

THE BLESSING OF HOMES ON THE EPIPHANY

Epiphany (also known as Twelfth Night, Theophany, or Three Kings Day) marks the occasion of a time-honoured Christian tradition of “chalking the doors.” The formula for the ritual — adapted for 2017 — is simple: take chalk of any colour and write the following above the entrance of your home: **20 + C + M + B + (last two digits of current year)**.

The letters have two meanings. First, they represent the initials of the Magi — Caspar, Malchior, and Balthazar — who came to visit Jesus in His first home. They also abbreviate the Latin phrase, *Christus mansionem benedicat*: “May Christ bless the house.” The “+” signs represent the cross, and the “20” at the beginning and the “final two-digit number” at the end mark the year. Taken together, this inscription is performed as a request that Christ to bless those homes so marked that he stay with those who dwell therein throughout the entire year.

The chalking of the doors is a centuries-old practice throughout the world. It is an easy tradition to adopt, and a great practice whereby we dedicate our year to God from its very outset, asking His blessing on our homes and on all who live, work or visit them there.

The timing for the chalking of the doors varies somewhat in practice. In some places, it is done on New Year’s Day. More commonly, it is performed today — the traditional Feast of the Epiphany — the Twelfth Day of Christmas. Most often the chalking takes place after Epiphany Mass, and can be done at any church, home, or dwelling. Traditionally the blessing is done by either a priest or the father of the family. This blessing can be performed simply by just writing the inscription and offering a short prayer, or more elaborately, including songs, prayers, processions, the burning of incense, and the sprinkling of holy water.

St Matthew writes that when the Magi saw the shining star stop overhead, they were filled with joy. On entering the house, they saw the child with Mary his mother (2:10-11). In the home, Christ is met in family and friends, in visitors and strangers. In the home, faith is shared, nurtured, and put into action. In the home, Christ is welcome.

The season of Epiphany offers an occasion for gathering with friends and family members for a blessing of the home, a school classroom, or even the Church, using the following as a model. Someone may lead the greeting and blessing, while another person may read the scripture passage. Following an eastern European tradition, a visual blessing may be inscribed with chalk above the main door; for example:

20 + C M B + (last two digits of current year).

The numbers change with each New Year. The three letters stand for either the ancient Latin blessing “**Christe mansionem benedicat**,” which means Christ, bless this house, or the legendary names of the Magi (Caspar, Melchior, and Balthazar).

When there is no priest to bless the house, the prayers are read by the head of the household.

RITE OF EPIPHANY BLESSING

GREETING

In the name of the Father, and of the Son, and of the Holy Spirit. **Amen**

May peace come to this house and to all who enter here.

READING

As we prepare to ask God's blessing on this household, let us listen to the words of scripture.

In the beginning was the Word: the Word was with God and the Word was God. He was with God in the beginning. Through him all things came to be, not one thing had its being but through him. All that came to be had life in him and that life was the light of men, a light that shines in the dark, a light that darkness could not overpower. He was in the world that had its being through him and the world did not know him. He came to his own domain and his own people did not accept him. But to all who did accept him he gave power to become children of God. The Word became flesh and lived among us, and we saw his glory, the glory that is his as the only Son of the Father, full of grace and truth.

This is the Word of the Lord. **Thanks be to God.**

INSCRIPTION

This inscription may be made with chalk above the entrance. As each of the characters is made on the wall or door the following is said:

The Magi of old, known as
C Caspar, **M** Melchior, and **B** Balthasar
followed the star of Gods Son who came to dwell among us.

20 Two thousand
17 and seventeen years ago.
+ Christ, bless this house,
+ and remain with us throughout this new year.

20 + C M B + (last two digits of current year).

PRAYER

O God, you revealed your Son to all people
by the shining light of a star.
We pray that you bless this home and all who live here
with your gracious presence.
May your love be our inspiration,
your wisdom our guide,
your truth our light,
and your peace be our blessing;
through Christ our Lord. Amen

OUR FATHER

FINAL BLESSING

May the Lord bless us, keep us from all evil, and bring us to everlasting life.

Amen

Let us bless the Lord.

Thanks be to God

It is appropriate to end with a hymn or a carol, e.g.

1 As with gladness men of old
did the guiding star behold;
as with joy they hailed its light,
leading onward, beaming bright;
so, most gracious Lord, may we
evermore be led to thee.

2 As with joyful steps they sped
to that lowly manger-bed;
there to bend the knee before
him whom heaven and earth adore;
so may we with willing feet
ever seek the mercy seat.

5. In the heavenly country bright,
need they no created light;
thou its light, its joy, its crown,
thou its sun which goes not down;
there for ever may we sing
alleluias to our King.

3. As they offered gifts most rare
at that manger rude and bare;
so may we with holy joy,
pure and free from sin's alloy,
all our costliest treasures bring,
Christ! to thee, our heavenly King.

4. Holy Jesus! every day
keep us in the narrow way;
and, when earthly things are past,
bring our ransomed souls at last
where they need no star to guide,
where no clouds thy glory hide.