

First Church
First United Methodist Church of Seattle

The Twelve Days of

Christmas

December 25 - January 6

**A daily calendar of traditions, reflections,
and activities.**

1

The First Day of Christmas

In those days a decree went out from Emperor Augustus that all the world should be registered. This was the first registration and was taken while Quirinius was governor of Syria. All went to their own towns to be registered. Joseph also went from the town of Nazareth in Galilee to Judea, to the city of David called Bethlehem, because he was descended from the house and family of David. He went to be registered with Mary, to whom he was engaged and who was expecting a child. While they were there, the time came for her to deliver her child. And she gave birth to her firstborn son and wrapped him in bands of cloth, and laid him in a manger, because there was no place for them in the inn.

In that region there were shepherds living in the fields, keeping watch over their flock by night. Then an angel of the Lord stood before them, and the glory of the Lord shone around them, and they were terrified. But the angel said to them, "Do not be afraid; for see—I am bringing you good news of great joy for all the people: to you is born this day in the city of David a Savior, who is the Messiah, the Lord. This will be a sign for you: you will find a child wrapped in bands of cloth and lying in a manger." And suddenly there was with the angel a multitude of the heavenly host, praising God and saying,

*"Glory to God in the highest heaven,
and on earth peace among those whom he favors!"*

When the angels had left them and gone into heaven, the shepherds said to one another, "Let us go now to Bethlehem and see this thing that has taken place, which the Lord has made known to us." So they went with haste and found Mary and Joseph, and the child lying in the manger. When they saw this, they made known what had been told them about this child; and all who heard it were amazed at what the shepherds told them. But Mary treasured all these words and pondered them in her heart. The shepherds returned, glorifying and praising God for all they had heard and seen, as it had been told them.

Luke 2:1-20 (NRSV)

For Prayer and Reflection:

Christmas Day is a celebration of how much God loves us. Take a few moments out from the busyness of the day to give thanks to God for sending Jesus into the world.

Traditions of the Season:

Each family has its own special Christmas traditions. While our Christmas celebrations might be different this year, take time as a family to talk about your favorite Christmas traditions. Parents should share their favorite Christmas traditions growing up. Ask grandparents and other family members and friends about their Christmas traditions. Are there any new Christmas traditions your family might want to start?

Today at Home:

Read the Christmas Story at the dinner table and light the Christ Candle in your Advent Wreath. Continue to light the Advent Wreath every day during the Twelve Days. Begin the Wise Men's journey toward your family's creche with them arriving on the Twelfth Night. Take time to relax and experience the joy of Christmas.



The Second Day of Christmas



Stephen, full of grace and power, did great wonders and signs among the people. Then some of those who belonged to the synagogue of the Freedmen (as it was called), Cyrenians, Alexandrians, and others of those from Cilicia and Asia, stood up and argued with Stephen. But they could not withstand the wisdom and the Spirit with which he spoke. Then they secretly instigated some men to say, "We have heard him speak blasphemous words against Moses and God." They stirred up the people as well as the elders and the scribes; then they suddenly confronted him, seized him, and brought him before the council. They set up false witnesses who said, "This man never stops saying things against this holy place and the law; for we have heard him say that this Jesus of Nazareth will destroy this place and will change the customs that Moses handed on to us." And all who sat in the council looked intently at him, and they saw that his face was like the face of an angel.

Acts 6:8-8:1 (NRSV)

For Prayer and Reflection:

The joy of Christmas is always in stark contrast to what is happening in the world. That may seem especially true this year. But Jesus is not found apart from the sorrows of the world, but in the midst of them. Reflect on the injustices that surround us. Ask God to give you vision to see the injustices around you each day and the courage to act on your vision.

**St. Stephen's Day (Boxing Day)****Traditions of the Season:**

Since St. Stephen was responsible for caring for the poor, St. Stephen's Day is associated with giving food, clothes, or money to those in need. In earlier times alms boxes were passed around in St. Stephen's name – hence the name, Boxing Day.

