

## 5th January 2025 - Epiphany Epiphany House Blessings

The Christian tradition of blessing homes on the Feast of the Epiphany is carried out to commemorate the visit of the Magi to the home of the Holy Family. In Christianity, it is a practice believed to go back to the Middle Ages.

However, the tradition of marking the doorway to a home, of course, goes back much earlier, into the history of the Jewish people, and to the time of the first passover. In the Old Testament (Exodus 12: 7) the Israelites are commanded to mark their doors with the blood of a sacrificed lamb on the night that the Lord will pass over their homes. The Lord explains to them (Exodus 12: 13):

“The blood will be a sign for you on the houses where you are. When I see the blood I shall pass over you, and you will escape the destructive plague when I strike Egypt.”

In the Jewish Shema, which we read in the Book of Deuteronomy (Chapter 6:4 - 9), written down several centuries after the Book of Exodus, God instructs his people to write the words he gives to them ‘on the doorpost of your house and on your gates’. The Jewish practice of affixing a Mezuzah to a doorpost continues to affirm this command to this day.

On first glance, the Christian chalk blessing looks rather more like the beginning of a mathematical equation. Each year the letters C+M+B are written. These letters have two meanings:

The first, and arguably more important, is that the letters CMB stand for ‘Christus mansionem benedicat’ the Latin for ‘May Christ bless this house’;

The second is that each letter stands for the name attributed to each of the Magi, Caspar, Melchior and Balthazar. Although records of these names appear to go back only as far as the 6th century, when the Emperor Justinian commissioned the now famous mosaics in Ravenna, they are the names traditionally attributed to the Magi ever since.

The formula is expanded by the addition of the date of the relevant year on either side of the letters, so for this year the marking should read: 20+C+M+B+25

Christian families are encouraged to follow a simple form of blessing using wording such as that set out here to bless their homes:

<https://hrcatholic.org/wp-content/uploads/2023/01/Epiphany-House-Blessing.pdf>

The blessing of the home is a reminder that our homes are sacred spaces where we grow in community and in our individual spiritual lives. The blessing also acts as an outward symbol to those visiting our homes of our allegiance to Jesus; that those who live within the house belong to him and that Jesus also reigns within the home.

Coming in and out of our homes and seeing the markings reminds us of the welcome that the Holy Family gave to the Magi when they visited, and is a reminder to welcome all who come to our homes. 'Remember always to welcome strangers, for by doing this, some people have entertained angels without knowing it' (Hebrews 13:2).

Rachel Grayson