

Tony Thinking Aloud lxxxvii

It may be that you profess the Christian faith or not, but I guess you will have related to Christmas, regardless of your background as it is a main focus day of the year.

In fact, all the major days at this time, except the two extra Bank Holidays, are significant days in the Church's Year. Today (I am writing on December 28th) is like the third Boxing Day this year! We are getting into the twelve days of Christmas - what is their significance?

They are the days between Christmas and Epiphany, when the visit of the Wise Men is commemorated. (January 6th although some orthodox Churches keep January 7th).

The Twelve days of Christmas were probably the only days holiday workers had over the centuries. Celebrations followed Christmas does not like today when lots of celebrations come before the day. Note the Sunday after the twelve days of Epiphany is Plough Sunday, when the plough was brought into church - perhaps to remind folk to get back to work!!! This happened at Barton Parish Church, each year the plough was blessed at the evening service, this continued until the evening service no longer took place thirty plus years ago and Farmer Bailey retired.

The carol the Twelve Days of Christmas is very well known with a list gift for everyday – 364 in all. Another application of the carol is to mark twelve acts of Christian faith. – Four gospels for example (four calling birds) and the ten commandments (ten lords a leaping). There are, too, many fun versions.

Epiphany at the end of the twelve days has long been observed as the day when the Kings/Wise Men/Magi visited Jesus with their gifts of gold, frankincense, and myrrh.

My grandmother always called it Old Christmas Day which may come as a reminder of the 11 days taken out of the calendar in 1752. It would suggest that if you add the eleven days to Christmas Day you are at Epiphany – hence Old Christmas Day.

The most important message of Epiphany is that the Wise Men/Kings/Magi were not Jewish they were Gentiles making an important point that the message of Jesus is for everyone.