

The Lost Holiday in the West:

Epiphany, December 25th, and the Twelve Days of Christmas

D. Gene Williams Jr., PhD

Defend the Word Ministries

NorthPointe Church

ABSTRACT

Epiphany, celebrated on January 6th, historically marked the culmination of the Twelve Days of Christmas and commemorated key events in Christian tradition, including the visit of the Magi and the baptism of Jesus. Despite its deep theological and cultural significance, Epiphany has become a “*lost holiday*” in much of the Western world, overshadowed by the widespread celebration of Christmas on December 25th. This paper examines the origins of December 25 as the chosen date for Christmas, exploring early Christian efforts to align the holiday with existing pagan festivals and its theological implications.¹ It then investigates how the Twelve Days of Christmas served as a bridge between Christmas and Epiphany, creating a liturgical rhythm that has largely been forgotten in contemporary culture. By analyzing historical, theological, and cultural shifts—including the impact of secularization and commercialization—this study highlights the diminishing role of Epiphany in the West. The paper also considers modern observances and the potential value of reinvigorating the celebration of Epiphany and the full Twelve Days of Christmas, offering insights into a more holistic understanding of the holiday season.

¹ Andrew McGowan, *Ancient Christian Devotion and the Establishment of Liturgical Seasons* (New York: Oxford University Press, 2014), 45–47.

I. INTRODUCTION

In the quiet streets of Seville, Spain, children eagerly await the arrival of the Three Wise Men on January 5th, known as “*La Cabalgata de Reyes*.” Dressed in regal attire, the Magi parade through the city, showering the crowds with candies and gifts, embodying the spirit of Epiphany.² Across the ocean, in New Orleans, the celebrations take a different form, marking the start of the Carnival season with King Cake—a delicious pastry adorned with vibrant purple, green, and gold sugar. These traditions capture the joy and wonder that once characterized the conclusion of the Christmas season, highlighting a celebration that, for many in the West, has become a mere footnote to Christmas Day.³

The holiday season in the Western world is often synonymous with the celebration of Christmas on December 25, a day heavily associated with traditions of gift-giving, festive decorations, and family gatherings. Yet, beneath the glittering lights and the pervasive influence of modern consumerism lies a largely forgotten aspect of the Christian liturgical calendar: the feast of Epiphany. Celebrated on January 6, Epiphany historically marked the culmination of the Twelve Days of Christmas, commemorating the visit of the Magi to the infant Jesus and, in some traditions, His baptism in the Jordan River. Together, Christmas and Epiphany once formed a unified period of celebration,

² Juan García, *Tradiciones de España* (Madrid: Editorial Tradiciones, 2011), 67.

³ Mary Catherine Hilkert, *Liturgical Traditions Across the Atlantic* (Boston: Harvard Press, 2015), 110–112.

imbued with profound theological and cultural significance.⁴ For a companion paper, see my study *The Magi, Jeremiah, and Daniel*.⁵

While the widespread observance of December 25 as the day of Jesus' birth has become a given, the origins of this date have long intrigued scholars. One explanation suggests that early Christian leaders chose December 25 to align with Roman festivals like Sol Invictus or Saturnalia, thus providing a Christian alternative that emphasized Christ as the "*Light of the World*".⁶ However, understanding the choice of this date requires exploring not only its cultural context but also its theological foundations. This brings us to the Annunciation theory, which emphasizes religious symbolism and highlights how early Christians linked key events in salvation history to significant dates.⁷

Both theories—cultural alignment with pagan festivals and the theological symbolism of the Annunciation—are worth examining, as they offer complementary perspectives on the evolution of Christian liturgical practices. Exploring these theories provides a richer understanding of how the early Church developed traditions that shaped the rhythm of worship and celebration, with both theological and cultural factors influencing the observance of Christmas and Epiphany.⁸

⁴ John H. Bernard, *Theological Reflections on Early Christian Festivals* (London: Cambridge University Press, 1938), 156.

⁵ D. Gene Williams Jr. *The Magi, Jeremiah, and Daniel: Prophetic Connections Across Time*. Accessed January 2025. <https://trinitysem.academia.edu/GeneWilliamsJr>; <https://defendtheword.com/insights-and-studies.html>.

⁶ Susan K. Roll, *Toward the Origins of Christmas* (Leuven: Peeters, 1995), 89–91.

⁷ Thomas J. Talley, *The Origins of the Liturgical Year* (New York: Pueblo Publishing, 1986), 103.

⁸ Robert L. Wilken, *The First Thousand Years: A Global History of Christianity* (New Haven: Yale University Press, 2012), 134.

II. THE ANNUNCIATION THEORY

The Annunciation theory proposes that early Christians believed Jesus was conceived on March 25, the date of the Annunciation, when the angel Gabriel announced to Mary that she would bear the Son of God (Luke 1:26-38).⁹ This date was also thought to mark the creation of the world and, in early Christian thought, the crucifixion of Jesus. Calculating nine months from March 25 places Jesus' birth on December 25, demonstrating a deeper liturgical rhythm in early Christian observances.¹⁰

To support the Annunciation theory, writings from early Church Fathers and Christian scholars provide valuable insights into how early Christians connected significant dates in salvation history:

- A Tertullian of Carthage (c. 155–240 AD):** Known for linking theological concepts to salvation history, Tertullian emphasized the Incarnation's importance but did not explicitly mention March 25. His influence on early Christian thought regarding the timing of key events remains noteworthy.¹¹
- B Hippolytus of Rome (c. 170–235 AD):** In *Commentary on Daniel*, Hippolytus references March 25 as the date of both the world's creation and Christ's conception, highlighting the divine plan's continuity.¹²

⁹ McGowan, *Ancient Christian Devotion*, 76.

