

## A Christmas Message in a Song

Luke 2:10-11

But the angel said to them. "Don't be afraid! I am here with good news for you, which will bring great joy to all the people. This very day in David's town your Savior was born, Christ the Lord!"

TG: Every time we celebrate Christmas and sing old and familiar hymns, how often do we pause to think about what we are actually singing? On December 18, 2015 in the Hokusei University Chapel, long time teacher Sally Nakai Kobayashi shared her views about why we celebrate Christmas. Sally, a US citizen, born into a Japanese American family while the family was being interned in Manzanar, one of the 10 concentration camps operated by the United States by way of Executive Order 9066, has been in Japan most of her adult life. She is a noted author of the book "Creating the Sapporo Snow Festival." This chapel talk is based upon her original message.

SNK: Why do we celebrate Christmas?

TG: I have no idea. It's fun?

SNK: This Bible verse tells us. Luke 2:10-11 (Good News Bible) ...

but the angel said to them. "Don't be afraid! I am here with good news for you, which will bring great joy to all the people. This very day in David's town your Savior was born-Christ the Lord!"

TG: We celebrate the birth of Jesus.

SNK: Do you know the Christmas song, "The Twelve Days of Christmas"?

TG: Yes, of course. It was everyone's favorite.

SNK: Many people think it's a fun song about strange Christmas gifts.

TG: What do the twelve days stand for?

SNK: The Twelve Days of Christmas are the days between Christmas day and Epiphany, January 6. That is the day that the Three Wise Men (Magi) brought gifts to the Baby Jesus. But the song had a very serious purpose when it was written.

TG: When was that?

SNK: Catholics in England during the period 1558 to 1829 were prohibited from practicing their faith. Even today, there is religious persecution in some places. It is said that the song, "The Twelve Days of Christmas" was written in England as a secret way to help children learn about the Christian faith.

TG: But what all the strange gifts?

SNK: The gifts in the song have hidden meanings about faith. The "true love" in the song is not an earthly suitor. "True Love" refers to God himself. The "me" who receives the presents refers to every baptized person. The "Partridge in a Pear Tree" is Jesus Christ, the Son of God.

TG: The song is long but easy to learn because it repeats the lines.

SNK: Yes.

Sing: On the 1st day of Christmas, My true love sent to me, A partridge in a pear tree.

Sing: "On the 2nd day of Christmas, My true love sent to me, two turtle doves and a partridge in a pear tree."

TG: It continues to the 12th day. The gifts in the song have the following meanings:

TG: A Partridge in a Pear Tree is Jesus Christ and two Turtle Doves refers to...

SNK: The Old and New Testaments of the Bible.

TG: What about Three French Hens?

SNK: They refer to Faith, Hope and Charity, the three Theological Virtues found in I Corinthians 13:13.

TG: Let me guess, Four Calling Birds refers to the Four Gospels, Matthew, Mark, Luke, John. But what about the five Golden Rings?

SNK: They refer to The first Five Books of the Old Testament, the Pentateuch, was written and compiled by Moses. The first book Genesis: The title "Genesis" means "origin" and appropriately describes its contents. It tells how God created the universe. And it gives a history about man's sin and suffering and man's fall from grace. Book 2-Exodus: Exodus is a Latin word from the Greek word Exodus. It means "exit," "departure" which refers to the most important event in Israel's history, the departure from Egypt where the Hebrews were slaves for many years. The most famous part of Exodus is the list of the Ten Commandments in Chapter 20. Book 3-Leviticus contains regulations for worship and religious ceremonies in ancient Israel. The main theme is the holiness of God and the ways in which His people were to worship and live so as to maintain their relationship with "the holy God of Israel. Book 4-Numbers tells the story of the Israelites during the nearly 40 years that passed after they left Egypt and entered the promised land. The people were often discouraged and afraid when things were difficult and they rebelled against God and Moses. It is the story of God's faithful, persistent care for His people despite of their weakness and disobedience. And it tells about Moses' steadfast, sometimes impatient, devotion to God and to his people. The name "Numbers" comes from the

census Moses took of the Israelites at Mount Sinai before their departure and again in Moab, east of the Jordan, about a generation later. Book 5-Deuteronomy: Moses gives a series of speeches to the people remembering the great events of the 40 years of their wanderings. Joshua is appointed the next leader and Moses dies in Moab. The great theme of the book is that God has saved and blessed His chosen people, whom He loves. The people are reminded to remember this and love and obey God so that they may have life and continued blessings. The key verses of this book are Chapter 6:4-6 which Jesus called the greatest of all commandments: "Love the Lord your God with all your heart, with all your soul. and with all your strength."

TG: I will need some help with the Six Geese laying.

SNK: This refers to the Six days of Creation (Genesis Chapter 1) In the beginning when God created the universe.

Day 1: "Let there be light" and light appeared and God separated the light into day and night.

