

# Christmas Mission Pilgrimage



Matachines dancing in front of Mission Concepcion in December 2019

Mission Nuestra Senora de la Purisima Concepcion  
Mission San José y San Miguel de Aguayo  
Mission San Juan Capistrano

Jesus said, 'I thank you, Father, Lord of heaven and earth, because you have hidden these things from the wise and the intelligent and have revealed them to infants; yes, Father, for such was your gracious will.'

Mat 11:25-26

# Christmas Pilgrimage

Christmas isn't just a day – it's a Season! From our celebration of the Birth of Jesus on December 25 until the Feast of the Baptism of the Lord in January, it is the Christmas season.

Have you ever heard the song called The Twelve Days of Christmas, and wondered what swimming swans and leaping lords have to do with Christmas?

It was written in the 16th century when the Catholic Church was being persecuted in England. According to tradition, someone wrote The Twelve Days of Christmas as a song for Catholics to remember their faith. Each element in the carol stood for a religious concept which both children and adults could remember:

1. The partridge in the pear tree was Jesus Christ, born in Bethlehem.
2. Two turtle doves were the Old and New Testaments.
3. Three French hens stood for Faith, Hope and Love.
4. The four calling birds were the four gospels of Matthew, Mark, Luke and John.
5. The five golden rings recalled the first 5 books of the Bible; Genesis, Exodus, Leviticus, Numbers, and Deuteronomy.
6. The six geese a-laying stood for the six days of creation.
7. Seven swans a-swimming represented the sevenfold gifts of the Holy Spirit – Wisdom, Understanding, Counsel, Fortitude, Knowledge, Piety, and Fear of the Lord.
8. The eight maids a-milking were the eight Beatitudes.
9. Nine ladies dancing were the nine fruits of the Holy Spirit – Love, Joy, Peace, Patience, Kindness, Goodness, Faithfulness, Gentleness and Self-Control.
10. The ten lords a-leaping were the Ten Commandments.
11. The eleven pipers piping stood for the eleven faithful disciples.
12. The twelve drummers drumming symbolized the twelve points of belief in the Apostles' Creed.

# Preparation Prayer

For our Christmas Pilgrimage at the San Antonio Missions, let us take some time to meditate on and celebrate these important aspects of our Catholic Faith. You can do all the meditations in one or two places, or you can do three meditations at each of the four Missions.

We begin this pilgrimage in the name of the Father and of the Son and of the Holy Spirit.

*R.* Amen

Peace be with you.

*R.* And with your spirit.

Let us pray.

Almighty God, men and women through the ages have made great sacrifices to make a journey of faith so their relationship with you may be strengthened. Lord, we undertake this Advent pilgrimage not only on behalf of ourselves but also for all those we carry in our hearts and on behalf of the whole Church. Lord Jesus, be our companion as we walk with our brothers and sisters in faith. May “your Word be a lamp for my feet and a light for my path” (*Psalms 119: 105*). Lord, may our hearts “burn within us” (*Luke 24:32*) during this journey of faith.

Send your Holy Spirit that we may have contrite hearts ready to receive your graces and healing as we prepare for the coming of your Son. We ask this through Christ our Lord.

*R.* Amen.

# Misión Nuestra Señora de la Concepción de Acuña



“On the first day of Christmas my true love gave to me:  
A Partridge in a Pear Tree ....”

The partridge symbolizes Jesus, the Christ, born in Bethlehem. He is symbolically presented as a mother partridge that feigns injury to decoy predators from her helpless chicks.

**Meditation:** Another traditional symbol of Christ is a mother pelican who, when food is scarce, pierces her own breast to feed her chicks with her blood. We all feel helpless and lost at some point in our lives. How can we reach out to Christ when we are in dire straits? What must we do in thanksgiving for his love and mercy?

