



January 05, 2014

Solemnity of the Epiphany

Today the Church celebrates the Solemnity of the Epiphany. "The Lord and ruler is coming; kingship is his, and government and power." With these words the Church proclaims that today's feast brings to a perfect fulfillment all the purposes of Advent. Epiphany, therefore, marks the liturgical high point of the Advent-Christmas season. — *Pius Parsch*

The Solemnity of the Epiphany is celebrated either on January 6 or, according to the decision of the conference of bishops, on the Sunday between January 2 and January 8. The young Messiah is revealed as the light of the nations. Three mysteries are encompassed in this solemnity: the adoration of the Christ Child by the Magi, the Baptism of Christ and the wedding feast at Cana. Extra candles and/or lamps may be placed around the sanctuary and in other parts of the church to honor Christ revealed as the Light of the Gentiles. It is customary to replace the images of the shepherds at the crib with the three Magi and their gifts. — *Ceremonies of the Liturgical Year*, Msgr. Peter J. Elliott, Ignatius Press.

Solemnity of the Lord's Epiphany

Many traditions and genuine manifestations of popular piety have been developed in relation to the Solemnity of the Lord's Epiphany, which is of ancient origin and rich in spiritual content. Among such forms of popular piety, mention may be made of:

- the solemn proclamation of Easter and the principal dominical feasts; its revival in many places would be opportune since it served to make the connection between the Epiphany and Easter, and orientate all feasts towards the greatest Christian solemnity;
- the exchange of "Epiphany gifts", which derives from the gifts offered to Jesus by the three kings (cf. Mt 2,11) and more radically from the gift made to mankind by God in the birth of Emmanuel amongst us (cf. Is 7, 14; 9, 16; Mt 1, 23). It is important, however, to ensure that the exchange of gifts on the solemnity of the Epiphany retain a Christian character, indicating that its meaning is evangelical: hence the gifts offered should be a genuine expression of popular piety and free from extravagance, luxury, and waste, all of which are unrelated to the Christian origins of this practice;
- the blessing of homes, on whose lintels are inscribed the Cross of salvation, together with the indication of the year and the initials of the three wise men (C+M+B), which can also be interpreted to mean *Christus Mansionem Benedicat*, written in blessed chalk; this custom, often accompanied by processions of children accompanied by their parents, expresses the blessing of Christ through the intercession of the three wise men and is an occasion for gathering offerings for charitable and missionary purposes;
- initiatives in solidarity with those who come from afar; whether Christian or not, popular piety has encouraged a sense of solidarity and openness;
- assistance to the work of evangelization; the strong missionary character of the Epiphany has been well understood by popular piety and many initiatives in support of the missions flourish on January 6, especially the "Missionary work of the Holy Child", promoted by the Apostolic See;
- the assignation of Patrons; in many religious communities and confraternities, patron saints are assigned to the members for the coming year (#118 *Directory on Popular Piety and the Liturgy*).