Today at Home:

As a family, make a box in St. Stephen's honor and place it beside your Christmas tree. Over the next week, take time to gather items you can donate. Pray over the items before dropping them off for donation.

3

The Third Day of Christmas

Beloved, let us love one another, because love is from God; everyone who loves is born of God and knows God. Whoever does not love does not know God, for God is love. 9 God's love was revealed among us in this way: God sent his only Son into the world so that we might live through him. In this is love, not that we loved God but that he loved us and sent his Son to be the atoning sacrifice for our sins. Beloved, since God loved us so much, we also ought to love one another. No one has ever seen God; if we love one another, God lives in us, and his love is perfected in us.

By this we know that we abide in him and he in us, because he has given us of his Spirit. And we have seen and do testify that the Father has sent his Son as the Savior of the world. God abides in those who confess that Jesus is the Son of God, and they abide in God. So we have known and believe the love that God has for us.

God is love, and those who abide in love abide in God, and God abides in them. Love has been perfected among us in this: that we may have boldness on the day of judgment, because as he is, so are we in this world. There is no fear in love, but perfect love casts out fear; for fear has to do with punishment, and whoever fears has not reached perfection in love. We love because he first loved us. Those who say, "I love God," and hate their brothers or sisters, are liars; for those who do not love a brother or sister whom they have seen, cannot love God whom they have not seen. The commandment we have from him is this: those who love God must love their brothers and sisters also.

1 John 4:7-21 (NRSV)



St. John's Day

For Prayer and Reflection:

St. John's Day remembers the commandment found in John's Gospel to love others as Christ loves us. John, sometimes called the apostle of love, wrote and preached about the good news and the love of Jesus. St. John's Day reminds us to "Go Tell It On the Mountain!" To follow Jesus is to walk in love. Pray that you might show God's love to those all around you.

Traditions of the Season:

St. John was the only Apostle who did not suffer martyrdom, though several attempts were made on his life. One of those involved him being given a glass of wine that had been poisoned. Legend says that the saint suffered no harm because he blessed the wine before he drank it. It is in honor of this legend that the drinking of wine or punch became a popular custom on this day. Christians would toast each other with "Drink the love of St. John."

Today at Home:

Make a punch and pour it into fancy goblets or glasses. At dinner toast each family member with the words: "I drink you the love of St. John." Have each family member respond: "Where there is love, there is God."

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The Fourth Day of Christmas

When Herod saw that he had been tricked by the wise men, he was infuriated, and he sent and killed all the children in and around Bethlehem who were two years old or under, according to the time that he had learned from the wise men.

Matthew 2:16 (NRSV)

For Prayer and Reflection:

Holy Innocents Day refers to King Herod's order found in Matthew 2:16. This day stands in sharp contrast with the joy of the season. It is a day to remember children who suffer throughout the world and to give thanks for children everywhere.

Traditions of the Season:

On this day, it is common to give children special privileges. For example, choosing what the family has for dinner or dessert or picking a game for the family to play together. After lighting the Advent wreath, consider surrounding the Christ Candle with smaller candles for each child in the family. Let each child light their candle from the flame of the Christ candle.

Today at Home:

Today offer prayers for the children of the world. Give thanks for all children.



5

The Fifth Day of Christmas

And suddenly there was with the angel a multitude of the heavenly host, praising God and saying,

*"Glory to God in the highest heaven,
and on earth peace among those whom he favors!"*

Luke 2:13 - 14 (NRSV)

*Make a joyful noise to the Lord, all the earth;
break forth into joyous song and sing praises.*

*Sing praises to the Lord with the lyre,
with the lyre and the sound of melody.*

*With trumpets and the sound of the horn
make a joyful noise before the King, the Lord.*

Psalm 98:4-6 (NRSV)

For Prayer and Reflection:

Music, like food, decorations, parties and cards, are a part of Christmas. We want to pull out all the stops in our celebration. Affirming and delighting in our joy echoes God's own joy in the delight of creation. How are you celebrating the joy of Christmas during these Twelve Days? How are you sharing it with others?

