

This is Lieutenant Roger McCort of The Salvation Army in Eureka with today's Community Comment.

I'm sure you recognize that on December 25 the commercial Christmas season comes to an abrupt halt, catapulting most Americans into the darkest days of the year with New Year's as a solitary point of light before Valentine's Day.

It wasn't always this way. In the days before Christmas was spelled with dollar signs it wasn't just one day and done like it is now. Instead, the majority of the world celebrated a full season of Christmastide, the Twelve Days that you've sung about a thousand times without ever wondering more than how much five gold rings cost in today's economy.

Back when Christmas was primarily a religious celebration instead of a mercantile one, it was based around a series of feasts and parties, because we in the church are actually a fun bunch of folks who like to get together and have a few laughs and eat. In fact, we love to eat! The driest, dullest, most drug out sermon is totally worth sitting through if there's a fabulous church potluck coming afterwards, I promise. Even if that one lady always brings the Jell-O with grated carrots in it, which may not be a sin, but it definitely should be a crime. I'm getting off track.

The Twelve Days of Christmas begin with Christmas Day and end on January 5, with each day having its own feast and traditions. Though these differ somewhat depending on your particular church, many are familiar to modern people from the songs and practices of Christmas. For example, we all know that Good King Wenceslaus looked out on the Feast of Stephen, but most people are unaware that the feast takes place on December 26 and commemorates the first Christian martyr. It was a meal of Christmas leftovers which would be shared with the poor. The carol sings of the king taking meat and wine and firewood out into a bitter winter's night to make sure the poorest of his subjects is warm and fed.

Another day, December 28, is reserved for the Feast of Holy Innocents, those children killed by Herod the Great in his effort to eliminate Jesus after the Magi declared a new King of the Jews was born. It remembers all who suffer and die though injustice; victims of war, abuse, and other horrors humans perpetrate on one another. The day is marked by devoting resources to help save or restore those we can or by giving time or money to organizations working to reach those who cannot help themselves.

Christmastide ends on Twelfth Night, a holiday immortalized by Shakespeare's play of the same name. On the last night of the season, the faithful would gather together to drink

wassail, a hot mulled cider, as they wandered through the streets bellowing out festive holiday songs. “Here we go a wassailing!” they would sing to one another before regrouping for parties with a carnival of games, music, and dancing. In some traditions, this marked the end of winter as well. The next day, Epiphany, was the day to take down the decorations and get back to the work of preparing the land for planting.

This year, rather than letting the celebration end when you throw out the gift wrap, try keeping one or more of the other eleven days as well and see if you don’t find a little more light in your life as a result. Make your own efforts to feed the hungry, to stand for the oppressed, and to heal the broken. Celebrate your family and friends! And together we can watch the world change for the better.

This has been Lt. Roger McCort for KINS Community Comment. Grace and peace to you.