

Epiphany of the Lord



Blessing the Home

God our Father,
source of love and harmony,
bless our home.
In our kitchen, nourish
us with stories and spirit.
Help us remember here
Jesus' gift of himself in a meal.
In our bedrooms, give us rest.
Make them peaceful places,
where we find energy
to serve your people
and do your work.
In our living room,
give us strength to welcome
all guests, Christ in disguise.
From our porch or garage,
send us forth to bring
Good News.
We ask this through the same
Christ our Lord. Amen.

Sunday, January 2, 2011 "Welcome, Everyone!"

Today's Readings: Isaiah 60:1-6; Ephesians 3:2-3a, 5-6; Matthew 2:1-12 We learn in today's Gospel that long before Jesus preached inclusivity, Mary practiced it. Imagine being the mother of a newborn, exhausted from a trip to register for the census in Bethlehem. Then picture giving birth in a stable, which was probably not as cozy and clean as most Christmas cards depict. Mary is far from her support system, so she can't rely on her mother, relatives, or friends for help. No casseroles, no baby blankets.

Then, according to Luke, a crowd of shepherds arrives. They must be strangers, but there is no record of Mary feeling uncomfortable with these uninvited guests. Instead, she "treasures" the memories and is filled with gratitude. Matthew's account of the Magi doesn't mention Mary's response, but she must have wondered, how many *more*

strangers would crowd into their temporary housing? These surprising visitors aren't even Jewish—and they bring the strangest gifts.

Mary's experience should give us fair warning. If we hang around with Jesus, we'd better keep our doors open. He brings along an odd assortment of friends. They may not bring frankincense or myrrh, but they arrive unexpectedly when there are only two pork chops for dinner. They come disguised as the children's friends or the lonely neighbor who talks too long while the rolls burn. They phone at the worst possible times, and they interrupt our most cherished plans. And in these, says Jesus, you'll find me, an epiphany, or appearance, of the divine. This solemnity seems to celebrate James Joyce's description of the Catholic Church: "Here comes everybody!"



This Week at Home

Monday, January 3

Count the Magi

How many Magi visited Jesus in Bethlehem? If you answered *three*, re-read yesterday's Gospel (Matthew 2:1-12). The number is never mentioned there. Maybe we get "three" from the song "We Three Kings of Orient Are," or from the number of gifts. How many other Christmas images are shaped not by scripture, but by carols and customs? Today's Readings: 1 John 3:22-4:6; Matthew 4:12-17, 23-25.

Tuesday, January 4

Memorial of Saint Elizabeth Ann Seton

Few know that Mother Seton (1774-1821), founder of American Catholic schools, was a devoted single parent. After her husband died, she raised their five children and his brothers and sisters. When Elizabeth became a Sister of Charity, the community allowed her to continue to care for them. Two daughters died young; her sons ruined every opportunity. She always prayed for them and lavished love on them. Today's Readings: 1 John 4:7-10; Mark 6:34-44.

Wednesday, January 5

Memorial of Saint John Neumann

John Neumann was an organizer. Born in the Czech Republic in 1811, he immigrated to New York at age 25, and was ordained soon after. As Bishop of Philadelphia, he organized the Catholic school system and increased the number of students dramatically. He wrote that education should be directed toward peoples' final end and the good of their society. If you know teachers or students, encourage them in their work. Today's Readings: 1 John 4:11-18; Mark 6:45-52.

Thursday, January 6

Optional Memorial of Saint André Bessette

Saint André (1845-1937) had *failed* at every trade he tried: shoemaker, baker, blacksmith. At first he wasn't admitted to

the Congregation of the Holy Cross because of poor health. But he squeaked in, joking, "When I joined this community, the superiors showed me the door, and I remained 40 years." He worked in the laundry and as doorkeeper, which should renew our appreciation of all who perform support services and may seem "invisible" to us. They are often ignored but help us mightily. Brother André's sanctity soon became clear. He was so well known for his healing touch that it took four secretaries to handle the 80,000 letters he received annually. He once said that artists paint best with small brushes. Thank someone you've overlooked, whose work makes your life easier. 1 John 4:19-5:4; Luke 4:14-22a

Friday, January 7

Optional Memorial of Saint Raymond of Penaforte

If you could live 100 years, what would you do? Saint Raymond did live so long and filled his days with fruitful service. Born into the Spanish nobility, he began teaching canon law at age 20. Further study, teaching, and writing followed. Raymond joined the Dominican order and then became the Pope's advisor. Appointed a bishop at the age of 60 and head of the Dominicans at 63, he visited all their houses *on foot*. He died in 1275 at age 100. May his great industry inspire us and his prayers intercede for us. Today's Readings: 1 John 5:5-13; Luke 5:12-16.

Saturday, January 8

Friend of the Bridegroom

As a prelude to tomorrow's feast of the Baptism of the Lord, read today's Gospel from John (3:22-30). When John the Baptist's disciples come to him, puzzled and offended that Jesus is attracting so much attention, the Baptist responds with perfect peace about his role as the friend of the "bridegroom." Why do you think the Baptist must "decrease" and why might he be so comfortable with that? When have you found yourself in a "decreasing" role? Today's Readings: 1 John 5:14-21; John 3:22-30.



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Keeping the Seasons
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