



January 6 is the Feast of the Epiphany, sometimes called "Three Kings Day," and starts what some consider to be the Season of or after Epiphany, continuing until Ash Wednesday. In some cultures, January 6 is a large and festive end to the Christmas season; a day of presents, parades, and celebration. Epiphany is an invitation to follow stars, listen to dreams, and step out of what we have always known. The Gospel of Matthew tells us this is the day the magi ("kings") arrived in Bethlehem, directed by angels and guided by a star, bringing gifts of gold, frankincense, and myrrh to Jesus. Gold symbolized Jesus as a king. Frankincense and myrrh are sweet-smelling resins that were burned as sacred offerings and during burials. The magi go home by another road. Little else is known about them, although a robust tradition has grown around them over time, including their number (three) and their names (Caspar, Melchior, and Balthazar). This holy mystery invites us to wonder who the magi are and how their sacred story intersects with our own. Who or what is leading you to God incarnate? Which stars will you follow this year and what road will you take? What gifts will you offer?

READ

Matthew 2:1-12 In the time of King Herod, after Jesus was born in Bethlehem, wise men from the East came to Jerusalem, asking, "Where is the child who has been born king of the Jews? For we observed his star at its rising, and have come to pay him homage." When King Herod heard this he was frightened and calling together all the chief priests and scribes of the people, he inquired where the Messiah was to be born. They told him, "In Bethlehem; for it has been written by the prophet: *'And you, Bethlehem, in the land of Judah, from you shall come a ruler who is to shepherd my people Israel.'*" Then Herod secretly called for the wise men and learned from them the exact time when the star had appeared. He sent them to Bethlehem, saying, "Go and search diligently for the child and when you have found him, bring me word so that I may also go and pay him homage." They set out and ahead of them went the star they had seen at its rising, until it stopped over the place where the child was. When they saw that the star had stopped, they were overwhelmed with joy. On entering the house, they saw the child with Mary his mother; and they knelt down and paid him homage. Then, opening their treasure chests, they offered him gifts of gold, frankincense, and myrrh. And having been warned in a dream not to return to Herod, they left for their own country by another road.



WONDER

On Epiphany, consider participating in an ancient tradition known as "Chalking the Door." This practice consists of marking a blessing in chalk in a specific pattern of letters and numbers, to invite God's blessing on a home, church, or other entryway, and on all who enter its doors during the year. All you need is chalk and a doorway. The markings are usually made above the front door or main entrance, in this pattern:

20 + C + M + B + 23

The numbers change each year to reflect the new calendar year. The letters C, M, and B are given two meanings: the initials of the traditional names of the three magi, Caspar, Melchior, and Balthazar, and the initials of the Latin phrase *Christus Mansionem Benedicat*, which means, "Christ bless this dwelling." The + signs are for the Cross of Christ. Before, during, or after the chalking of the door, the following prayer might be offered:

O God of Stars and Journeys, we ask your blessing on this threshold. May all whose journeys lead them through these doors be blessed with health, generosity of spirit, a joyful heart, and deep peace. O God of Welcome, may all who enter this doorway rejoice to find Christ living among us, and may we seek and serve, in everyone we meet, that same Jesus who is the incarnate Word, now and forever. Amen.

Seeing the symbols over our door during the year remind us, even as life goes back to a regular routine after Christmas, that our homes and all those who dwell there belong to Christ. They are also reminders of the welcome the magi gave to Jesus. Who might we welcome into our hearts this coming year? With time the chalk will fade. As it does, we let the meaning of the written symbols sink into the depths of our hearts and manifest in our words and actions.

PRAY

O God Among Us, may we be visited by angels, may we follow stars, may we bring the gifts we have to offer. May we embrace the journey and travel in love. May Christ bless our homes and find a home in our hearts throughout the year. *Amen.*