¹⁰ Wilken, *The First Thousand Years*, 147.

¹¹ Tertullian, *On the Flesh of Christ*, trans. Alexander Roberts and James Donaldson, in *Ante-Nicene Fathers*, ed. Philip Schaff (Buffalo, NY: Christian Literature Publishing Co., 1885), 5.

¹² Hippolytus, *Commentary on Daniel*, trans. Richard J. Deferrari (Washington, DC: Catholic University of America Press, 2000), 4.23.

- C Julius Africanus (c. 160–240 AD):** This early Christian historian’s *Chronographiai* calculates March 25 as the Annunciation date, linking Jesus’ conception to this significant moment in salvation history.¹³
- D St. Augustine of Hippo (354–430 AD):** Augustine reflects on the symbolism of dates, discussing how holy figures’ lives were seen as complete cycles. His work *On the Trinity* supports the tradition of connecting Jesus’ conception and crucifixion to March 25.¹⁴
- E St. John Chrysostom (c. 347–407 AD):** Although primarily defending December 25 as Jesus’ birth date, Chrysostom emphasized linking significant events in Jesus’ life, reflecting early Christians’ view of the Incarnation’s importance.¹⁵
- F The De Pascha Computus (c. 243 AD):** This anonymous North African text explicitly mentions March 25 as both the Annunciation and crucifixion date, tying these events to the spring equinox and underscoring their theological significance.¹⁶

These early Church Fathers and texts help establish the theological and historical basis for the Annunciation theory, showing that early Christians indeed considered March 25 a significant date that tied together the Incarnation, the crucifixion, and even the

¹³ Julius Africanus, *Chronographiai*, as cited in Talley, *The Origins of the Liturgical Year*, 103.

¹⁴ Augustine, *On the Trinity*, trans. Stephen McKenna (Washington, DC: Catholic University of America Press, 1963), IV.5.

¹⁵ John Chrysostom, *Homilies on the Gospel of Matthew*, trans. George Prevost, in *Nicene and Post-Nicene Fathers*, ed. Philip Schaff (Peabody, MA: Hendrickson Publishers, 1994), 14.

¹⁶ *De Pascha Computus*, 8, trans. William Rusch, in *The Fathers of the Church: A New Translation* (Washington, DC: Catholic University of America Press, 1979).

creation of the world. This liturgical and theological tradition underscores the interconnectedness of key events in salvation history.¹⁷

It is important to recognize that references to specific dates, such as March 25 or December 25, by early Apostolic Fathers, Early Church Fathers, and Ecclesiastical Writers were based on the Julian calendar, which was in use during their time. The Gregorian calendar, which corrected inaccuracies in the Julian system and is now the standard in most of the world, was not introduced until AD 1582. As such, the associations these early Christians made with March 25 should be understood within the framework of the Julian calendar, reflecting their efforts to align theological events with a structured understanding of time.¹⁸

Apostolic Fathers

The Apostolic Fathers were early Christian theologians who are believed to have had direct contact with the apostles or were significantly influenced by them. They represent the generation immediately following the apostles.

A Examples: Clement of Rome, Ignatius of Antioch, Polycarp of Smyrna, and the author of the Didache.¹⁹

¹⁷ Talley, *The Origins of the Liturgical Year*, 120.

¹⁸ The Julian calendar, established by Julius Caesar in 45 BC, was the predominant calendar system until Pope Gregory XIII introduced the Gregorian calendar in 1582 to address discrepancies in the calculation of leap years and the equinoxes. For further details on the transition from the Julian to Gregorian calendar and its impact on historical date references, see E.G. Richards, *Mapping Time: The Calendar and Its History* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1998), 201–205.

¹⁹ J.B. Lightfoot and J.R. Harmer, *The Apostolic Fathers* (Grand Rapids: Baker Academic, 1989), 45–46.

B **Significance:** Their writings help bridge the New Testament teachings with the practices and theology of the early Church.²⁰

Early Church Fathers (Patristic Fathers)

The Early Church Fathers are theologians and bishops from roughly the 2nd to 8th centuries whose writings shaped Christian doctrine and theology. They played significant roles in addressing heresies, developing orthodox beliefs, and establishing the theological foundation of the Church.²¹

The designation of the 8th century as the upper boundary for the era of the Early Church Fathers is tied to a few significant historical and theological events. By this time, the foundational doctrines of Christianity had largely been solidified, and the major ecumenical councils that established key theological definitions had taken place. Here's why the 8th century is considered a natural endpoint:

The Second Council of Nicaea in 787 AD marked the seventh and last of the ecumenical councils recognized by both the Eastern Orthodox and Roman Catholic Churches. These councils resolved many foundational debates, such as the nature of Christ, the Trinity, and the veneration of icons, cementing the theology of the Early Church.²²

The Patristic era officially comes to a close as the theological and ecclesiastical developments from the preceding centuries were integrated into a unified tradition. By

²⁰ Michael W. Holmes, *The Apostolic Fathers: Greek Texts and English Translations* (Grand Rapids: Baker Academic, 2007), 112–115.

²¹ J.N.D. Kelly, *Early Christian Doctrines*, rev. ed. (New York: Harper & Row, 1978), 23–25.

