

Epiphany Home Blessing: A general introduction

What is “Epiphany Home Blessing”?

The feast of manifestation, or Epiphany, is traditionally celebrated on the 12th day after Christmas, in another words, January 6th. In the dioceses of the United States this feast has been moved to the first Sunday after January 1st. For example, the 2023’s Epiphany will be celebrated on Sunday, January 8.

In the old time, the priests would visit and bless each home in their parish after the Feast of the Epiphany. Over time as parishes became so large for any priest to do so, Church embraces the tradition that a family member (usually the head of the households, but it is up to the family to decide) would lead this blessing in place of the priest.

What is so special about the Epiphany Home Blessing?

What makes this sacramental so interesting is that other than the blessing prayers and sprinkling holy waters, part of the ritual is to use a blessed chalk to inscribe the initials of the Magi, aka the Three Kings, on the lintel of the front door of the house. According to the legend, the magi who came from the east to Bethlehem to adore the Lord are Caspar, Malchior, and Balthazar. The inscription would be — adapted for 2023 — “20 + C + M + B + 23”.

This tradition has biblical roots going back to the story of Exodus in the Old Testament when the Israelites were asked to put the blood of a lamb or goat on the doorposts and above the doors of the houses. (*cf. Exodus 12:1-13*) While the Epiphany blessing was not given in the same manner as it was to Moses, the Church provides it for our own spiritual benefit. The Church desires our salvation and so gives us beautiful sacramentals to assist us along the path to Eternal Life.

From the Catholic Congregation for Divine Worship and the Discipline of the Sacraments:

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.

Why should I follow this practice?

Although the chalking of the doors is a centuries-old practice throughout the world, it appears to be somewhat less well-known in the United States. By adopting this great practice, 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. Inscribe the magi's initials on lintel is to welcome the three Kings to visit our home, as we have prayed that the Holy Family to remain in our home so that we may honor Jesus as the head of our household. St. Augustine said: "if Jesus is not born in our heart, not born in our home, what good would Jesus' birth be for us?"

What do I need and where do I get them to bless my home on the Epiphany?

You will need:

1. **Epiphany Home Blessing liturgy and prayers:** There are many versions of Epiphany Home Blessing prayer can be found on internet. The one posted on the website of United States Conference of Catholic Bishops (USCCB) is a good reference, and we can add the liturgy of "chalking the door".
2. **Holy Water:** Many churches provide holy water. Sacred Heart of Jesus Chinese Parish (SHJCP) will provide holy water after the Epiphany Mass for you to use in this liturgy.
3. **Blessed chalk:** For this purpose, the pastor of Sacred Heart of Jesus Chinese Parish, Fr. Vincent Lin will bless chinks in the Epiphany Mass with the following Blessing Chalk Prayer from the Roman Ritual:

*Bless, + O Lord God, this creature, chalk, and let it be a help to mankind.
Grant that those who will use it with faith in your most holy name, and
with it inscribe on the doors of their homes the names of your saints,
Casper, Melchior, and Baltassar, may through their merits and
intercession enjoy health in body and protection of soul; through Christ
our Lord.*

4. **A door way:** The "lintel" of the door is where this is the most traditional, which was historically the horizontal piece above the door, but in practice, anywhere around the front door of the home is a great choice. People usually do this at the top of the main door on the outside, but it can also be done anywhere on the door, and also on the inside of the home as well. Please see the picture at the end of this mail for some examples.
5. **A ladder or chair (optional):** Depending where you choose to inscribe, and most likely you will need it!

When should I bless ?

There is no hard rule of the time, but most people would choose to do it within 7 days that the parish celebrates the Epiphany (i.e. January 8 for the year 2023), or the traditional Epiphany, which is January 6.

What if my physical condition or environment does not allow me to chalk the door?

Although Chalking the Doors is a beautiful ritual, it is not required for the house blessing. The house blessing prayer itself is all your need for your family to have a blessed and protected whole year. However, you can use your creativity to gain the same spiritual benefit and fun, such as write a “20 + C + M + B + 23” banner and pin it on the wall, or write it on a card and put on desktop.

More questions or you like to learn more about the history of Epiphany and the legend of Magi?

Please feel free to email Book Hut of Jesus (the library of Sacred Heart Of Jesus Chinese Parish) at library@chinese-catholic.org and we will be more than happy to help. You may also google “Epiphany house blessing” to find abundant resources.



