



## The Feast of the Epiphany

Each year on the Sunday between January 2 and 8, we celebrate the feast of the Epiphany—the manifestation of our Lord Jesus Christ to the Gentiles. The word *epiphany* means manifestation.

The gospel for Epiphany is Matthew's story of the wise men from the East (Matthew 2:1-12). Matthew, the most overtly Jewish of all the gospels, records the visit of the wise men from the East, apparently Gentiles from Persia or Babylonia, as the first to come to worship Jesus. In contrast, Luke tells us about shepherds in the fields near Bethlehem, who would obviously be Jews.

In the early Church, Epiphany was the original celebration of the nativity of our Lord, understood as the manifestation of Christ to the whole world. January 2 was the date chosen to celebrate the feast by Christians in the East, probably because the Egyptians celebrated their great feast of the winter solstice on that day, in honor of their sun-god Horus.

The Church consciously decided to observe the nativity of Jesus in direct competition with this pagan feast. The Christian feast was primarily a commemoration of the Lord's baptism, as it still is for Eastern Orthodox churches.

The feast of Epiphany became known in the West during the fourth century, about the same time as the feast of Christmas came to be celebrated on the 25th of December. Epiphany in the West acquired some of the Christmas associations, particularly the story of the magi's visit, which then became regarded as a manifestation to the Gentiles.

One custom associated with the Epiphany feast was a procession of children dressed as the magi, carrying a star on a pole and going from house to house singing star carols. Another was the baking of a special Kings' cake with a coin in it. Whoever found the coin would be king of the Epiphany Day party.

In Latin America, as well as other parts of the world, the feast of the Epiphany is known as the Day of the Kings. Christians exchange presents on this day rather than on Christmas Day, appropriate since the Epiphany is the observance of the coming of the wise men with gifts for the Christ child.

Because of the emphasis on the manifestation of Christ to the Gentiles, Epiphany introduces the need for mission and evangelism, the outreach of the Church with the good news of God's love incarnate in Jesus Christ.

*“Epiphany, on which Christ,  
the Savior of the world,  
for the first time appeared to the gentiles,  
is to be venerated with  
a most holy honor by us also.  
For that day is not past in such a way  
that the power of the work  
which was then revealed  
should be past as well.”*

—Pope Leo I, the Great

**The Royal Society**

The Royal Society is a learned society in London, England, that was founded in 1660. It is the oldest scientific academy in continuous existence. The society's motto is "Nullius in verba", which translates to "No man's word as authority". The society is a self-governing body of natural philosophers, mathematicians and scientists, and is one of the most prestigious institutions in the world. It is a charitable organization and is a member of the Academies of Europe.

1660  
1662  
1663  
1664  
1665

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