



Photo by Rod Long on Unsplash



EPHESIANS 3:1-6

For this reason I, Paul, a prisoner of Christ Jesus on behalf of you Gentiles
—² if you have heard of the stewardship (οἰκονομίαν) of God's grace
that was given to me for you, ³ namely, that according to revelation the
mystery was made known to me, as I have written before briefly, ⁴ by
which, in reading, you can perceive my insight into the mystery of Christ,
⁵ which was not made known to the sons of men in other generations as it
has now been revealed to his holy apostles and prophets by the Spirit
⁶ This mystery is that the Gentiles are fellow heirs, members of the same
body, and partakers of the promise in Christ Jesus through the gospel.

1:8-16
2:11-22



<https://www.youtube.com/live/qEQth8WCLQ0?si=WiGt5RnsVT4TyDo>

The following is from the internet by Katyshevel

What is Epiphany?

Epiphany reminds us of how the light of Jesus Christ continues to guide our lives every day—even after we put away the bright and cheery Christmas lights. Epiphany is a Christian holiday celebrated in the West on January 6. The word “Epiphany” originates from the Greek *epiphaneia*, meaning “manifestation” or “appearance.”

Also known as “Three Kings Day,” the Western church largely celebrates the visit of the three Magi to the newly-born Jesus in Bethlehem that is detailed in Matthew 2:1-12. More broadly, the day of Epiphany commemorates the revelation of Christ as the eternal Savior of all humankind. Not only did Christ reveal himself as the Son of God to the three Magi, but also through his baptism (Mark 1:9-11) as well as through his first miracle in the turning of the water to wine at Cana (John 2:1-11). The liturgical season of Epiphany, which stretches from January 6 through Ash Wednesday, highlights all these “theophanies” or “epiphanies” of Christ’s divinity to the world.

All these significant revelations of Jesus have been commemorated on Epiphany at different historical periods and in different regions throughout the Eastern and Western churches. In addition to Christmas and Easter, Epiphany is one of the [three oldest Christian feast days](#).

What is the difference between Epiphany and the Twelve Days of Christmas?

The Twelve Days of Christmas traditionally refers to the period of 12 calendar days between Christmas Day, December 25, and Epiphany on January 6.

What’s the difference between Epiphany in the Western church and Epiphany in the Eastern church?

Western Christians, such as Roman Catholics and Protestants, and Eastern Christians, such as Russian and Greek Orthodox churches, follow different calendars when it comes to deciding feast days and liturgical

seasons. In the West, Christmas is celebrated on December 25 and the feast of Epiphany is celebrated on January 6. Additionally, the feast day of Epiphany in the Western church principally focuses on the visit of the Magi to baby Jesus and how this visit revealed Jesus 'divinity. Eastern Christian traditions follow the Julian calendar in which Christmas Eve falls on January 6 and the feast day of Epiphany falls on January 19. In the East, the feast of Epiphany principally focuses on Jesus 'baptism, and how this act revealed Christ's divinity. Western Christians celebrate Jesus 'baptism on the Sunday that follows the Epiphany feast day.

How long does Epiphany last?

The feast day of Epiphany lasts for 24 hours and is observed by Western Christians on January 6. For Christian traditions that follow the Revised Common Lectionary, such as the Presbyterian Church (U.S.A.), the liturgical season of Epiphany lasts from January 6 through Ash Wednesday, which marks the beginning of Lent.

Do Protestants celebrate Epiphany?

Yes, Christians all around the world celebrate Epiphany: Protestants, as well as Roman Catholics and Eastern Orthodox.

What is the history of Epiphany?



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The church's celebration of Epiphany is one of the church's three earliest feast days, even older than Christmas. As a result, its history is complicated and has no one pervading theory of origination. In *Journey into the Heart of God: Living the Liturgical Year*, Philip Pfatteicher cites the earliest recorded evidence for Epiphany dated around 215 in Egypt. Some historians believe that the church's observance of Epiphany was established to replace local pagan feast celebrations dated in and around January 6. (A similar hypothesis has been proposed for December 25 by Paul F. Bradshaw and Maxwell E. Johnson in *The Origins of Feasts, Fast, and Seasons in Early Christianity*.)

Scholars note that another theory for the establishment of Epiphany is linked closely with the celebration of Easter. (See Bradshaw and Johnson and Pfatteicher.) Early Christians in Asia Minor celebrated both the death and resurrection of Jesus and the Jewish Passover on April 6. They chose April 6 because they professed that Jesus' life was perfect and this

perfection must be reflected in the dates of his conception and death, meaning that his beginning and end must have occurred on the same date. Therefore, they believed that the date of Jesus 'crucifixion must have been the same as his conception — April 6, nine months before his birth on January 6.

