

# Church Traditions: The Nativity



to have.

The name of the first season of the church year, Advent, is taken from the Latin word which means "coming". Blue (*the color of hope*) paraments and vestments are used in our chancel and altar during Advent. An Advent wreath with five candles is placed just outside the Chancel on the floor of the Nave. On the First Sunday in Advent, the first candle is lighted just prior to the beginning of our Liturgy. On the Second, Third, and Fourth Sundays another candle is lighted until all four Advent candles are lighted. On Christmas Eve the Christ Candle (*the tall white candle in the middle of the Advent wreath*) is lighted symbolizing, Christ the light of the world has come.



symbolizing Christ, the light of the world.

## THE NATIVITY OF OUR LORD.

Decorations for Christmas are added to the Chancel and Nave as we advance during the Advent season and prepare for the coming of the Christ Child. The liturgical color for Christmas is white, symbolizing the purity of Christ and our joy at His birth. Altar flowers are usually white or red. Greens and wreaths are placed around the nave, narthex, and the Chancel may be adorned with an abundance of poinsettias. A Christmas Tree is set up near or in the Chancel. Its decorations are to call to mind symbols of Christ. On Christmas Eve extra candles are placed by the pews and in the windows of the nave

## THE TWELVE DAYS OF CHRISTMAS

The twelve days of Christmas refer to the twelve days from Christmas Day through the day before Epiphany. On that day, Christians celebrate the wise men bringing gifts to the Christ Child and the Good News to the Gentiles that God was made flesh and dwelt

among us. For this reason, in certain countries and religions, gifts are given on Epiphany, and in some places, a gift is given for each of the Twelve Days of Christmas.

Though the popular song "The Twelve Days of Christmas" seems to be a nonsensical lyric to entertain children, tradition has it that this song contains Christian instruction of the catechism, hidden behind the words. Each gift given relates to some aspect of Christian faith and was used as a device to aid children in remembering these basic teachings. The "True Love" of the song refers to God, and the word "me" refers to all believers in Christ.

As the story goes, this song dates back to the sixteenth-century religious wars in England when certain religious bodies were prohibited by law from any practice of their faith - public or private. Instead of learning their faith by writing and reciting doctrine, biblical truths and Bible verses, the adults, fearing imprisonment or worse, taught children to memorize their catechism by using the song as a mnemonic device.

### **The Real Song Went Something Like This**

On the first day of Christmas my true love gave to me -  
God's Son born to set us all free  
On the second day of Christmas my true love gave to me -  
Two Testaments  
On the third day of Christmas my true love gave to me -  
Faith, Hope and Love  
On the fourth day of Christmas my true love gave to me -  
Four Gospels True  
On the fifth day of Christmas my true love gave to me -  
Five Books of Grace  
On the sixth day of Christmas my true love gave to me -  
Days of Creation  
On the seventh day of Christmas my true love gave to me -  
Gifts of the Spirit  
On the eighth day of Christmas my true love gave to me -  
Eight "Blessed Are They"  
On the ninth day of Christmas my true love gave to me -  
Fruits of the Spirit  
On the tenth day of Christmas my true love gave to me -  
God's Ten Commandments  
On the eleventh day of Christmas my true love gave to me -  
Faithful Apostles  
On the twelfth day of Christmas my true love gave to me -  
Twelve points of Doctrine.



### **THE EPIPHANY OF OUR LORD.**

Epiphany is celebrated on January 6, marking the manifestation of Christ to the world. The coming of the Wise Men to Bethlehem is related to the Gospel. Paraments and Vestments for the Epiphany season are white. On the Epiphany of our Lord it is especially noteworthy that we

focus our thoughts on the Wise Men worshipping the Christ Child. As a reminder of the wise men's gifts to the Christ our gifts that day are of special importance.

### **THE EPIPHANY SEASON.**

The First Sunday after the Epiphany is known as the Baptism of our Lord. The Paraments are white. The Second through Fifth Sunday after the Epiphany we use green paraments and vestments. The color green used during Epiphany is to remind us of our spiritual growth. The Transfiguration of our Lord is celebrated on the Last Sunday after the Epiphany and brings this Season to a close.

Paraments for the Sunday of the Transfiguration are white out of respect for Christ.



Most of the information above is from  
*"The Altar Guild"* - S. Anita Stauffer.