Day 2: God separated the waters and created the sky.

Day 3: God created the Earth and all the plants.

Day 4: God made the sun, moon and stars to shine.

Day 5: God created all the creatures that live in the sea.

Day 6: God filled the Earth with animals, birds of the air and people.

TG: And we know that on day 7 the whole universe was completed and God rested. God blessed the 7th day as a day of rest.

SNK: What do you think seven Swans swimming refer to?

TG: I have no idea.

SNK: The Seven Swans swimming refers to the seven gifts of the Holy Spirit (Romans 12:6-8) We have different gifts, according to the grace given us. If a man's gift is prophesying, let him use it in proportion to his faith. If it is serving, let him serve; if it is teaching, let him teach; if it is encouraging, let him encourage; if it is contributing to the needs of others, let him give generously; if it is leadership, let him govern diligently; if it is showing mercy, let him do it cheerfully.

TG: And the Eight Maids milking?

SNK: They refer to the Eight Beatitudes (Matthew 5:3-10) Beatitude is a state of perfect blessedness or happiness

1 Blessed are the poor in spirit, for theirs is the kingdom of heaven.

2 Blessed are those who mourn, for they will be comforted.

3 Blessed are the meek, for they will inherit the earth.

4 Blessed are those who hunger and thirst for righteousness, for they will be filled.

- 5 Blessed are the merciful, for they will be shown mercy.
- 6 Blessed are the pure in heart, for they will see God.
- 7 Blessed are the peacemakers, for they will be called sons of God.
- 8 Blessed are those who are persecuted because of righteousness, for theirs is the kingdom of heaven.

SNK: The Nine Ladies Dancing refers to the nine Fruits of the Holy Spirit (Galatians 5:22-23). But the fruit of the Spirit is: 1. love, 2. joy, 3. peace, 4. patience, 5. kindness, 6. goodness, 7. faithfulness, 8. gentleness, and 9. self-control.

SNK: And the Ten Lords leaping refers to The Ten Commandments (Exodus 20:1-17)

- 1 You shall have no other Gods before me.
- 2 You shall not make for yourself any idols.
- 3 You shall not take the name of the Lord thy God in vain.
- 4 Remember the Sabbath day by keeping it holy.
- 5 Honor your father and your mother.
- 6 You shall not murder.
- 7 You shall not commit adultery.
- 8 You shall not steal.
- 9 You shall not give false testimony against your neighbor.
- 10 You shall not covet (want something that belongs to someone else).

SNK: The Eleven Pipers Piping refers to the Eleven Faithful Apostles: Originally, Jesus had 12 apostles but one betrayed Him. This is a list of the Faithful Apostles: 1. Simon Peter, 2. Andrew, 3. John, 4. James the Greater, 5. James the Less, 6. Matthew, 7. Philip, 8. Bartholomew, 9. Thomas, 10. Thaddaeus, and 11. Simon the Zealot.

And finally the Twelve Drummers Drumming refers to Twelve Points of Doctrine in the Apostle's Creed (A creed is a brief statement of religious belief. In some churches, the people recite this creed during the Sunday service. The important word is "believe")

1. I believe in God the Father, Almighty, Maker of heaven and earth;
2. And in Jesus Christ, His only begotten Son, our Lord;
3. Who was conceived by the Holy Ghost, born of the Virgin Mary;
4. Suffered under Pontius Pilate; was crucified, dead and buried;
5. The third day he rose again from the dead;
6. He ascended into heaven, and sits at the right hand of God the Father Almighty;
7. From thence he shall come to judge the quick and the dead;
8. I believe in the Holy Ghost;
9. I believe in the holy catholic church: the communion of saints;
10. The forgiveness of sins;
11. The resurrection of the body;
12. And the life everlasting. Amen.

TG: With depictions of a seemingly out of control Christmas, we have blueprint of the Christian faith that came from our Catholic sisters and brothers when their faith ancestors were oppressed. Interestingly enough, the song itself is so inclusive, any Christian can sing and benefit from it. It focuses on the trinity, sets us towards being biblically literate and helps us to find our place within the ecumenical world as laid down by the Apostles Creed. It strikes me as a way of the Catholics at that time to teach their young a formula for getting along with their Protestant playmates. And from playmates to friends.

TG: Imagine all the people, living life in peace. Let us pray.

Dear God,

We give you thanks and praise for all the abundance of gifts you have so graciously given us. We admit that in your sight we have not served you as we should. Help us, Lord, to be better examples of your will. May we learn more about you and your plan for the world. We give thanks to our Catholic brothers and sisters who in the past endured intense persecution for being your children. May the lessons learned today for the 12 Days of Christmas song dwell in our hearts and provide us light to see where we have not seen before and a desire to go in new directions for sharing your peace. We ask you for your continued blessings upon our university and junior college, its students, staff, and faculty. That together we may set your love into action for all to see. In Jesus' name we pray. Amen.

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