

Thoughts for an *Extraordinary* Epiphanytide

Name: The word “Epiphany” comes from the Greek “ἐπιφάνεια,” [epipháneia] which means “manifestation.”

Themes: Epiphany and Epiphanytide commemorate three manifestations of the Lord:

- The visitation of the Magi from the East
- Our Lord’s Baptism
- Our Lord’s first miracle of turning water into wine at the wedding at Cana

While all three are interwoven in the Office for the Epiphany, the Mass of Epiphany day focuses on the visitation of the Magi. The Baptism of the Lord is celebrated in the Mass on 13 January, while the miracle at Cana is commemorated on the Second Sunday after the Epiphany. On the First Sunday after the Epiphany the Feast of the Holy Family is celebrated.

Length: Epiphany always falls on 6 January. From this day until 13 January, the feast of the Baptism of the Lord, the Epiphany Preface is said at Mass and the Office reflects the mysteries being celebrated. As it is eight days from 6 January to 13 January, this arrangement forms, as it were, an unofficial octave of Epiphany. After this unofficial octave, the Church enters into the Time after Epiphany. The number of Sundays during this time depends on when Easter will be celebrated in a given year. The Mass readings and prayers which are not used before the start of Septuagesima will be said in the Masses between the 23rd and 24th Sundays after Pentecost.

Gloria?: Yes, and even on ferias until the Feast of the Baptism of the Lord! The angels have sung the opening words of the *Gloria* to the shepherds and the Church takes up this hymn in joyful celebration of the birth of Christ.

Liturgical Color: The color white is used until the end of the unofficial octave of Epiphany. The symbolism of this color is the same as it was during the Twelve Days of Christmas: (1) the gladness to which the Angels invited the world, (2) the beauty of our Divine Sun that has risen in Bethlehem, (3) the spotless purity of the Virgin-Mother, and (4) the cleanheartedness which they should have who come to worship at the mystic Crib.

After the feast of the Baptism of the Lord, green becomes the color of the season. This color is used to teach us that in the birth of Jesus, Who is “the flower of the fields,” we first received the hope of salvation, and that after the bleak winter of paganism and of the Old Law there opened the verdant springtime of grace. Green also symbolizes the growth that we are to make spiritually by reflecting on the mysteries we have been celebrating and contemplating, and will continue to contemplate, until the end of Christmastide.

Organ and Flowers?: Yes, they have returned from their Advent absence to help the Church express her gladness during this season of joy.

Epiphany Water: On the day before the Epiphany, Epiphany Water may be blessed using a special blessing in the Roman Ritual. It was during Our Lord’s Baptism, which is commemorated for the first time

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on the Epiphany, that water was first sanctified so that it might serve as the matter of the Sacrament of Baptism.

Blessing of Gold, Frankincense, and Myrrh: In honor of the gifts of the Magi, the Ritual also has special Epiphany blessings for gold, frankincense, and myrrh.

House Blessing: There is a special house blessing that can be done during this time. Additionally, the Priest can bless chalk, with a special Epiphany blessing, which he then uses to write on or over the doors of the house: crosses, the year, and the letters “C,” “M,” and “B”. These are the first letters of the words in the Latin phrase “Christus Mansionem Benedicat (may Christ bless this house).” They also represent the first initials of the traditional names of the three Magi: Caspar, Melchior, and Balthazar.

The Noveritis: After the chanting of the Gospel on the feast of the Epiphany, the Noveritis (named from the first word of the text) is traditionally chanted. This proclamation makes known to the faithful that year’s dates of Easter, Septuagesima, Ash Wednesday, Ascension, Pentecost, Corpus Christi, and the First Sunday of Advent (which are all moveable). This custom, which dates from the earliest ages of the Church, shows both the mysterious connection which unites the great solemnities of the year one with another and the importance the faithful ought to attach to the celebration of the greatest one of all, Easter. As the faithful are honoring the manifestations of Christ on the Epiphany, they will also celebrate Him, on the announced date of Easter, as the Conqueror of Death. The tone of the Noveritis is similar to that of the Exultet of the Easter Vigil, which gives a taste of paschal joy to this publication of the date of Easter.

Feast of the Purification: The Feast of the Purification occurs 40 days from Christmas, on 2 February. This feast commemorates two mysteries. One was Mary’s fulfillment of the Old Testament law which directed a poor mother of a male child to offer in sacrifice a pair of turtle-doves, or two young pigeons, 40 days from the birth of the child, as a ceremony for purification (hence the name of the feast). The second, concerning Jesus, was the redeeming from God’s service of the firstborn male child by five shekels. However, because of the miraculous manner of Mary’s motherhood and because Christ is the Son of God Who came to be the Redeemer of others, neither were obliged to fulfill these laws. But in order to serve as an example of humility and obedience (and probably also to avoid scandal), Mary and Joseph, under the inspiration of the Holy Ghost, nevertheless undertook to fulfill these precepts.

This feast, while being the most ancient feast of the Latin Church to the Mother of God, is the last feast of the year to use the Christmas Preface and thus closes the Christmas cycle. The use of the Christmas Preface is unexpected as the Marian Preface is used on all other Feasts of Our Lady.

Before the start of the Mass of the Purification, candles are traditionally blessed and distributed. The candles are blessed from the Epistle Corner of the Altar (the right side as you are looking at the Altar). This is one of the three blessings traditionally done from the Epistle Corner. The other two are the blessing of ashes on Ash Wednesday and the blessing of the palms on Palm Sunday. After the candles are distributed, there is a candlelight procession. Due to all of this, the Feast of the Purification is also known as “Candlemas.” Each blessed candle, which is composed of three parts (the wax, the wick, and the flame), represent Christ. (1) The wax, which is the production of the virginal bee, is the Flesh of Our Lord; (2) the wick, which is within, is His Soul; and (3) the flame, which burns on the top, is His Divinity.