

**Series #22: Epiphanies, Theophanies, and the Incarnation**  
**Session 2 – The Epiphany of Our Lord**  
**Tuesday, January 19, 2021**

**Schedule**

January 12 – The Nativity

January 19 – The Epiphany

January 26 – The Baptism of Our Lord

February 2 – The Presentation of Jesus Christ in the Temple

February 9 – The Wedding at Cana

February 16 – The Transfiguration

**What is an Epiphany?**

- From the Greek verb *epiphainen* (ἐπιφαίνειν) = “to shine upon,” “to manifest,” or “to make known.”

**The Epiphany of Our Lord, aka Three Kings Day or Twelfth Night**

- The Solemnity of the Epiphany occurs on January 6.
  - The feast recognizes the ways that Christ made himself known in the world:
    - The visit of the Magi (Matthew 2:1-12)
    - The Baptism of Jesus (Mark 1:9-11)
    - The Wedding at Cana (John 2:1-11) – Year A only, since 1979
- In the Eastern Church, January 6 is known as The Theophany (the Festival of Lights) and commemorates the Baptism of Jesus Christ at which not only was Christ made known to the world, but all three persons of the Trinity were also made manifest. Churches still following the Julian (old) Calendar celebrate it on January 19 on the Gregorian Calendar.
- Since 1969, the RCC made the date variable and can occur on January 6, or on the Sunday between January 3 and 8. Since about 1976, many parts of the Anglican Communion have adopted that practice as well. What about the Episcopal Church? *All may, some do, (none must).*
  - The Sunday after the Epiphany is when the Baptism of Jesus is commemorated. (More about that celebration next week!)

**History of the celebration of the Epiphany**

- The biblical story of the Epiphany being read around January 6 may have occurred as early as 200 CE, but the first references to Epiphany as a Christian celebration date to 361 CE.
- St. Gregory of Nazianzus delivered a sermon on December 25, 380, calling it the “theophany.” He then preached on Jesus’ baptism on January 6. There was some debate as to the exact dates during this time.

### Who were the Three Kings/Magi/Wise Men?

- The traditional names are Caspar, Melchior (a Persian scholar), and Balthazar (a Babylonian scholar).
- The word magi is the plural of Latin magus, borrowed from Greek μάγος (magos), as used in the original Greek text of the Gospel of Matthew (in the plural: μάγοι, magoi). Greek magos itself is derived from Old Persian magâunô from the Avestan magâunô, i.e., the religious caste into which Zoroaster was born (see Yasna 33.7: "yâ sruyê parê magâunô" = "so I can be heard beyond Magi"). The term refers to the Persian priestly caste of Zoroastrianism. As part of their religion, these priests paid particular attention to the stars and gained an international reputation for astrology, which was at that time highly regarded as a science.
- The gifts of gold, frankincense, and myrrh
  - All three gifts are ordinary offerings and gifts given to a king. Myrrh being commonly used as an anointing oil, frankincense as a perfume, and gold as a valuable.
  - The three gifts had a spiritual meaning: gold as a symbol of kingship on earth, frankincense (an [incense](#)) as a symbol of deity, and myrrh (an embalming oil) as a symbol of death.

### Epiphany Traditions & Customs

- At the mass According to ancient custom, the priest announced the date of Easter on the feast of Epiphany. This tradition dated from a time when calendars were not readily available, and the church needed to publicize the date of Easter, since many celebrations of the liturgical year depend on it. The proclamation may be sung or proclaimed at the ambo by a deacon, cantor, or reader either after the reading of the Gospel or after the postcommunion prayer.
  - The Roman Missal thus provides a formula with appropriate chant (in the tone of the *Exsultet*) for proclaiming on Epiphany, wherever it is customary to do so, the dates in the calendar for the celebration of Ash Wednesday, Easter Sunday, Ascension of Jesus Christ, Pentecost, the Body and Blood of Christ, and the First Sunday of Advent that will mark the following liturgical year.
- On the Feast of the Epiphany in some parts of central Europe the priest, wearing white vestments, blesses Epiphany water, frankincense, gold, and chalk. The chalk is used to write the initials of the three magi (traditionally, Caspar, Melchior, and Balthasar), over the doors of churches and homes. The initials may also be interpreted as the Latin phrase, *Christus mansionem benedicat* (may Christ bless the house).