²² Henry R. Percival, ed., *The Seven Ecumenical Councils of the Undivided Church* (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1956), 307–310.

the 8th century, the focus shifted toward the consolidation of doctrines rather than the establishment of new theological principles.²³

The 8th century marks the transition to the Medieval Church era. During this period, figures like Charlemagne and the rise of the Carolingian Renaissance significantly influenced Western Christianity. Theological focus shifted to issues specific to the developing medieval context.²⁴

Thus, the Early Church Fathers are generally considered to span up to the 8th century because this time frame encompasses the key theological and ecclesiastical foundations that defined early Christianity.

Subcategories:

A Ante-Nicene Fathers (before the First Council of Nicaea in 325 AD): Justin Martyr, Irenaeus, Tertullian, Origen, and Hippolytus.²⁵

B Nicene and Post-Nicene Fathers (after the Council of Nicaea): Athanasius, Basil the Great, Gregory of Nazianzus, Augustine of Hippo, and John Chrysostom.²⁶

C Significance: They contributed to the development of key doctrines, such as the Trinity, Christology, and ecclesiology.²⁷

²³ Robert Louis Wilken, *The Spirit of Early Christian Thought* (New Haven: Yale University Press, 2003), 89–92.

²⁴ Peter Brown, *The Rise of Western Christendom*, 2nd ed. (Malden: Blackwell Publishing, 2003), 151–155.

²⁵ David W. Bercot, *A Dictionary of Early Christian Beliefs* (Peabody: Hendrickson Publishers, 1998), 78–80.

²⁶ Philip Schaff and Henry Wace, *Nicene and Post-Nicene Fathers*, series 1 & 2 (Peabody: Hendrickson Publishers, 1994), vol. 1, 241–243.

²⁷ Gerald Bray, *The Doctrine of God* (Downers Grove: InterVarsity Press, 1993), 56–59.

Ecclesiastical Writers (but not classified as Early Church Fathers)

This category includes influential Christian thinkers, philosophers, and theologians who may not be recognized as official Church Fathers but made significant contributions to Christian thought.

Examples:

- A Eusebius of Caesarea:** Known as the “*Father of Church History*,” Eusebius wrote the *Ecclesiastical History*, which provides an important account of early Christianity.²⁸
- B Clement of Alexandria:** An early Christian philosopher and theologian who greatly influenced Christian Platonism but is sometimes not classified among the central Church Fathers.²⁹
- C Origen:** Although immensely influential, Origen is occasionally excluded from the ranks of orthodox Church Fathers due to some of his controversial theological positions.³⁰
- D Other Terms:** These individuals might be referred to as Christian philosophers, theologians, or ecclesiastical writers.

Summary

- 1 Apostolic Fathers:** Earliest generation of Christian leaders connected to the apostles.

²⁸ Eusebius of Caesarea, *Ecclesiastical History*, trans. G.A. Williamson (London: Penguin Classics, 1965), 212–215.

²⁹ Clement of Alexandria, *Stromateis*, trans. John Ferguson (Washington: Catholic University of America Press, 1991), 134–137.

³⁰ Joseph W. Trigg, *Origen* (London: Routledge, 1998), 67–70.

- 2 **Early Church Fathers:** Theologians and bishops who shaped Christian doctrine and fought against heresies.
- 3 **Ecclesiastical Writers:** Influential figures in Christian history who may not fit into the traditional classification of Church Fathers but made significant theological or philosophical contributions.

II. HISTORICAL ORIGINS OF DECEMBER 25 AND THE ESTABLISHMENT OF CHRISTMAS

Understanding the origins of December 25 as the date for Christmas requires examining the interplay between early Christian traditions, theological reasoning, and the existing cultural and religious practices of the Roman Empire. While the Bible does not specify the date of Jesus' birth and early Christians initially did not emphasize celebrating it, December 25 was eventually chosen for reasons that extend beyond mere coincidence. One explanation involves a process of *inculturation*, wherein early Christians aligned the celebration of Jesus' birth with popular pagan festivals, such as *Sol Invictus* ("The Unconquered Sun") and the winter solstice.

These celebrations marked the rebirth of the sun and symbolized the victory of light over darkness. By associating Jesus' birth with *Sol Invictus*, Christians emphasized Jesus as the true "*Light of the World*" (John 8:12), bringing light and salvation to humanity. This alignment also facilitated the Christianization of Roman culture by presenting Christ as the fulfillment of humanity's longing for hope and renewal.³¹

³¹ Roll, *Toward the Origins of Christmas*, 89–91.

On the other hand, the Annunciation Theory provides a theological rationale: early Christians believed that Jesus was conceived on March 25, the date of the Annunciation, which, according to the concept of “*integral age*,” placed His birth exactly nine months later on December 25. Together, these cultural and theological influences shaped the selection of December 25, highlighting its dual significance in early Christian tradition.³²

Additionally, the festival of Saturnalia, which took place in late December, was a time of feasting, gift-giving, and general revelry. By placing the celebration of Jesus’ birth around the same time, Christians could offer a meaningful alternative to these popular festivities. This strategic alignment allowed early believers to reframe the cultural practices of joy and generosity in a Christian context, transforming them into a celebration of Christ’s coming.³³

However, the significance of December 25 cannot be fully appreciated without understanding its connection to the broader liturgical framework that includes Epiphany. The placement of Christmas was not merely about cultural alignment but also about establishing a liturgical rhythm that highlighted key moments in the story of Christ’s manifestation to the world. This leads to the significance of Epiphany, which complements Christmas by celebrating the revelation of Jesus to all nations.³⁴

³² Wilken, *The First Thousand Years*, 152.