There are still other accounts of early Christians in places like Alexandria, Egypt, celebrating Epiphany without any mention of Jesus 'birth narrative at all. In Alexandria, the Gospel of Mark was the available Scripture. Since the Gospel of Mark notably omits the story of Jesus 'birth, their Epiphany celebrations focused on the baptism and miracle stories of Jesus. These earliest Epiphany celebrations were feast days for the baptism and joyous welcome of new catechumens, or converts, into the life of the church.

In *Journey into the Heart of God: Living the Liturgical Year*, Philip Phatteicher notes that a gradual "exchange of feasts" took place between the Eastern and Western Church in the mid-to-late fourth century. The Western church received the Eastern observance of Epiphany and the Eastern church adopted the Western observance of Christmas. When the Western church in Rome adopted the Eastern celebration of Epiphany, the story of the three Magi was the focus of their celebration. Jesus 'baptism would later be commemorated on a Sunday after the Sunday of Epiphany, as it is today in the West. Today, the connection between Epiphany and Jesus 'baptism remains stronger in the East. In the West, Epiphany, known today as "Three Kings Day" in some regions, is most commonly associated with the journey and gifts of the three Magi.

Is Epiphany in the Bible?

Bradshaw and Johnson note that Epiphany has historically been a celebration of many theological themes, including Christ's birth before Christmas was observed. On Epiphany, the Eastern and Western churches throughout the centuries have also commemorated Jesus 'baptism, the journey of the three kings to visit the Christ child, as well as the wedding at Cana wherein Jesus performed his great miracle of turning water into wine. The story of Jesus 'birth (Matthew 1:18-25; Luke 2:1-7), the journey of the three Magi (Matthew 2:1-12), Jesus 'baptism (Mark 1:9-11), and the wedding at Cana (John 2:1-11) are all located in the Bible.



Photo of La Befana by Gabriella Clare Marino on Unsplash

What is the legend of La Befana: Italy's Epiphany gift-giver?

On Epiphany Eve, the children of Italy anticipate the visit of a mythical figure who carries a broomstick and brings gifts. She's a woman known as *La Befana*. Sources date that the legend of *La Befana* has been observed as early as the 13th century, easily pre-dating Santa Clause. The Italian legend blends with biblical tradition. The story goes that the three Magi stopped at the home of an old woman on their way to visit the baby Jesus. She offered them rest and hospitality. In exchange, they invited her to join them on their journey, but she turned down their offer, saying that she had too much housework to do. She later regretted her decision. Each year, on Epiphany Eve, *La Befana sets out on her own search for the Christ Child*, visiting the homes of children and leaving toys and sweets. A later adaptation of the myth even has *La Befana* leaving gifts of *carbone* — candy made to resemble coal.

What are “Star Words?”

Passing out “star words” has been a practice in churches that has grown in popularity over the past decade or so. The annual ritual derives from the

story of the luminous star that led the three Magi to the Christ Child. “Star words” are **intention words** that are printed or written out on paper stars. Each year, during Epiphany worship, members of churches are invited to take a paper star, often either from a basket or from the Communion Table. Without knowing the word written on their paper star ahead of time, worshippers are invited to place their trust in the word they have drawn and to allow that word to reflectively guide them. The word we choose helps us prayerfully set our intention for the coming year. Star words are a lovely liturgical practice that encapsulates so well the spirit of Epiphany: our ever-present hope that God is an illuminating presence in our daily lives, calling us, loving us, and leading us forth into our world together.

Pastor Katie here: Small churches often struggle with insecurity, comparing themselves to the membership rolls and program offerings of larger churches. But church vitality is more about spirit than size, and small churches across the country often serve as hubs of connection for small towns and rural areas.

Since there's no hiding in the small church, accountability is real. You are known and missed when you are not in attendance. Small churches also often feel like family because every program is intergenerational. There are not enough people to split up the adults, youth, and children — everyone needs to line up for the water balloon toss or the egg-and-spoon relay, or else we can't play!

But we shouldn't wax overly romantic about the small church. The challenges these small communities face are abundant. Conflict can burn through small churches like all-consuming wildfires; leadership requires everyone's hard work. If you want a music program, you'd better be ready to sing — whether you can carry a tune or not.

Small churches need servant leaders, with buy-in from worshipers willing to put as much work and care into their church as their own home.