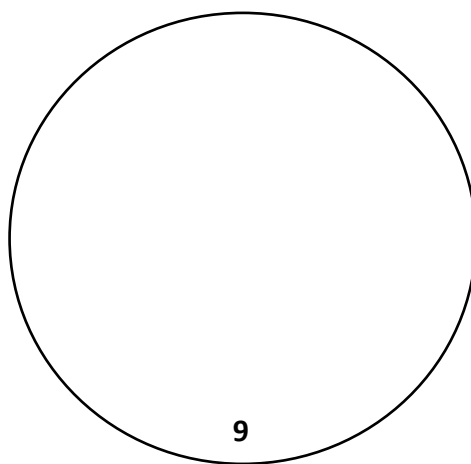
School vacation project! Print this page on card stock (or print on regular paper and then glue the page to card stock). Draw a picture for each one of the 12 Days of Christmas and cut out the circles. Poke a hole at the top of each one and tie a 8' piece of ribbon through the hole. You now have 12 new homemade ornaments to hang on the tree next year!



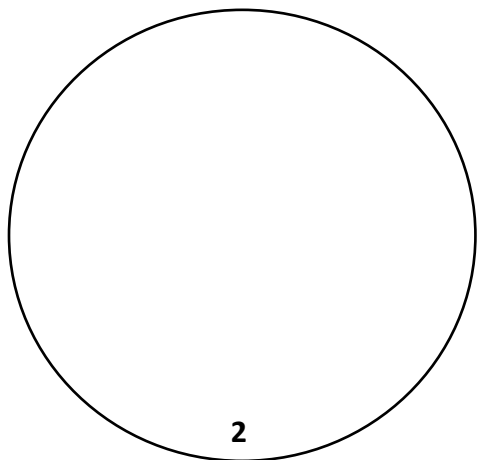
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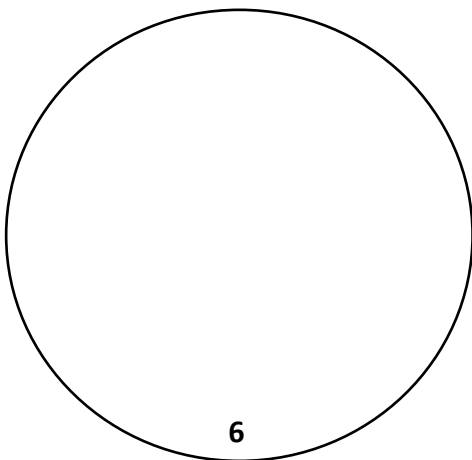
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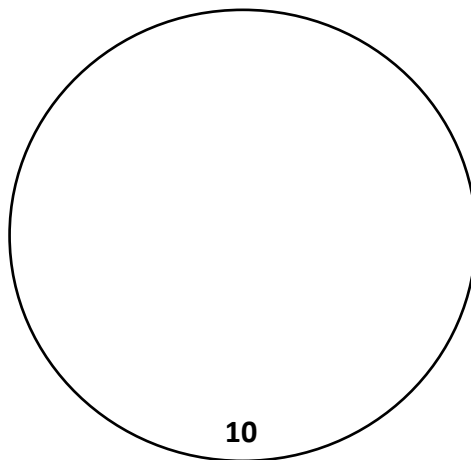
