



What's What

A weekly communication that provides an opportunity for our faith community to grow together in faith.

Epiphany

Epiphany is celebrated with special solemnity in churches in the US on the Sunday between January 2 and 8. Epiphany comes from the Greek *epiphanein*, a "showing, appearance, or revelation." It was used to describe the appearance of a god among the people, a theophany, or a visit from some civil dignitary. The Greek-speaking church of the East found it natural to use the word to describe the appearance of the true God in flesh. Consequently, some churches in that part of the world celebrated a festival on January 6 recalling Jesus' baptism in the Jordan and his Cana miracle; others celebrated a festival commemorating his birth, and eventually a combination of the two.

Evidence of a Nativity festival in Egypt and in the churches of the Near East is very ancient, possible beginning before the 3rd century. Theories of why a January 6 date was chosen by the Eastern church parallels the arguments for the December 25 date in the west. A popular theory, challenged by more recent research, presumes that the winter solstice occurred on January 6, according to the calendar used in that part of the world. On that day pagans celebrated with nuances of wine, water, and light, the appearance

("epiphany") of Aion, god of time and eternity, among the people. Christians, as the argument goes, adopted this day as their feast of the Incarnation, incorporating into the liturgy the gospel stories of Jesus' "epiphanies" at his birth, on the occasion of the visit of the Magi, at his baptism in the Jordan, and at his first miracle of turning water into wine at the wedding feast of Cana. This mixed theme made sense to these early people in the East because Jesus was not revealed to the people until his baptism.

This feast of the Epiphany was introduced into Gaul in the mid-4th century because the churches in that part of Europe had close ties to the East. In Gaul the Epiphany themes of the Magi, the baptism of Jesus, his transfiguration, and the miracle at Cana

were developed. By the end of the 4th century, Eastern and Western churches took over each other's Nativity feasts. Since then, Christmas and the Epiphany have been celebrated in both churches. This duplication led to the evolution of a separate theme for each. The Eastern church continued to emphasize the theme of Jesus' epiphanies with the gospel stories of Jesus' baptism and his miracle at Cana. In the Western church, the Epiphany evolved into a celebration of the gospel story of the visit of the Magi (Matthew 2:1-12) on the occasion of Jesus' birth: his epiphany to the gentiles.

The Christmas season officially ends the Sunday after Epiphany with the commemoration of Christ's baptism.

Catholic Customs & Traditions,
Greg Dues,
Twenty-Third Publications, 2003

Blessing of Households

From the Middle Ages the tradition of blessing homes has been associated with Epiphany, recalling the visit of the Magi.

If you are interested in reviving this tradition in your home, gather the members of your family together and with a piece of chalk write the following on the inside of

the main door in your house:
20 + C + M + B + 08

This code represents the year, the "20" at the beginning and the "08" at the end, and the initials C, M, and B have two different explanations. They represent the names of the Magi (according to tradition), Caspar, Melchior, and Balthasar. The other explanation

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Things to talk about:

- When was a time when you unexpectedly learned something about God, your own epiphany?
- Who would say that he or she has learned something about God from you? What has this person learned?
- In whom do you see the light of Christ shining through? How can you tell?
- How does the light of Christ shine through you?



tion of the initials is that they are the first letters of the blessing: *Christus mansionem benedicat*, which is Latin for "May Christ bless the house."

After the code is written a prayer could be offered for the protection of mind and body for those who dwell in the home. End the blessing by making the Sign of the Cross.



Saint in the Spotlight — Saint Gregory of Nyssa

On Thursday, January 10, we will celebrate the memorial of St Gregory of Nyssa.

The son of two saints, Basil and Emmilia, young Gregory was raised by his older brother, St. Basil the Great, and his sister, Macrina, in modern-day Turkey. Gregory's success in his studies suggested great things were ahead for him. After becoming a professor of rhetoric, he was persuaded to devote his learning and efforts to the Church. By then married, Gregory went on to study for the priesthood and become ordained (this at a time when celibacy was not a matter of law for priests).

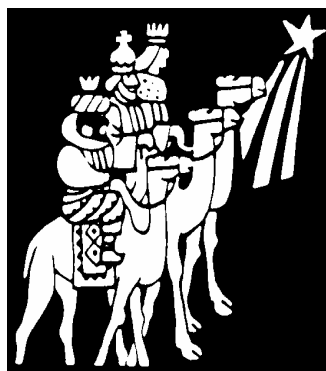
He was elected Bishop of Nyssa (in Lower Armenia) in 372, a period of great tension over the Arian heresy, which denied the divinity of Christ. Briefly arrested after being falsely accused of embezzling Church funds, Gregory was restored to his see in 378, an act met with great joy by his people.

It was after the death of his beloved

brother, Basil, that Gregory really came into his own. He wrote with great effectiveness against Arianism and other questionable doctrines, gaining a reputation as a defender of orthodoxy. He was sent on missions to counter other heresies and held a position of prominence at the Council of Constantinople. His fine reputation stayed with him for the remainder of his life, but over the centuries it gradually declined as the

authorship of his writings became less and less certain. But, thanks to the work of scholars in the 20th century, his stature is once again appreciated. Indeed, St. Gregory of Nyssa is seen not simply as a pillar of orthodoxy but as one of the great contributors to the mystical tradition in Christian spirituality and to monasticism itself..

www.americancatholic.org/Features/SaintOfDay



Blessing of the Home and Household on the Epiphany

Lord God of heaven and earth,
you revealed your only-begotten Son
to every nation
by the guidance of a star.

Bless this house
and all who inhabit it.

Fill them with the light of Christ,
That their concern for others
may reflect your love.

We ask this through Christ our Lord.
Amen.

Household Blessings & Prayers, USCCB 1988, page128

Connections to Doctrine & Tradition

- While we can know God by natural reason to some extent, we know God more deeply, as did the visitors from the east, only through God's intervention. This is called revelation (DV 2-4; CCC 50-53, 65-184)
- The family is the basic unit of the Church, the place in which we learn to live after Christ's example (NDC29; CCC 2197-2257)
- God directs creation towards its fulfillment in Jesus Christ (NDC 16)
- Every blessing praises God and his gifts. As baptized people we are called to be a "blessing" and to bless. (CCC 1669, 1679)

CCC: *Catechism of the Catholic Church*; GS: *Gaudium et Spes*; NDC: *National Directory for Catechesis*; LG: *Lumen Gentium*; DV: *Dei Verbum* .
These documents can be found online at www.vatican.va or www.usccb.org.

Want to know more?

Would you like to know more about Advent? Check out the following books or websites for more information:

- [The Catholic Family Handbook](#), Lovasik, Sophia Institute Press, 2000
- [Advent and Christmas Videos on YouTube](#)
<http://youtube.com/americancatholic>
- <http://www.americancatholic.org/Messenger/Jan2001/Feature3.asp>

These are just suggestions. In providing these we assume no responsibility for, nor do we necessarily endorse these books or websites, their content, or their sponsoring organizations.

"What's What" is a publication of the Youth Ministry Department of St Mary, Canandaigua, and St Bridget, Bloomfield.

Our Youth Ministry Mission Statement [Draft]:

Building on the mission of our parishes to follow the way of Christ in our thoughts, words, and deeds, and to make Christ more fully present in all who live within our community, the Youth Ministry mission is to empower young people to live as disciples of Jesus Christ in the world today; to affirm the gifts of our youth and provide opportunities for young people to share their gifts with the larger community; and to meet the religious, spiritual and social needs of all youth with the committed leadership, guidance and support of our parish family, providing an opportunity for our entire faith community to grow together in Christian faith.