

# Church Traditions: Epiphany



A specific pattern has developed for the various cycles of the church Year. There is a period of preparation, the feast itself and a period of embellishment. Within the Christmas Cycle, Advent is the

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Epiphany is one of the oldest festivals of the Church Calendar. It was observed in Asia Minor and Egypt as early as the second century as a celebration of the birth and baptism of Jesus. It has its counterpart in ancient pagan culture. In Alexandria, January 5-6 was a celebration of the birth of the goddess Aion, the daughter of the virgin, Kore, as well as a celebration of the winter solstice. As the early Christian Church began to associate Jesus' baptism with His birth, which were celebrated together in opposition of the pagan festival. By the latter half of the second century, December 25, was celebrated as the feast of Christ's birth and January 6th the commemoration of the visit of the Magi, the baptism of Jesus and the miracle at the wedding of Cana.

From the Greek language we received the word "*Epiphany*" which means "*manifestation*". In ancient times and "*Epiphany*" meant either a visible manifestation of a god or the solemn visit of a ruler, who was venerated as a god. When a ruler made such a visit he came in "*full*" regal pomp and splendor. All this was done at his own expense. Likewise, Christ came to His city -- the Church. He came in glory at His own expense -- the cost of His very life. When the Western Church adopted December 25 as its' celebration of Jesus' birth, it adopted Epiphany (January 6) as its observance of Christ's manifestation to the Gentiles and as the divine Son of God. For that reason the festival season of Epiphany recalls Jesus' manifestation to the Magi, to John the Baptist at the Jordan River, and at the Wedding of Cana. It is said that Jesus' manifestation in these three instances and their corresponding events, the world was already enlightened before He enlightened them through His preaching (*also known as our Lord's earthly ministry*). This festival has been given the names of "*Theophany*" "*Feast of the Three Kings*", and "*Twelfth Day*".



The length of the Epiphany season varies according to the date for Easter in any given year. Its maximum length is eight weeks, and in the Lutheran Church the last Sunday of this Season commemorates Jesus' Transfiguration. The continuing and mounting theme for the Sundays in Epiphany is the manifestation of Jesus deity, climaxing in the Transfiguration event.

**For to us a child is born, to us a son is given,  
and the government will be on his shoulders.  
And he will be called Wonderful Counselor,  
Mighty God, Everlasting Father, Prince of Peace.  
Of the increase of his government  
and peace there will be no end.  
He will reign on David's throne and over his kingdom,  
establishing and upholding it with justice and  
righteousness from that time on and forever.  
The zeal of the LORD Almighty will accomplish this.**

*Isaiah 9:6 - 7*