Traditions of the Season:

One of the best-loved Christmas songs during this season is "The Twelve Days of Christmas." Some have suggested it is an "underground catechism" with each of the numbers related to the faith. An interesting story, whether or not it is true.

1. My true love (God), Partridge (Jesus), Pear tree (apple tree in the Garden of Eden)
2. Turtle doves – Old and New Testaments
3. French hens – Faith, Hope, and Charity
4. Calling birds – 4 Gospels
5. Gold rings – The First 5 Books of the Old Testament (The Pentateuch)
6. Geese a-laying – 6 Days of Creation
7. Swans a-swimming – 7 Gifts of the Holy Spirit
8. Maids of milking – 8 Beatitudes
9. Ladies dancing – 9 Fruits of the Spirit (Gal. 5:23)
10. Lords a-leaping – 10 Commandments
11. Pipers piping – 11 Faithful Disciples
12. Drummers drumming – 12 Points of Belief in the Apostles Creed

Today at Home:

Sing and play lots of Christmas music, including "The Twelve Days of Christmas."

6

The Sixth Day of Christmas

*Then the glory of the Lord shall be revealed,
and all people shall see it together,
for the mouth of the Lord has spoken."*

Isaiah 40:5 (NRSV)

After this I looked, and there was a great multitude that no one could count, from every nation, from all tribes and peoples and languages, standing before the throne and before the Lamb, robed in white, with palm branches in their hands. They cried out in a loud voice, saying,

"Salvation belongs to our God who is seated on the throne, and to the Lamb!"

Revelation 7:9-10 (NRSV)

For Prayer and Reflection:

Christmas truly is "Joy to the World!" Christians throughout the world commemorate the birth of Christ in countless ways. Maybe even your own celebrations reflect part of your ethnic or cultural background. Reflect on which of your family traditions most speak of this joy to you. Pray for other Christians around the world with whom we share the common bond and joy of Christ's birth.

**Traditions of the Season:**

Learn about Christmas customs in other countries. Which of your own customs mirror some of those? One of the most widespread customs is the Christmas Tree. The story says that Martin Luther was walking home from church one lovely starry evening and was so inspired by the scene around him that he wanted to share it with his family. He cut down a small evergreen tree, brought it home and decorated it with tiny candles. The candles came to symbolize the light of Christ and the evergreen tree represented eternal life. Today the Christmas tree is still a source of enchantment for young and old alike.

Today at Home:

Take a drive or a walk around the neighborhood and enjoy the decorations and lights of the season.

7

The Seventh Day of Christmas

Then Jesus came from Galilee to John at the Jordan, to be baptized by him. John would have prevented him, saying, "I need to be baptized by you, and do you come to me?" But Jesus answered him, "Let it be so now; for it is proper for us in this way to fulfill all righteousness." Then he consented. And when Jesus had been baptized, just as he came up from the water, suddenly the heavens were opened to him and he saw the Spirit of God descending like a dove and alighting on him. And a voice from heaven said, "This is my Son, the Beloved, with whom I am well pleased."

Matthew 3:13-17 (NRSV)

**For Prayer and Reflection:**

Human beings have a need to review their lives, to look at how they might make corrections where they have failed, and to make new beginnings. Christmas allows us to see, in the midst of time what is unchanging and eternal. Today is a day to ask, "Who am I and where am I going?" What hopes or dreams do you have for the new year?

Traditions of the Season:

As a new year begins, many congregations around the world participate in the Methodist Covenant Service, a practice that dates back to the movement's founder, John Wesley. On many occasions Wesley urged that an opportunity be provided for Methodist to make, or renew, their "covenant" with God. His first formal covenant service was held in London in 1755.

Today at Home:

Make plans to attend John Wesley's Covenant Service at our church this coming Sunday. The coming Epiphany Season will allow us to reflect on the covenant we make at baptism. Do you remember the promises you made at your own baptism? Do you celebrate the baptismal anniversaries of family members?



