

The Epiphany of the Lord

The Western Church began celebrating the Epiphany in the 4th century where it was, and still is, associated with the visit of the Magi (wise men or kings) to the infant Jesus when God revealed himself to the world through the wonder of the incarnation of Jesus. The Magi (traditionally named Melchior, Caspar and Balthazar) found Jesus by following a star across the desert to Bethlehem. In the gospel according to Matthew, they offered gifts of gold, frankincense and myrrh (Matt 2:11). These gifts were symbolic of the importance of Jesus' birth, the gold representing his royal standing; frankincense his divine birth; and myrrh his mortality. The word *Epiphany* comes from a Greek verb meaning "to reveal", and the feast is celebrated on 6 January (twelve days after Christmas) but, in most countries and dioceses, the celebration is transferred to the Sunday between 2 January and 8 January, inclusive.

The Orthodox Church celebrates Epiphany as a season, not simply a day. The Epiphany season is seen as a continuation of the Christmas season, and together they last forty days. The three main events focused on during the Epiphany season are the visit of the Magi, the baptism of Jesus, and Jesus' miracle at the marriage at Cana – three manifestations, or showings, of who Jesus is.

Various paintings, artworks and sketches show the three wise men, or kings, and Jesus. Some paintings show them on the way to Bethlehem or adoring the baby Jesus. The kings are important because their visit illustrates that Jesus was the king of all kings who came for the Jews and the Gentiles.

The Ceremonial of bishops suggests that there be a 'suitable and increased display of lights' today. It also suggests 'a special presentation of the gifts' (perhaps reflecting or symbolising the gifts brought by the Magi). After the gospel of the day, the deacon or a cantor may sing the table of moveable feasts for this year. The text and a musical tone for this are provided in the missal (p.1505).