**Prayer:** Oh Lord, who sacrificed for us so that we may live in the knowledge that our bodily death is not the end but only the beginning of a new life, we rejoice in hope! We rejoice in the knowledge that your heavenly city awaits your faithful people. We rejoice in the season that brings all men and women together to fulfill your great commandment of love. We rejoice in the season of giving so that we might reveal your love to all through our generosity and your merciful grace. Amen.

## “On the second day of Christmas my true love gave to me: Two Turtle Doves ...”

This represents the Old and New Testaments, the Sacred Scriptures; which along with Sacred Tradition, comprise God's Revelation. God's covenantal relationship with us begins in the Old Testament, first with Adam and Eve, then Noah, and especially with Abraham and King David and their descendants. This sacred trust is then fulfilled in the New Testament by the New Covenant of Christ's Paschal sacrifice.

**Meditation:** Pope Francis recently declared the Third Sunday of Ordinary Time (the third Sunday after the Baptism of the Lord) as Word of God Sunday. Why are the Sacred Scriptures essential to our lives as Catholics? In what particular way will you observe Word of God Sunday?

**Prayer:** Heavenly Father, you first revealed yourself through the writings of the prophets until the coming of your Son, Jesus Christ, your perfect image. We thank you for gift of your Son and the New Covenant in his name that we may have an intimate relationship with you and the Word made flesh. As we exchange gifts, Father, let us be thankful and recognize that you have given us the greatest gifts of all. Amen.



“On the third day of Christmas my true love gave to me: Three French Hens ...”

This represents of the gifts of the Magi: gold, frankincense and myrrh. These gifts symbolize the three theological virtues of faith, hope and love; as well as the Trinity: Father, Son and Holy Spirit.

**Meditation:** The three theological virtues are intimately related to the Holy Trinity. Infused in us by God at our Baptism, these virtues enable us to act as God's children and dispose us to live in relationship with the Holy Trinity. Faith, Hope and Love have God for their origin, their motive, and their object – God known by faith, God hoped in for salvation, and loved for his own sake. Have we ever given thanks for the theological virtues bestowed on us at our Baptism? Through these gifts, how can we deepen our relationship with the three Persons of the Holy Trinity?

**Prayer:** By Faith, we believe in God and all that he has revealed to us through Sacred Scripture and Sacred Tradition. By Hope we desire, and have steadfast trust in God as we await eternal life and the graces to merit it. By Love, we love God above all things and our neighbor as ourselves for love of God. Love, the heart of all and every virtue, “binds everything together in perfect harmony” (Col 3:14). Amen.

# Misión San Jose y San Miguel de Aguayo



"On the fourth day of Christmas my true love gave to me: Four Calling Birds ..."

The calling birds symbolize the four Gospels: Matthew, Mark, Luke and John, which proclaim the Good News of God's salvation in Jesus Christ.

**Meditation:** The Gospels have often been called "different portraits" of Jesus. Only the Gospels of Matthew and Luke include the details of the birth of Christ, for example, while the Gospel of John is focused on Jesus' divine origin as the Word of God made flesh. How do these two perspectives on who Jesus is give us the full "portrait" of his human and divine natures in the one divine person? If you have a copy of the New Testament, read the first few chapters of each Gospel to consider and meditate on each "portrait" we have of Jesus.

**Prayer:** Lord Jesus, today I give thanks for your Good News of salvation which I have been blessed to have heard. Open my heart to hear the Gospel anew and grant me the confidence to proclaim the Good News to others. Pour out your Holy Spirit, that I might be strengthened to go forth and witness to the Gospel through my words and actions every day. I ask for your grace to heed the call of the New Evangelization to deepen my faith, grow in confidence to proclaim the Gospel, and boldly witness to the saving grace of your Son, Jesus Christ, Amen.

## "On the fifth day of Christmas my true love gave to me: Five Golden Rings ..."

This points to the first five books of the Old Testament, the Pentateuch: Genesis, Exodus, Leviticus, Numbers, and Deuteronomy. In a nutshell, they give us the story of humanity's fall from grace and God's response of mercy to fashion a people of priests, prophets, and kings to be a light unto the world.

