

Epiphany reminds us that Christmas is just the beginning of the story.

## The Meaning of Epiphany

The church celebrates Epiphany on January 6<sup>th</sup> each year, twelve days after Christmas Day. On Epiphany, we recall the arrival of the wise men to visit the newborn baby Jesus. The season of Epiphany stretches out from January 6<sup>th</sup> until the beginning of Lent. The season varies in length because the date of Easter changes yearly. Epiphany might be as long as nine weeks or as short as four weeks.

While the season of Epiphany does not get as much hype as the preceding seasons of Advent and Christmas, it is an important time of the church year nonetheless. After all the December celebrations die down, Epiphany reminds us that Christmas is just the beginning of the story.

## Three Teaching Points for Epiphany

### The Magi

While secular culture generally celebrates Christmas on a single day, the church extends the celebration of Jesus' birth until the arrival of the magi on January 6<sup>th</sup>. Most of us are familiar with the story of the wise men from the popular hymn [We Three Kings](#), they follow a star to find the Christ child and bring him gold, frankincense, and myrrh (Matt 2:1-12).

Epiphany is a good opportunity to expound on some of the details of the story that make the magi so remarkable. First, the wise men are paying attention. They "observed his star at its rising" and realized it was a sign (Matt 2:2). Second, the wise men trust God's guidance. They leave their country and travel a great distance without knowing exactly where they are going. After finding the Christ child, the three kings are warned in a dream not to return to Herod and they diligently leave "for their own country by another road" (Matt 2:12). Third, the magi humbled themselves at the sight of an infant king in a manger, "they saw the child with Mary his mother; and they knelt down and paid him homage" (Matt 2:11). Despite the odd circumstances, a baby born to an unwed, un-wealthy mother in a barn, the magi presented Jesus with gifts fit for a king born under very different circumstances.

This beautiful, odd story foretells the many ways Jesus' life will reverse worldly expectations. Despite how the Holy Family might appear to the townsfolk of Bethlehem, the magi's visit identifies Jesus as a king. Furthermore, the magi have crossed international borders. They come from a foreign country to mark Jesus as a king for all people. One resource for teaching about the magi is this Building Faith article with ideas for [Celebrating Epiphany at Church!](#)

## Baptism & The Trinity

On the first Sunday after Epiphany, we celebrate the Baptism of our Lord. It is an especially appropriate day for baptism (Episcopalians see BCP 312) and a good opportunity to teach about the Trinity. It is one of the few places in scripture where all three persons of the Trinity are revealed together: as Jesus is being baptized a spirit descends on him and a voice says,

"You are my Son, the Beloved; with you I am well pleased" (Mark 1:11). Jesus is revealed as the Son of God and the third person of the Trinity. These lessons provide a good opportunity to teach about what the Baptism of our Lord reveals about Jesus and what our baptism reveals about us. One resource for teaching about Baptism and the Trinity is the [Godly Play Story of Holy Baptism](#).

## Revealing Jesus

Beginning with the visit of the magi and the Baptism of our Lord, the lectionary for the season of Epiphany reveals more and more about Jesus as the weeks go by. The stories of Epiphany depict Jesus as a king, the Son of God, a leader, a healer, and a teacher. There is certainly continuity within this season, the theme of revelation ties the season together as we encounter different layers of Jesus' identity, but there is also great flexibility within Epiphany. Teaching topics could vary from how Jesus is revealed in our lives today to a series on the Baptismal Covenant or the healing power of faith. One resource for teaching during [Epiphany is Faithful Celebrations: Making Time for God from Advent through Epiphany](#).

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