

Epiphany Traditions

It is traditional for parish priests to bless water on Epiphany, which is used for the blessing of homes that day. Chalk for each family is also blessed so that they may mark the names of the three Magi over their doors, as a witness of their faith and protection against evil.

With chalk, they write an inscription on the lintel above the front door. The series of numbers, letters, and crosses changes only slightly from year to year. For example, at the start of the year **2021**, the line will read as follows:

20+C+M+B+21

The four digits designating the New Year appear at the beginning and end of the line. Because Epiphany comes so near the beginning of the New Year, the numbers represent an annual renewal of God's blessing.

The letters have two meanings. They are the initials of the traditional names of the Magi: Caspar, Melchior and Balthasar. They also abbreviate the Latin words "*Christus mansionem benedicat.*" "May Christ bless the house." The letters recall the day on which the inscription is made, as well as the purpose of blessing.

The crosses represent Christ, whom we invoke, and the saintliness of the magi. The inscription is made above the front door, so that all who enter and depart this year may enjoy God's blessing. The month of January still bears the name of the Roman god Janus, the doorkeeper of heaven and patron of the beginning and end of things. This blessing adds a Christian dimension to the traditional observance of the first month. The inscription is made of chalk, a product of clay, which recalls the human nature taken by God's eternal word in this holy season.

If you want to inscribe your home this Epiphany, a rite is provided on the reverse side of this page.



Inscribing of the Home on Epiphany

This blessing of the home and inscription of the initials of the three Magi above each door can be performed either by a priest or the head of the household. The feast of the Epiphany is traditionally celebrated on the 12th day of Christmas, January 6th. In the dioceses of the United States this feast has been moved to the Sunday between January 2 and January 8.

Upon entering the home:

Leader (*Priest, if present, or the head of the household*): Peace be to this house.

All: And to all who dwell herein.

All: From the east came the Magi to Bethlehem to adore the Lord; and opening their treasures they offered precious gifts: gold for the great King, incense for the true God, and myrrh in symbol of His burial.

One of the members of the family may now sprinkle the entrance with Epiphany Water.

All: Our Father...

Leader: O Lord, hear my prayer.

All: And let my cry come unto You.

Leader: The three Magi, Caspar, Melchior, and Balthasar followed the star of God's Only begotten Son who became man 2021 years ago. May Christ bless our dwelling and remain with us throughout the new year. Amen.

The Inscription

20+C+M+B+21

is then inscribed with the blessed chalk above the front door.

Leader: Let us pray:

O Lord, Holy, Father Almighty, everlasting God, we beg You to hear us: and send Your holy Angels from heaven, to guard and cherish, protect and visit, and evermore defend all who dwell in this house. We call upon Your Saints, Caspar, Melchior, and Balthasar, to protect this Family and this home from every harm and danger, and may the mark over this door remain as a constant reminder to us and all who enter here that our house is truly a house of the Lord. O God, make the door of this house the gateway to Your Eternal Kingdom. All this we ask through Jesus Christ our Lord. Amen.