**Meditation:** In the Old Testament, it was predicted that Messiah would be born of a virgin (Isa 7:14; cf. Mt 1:33), his birthplace would be Bethlehem (Mic 5:2; cf. Mt 2:1, 6), and John the Baptist would be his forerunner (Isa 40:3-5; Mal 3:1; cf. Mt 3:3, Mk 1:3; Lk 3:4-6). The Gospels often quote these prophecies to help their audiences understand that Jesus is the Promised One. Think back on your life and consider how the grace of God has "broken into" the pattern of your being and how this moment is part of the promise of its fulfillment in Jesus. What else in your life do you think may be part of that fulfillment?

**Prayer:** Oh Radiant Dawn of the Lord most high, splendor of eternal light, sun of justice: come and shine on those who dwell in darkness and in the shadow of death. Guide us through the wilderness of our lives. As we light candles in our homes and trim them with lights, let us be mindful that salvation and reconciliation come through your Son, the Light of the World, Amen.







"On the sixth day of Christmas my true love gave to me: Six Geese a-Laying ..."

These symbolize the six days of the creation. Eggs are also a universal symbol of new life.

**Meditation:** The creation story in the book of Genesis tells of a God whose mere word creates a beautiful universe in which human beings are an integral and important part. In an age of science and technology, how are Catholics to understand this account that says God created the heavens and earth in six days and rested on the seventh? "The Bible isn't meant to be a manual of natural science," Pope Benedict XVI said in 2013. "It is meant to make understandable the authentic and deep truth of all things." It shows that everything God creates is "beautiful and good, filled with wisdom and love. God's creative action brings order, leads to harmony and gives beauty." It also means, he said, that "we all carry in us the vital breath of God," and every human life is under his specific protection. "Man must not see the world as his own property to pillage and exploit, but as a gift from God to safeguard and develop with respect..."

**Prayer:** Almighty God, Creator and sustainer of the Universe, you remind us this day that there is beauty and holiness in your handiwork. Help us to live in this truth and strive, with your grace, to care for the gift of our world, our common home. During this holy season, let us focus less on ourselves and our desires, and more on others and their needs. As Pope Francis reminds us, we cannot care for creation, "if our hearts lack tenderness, compassion and concern for our fellow human beings." Help us to bear our unique responsibility to bring forth into the world the gifts we have received. Amen.



## San Juan Capistrano

“On the seventh day of Christmas my true love gave to me: Seven Swans a-Swimming ...”

Representing the seven gifts of the Holy Spirit: wisdom, understanding, counsel, fortitude, knowledge, piety, and fear of the Lord - or the seven sacraments: baptism, confirmation, penance, Eucharist, matrimony, holy orders and anointing of the sick. In biblical tradition, seven is the number of completeness and perfection, deriving from the six days of creation and the day God rested from his creative labors.

**Meditation:** We have the seven sacraments to sanctify, strengthen and purify us on our earthly journey, while the Holy Spirit is active in us through his seven-fold gifts. During our earthly pilgrimage, do we take recourse in the grace of the sacraments offered to us every day? Do we allow the Holy Spirit to be active in us so that his gifts take root and bloom in how we live and interact with others? How can we better take advantage of the many graces we have access to throughout life to grow into a more faithful image of the God who created us?

**Prayer:** Lord, examine our hearts today, let us come to you anew, and help us humbly and courageously examine our consciences. Help us repent and make us pure as the snow of the season. Let us take your saving words to heart and make a new beginning. Lord, let this season of the birth of our Savior be a new birth of your grace in me. Amen

## “On the eighth day of Christmas my true love gave to me: Eight Maids a-Milking ...”

The eight maids stand for the eight Beatitudes or blessings listed in Matthew 5:3-10. “Blessed are the poor in spirit, for theirs is the kingdom of heaven. Blessed are those who mourn, for they shall be comforted. Blessed are the meek, for they shall inherit the earth. Blessed are those who hunger and thirst for righteousness, for they will be filled. Blessed are the merciful, for they will receive mercy. Blessed are the pure in heart, for they will see God. Blessed are the peacemakers, for they will be called children of God. Blessed are those who are persecuted for righteousness’ sake, for theirs is the kingdom of heaven.”