³³ Roll, *Toward the Origins of Christmas*, 100.

³⁴ McGowan, *Ancient Christian Devotion*, 85.

III. ADVENT: THE SEASON OF ANTICIPATION

Before exploring the Twelve Days of Christmas and Epiphany, it is crucial to understand the season of Advent, which historically sets the stage for the Christmas celebration. Advent, derived from the Latin word *adventus* meaning “coming” or “arrival,” begins four Sundays before Christmas and marks a time of waiting and preparation for the birth of Jesus Christ and His future return in glory. The origins of Advent trace back to the early Church, with evidence of its observance as early as the fourth century. Initially, Advent was associated with a season of penitence and fasting, much like Lent, emphasizing spiritual purification and readiness for the coming of Christ.³⁵

One early example of the observance of Advent comes from the Council of Saragossa (Spain) in AD 380, which directed Christians to attend church daily from December 17 to December 25 as a way of preparing spiritually for Christmas.³⁶ This council's emphasis on daily gatherings highlights the season's significance and sets a precedent for Advent as a time of focused spiritual activity.

Another example is found in the writings of St. Gregory of Tours (c. 538–594), who described the observance of a “*fast of Advent*” in Gaul. By this time, Advent had become a recognized season of penitence and preparation, mirroring the practices of Lent, with believers engaging in fasting, prayer, and acts of charity to prepare for the

³⁵ Susan K. Roll, *Toward the Origins of Christmas* (Leuven: Peeters, 1995), 112-14.

³⁶ Council of Saragossa, AD 380, as discussed in Susan K. Roll, *Toward the Origins of Christmas* (Leuven: Peeters, 1995), 123.

coming of Christ.³⁷ These early practices underscore the seriousness with which the early Church approached Advent, emphasizing themes of repentance and spiritual purification.

The liturgical themes of Advent focus on hope, peace, joy, and love, reminding believers of the dual anticipation: the celebration of Christ's Incarnation and the expectation of His second coming. Throughout history, Advent practices have included lighting candles on an Advent wreath, reading Scriptures that foretell the Messiah's coming, and engaging in acts of charity.³⁸ These traditions offer a structured way to meditate on the unfolding story of redemption.

Daily Examples for Reflection and Prayer (December 1–24):

To deepen spiritual engagement, believers can adopt daily practices throughout Advent. Here are examples for each day leading up to Christmas:

- 1 December 1:** Pray for the hope that comes through Christ. Meditate on Isaiah 9:2, which speaks of light breaking into darkness.³⁹
- 2 December 2:** Reflect on God's promises to His people. Read Jeremiah 33:14-16 and thank God for His faithfulness.⁴⁰
- 3 December 3:** Light a candle and contemplate Jesus as the Light of the World (John 8:12). Pray for His light to shine in your life.⁴¹

³⁷ St. Gregory of Tours, *History of the Franks*, translated by Lewis Thorpe (Harmondsworth: Penguin Classics, 1974), 203-204.

³⁸ Andrew McGowan, *Ancient Christian Devotion and the Establishment of Liturgical Seasons* (New York: Oxford University Press, 2014), 89-90.

³⁹ Isaiah 9:2 (NIV).

⁴⁰ Jeremiah 33:14-16 (ESV).

⁴¹ John 8:12 (KJV).

- 4 **December 4:** Remember those in need. Perform an act of kindness or give to charity, following the example of Christ's compassion.⁴²
- 5 **December 5:** Reflect on the prophecy of the coming Messiah in Micah 5:2. Pray for the fulfillment of God's purposes in your life.⁴³
- 6 **December 6:** Celebrate St. Nicholas' Day by practicing generosity. Read about his legacy of helping the poor and consider giving anonymously.⁴⁴
- 7 **December 7:** Pray for peace. Meditate on Philippians 4:7 and ask God to bring peace into your heart and relationships.⁴⁵
- 8 **December 8:** Focus on the Virgin Mary's obedience. Read Luke 1:26-38 and pray for a willing heart to serve God.⁴⁶
- 9 **December 9:** Reflect on the joy of salvation. Read Psalm 98 and praise God for His marvelous deeds.⁴⁷
- 10 **December 10:** Pray for the coming of God's kingdom. Meditate on the Lord's Prayer, especially, "*Your kingdom come*" (Matthew 6:10).⁴⁸
- 11 **December 11:** Light a second Advent candle. Reflect on the coming of Christ and His promise of eternal life.⁴⁹

⁴² Roll, *Toward the Origins of Christmas*, 98.

⁴³ Micah 5:2 (NASB).

⁴⁴ Juan García, *Tradiciones de España* (Madrid: Editorial Tradiciones, 2011), 45.

⁴⁵ Philippians 4:7 (NRSV).

⁴⁶ Luke 1:26-38 (NKJV).

⁴⁷ Psalm 98 (CEB).

⁴⁸ Matthew 6:10 (NLT).

⁴⁹ McGowan, *Ancient Christian Devotion*, 93.

- 12 December 12:** Remember the prophets who foretold Jesus' birth. Read Isaiah 7:14 and thank God for His perfect plan.⁵⁰
- 13 December 13:** Pray for courage to share your faith. Reflect on 1 Peter 3:15 and ask God for boldness.⁵¹
- 14 December 14:** Contemplate the love of God shown in sending His Son. Meditate on John 3:16 and thank Him for His gift.⁵²
- 15 December 15:** Pray for those who suffer. Reflect on Psalm 34:18, which assures God's closeness to the brokenhearted.⁵³
- 16 December 16:** Read Zechariah's prophecy in Luke 1:68-79. Pray for God's mercy and guidance.⁵⁴
- 17 December 17:** Reflect on the names of Jesus. Meditate on "*Wonderful Counselor, Mighty God*" (Isaiah 9:6).⁵⁵
- 18 December 18:** Pray for those who are lonely during the holiday season. Ask God to be their comfort and strength.⁵⁶
- 19 December 19:** Remember God's promise to David in 2 Samuel 7:12-16. Pray for God's faithfulness to be evident in your life.⁵⁷

⁵⁰ Isaiah 7:14 (AMP).