The Eighth Day of Christmas

When the angels had left them and gone into heaven, the shepherds said to one another, "Let us go now to Bethlehem and see this thing that has taken place, which the Lord has made known to us." So they went with haste and found Mary and Joseph, and the child lying in the manger. When they saw this, they made known what had been told them about this child; and all who heard it were amazed at what the shepherds told them. But Mary treasured all these words and pondered them in her heart. The shepherds returned, glorifying and praising God for all they had heard and seen, as it had been told them.

After eight days had passed, it was time to circumcise the child; and he was called Jesus, the name given by the angel before he was conceived in the womb.

Luke 2:15-21 (NRSV)

For Prayer and Reflection:

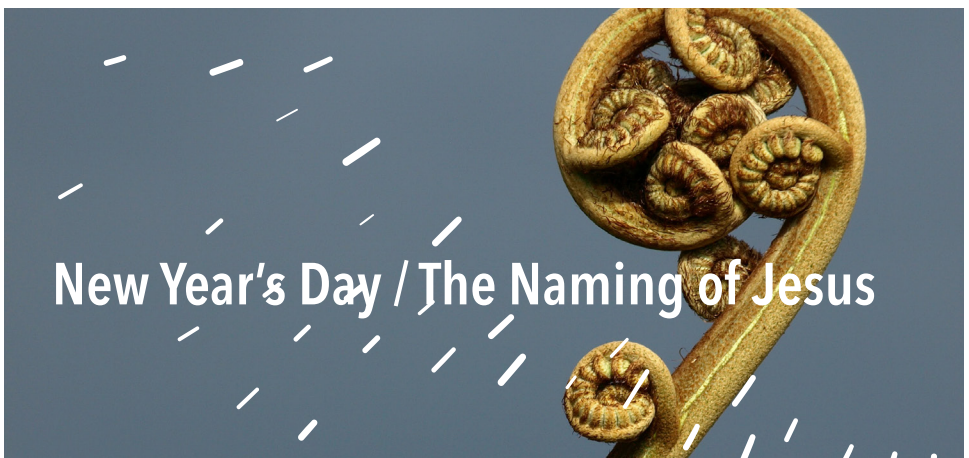
January 1 is New Year's Day and is the day when we raise the question of what we want the new year to be for us. We may even put our desires into resolutions. As Christians we believe that our own lives are always capable of becoming a new creation. Today is also traditionally the day which commemorates The Naming of Jesus. It can be a day to reflect on the meaning of Jesus in our own lives. Perhaps you will want to use this day to think about any spiritual practices (like prayer, meditation, Bible reading, etc.) you would like to commit to during the coming year.

Traditions of the Season:

The Advent carol "O Come, O Come, Emmanuel" contains the traditional names used to refer to The Messiah. These are called the "O-antiphons" because they all begin with "O": O Wisdom, O Adonai, O Root of Jesse, O Key of David, O Dayspring, O King of the Nations, O Emmanuel. Which name or what image most speaks to you?

Today at Home:

Think about the New Year's Resolutions (including spiritual ones) you would like to make individually. Talk tonight at the dinner table about what resolutions you will make as a family.



The Ninth Day of Christmas



In the beginning was the Word, and the Word was with God, and the Word was God. He was in the beginning with God. All things came into being through him, and without him not one thing came into being. What has come into being in him was life, and the life was the light of all people. The light shines in the darkness, and the darkness did not overcome it.

There was a man sent from God, whose name was John. He came as a witness to testify to the light, so that all might believe through him. He himself was not the light, but he came to testify to the light. The true light, which enlightens everyone, was coming into the world.

He was in the world, and the world came into being through him; yet the world did not know him. He came to what was his own, and his own people did not accept him. But to all who received him, who believed in his name, he gave power to become children of God, who were born, not of blood or of the will of the flesh or of the will of man, but of God.

And the Word became flesh and lived among us, and we have seen his glory, the glory as of a father's only son, full of grace and truth. (John testified to him and cried out, "This was he of whom I said, 'He who comes after me ranks ahead of me because he was before me.'") From his fullness we have all received, grace upon grace. The law indeed was given through Moses; grace and truth came through Jesus Christ. No one has ever seen God. It is God the only Son, who is close to the Father's heart, who has made him known.