**Meditation:** Christians believe that God fulfilled his Old Testament promise to gather from all nations those who belong to God in in the Person of Christ. These believers are formed into the new Israel through the New Covenant in Christ. The beatitudes are the basic outline of the spirit of this New Covenant. Jesus, the new Moses, writes these not on tablets of stone, but on the human heart transformed and elevated by grace. Thus, the new law is an interior law – the law of love.

**Prayer:** *Blessed are the poor in spirit* - Heavenly Father, I want the humility not to be impressed with myself and my accomplishments. I can do no good thing apart from you. Forgive any sense of egotistical pride and self-sufficiency; I cast myself upon your mercy.

*Blessed are those who mourn* - Lord, let me mourn with what breaks your own heart. Let me embrace the true grief of the Man of sorrows and die to self-pity. Let me receive your grace and mercy, until all tears are wiped away in your heavenly kingdom.

(continued)

(continued)

***Blessed are the meek*** - Lord Jesus, you were meek, lowly, and gentle of heart – not weak. You had all the heavenly host at your command. Let me, like you, be gentle in strength. Let me learn from you and imitate your patience, long-suffering and humility.

***Blessed are those who hunger and thirst for righteousness*** – As we hunger and thirst for food and drink, let me long for you and your justice – ever tempered with mercy. Quench my soul with the graces of your living water in the sacraments. We have tasted and know you are all good.

***Blessed are the merciful*** - Father of mercies, help me open my heart to forgiveness, even when it is difficult. Lead me to forgive as you do, and in the measure as I have been forgiven by you. Let me be a channel of your mercy and grace for others.

***Blessed are the pure in heart*** - Wash me clean, Oh Lord, of my sins. Burn off the impurities of my heart with your refining fire. Retain whatever good grain is in me, and separate it from the chaff; the worthless, insincere, and immoral.

***Blessed are the peacemakers*** - Prince of peace, let me come before you in complete trust to receive your peace that the world cannot give. Let me be at peace with everyone and, like St. Francis of Assisi, let me be an instrument of that peace where there is discord.

***Blessed are those who are persecuted for righteousness' sake*** - Oh, Righteous One, help me to follow wherever you lead. Give me your grace to suffer opposition – even persecution – for doing what is right. Remind me that we are true citizens of heaven, “for this world is passing away”.

Amen

# Misión San Francisco de Espada



“On the ninth day of Christmas my true love gave to me: Nine Ladies Dancing ...”

The dancing Ladies symbolize the fruits of the Holy Spirit: love, joy, peace, patience, kindness, generosity, faithfulness, gentleness and self-control.

**Meditation:** “Just so, every good tree bears good fruit, and a rotten tree bears bad fruit. A good tree cannot bear bad fruit, nor can a rotten tree bear good fruit. Every tree that does not bear good fruit will be cut down and thrown into the fire. So by their fruits you will know them.” (Matthew 7:17-20) This passage helps us understand the Fruits of the Holy Spirit, the observable behaviors of people who have allowed the grace of the Holy Spirit to be effective in them. What Fruits has the Holy Spirit borne in me, and what aspects of my life may need more “tilling of the soil” for other blossoms to grow and bear fruit?

**Prayer:** Abide in me, oh, Holy Spirit and let me be docile to your promptings. Let my words and actions bear witness to the Savior born to us this season. At the end of my days, may the Father be pleased with my life, bringing an abundant harvest of your fruits. Amen.



“On the tenth day of Christmas my true love gave to me: Ten Lords a-Leaping ...”

