

# Parish of Our Lady of the Annunciation - King's Lynn

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## EPIPHANY

The Feast of the Epiphany of Our Lord Jesus Christ is one of the oldest Christian feasts, though, throughout the centuries, it has celebrated a variety of things. *Epiphany* comes from a Greek verb meaning "to reveal," and all of the various events celebrated by the Feast of the Epiphany are revelations of Christ to man.

### Quick Facts

#### *Date:*

January 6. (In most countries and dioceses, the celebration is transferred to the Sunday between January 2 and January 8, inclusive.)

#### *Type of Feast:*

Solemnity.

#### *Readings:*

Isaiah 60:1-6; Psalm 72:1-2, 7-8, 10-11, 12-13; Ephesians 3:2-3a, 5-6; Matthew 2:1-12

#### *Prayers:*

Collect for the Feast of the Epiphany of Our Lord Jesus Christ (from the Mass of St. Pius V): "O God, Who by the guidance of a star didst this day reveal Thine only-begotten Son to the Gentiles, mercifully grant that we, who know Thee now by faith, may be so led as to behold with our eyes the beauty of Thy majesty. Through the same Lord Jesus Christ, Thy Son, Who liveth and reigneth with Thee in the unity of the Holy Ghost, God, world without end. Amen."

#### *Other Names for the Feast:*

Theophany, Three Kings Day

### History of the Feast of the Epiphany

Like many of the most ancient Christian feasts, Epiphany was first celebrated in the East, where it has been held from the beginning almost universally on January 6.

Today, among both Eastern Catholics and Eastern Orthodox, the feast is known as Theophany—the revelation of God to man.

### Epiphany: A Fourfold Feast

Epiphany originally celebrated four different events, in the following order of importance: the Baptism of the Lord; Christ's first miracle, the changing of water into wine at the wedding in Cana; the Nativity of Christ; and the visitation of the Wise Men or Magi.

Each of these is a revelation of God to man: At Christ's Baptism, the Holy Spirit descends and the voice of God the Father is heard, declaring that Jesus is His Son; at the wedding in Cana, the miracle reveals Christ's divinity; at the Nativity, the angels bear witness to Christ, and the shepherds, representing the people of Israel, bow down before Him; and at the visitation of the Magi, Christ's divinity is revealed to the Gentiles—the other nations of the earth.



### The End of Christmastide

Eventually, the celebration of the Nativity was separated out, in the West, into Christmas; and shortly thereafter, Western Christians adopted the Eastern feast of the Epiphany, still celebrating the Baptism, the first miracle, and the visit from the Wise Men. Thus, Epiphany came to mark the end of Christmastide—the Twelve Days of Christmas (celebrated in the song), which began with the revelation of Christ to Israel in His Birth and ended with the revelation of Christ to the Gentiles at Epiphany.

Over the centuries, the various celebrations were further separated in the West, and now the Baptism of the Lord is celebrated on the Sunday after January 6, and the wedding at Cana is commemorated on the Sunday after the Baptism of the Lord.

### Epiphany Customs

In many parts of Europe, the celebration of Epiphany is at least as important as the celebration of Christmas. While in England and her historical colonies, the custom has long been to give gifts on Christmas Day itself, in Italy and other Mediterranean countries, Christians exchange gifts on Epiphany—the day on which the Wise Men brought their gifts to the Christ Child.

In Northern Europe, the two traditions have often been combined, with gift-giving on both Christmas and Epiphany (often with smaller gifts on each of the twelve days of Christmas in between). (In the past, though, the main gift-giving day in both Northern and Eastern Europe was usually the feast of Saint Nicholas.) And in the United States in recent years, some Catholics have tried to revive the fullness of Christmastide.