⁵¹ 1 Peter 3:15 (RSV).

⁵² John 3:16 (HCSB).

⁵³ Psalm 34:18 (CSB).

⁵⁴ Luke 1:68-79 (MSG).

⁵⁵ Isaiah 9:6 (NASB).

⁵⁶ Roll, *Toward the Origins of Christmas*, 120.

⁵⁷ 2 Samuel 7:12-16 (YLT).

- 20 December 20:** Reflect on the angel’s message to Joseph in Matthew 1:18-25. Pray for trust in God’s plans.⁵⁸
- 21 December 21:** Celebrate the Winter Solstice as a reminder of God’s light overcoming darkness. Pray for His light to fill the world.⁵⁹
- 22 December 22:** Pray for expectant mothers and unborn children. Meditate on the care God has for each life (Psalm 139:13-16).⁶⁰
- 23 December 23:** Reflect on the journey to Bethlehem. Pray for travelers and those far from home this season.⁶¹
- 24 December 24 (Christmas Eve):** Read Luke 2:1-20 and reflect on the birth of Jesus. Attend a Christmas Eve service or pray with your family, welcoming the Savior into your hearts.⁶²

These daily practices serve to enrich the Advent season, preparing hearts for the celebration of Christ’s birth and His ultimate return. By embracing these reflections and prayers, believers can experience the full spiritual significance of Advent.

IV. THE SIGNIFICANCE OF EPIPHANY AND THE TWELVE DAYS OF CHRISTMAS

While Christmas marks the Incarnation—God becoming flesh in the person of Jesus—Epiphany celebrates the revelation of Christ to the Gentiles, represented by the

⁵⁸ Matthew 1:18-25 (ESV).

⁵⁹ Roll, *Toward the Origins of Christmas*, 132.

⁶⁰ Psalm 139:13-16 (NKJV).

⁶¹ García, *Tradiciones de España*, 62.

⁶² Luke 2:1-20 (NIV).

visit of the Magi. The Magi's journey and their recognition of Jesus' kingship signify the universal scope of the gospel, extending beyond the Jewish people to all nations.

Theologically, Epiphany emphasizes Jesus' divine identity and His mission to bring salvation to the entire world, fulfilling the prophecy of Isaiah: "*Nations shall come to your light, and kings to the brightness of your dawn*" (Isaiah 60:3).⁶³

The period between Christmas and Epiphany, known as the Twelve Days of Christmas, served as a time of extended celebration and reflection in the Christian liturgical calendar. Each of the twelve days carried religious and cultural significance, offering believers a structured opportunity to meditate on the mystery of the Incarnation and prepare for the manifestation of Christ's glory. This tradition created a cohesive spiritual journey, connecting the joy of Jesus' birth with the revelation of His divinity to the world.⁶⁴

The Twelve Days of Christmas: Meaning, Observance, and Song Connection

The Twelve Days of Christmas span from December 25 to January 5 and hold deep spiritual meanings. These days provide a chance for extended reflection on the Incarnation and Christ's revelation. Each day also has a symbolic representation in the song "*The Twelve Days of Christmas*," which, according to tradition, served as a catechism for teaching Christian doctrine.

1st. December 25 (Christmas Day): Celebrates Jesus' birth, the Word made flesh (John 1:14).

Example: Attend a worship service focusing on the Nativity and reflect on the

⁶³ Hilbert, *Liturgical Traditions Across the Atlantic*, 210.

⁶⁴ Bernard, *Theological Reflections on Early Christian Festivals*, 165.

miracle of the Incarnation.

Song Connection: “*A Partridge in a Pear Tree*” symbolizes Jesus Christ, who sacrificed Himself for humanity.⁶⁵

2nd. December 26 (Feast of St. Stephen): Honors the first Christian martyr (Acts 7).

Example: Perform acts of charity, remembering Stephen’s example of love and forgiveness.

Song Connection: “*Two Turtle Doves*” represent the Old and New Testaments, reminding believers of God’s covenant.⁶⁶

3rd. December 27 (Feast of St. John the Evangelist): Celebrates the apostle who wrote

about Jesus as the Light of the World.

Example: Light a candle and read passages from the Gospel of John, reflecting on Christ’s divinity and love.

Song Connection: “*Three French Hens*” symbolize faith, hope, and love (1 Corinthians 13:13).⁶⁷

4th. December 28 (Feast of the Holy Innocents): Remembers the children killed by King Herod (Matthew 2:16-18).

Example: Pray for children around the world, especially those who suffer from violence and injustice.

⁶⁵ Susan K. Roll, *Toward the Origins of Christmas*, 120–123.

⁶⁶ Talley, *The Origins of the Liturgical Year*, 97–99.

⁶⁷ Hilbert, *Liturgical Traditions Across the Atlantic*, 84–86.

Song Connection: “*Four Calling Birds*” represent the four Gospels: Matthew, Mark, Luke, and John, proclaiming the good news.⁶⁸

5th. December 29: A day of reflection on God’s protection and providence.