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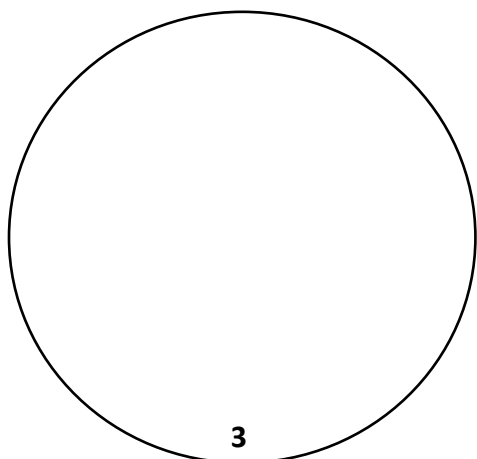
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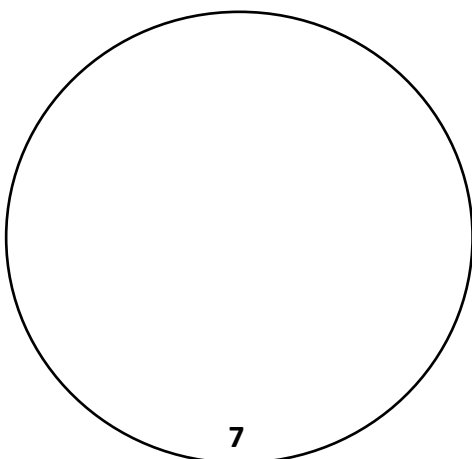
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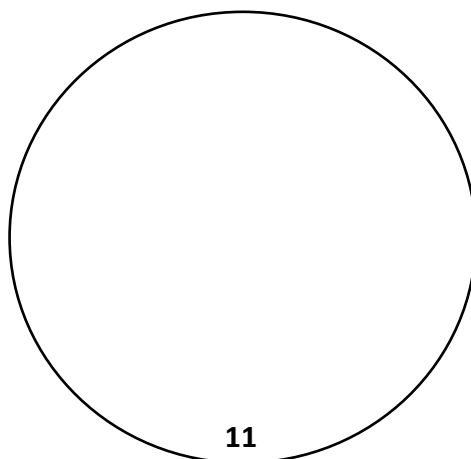
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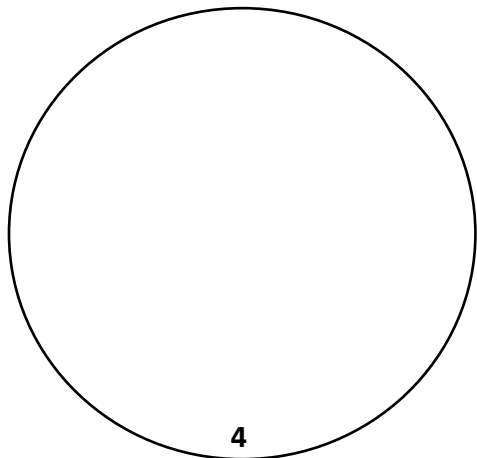
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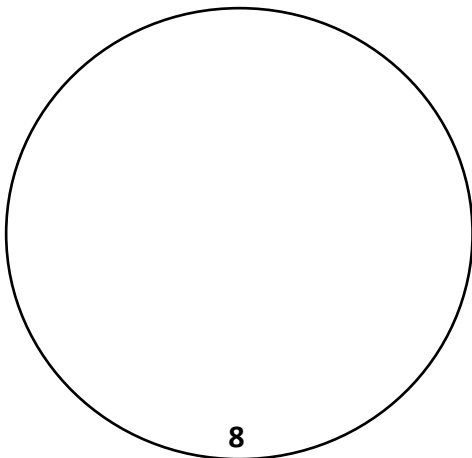
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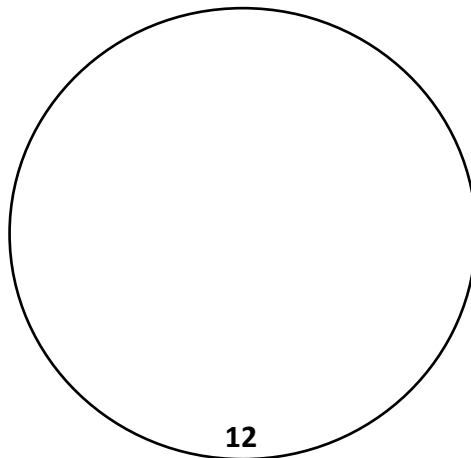
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