John 1:1-18 (NRSV)

For Prayer and Reflection:

Christmas celebrates far more than a birthday. The Story of Christmas is ultimately tied to The Story of Easter. If we focus only on the baby Jesus separate from the adult Jesus, the story is in danger of being only a sweet and sentimental tale. It's hard to believe, but we will be "marked with ashes" in a little over a month. What does the statement "The wood of the crib becomes the wood of the cross" mean to you?

**Traditions of the Season:**

The Legend of the Holly says that when the soldiers pressed the crown into Jesus' brow, the white berries on the holly turned a brilliant red. The use of holly in wreaths and other decorations at Christmas foreshadows the suffering and death of Jesus.

Today at Home:

Sing or read the lovely Christmas carol "The Holly and the Ivy."

10

The Tenth Day of Christmas

He said also to the one who had invited him, "When you give a luncheon or a dinner, do not invite your friends or your brothers or your relatives or rich neighbors, in case they may invite you in return, and you would be repaid. But when you give a banquet, invite the poor, the crippled, the lame, and the blind. And you will be blessed, because they cannot repay you, for you will be repaid at the resurrection of the righteous."

Luke 14:12-14 (NRSV)



For Prayer and Reflection:

Christmastide is meant for hospitality, gift-giving, caroling, and storytelling. This is the time to relax and experience the joy after weeks of preparation. Reflect on the old proverb that says "A guest in the home is Christ in the home." If you saw all those you came in contact with as Christ, what difference might it make in your life?

Traditions of the Season:

One of the famous stories of the season is the story of Befana. Her name comes from the word *Epiphany*. Befana was invited to join the Magi in their search for the newborn Christ, but she was too busy. The legend says that she still looks for the Christ child, seeing Christ in everyone she meets.

Today at Home:

Find the story of Befana at the library or on the internet. A particularly lovely version is Tomie DePaola's *The Legend of Old Befana*. Begin to prepare for your Twelfth Night Celebration. Maybe children would want to enact this story that night.

11

The Eleventh Day of Christmas

*"Blessed be the Lord God of Israel,
for he has looked favorably on his people and redeemed them.
He has raised up a mighty savior for us
in the house of his servant David,
as he spoke through the mouth of his holy prophets from of old,
that we would be saved from our enemies and from the hand of all
who hate us.
Thus he has shown the mercy promised to our ancestors,
and has remembered his holy covenant,
the oath that he swore to our ancestor Abraham,
to grant us that we, being rescued from the hands of our enemies,
might serve him without fear, in holiness and righteousness
before him all our days."*

Luke 1:68-75 (NRSV)

For Prayer and Reflection:

As we near the end of the season, this is a good day to reflect on how we have kept the Advent and Christmas Seasons. Was this year's "waiting" (the four weeks of Advent) and this year's "coming" (The Twelve Days of Christmas) meaningful for you at a deep level? Why or why not? What would you like to do differently next year? What would you keep the same?

Traditions of the Season:

In some households when the Christmas tree is taken down the trunk is sawed off and becomes a holder for candles marking the five Sundays of Lent. It is similar to the Advent wreath, but the candles are all lighted at the beginning and then put out one by one culminating in the darkness of Holy Week. This can be another way to connect "the wood of the crib to the wood of the cross." It is traditional to take down the Christmas tree on Epiphany (January 6).

Today at Home:

Use the reflection above with the whole family or with friends. Sometimes we are surprised by what our children find most meaningful. Write down what you discovered about your celebration this year. Bring it out again on the first Sunday of Advent next year to set the tone for your or your family's coming celebration.