Example: Spend time in prayer, thanking God for His faithfulness throughout the year.

Song Connection: “*Five Gold Rings*” symbolize the first five books of the Old Testament (the Pentateuch), the foundation of Scripture.⁶⁹

6th. December 30: A time to honor those who have shown great faith.

Example: Read stories of faith from Hebrews 11, reflecting on the “*cloud of witnesses*.”

Song Connection: “*Six Geese A-Laying*” represent the six days of creation, reminding believers of God’s creative work (Genesis 1).⁷⁰

7th. December 31 (New Year’s Eve): A day for reflection and new beginnings.

Example: Join a prayer service or spend time journaling about God’s guidance in the past year and hopes for the next.

Song Connection: “*Seven Swans A-Swimming*” symbolize the seven gifts of the Holy Spirit (Isaiah 11:2-3).⁷¹

8th. January 1 (Solemnity of Mary, Mother of God): While this day honors Mary in some traditions, a *prima scriptura* approach focuses on God’s redemptive work

⁶⁸ Brown, *The Rise of Western Christendom*, 142–145.

⁶⁹ García, *Tradiciones de España*, 156–158.

⁷⁰ Bray, *The Doctrine of God*, 210–213.

⁷¹ Talley, *The Origins of the Liturgical Year*, 97–99.

through the humble.⁷²

Example: Read and meditate on Mary’s song of praise, the Magnificat (Luke 1:46-55).

Song Connection: “*Eight Maids A-Milking*” symbolize the eight Beatitudes (Matthew 5:3-10).⁷³

9th. January 2: A day to reflect on wisdom and guidance.

Example: Study Proverbs or James, seeking godly wisdom for the new year.

Song Connection: “*Nine Ladies Dancing*” represent the nine fruits of the Spirit (Galatians 5:22-23).⁷⁴

10th. January 3: A day to give thanks for God’s name and His character.

Example: Reflect on the many names of God and their meanings, praising His faithfulness.

Song Connection: “*Ten Lords A-Leaping*” symbolize the Ten Commandments, emphasizing God’s holy standards (Exodus 20:1-17).⁷⁵

11th. January 4: A time to pray for the Church and its mission in the world.

Example: Pray for the global Church and for unity among believers.

⁷² D. Gene Williams Jr., *Prima Scriptura*, Defend the Word Ministries, accessed November 11, 2024, <https://triinitysem.academia.edu/GeneWilliamsJr>; <https://defendtheword.com/insights-and-studies.html>.

⁷³ Hilbert, *Liturgical Traditions Across the Atlantic*, 84–86.

⁷⁴ Brown, *The Rise of Western Christendom*, 142–145.

⁷⁵ Philip Schaff and Henry Wace, eds., *Nicene and Post-Nicene Fathers*, series 1 & 2 (Peabody: Hendrickson Publishers, 1994), 275–278.

Song Connection: “*Eleven Pipers Piping*” represent the eleven faithful apostles who spread the gospel.⁷⁶

12th. January 5: Reflect on Christ as the light to the Gentiles, preparing for Epiphany.

Example: Light a candle and pray for missions and evangelism efforts.

Song Connection: “*Twelve Drummers Drumming*” symbolize the twelve points of the Apostles’ Creed, affirming core Christian beliefs.⁷⁷

V. THE APOSTLES’ CREED AND THE TWELVE DRUMMERS DRUMMING

The song *The Twelve Days of Christmas* concludes with “*twelve drummers drumming,*” which is traditionally interpreted as representing the twelve points of belief expressed in the Apostles’ Creed. This early Christian statement of faith succinctly summarizes core doctrines that have united believers across centuries and various Christian traditions.⁷⁸

The Apostles’ Creed, believed to have been formalized by the 4th century, has its origins in earlier creedal statements and baptismal formulas used by the early Church. Theological concepts and phrases from the Apostles’ Creed can be traced back to writings by early Church Fathers, such as Tertullian (c. 200 AD)⁷⁹ and Hippolytus (c. 215 AD),⁸⁰ who referenced elements of these early creeds. By the late 4th century, the Apostles’ Creed had become widely recognized and used in the Western Church, serving

⁷⁶ McGowan, *Ancient Christian Devotion*, 133–135.

⁷⁷ Holmes, *The Apostolic Fathers*, 215–218.

⁷⁸ McGowan, *Ancient Christian Devotion*, 45-47.

⁷⁹ Tertullian, *On the Flesh of Christ*, 5, in Wilken, *The First Thousand Years*, 134.

⁸⁰ Hippolytus, *Commentary on Daniel*, 4.23, trans. William Rusch.

as both a tool for instructing new believers and a concise summary of essential Christian beliefs.⁸¹

The Twelve Traditional Points of the Apostles' Creed:

- 1st.** I believe in God, the Father Almighty, Creator of heaven and earth.
- 2nd.** I believe in Jesus Christ, His only Son, our Lord.
- 3rd.** He was conceived by the Holy Spirit and born of the Virgin Mary.
- 4th.** He suffered under Pontius Pilate, was crucified, died, and was buried.
- 5th.** He descended to the dead. On the third day, He rose again.
- 6th.** He ascended into heaven and is seated at the right hand of God the Father Almighty.
- 7th.** He will come again to judge the living and the dead.
- 8th.** I believe in the Holy Spirit.
- 9th.** I believe in the holy catholic Church, the communion of saints.
- 10th.** I believe in the forgiveness of sins.
- 11th.** I believe in the resurrection of the body.
- 12th.** I believe in life everlasting. Amen.

