

Six family traditions for Epiphany

Epiphany is an ancient feast celebrating the appearance or manifestation of God to the whole world. Traditionally celebrated on January 6 (still the practice in some places around the world), the liturgical reforms of 1970 moved Epiphany to the second Sunday of January.

Epiphany was once a more prominent celebration; not only was it the preferred day for gift-giving (in imitation of the Magi), but Christians originally celebrated Epiphany as *all* the manifestations of the divinity of Jesus prior to the start of his public ministry: his birth (with the visit of the Magi), the presentation in the Temple, the finding in the Temple, his baptism in the Jordan, and even the miracle at Cana.

Today, Roman Catholics focus on the manifestation of Christ's birth to the entire world, represented by the magi and the star. (Birthday announcements don't get more public than hanging a new star in the sky.)

Here are six ways you can celebrate Epiphany with your kids this year.

1. Bless your home and household on Epiphany

It is traditional to bless your home and household on the Feast of the Epiphany, perhaps because of the biblical reference to the three kings entering the home where the Holy Family was staying in order to worship the Christ child there. You can find an [Epiphany blessing of the home](#) in *Catholic Household Blessings and Prayers* (or at the USCCB website).

A more traditional form of the Epiphany blessing involves

using blessed chalk to write the letters C, M, and B, plus the year, above the main entrance to the home (or above the door to each room in the house), like so: 20 + C + M + B + 18. The letters are the initials of the traditional names of the three magi: Caspar, Melchior, and Balthazar. They also represent the Latin words *Christus mansionem benedicat*, which means: “May Christ bless the house.” Of course, the + represents the cross.^f

2. Send the magi on a journey through your house

If you have a manger set, bring out the three kings on Christmas Day—but instead of placing them at the manger right away, put them somewhere else in your house so that they can journey to the manger over the twelve days between Christmas Day and the traditional date for the Feast of the Epiphany (January 6).

You can have the three kings move to a different room or area of your house on each day. Let your kids search for them every morning; when they find them, say to your kids: “The wise men are searching for Jesus in ____ (the dining room, your bedroom, etc.). How can we show the magi that Jesus is present in this place?” Brainstorm examples of Christian behavior in the particular place, then close with a short prayer:

“O holy magi, help us to see Christ in this place, and make it holy in all we say and all we do here. Amen.”

3. Hold a procession of the magi

On the Feast of the Epiphany, read the Gospel account of the visit of the three wise men (see [Matthew 2:1-12](#)), then have your children march through the house holding the figures of the three kings and singing “[We Three Kings](#).”

4. Eat King's Cake

A popular Epiphany tradition in many cultures, the King's Cake (or King Cake) is a sweet cake in which a small figure of the baby Jesus is hidden. Searching for the baby Jesus in the cake imitates the Magi's search for the baby Jesus. You can find great recipes for King's Cake, along with some cultural background, over at [Catholic Cuisine](#).

Another option? Galette des Rois, a traditional French cake for Epiphany with a sweet almond filling. Here's a video demonstrating how to make it:

Be sure to put a miniature Christ child in your cake, not a mini Shrek, as the lady in the video does.

5. Celebrate Twelfth Night

Twelfth Night is a largely forgotten traditional celebration held on the twelfth night of the Christmas season, January 6—the traditional date of Epiphany before the liturgical reforms of Vatican II.

Over at Catholic Cuisine, they have a complete and comprehensive plan for a [Twelve Days of Christmas themed dinner feast](#) that features twelve courses, including partridge in a pear tree pie. You can also find an extensive history, as well as some traditional ways of celebrating, at [Fish Eaters](#).

6. Give gifts

Some families make it a tradition to save Christmas gift-giving until Epiphany...and then to give each person just three gifts. This might be a fun tradition to transition to as your

kids get older. One advantage: More time to get the perfect gift, which means less stress around Christmas...plus, take advantage of those after-Christmas sales.

Learn more

If you're looking for even more ways to spice up your Epiphany celebrations, check out the lengthy list of [national and local Epiphany customs over at Wikipedia](#).

Here's a Vatican News video about [Epiphany in early Christian art](#).

Here's a video of a family chalk blessing ritual...probably about as messy and crazy as your own family prayer time with young kids. This one features a spider, the letter E, and...an Indian war whoop? Fun!

And here is a more serious explanation and demonstration of a chalk ritual by Fr. O'Connor at Pilgrim Center of Hope.