

Celebrating The Twelve Days of Christmas

For centuries the liturgical celebration of Christmas has officially started on December 25 and lasted for the next 11 days, followed by the feast of the Epiphany on January 6th. Unfortunately our secular culture has turned the Christmas season into a marketing campaign that begins long before Thanksgiving and ends with day-after-christmas-sales on December 26.

But there's value in trying to reclaim the original practice of celebrating 12 Days of Christmas more mindfully and intentionally, for example:

1. December 25 – Christmas day

A day to celebrate cherished family traditions

- action: Recall a special memory of a past Christmas.
- prompt: What does Christmas mean to you personally?

2. December 26 – Boxing Day

In England, this used to be the day when families with servants gave them a day off, along with a Christmas “box” containing some special gift.

- action: Give a gift to the person who delivers your mail or picks up your garbage.
- prompt: Who is someone in the healthcare or service industry you depend on for something that makes your life easier?

3. December 27 – feast of St. John the Apostle

According to the Gospels, the apostle John was especially beloved by Jesus who gave him the responsibility of looking after Mary following the crucifixion.

- action: Do something special for someone who is especially beloved.
- prompt: What responsibilities go along with loving?

4. December 28 – The Feast of the Holy Innocents

According to the Gospel infancy narratives, King Herod ordered all newborn baby boys murdered in order to prevent one of them from growing up to be the king of the Jews.

- action: Make a donation to a charity that works on behalf of children.
- prompt: What is something that caused you great pain and how did you survive?

5. December 29 – The second (and worst) London Blitz

Between 6:15 and 9:45 pm, German forces dropped more than 100,000 bombs over the London causing entire streets to be flattened. Hundreds of people lost their lives and even more were horribly wounded.

- action: Make a donation to a charity that supports refugees of war torn countries.
- prompt: What can you do on a personal level to make the world a more peaceful, less violent place?

6. December 30 – Hogmanay

This traditional Scottish holiday is celebrated with a variety of customs that date back to pagan times, often involving bonfires and elaborate fire rituals.

- action: Build a fire and light candles.
- prompt: What does firelight and candlelight symbolize for you?

7. December 31 – New Year’s Eve

Traditionally celebrated by staying up till midnight to bid farewell to the old year and welcome the new one.

- action: Light a candle and then step outside in the dark to say a silent goodbye to the old year with a word of gratitude for what it brought with it and a word of hope for what the new year will bring.
- prompt: What have been your greatest joys and your deepest sorrows this past year and what is your wish for yourself and others as this new year begins?

8. January 1 –New Years Day

Traditionally this is a day for making resolutions and setting goals

- action: Make a soul collage or manifestation to express something about who you are at this point in your life and/or who you are becoming.
- prompt: What do you want to continue, change or begin in the coming year and what will you need to do in order to make it happen?

9. January 2 - Mahatma Gandhi's march for peace in East-Bengali

Gandhi's vision of India called for a state based on religious pluralism and was strongly challenged by a rapidly growing Muslim nationalist independence movement. This led to the partition of India in 1947 into India and Pakistan.

Gandhi visited the affected areas and undertook several fasts in an attempt to stop the religious violence.

- action: Read and reflect on one of the Upanishads and/or one of Rumi's poems.
- prompt: What is something you have learned from other cultures and/or religious traditions that is informing your own spiritual beliefs and practices?

10. January 3 - birthday of J.R.R. Tolkien

*John Ronald Reuel Tolkien, a University of Oxford professor of Old and Middle English, is best known as the author of *The Hobbit* and the *Lord of the Rings* trilogy.*

- action: Read aloud a chapter from the *Hobbit* or the *Lord of the Rings*.

- prompt: What are you doing to nurture your imagination and why is it important?

11. January 4 - Solomon Northup, author of "Twelve Years a Slave", regains his freedom

Born a free man in New York, Northup was drugged, kidnapped and sold into slavery in 1841. He eventually came into contact with a Canadian abolitionist and following an intervention of an official agent of the state of New York was finally freed in 1853.

- action: make a contribution to the ACLU, NAACP or the SPLC.
- prompt: What have you learned about black history or culture that has made an impact on you?

12. January 5 - Honoring Shakespeare's 12th night

Twelfth Night, which brings the Christmas season to a close, was used as the setting for one of Shakespeare's most famous plays, believed to have been written in 1601 or 1702.

- action: Read aloud a scene from 12th night.
- prompt: Why is literature important to you and how have you made time for it?

January 6 - Epiphany

Taken from a Greek verb Epiphania, meaning "to reveal," the feast of Epiphany brings the Christmas season to an end. Sometimes called the feast of the three kings, it's one of the oldest of all Christian feasts and stands for the revelation of Christ as the light of the world.

- action: Go for a drive to look at neighborhood Christmas lighting displays.
- prompt: What is one of the most important insights you have had and how has it shaped your life?