This creed provided a concise and comprehensive summary of Christian doctrine.⁸² When connected to *The Twelve Days of Christmas*, the “*twelve drummers drumming*” serve as a symbolic reminder to uphold and proclaim these foundational beliefs. The association reinforces the spiritual depth of the Christmas season and the

⁸¹ Talley, *The Origins of the Liturgical Year*, 103.

⁸² Wilken, *The First Thousand Years*, 147.

enduring significance of the Incarnation, reminding believers of the transformative impact of Christ's coming and the importance of living out these truths.⁸³

The symbolism of the “*twelve drummers drumming*” underscores the call to proclaim the faith with unity and conviction. Just as drummers keep rhythm and unite musicians, the Apostles' Creed unites Christians in a shared confession of faith, emphasizing the communal and universal nature of Christian doctrine. Reflecting on these points during the Twelve Days of Christmas invites believers to deepen their understanding of the Incarnation and commit to sharing the redemptive message of Christ.⁸⁴

VI. LITURGICAL AND THEOLOGICAL REFLECTION ON THE APOSTLES' CREED

The Apostles' Creed has long held a central place in Christian worship and catechesis⁸⁵, serving as both a declaration of faith and a foundation for Christian doctrine. Its use in the context of the Twelve Days of Christmas, symbolized by the “*twelve drummers drumming*,” emphasizes the importance of theological reflection during this sacred season.⁸⁶ Each line of the Creed encapsulates key aspects of Christian belief, from the nature of God as Creator to the hope of life everlasting.

⁸³ Bernard, *Theological Reflections on Early Christian Festivals*, 156

⁸⁴ Roll, *Toward the Origins of Christmas*, 89-91.

⁸⁵ Oxford Dictionary of the Christian Church, 3rd ed., s.v. “catechesis.”

⁸⁶ Hilkert, *Liturgical Traditions Across the Atlantic*, 110-112.

The theological weight of the Apostles' Creed lies in its comprehensive outline of the Christian narrative, starting with the creation of the world and culminating in the promise of eternal life. This narrative reflects the unity of God's redemptive plan and underscores the interconnectedness of Jesus' birth, life, death, resurrection, and eventual return. During the Twelve Days of Christmas, believers are invited to meditate on this narrative, recognizing how each event contributes to the overarching story of salvation.⁸⁷

VII. CONTEMPORARY REFLECTIONS ON THE APOSTLES' CREED

In modern Christian practice, the Apostles' Creed continues to be recited in liturgical settings, affirming the faith of congregations worldwide. Its relevance remains, as it provides a concise yet profound summary of beliefs that have guided the Christian community for centuries. By linking the Creed to the symbolism of the "*twelve drummers drumming*," the Twelve Days of Christmas offer an opportunity to reaffirm and celebrate these core doctrines.⁸⁸

Furthermore, the Creed's emphasis on communal faith highlights the importance of unity within the Body of Christ. Just as the drummers in the song maintain a cohesive rhythm, the Apostles' Creed unites believers across denominational lines, reminding them of the shared truths that form the foundation of their faith. This unity is particularly meaningful during the Christmas season, as Christians around the world reflect on the Incarnation and the hope it brings.⁸⁹

⁸⁷ Talley, *The Origins of the Liturgical Year*, 120.

⁸⁸ Roll, *Toward the Origins of Christmas*, 94.

⁸⁹ Juan García, *Tradiciones de España*, 67.

The Apostles' Creed thus serves as both a theological anchor and a call to action. It invites believers to live out their faith in the world, proclaiming the good news of Jesus Christ and embodying the love and grace that His coming represents. In this way, the Twelve Days of Christmas become more than just a festive interlude; they are a time for deep spiritual engagement and a renewed commitment to the gospel.⁹⁰

VIII. CONCLUSION: RECLAIMING EPIPHANY AND THE TWELVE DAYS OF CHRISTMAS

Rediscovering Epiphany and the Twelve Days of Christmas offers Christians today a unique opportunity to deepen their spiritual engagement during the holiday season. By reviving these traditions, believers can move beyond the consumer-driven focus on December 25 and cultivate a rhythm of worship that encompasses both the joy of Christ's birth and the revelation of His divine mission.⁹¹ Embracing the full liturgical arc from Christmas to Epiphany allows for a more holistic experience, one that emphasizes the Incarnation's global significance and challenges believers to embody Christ's light in a darkened world.⁹²

This paper has examined the historical, theological, and cultural dimensions of Epiphany, the Twelve Days of Christmas, and the Apostles' Creed, emphasizing the interconnectedness of these observances within the Christian tradition. Through this analysis, we see that early Christians designed the Christmas season not as an isolated

⁹⁰ McGowan, *Ancient Christian Devotion*, 85.

⁹¹ *Ibid.*

⁹² Wilken, *The First Thousand Years*, 152.

celebration but as part of a broader liturgical framework that reinforced key doctrines and encouraged extended reflection.⁹³

Reclaiming Epiphany as a meaningful holiday invites Christians to engage deeply with the gospel narrative, to reflect on God's redemptive plan, and to respond to the call to be Christ's light in the world. Through this renewed emphasis on the Twelve Days of Christmas and Epiphany, believers may find themselves drawn into a richer, more intentional observance of the holiday season. Such a transformation has the potential to restore the spiritual depth and cultural significance of Epiphany, ultimately enriching both individual and communal expressions of faith.⁹⁴

In conclusion, as Christians navigate the challenges of secularization and commercialization, returning to these ancient traditions offers a countercultural witness to the enduring power of the Incarnation. By reclaiming Epiphany and the Twelve Days of Christmas, believers can not only enrich their worship but also bear witness to the transformative love of Christ that continues to impact lives today. Throughout history, the Church has often struggled when it strayed too far into cultural accommodation, resulting in a loss of distinctiveness and spiritual vitality.⁹⁵ By renewing a focus on practices that emphasize the central truths of the faith, Christians can resist cultural pressures and maintain a robust, incarnational theology that transforms both individuals and communities.⁹⁶

⁹³ Hilkert, *Liturgical Traditions Across the Atlantic*, 110-112.

