

The Epiphany of Lord (ABC)
January 3, 2026
“House blessings”

“On entering the house, they saw the child with Mary his mother” (Mt. 2:11). The mysterious magi appear only once in the New Testament, today when they arrive from the East and bring gifts of gold, frankincense, and myrrh to honor the Infant Savior. Epiphany, which means “manifestation,” is a beautiful feast of the Church, sanctified by sweet-smelling incense, a special proclamation of upcoming liturgical feasts, and house blessings.

The blessing of houses, which is a sacramental (as opposed to the seven Sacraments) commemorates the visit of the magi on Christmas. Because the magi entered a house to worship Christ (Mt. 2:11), we bless houses on Epiphany.

Early Christians associated Epiphany with the blessing of houses and hospitality to Christ. By the Middle Ages, popular tradition gave the magi three names: Caspar, Melchior, and Balthasar. Their remains are housed in the cathedral of Cologne, Germany today. The magi are commemorated in house blessings.

The blessing went this way: a priest came to a person’s home armed with chalk, holy water, and special prayers. He blessed each room of the house, and chucked the following on the doorpost: “20 + C + M + B + 26.” The letters represent the magi who visited the Christ-Child, or the Latin blessing “Christus mansionem benedicat” (meaning “May Christ bless this dwelling”). The crosses between the numbers and letters represent Christ, and the year marks time as consecrated to him.

In some regions, children dressed as magi, called “Star Singers,” visited homes, sang hymns, and collected money for the poor.

By the 12th Century, Epiphany had become a major feast across Europe. Blessing of chalk, water, salt, and incense on Epiphany, and clergy, or heads of households, marking doorways and homes with blessed chalk, were key elements of the feast.

The practice spread widely in German-speaking lands, France, Poland, and parts of Italy.

In Protestant regions, where sacramentals were discouraged, the Epiphany blessing survived as a family devotion, folk custom, and local tradition.

Today, Catholics, Anglicans, Lutherans, and Eastern Christian traditions bless homes on Epiphany.

This ritual emphasizes: (1) Christ’s lordship over the home, (2) hospitality, peace, and charity, and (3) the home as a “domestic church.”

In this blessing, Christ is welcomed into daily life, the home is placed under God’s protection, faith is lived publicly, and time, space, and family are consecrated to God.

With some blessed chalk and holy water, your home can be blessed. [Sacred Heart: I’m looking forward to blessing homes of those who have signed up as part of our 150th celebration.]

House blessings are part of the richness of our Catholic Tradition. As 2026 begins, may we embrace this and other sacred customs to enrich our spiritual lives and the Church Universal.

Happy Epiphany, and God bless you and your home!