12

The Twelfth Day of Christmas

In the time of King Herod, after Jesus was born in Bethlehem of Judea, wise men from the East came to Jerusalem, asking, "Where is the child who has been born king of the Jews? For we observed his star at its rising, and have come to pay him homage." When King Herod heard this, he was frightened, and all Jerusalem with him; and calling together all the chief priests and scribes of the people, he inquired of them where the Messiah was to be born. They told him, "In Bethlehem of Judea; for so it has been written by the prophet:

*'And you, Bethlehem, in the land of Judah,
are by no means least among the rulers of Judah;
for from you shall come a ruler
who is to shepherd my people Israel.'"*

Then Herod secretly called for the wise men and learned from them the exact time when the star had appeared. Then he sent them to Bethlehem, saying, "Go and search diligently for the child; and when you have found him, bring me word so that I may also go and pay him homage." When they had heard the king, they set out; and there, ahead of them, went the star that they had seen at its rising, until it stopped over the place where the child was. When they saw that the star had stopped, they were overwhelmed with joy. On entering the house, they saw the child with Mary his mother; and they knelt down and paid him homage. Then, opening their treasure chests, they offered him gifts of gold, frankincense, and myrrh. And having been warned in a dream not to return to Herod, they left for their own country by another road.

Matthew 2:1-12 (NRSV)

For Prayer and Reflection:

The magi were among the first of many who would come seeking Jesus. If you had been a contemporary of Jesus, do you think you might have been among those who sought him? Why or why not? Reflect upon what you are most deeply seeking at this time in your life. Where might you find it?

**Traditions of the Season:**

Today, at last, the Magi should arrive at your crèche if you have been inching them ever closer each day, and the nativity scene becomes complete. Tonight (Twelfth Night) marks the end of the Christmas season.

Today at Home:

Perhaps you will want to invite friends and family to a virtual Twelfth Night Party. You will find many Twelfth Night traditions in books from the library or on the internet. (You might find New Orleans' Epiphany parties which culminate in "Fat Tuesday" to be especially interesting.) One tradition is baking a bean or coin into a "King's Cake" with the person finding it being crowned the Twelfth Night King. You might also hold a virtual tree un-decorating party. Play or sing Christmas carols for the last time of the season.

THE FEAST OF THE EPIPHANY

*Arise, shine; for your light has come,
and the glory of the Lord has risen upon you.
For darkness shall cover the earth,
and thick darkness the peoples;
but the Lord will arise upon you,
and his glory will appear over you.
Nations shall come to your light,
and kings to the brightness of your dawn.
Lift up your eyes and look around;
they all gather together, they come to you;
your sons shall come from far away,
and your daughters shall be carried on their nurses' arms.
Then you shall see and be radiant;
your heart shall thrill and rejoice,
because the abundance of the sea shall be brought to you,
the wealth of the nations shall come to you.
A multitude of camels shall cover you,
the young camels of Midian and Ephah;
all those from Sheba shall come.
They shall bring gold and frankincense,
and shall proclaim the praise of the Lord.
For the coastlands shall wait for me,
the ships of Tarshish first,
to bring your children from far away,
their silver and gold with them,
for the name of the Lord your God,
and for the Holy One of Israel,
because he has glorified you.*



For Prayer and Reflection:

Isaiah declares that God's intention is to bless all nations. What does this reveal about God's nature? How might you reflect this image of God in your own life more fully?

Traditions of the Season:

A tradition associated with Epiphany is the blessing of homes. Using chalk, mark the inside or outside of the main door of the house with the initials of the traditional names of the Magi (Melchior, Balthazar, and Caspar) and a code of the current year connected with crosses: 20+C+M+B+20. (Another explanation of the initials (C-M-B) are the first letters of the blessing: *Christus mansionem benedicat*: Latin, "May Christ bless the house.")

Today at Home:

Mark your doorway as described above, followed by the praying of this prayer: "Bless, O God, this household and family and allow all of us who live here to find in it a shelter of peace and love. Inspire each of us in this family to develop our individual talents and to contribute for the benefit of the whole. Make our house a haven for us all and a place of warmth and caring for all our friends who visit us. Enlighten us with the brilliance of your Epiphany star so that as we leave house and family to go out into the world, we might clearly see our way to you and discover you in our work and play. This we ask in Christ's name, Amen."

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