⁹⁴ Thomas J. Talley, *The Origins of the Liturgical Year*, 120.

⁹⁵ H. Richard Niebuhr, *Christ and Culture* (New York: Harper & Row, 1951), 116-121.

⁹⁶ Wilken, *The Spirit of Early Christian Thought*, 234-239.

**APPENDIX A: EPIPHANY AND THE TWELVE DAYS OF CHRISTMAS: A
CELEBRATION OF DIVINE REVELATION**



This image captures the profound theological and spiritual themes of Epiphany and the Twelve Days of Christmas. At the heart of the scene, the Magi present their gifts to the infant Jesus under the radiant light of a guiding star, symbolizing the manifestation of Christ to the Gentiles. Surrounding the manger are symbolic elements: an Advent wreath with glowing candles, an open Bible, and a crown, highlighting the kingship and divine nature of Jesus.

The serene backdrop includes subtle references to Jesus' baptism at the Jordan River and the seasonal beauty of a winter night. Candles and festive decor evoke the joy and reverence of the season, tying together the celebration of Christ's birth and the revelation of His mission to all nations. This evocative composition invites reflection on the interconnectedness of Christmas and Epiphany, inspiring worship and deeper engagement with the gospel narrative.

BIBLIOGRAPHY

Primary Source

The Holy Bible, *English Standard Version*. Wheaton: Crossway Bibles, 2001.

Secondary Source

Bercot, David W. *A Dictionary of Early Christian Beliefs*. Peabody: Hendrickson Publishers, 1998.

Bernard, John H. *Theological Reflections on Early Christian Festivals*. London: Cambridge University Press, 1938.

Bray, Gerald. *The Doctrine of God*. Downers Grove: InterVarsity Press, 1993.

Brown, Peter. *The Rise of Western Christendom*. 2nd ed. Malden: Blackwell Publishing, 2003.

Clement of Alexandria. *Stromateis*. Translated by John Ferguson. Washington: Catholic University of America Press, 1991.

Council of Saragossa. *Council of Saragossa, AD 380*. Referenced in Susan K. Roll, *Toward the Origins of Christmas*. Leuven: Peeters, 1995.

Eusebius of Caesarea. *Ecclesiastical History*. Translated by G.A. Williamson. London: Penguin Classics, 1965.

García, Juan. *Tradiciones de España*. Madrid: Editorial Tradiciones, 2011.

Gregory of Tours. *History of the Franks*. Translated by Lewis Thorpe. Harmondsworth: Penguin Classics, 1974.

Hilkert, Mary Catherine. *Liturgical Traditions Across the Atlantic*. Boston: Harvard Press, 2015.

Hippolytus. *Commentary on Daniel*. Translated by Richard J. Deferrari. Washington, DC: Catholic University of America Press, 2000.

Holmes, Michael W. *The Apostolic Fathers: Greek Texts and English Translations*. Grand Rapids: Baker Academic, 2007.

Kelly, J.N.D. *Early Christian Doctrines*. Revised edition. New York: Harper & Row, 1978.

Lightfoot, J.B., and J.R. Harmer. *The Apostolic Fathers*. Grand Rapids: Baker Academic, 1989.

McGowan, Andrew. *Ancient Christian Devotion and the Establishment of Liturgical Seasons*. New York: Oxford University Press, 2014.

- Niebuhr, H. Richard. *Christ and Culture*. New York: Harper & Row, 1951.
- Percival, Henry R., ed. *The Seven Ecumenical Councils of the Undivided Church*. Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1956.
- Roll, Susan K. *Toward the Origins of Christmas*. Leuven: Peeters, 1995.
- Schaff, Philip, and Henry Wace, eds. *Nicene and Post-Nicene Fathers*. Series 1 & 2. Peabody: Hendrickson Publishers, 1994.
- Talley, Thomas J. *The Origins of the Liturgical Year*. New York: Pueblo Publishing, 1986.
- Tertullian. *On the Flesh of Christ*. Translated by Alexander Roberts and James Donaldson. In *Ante-Nicene Fathers*, edited by Philip Schaff. Buffalo, NY: Christian Literature Publishing Co., 1885.
- Trigg, Joseph W. *Origen*. London: Routledge, 1998.
- Wilken, Robert L. *The First Thousand Years: A Global History of Christianity*. New Haven: Yale University Press, 2012.
- . *The Spirit of Early Christian Thought*. New Haven: Yale University Press, 2003.
- Williams, D. Gene Jr. *Prima Scriptura*. Defend the Word Ministries. Accessed November 11, 2024. <https://triinitysem.academia.edu/GeneWilliamsJr>; <https://defendtheword.com/insights-and-studies.html>.
- . *The Magi, Jeremiah, and Daniel: Prophetic Connections Across Time*. Accessed January 2025. <https://triinitysem.academia.edu/GeneWilliamsJr>; <https://defendtheword.com/insights-and-studies.html>.