The Ten Lords stand for the Ten Commandments given to Moses on Mt. Sinai. “If you wish to enter into life, keep the commandments.” (Mt. 19:17)

**Meditation:** “A lawyer asked [Jesus] a question to test him. ‘Teacher, which commandment in the law is the greatest?’ He said to him, ‘You shall love the Lord your God with all your heart, and with all your soul, and with all your mind.’ This is the greatest and first commandment. And the second is like it. ‘You shall love your neighbor as yourself.’ On these two commandments hang all the law and the prophets.” (Mt. 22:36-40) Jesus then speaks further, “This is my commandment, that you love one another as I have loved you.” (Jn 15:12) St. Paul then emphasizes, “Love does no wrong to a neighbor; therefore love is the fulfilling of the [commandments].” (Rom. 13:9-10) Is this how we understand the Ten Commandments? How can we better understand them as St. Paul explains them to the Christians in Rome?

**Prayer:** Lord, only with your grace can we strive to live by your commandments, which you have elevated to the law of love. We pray for those in authority, civil and ecclesial, who are charged with overseeing the law; give them good judgement, discernment, and humility. And let us all remember that no legitimate human law may contradict divine law. We pray for all those lonely, aggrieved or in pain during his holy season, that we may be faithful to your command to love one another. Amen.

## “On the eleventh day of Christmas my true love gave to me: Eleven Pipers Piping ...”

The Pipers symbolize the eleven faithful apostles: Simon Peter, Andrew, James, John, Phillip, Bartholomew, Matthew, Thomas, James the son of Alphaeus, Simon the Zealot and Judas son of James. The list does not include Judas Iscariot, the twelfth disciple who betrayed Jesus.

**Meditation:** “Then Jesus summoned his twelve disciples and gave them authority over unclean spirits, to cast them out and to cure every disease and every sickness ... These twelve Jesus sent out with the following instructions ... ‘Go nowhere among the Gentiles, and enter no town of the Samaritans, but go rather to the lost sheep of the house of Israel. As you go, proclaim the good news, ‘The kingdom of heaven has come near.’” Mat 10:1-7. Christ called freely, and in freedom the Twelve responded. He did not bring down visions from heaven to overwhelm them to cooperate, his voice was enough.

**Prayer:** Heavenly Father, Your Son Jesus called the twelve to his side, to leave their homes and families to be his disciples and friends, though not all were faithful. You have also called and sanctified us through our baptism to be your disciples and friends in the present day. Graciously hear our plea to be faithful to your call, no matter our vocation or state of life. Let all that I do be my response to your call to be your disciple and a light to others. May my heart always be confident and generous in responding to your voice. Amen.

"On the twelfth day of Christmas my true love gave to me: Twelve Drummers Drumming ..." sounding the cadence of what we believe, the Twelve Articles of the Apostle's Creed:

1. I believe in God, the Father almighty, creator of heaven and earth.
2. I believe in Jesus Christ, His only Son, our Lord.
3. He was conceived by the power of the Holy Spirit and born of the Virgin Mary.
4. He suffered under Pontius Pilate, was crucified, died and was buried.
5. On the third day He rose again. He ascended into heaven, and is seated at the right hand of the Father.
6. He will come again to judge the living and the dead.
7. I believe in the Holy Spirit,
8. The holy Catholic Church,
9. The communion of saints,
10. The forgiveness of sins,
11. The resurrection of the body,
12. And life everlasting.

**Meditation:** In its present form, the Apostles' Creed, can be traced back to around the 7th or 8th century. It appeared in slightly different forms in documents as early as the year 200. It is divided into what are called 12 articles and is the most succinct summary of our faith. Like the somewhat more detailed Nicene Creed recited during the Mass, it is a solid profession of the fundamental truths we believe as Catholics. Though we may know this basic prayer by memory, have we really considered what we are professing we believe? What is meant by the last four articles?



