

Why I Am Catholic

Another reason I am Catholic is the Feast of Epiphany. The visit of the three wise men (or three kings) has been celebrated going back to the earliest years of the Church. Epiphany means "appearance or manifestation." The feast is also called Theophany (12th day). According to Wikipedia, the earliest reference to the feast is in the year 361. In 385, a pilgrim writes of the feast being celebrated on Jan. 6 in Bethlehem and Jerusalem.

One of the prophecies of Isaiah—more than 500 years before Christ—is that "caravans of camels shall fill you, dromedaries from Midian and Ephah; All from Sheba shall come bearing gold and frankincense, and proclaiming the praises of the Lord." (Is 60:6) St. Matthew details the Visit of the Magi in Chapter 2 of his gospel.

Dromedaries are one-humped camels. The three kings are traditionally named Caspar (or Gaspar), Melchior, and Balthasar.

On this day these initials are written in chalk over the doors of churches and homes (20 + C + M + B + 08 or CMB A.D. 2008). The initials also signify the phrase *Christus mansionem benedicat*, (may Christ bless the house).

In many countries, Christmas presents are not brought, received, or opened until Jan. 6, when the three kings bring gifts to Jesus. Historically bright new stars often were connected with the birth of new kings. Also, it may have taken from six months to two years for the wise men to make their journey. Epiphany is mainly celebrated by Catholics, Orthodox Christians, and Episcopalians, although other denominations now are taking up the tradition.

The Twelve Days of Christmas (originally in Rome News-Tribune)

(Parishioner Mary Deese wrote the following article and it is reprinted with her permission :)

Contrary to popular belief, the 12 days of Christmas are not the 12 days leading up to Christmas. According to the old church calendar, the 12 day period of Christmas actually began at sunset on Christmas Eve and ended at sunset on the eve of Epiphany, January 5.

As for the popular song, "The Twelve Days of Christmas," had a very serious purpose when it was first written. Catholics in England were prohibited from practicing their faith from 1558 to 1829. It was a crime to be a Catholic.

The song was written as a catechism song to help young Catholics learn the tenets of their faith. The song's gifts are hidden meanings to the teachings of the faith. The "true love" mentioned refers to God and the "me" who receives the gifts refers to every baptized person.

This is what the symbols mean:

partridge in a pear tree: Jesus Christ on the cross

two turtle doves: the Old and New Testaments

three French hens: faith, hope, charity, the Theological Virtues

four calling birds: the four Gospels and/or the Four Evangelists

five golden rings: the first five books of the Old Testament, called the "Pentateuch," which gives the history of man's fall from grace

six geese a-laying: the six days of creation

seven swans a-swimming: the seven gifts of the Holy Spirit, the seven sacraments

eight maids a-milking: the eight Beatitudes

nine ladies dancing: the nine Fruits of the Holy Spirit

10 lords a-leaping: the 10 Commandments

11 pipers piping: the 11 faithful apostles

12 drummers drumming: the 12 points of doctrine in the

Apostles Creed

Information from the internet sites <http://www.kencollins.com/Questions-17.htm> and <http://www.cin.org/twelvdlay.html>