**Prayer:** The Act of Faith - O my God, I firmly believe that you are one God in three divine Persons, Father, Son, and Holy Spirit. I believe that your divine Son became man and died for our sins, and that he will come to judge the living and the dead. I believe these and all the truths which the holy Catholic Church teaches, because you have revealed them, who can neither deceive nor be deceived. Amen. Jesus said to him ... All things can be done for the one who believes." Immediately the father of the child cried out, "I believe; help my unbelief!" (Mk 9:23-24)

**Conclusion:** Christmas Day is only beginning a full twelve days the Church celebrates with the birth of Christ. Its culmination is the Feast of the Epiphany, when we experience the completion of the mystery of the Incarnation: the tiny Baby born in a humble Bethlehem stable is in reality the King of the whole world. It takes twelve days of journeying for the Magi to find the new-born King, present Him with regal gifts, and proclaim him to the world at large. Epiphany is the fulfillment of our Advent expectations for a royal and kingly Savior.



## The Rosary

1. On the crucifix, make the sign of the cross and then pray the Apostles' Creed:  
I believe in God, the Father Almighty, Creator of Heaven and earth; and in Jesus Christ, His only Son, Our Lord, Who was conceived by the Holy Ghost, born of the Virgin Mary, suffered under Pontius Pilate, was crucified; died, and was buried. He descended into Hell; the third day He arose again from the dead; He ascended into Heaven, sitteth at the right hand of God, the Father Almighty; from thence He shall come to judge the living and the dead. I believe in the Holy Spirit, the holy Catholic Church, the communion of saints, the forgiveness of sins, the resurrection of the body, and life everlasting. Amen.
2. On the next Large bead, say the Our Father
3. On the following three small beads, pray three Hail Mary's
4. On the chain, pray the Glory Be.
5. On the large bead, meditate on the first mystery and pray the Our Father.
6. Skip the centerpiece medallion, and on the ten beads pray the Hail Mary; on the chain pray a Glory Be.
7. Repeat steps 5 and 6 four more times
8. *Fatima Prayer* may be added after the Glory Be and before the next Our Father:  
O My Jesus, forgive us our sins, save us from the fires of hell and lead all souls to heaven, especially those in most need of Thy mercy. Amen
9. At the end say the Hail Holy Queen:

Hail, Holy Queen, Mother of mercy, our life, our sweetness, and our hope. To thee do we cry, poor banished children of Eve, to thee do we send up our sighs, mourning and weeping in this valley of tears. Turn then, most gracious advocate, thine eyes of mercy toward us; and after this our exile show unto us the blessed fruit of thy womb Jesus, O clement, O loving, O sweet Virgin Mary.  
Pray for us, O holy Mother of God. That we may be made worthy of the promises of Christ.

O God, whose only-begotten Son, by His life, death, and resurrection, has purchased for us the rewards of eternal salvation; grant we beseech Thee, that meditating upon these mysteries of the most holy Rosary of the Blessed Virgin Mary, we may imitate what they contain and obtain what they promise. Through the same Christ our Lord. Amen.

## The Joyful Mysteries

### The Annunciation

And when the angel had come to her, he said, "Hail, full of grace, the Lord is with thee. Blessed art thou among women."

(Luke 1:28)

### The Visitation

Elizabeth was filled with the Holy Spirit and cried out in a loud voice: "Blest are you among women and blest is the fruit of your womb"

(Luke 1:41—42)

### The Birth of Jesus

She gave birth to her first-born Son and wrapped Him in swaddling clothes and laid Him in a manger, because there was no room for them in the place where travelers lodged.

(Luke 2:7)

### The Presentation

When the day came to purify them according to the law of Moses, the couple brought Him up to Jerusalem to be presented to the Lord, for it is written in the law of the Lord, "Every first-born male shall be consecrated to the Lord".

### Finding the Child Jesus in the Temple

On the third day they came upon Him in the temple sitting in the midst of the teachers, listening to them and asking them questions.

(Luke 2:46)



