

On the tenth day of Christmas

Traditionally observed on January 6, the feast of the Epiphany in the U.S. falls on the Sunday between January 2 and 8 and commemorates the arrival of the Three Wise Men. (Eastern Rite Catholics celebrate Epiphany as the Baptism of Jesus.) As part of their celebration, many families participate in a home blessing on this day.

Blessing of the House for Epiphany

All make the Sign of the Cross.  
**Head of Household:** Peace be to this house and to all who dwell here, in the name of the Lord.  
**All:** Blessed be God forever.  
**Reader:** In the beginning was the Word and the Word was with God, and the Word was God. He was in the beginning with God. All things came to be through him, and without him nothing came to be. . . . And the Word became flesh and dwelt among us, and we saw his glory, the glory as of the Father's only Son, full of grace and truth (Jn 1:1-3, 14).



became flesh and dwelt among us, and we saw his glory, the glory as of the Father's only Son, full of grace and truth (Jn 1:1-3, 14).

**All:** Lord God of heaven and earth, you revealed your only-begotten Son to every nation by the guidance of a star. Bless this house and all who inhabit it. May we be blessed with health, goodness of heart, gentleness, and the keeping of your law. Fill us with the

light of Christ, that our love for each other may go out to all. We ask this through Christ our Lord. Amen.

After the prayer of blessing is recited, each room of the home is sprinkled with holy water. Blessed chalk is used to inscribe the initials of the Magi (C, M, and B, for Caspar, Melchior, and Balthasar) above the doors, separated by crosses and framed by numbers indicating the calendar year. For 2010, the inscription would read as follows:

+ 20 + C + M + B + 10 +  
— Adapted from traditional Epiphany house blessings

On the eleventh day of Christmas

Christmas may start to feel like long ago, as most of us return to work and school. But it's a great time to carry "merry" in your heart. Use leftover Christmas napkins or buy some at an after-Christmas clearance sale and bake one last batch of Christmas cookies for your child's classmates, her teachers, or your coworkers. Rescue a wreath. Keep the lights up a little longer. Sing Christmas carols with your children before bedtime.

On the twelfth day of Christmas

Today, reread the Christmas story, then write a message to yourself and your family about the peace, hope, and joy of this year and tuck it away with the decorations, to be read next year. In the evening, place Christmas photos and photo cards in an album. Gently store the ornaments and blow out the scented candles.

Finally, before you pack away the manger scene, pray this blessing over it one last time:



God of every nation and people,  
from the very beginning of creation  
you have made manifest your love:  
when our need for a Savior was great,  
you sent your Son to be born of the Virgin Mary.  
To our lives he brings joy and peace,  
justice, mercy and love.

Lord,  
bless all who look upon this manger;  
may it remind us of the humble birth of Jesus  
and raise our thoughts to him.  
who is God-with-us and Savior of all,  
and who lives and reigns for ever and ever.  
Amen.

— From *Catholic Household Blessings and Prayers*  
(United States Conference of Catholic Bishops, revised  
edition, 2007)

From Christmas Day all through the Christmas season, let peace on earth and goodwill toward all be an "evergreen" sentiment. Jesus is present!

For Further Reading

Baker, Bishop Robert J., Michael Dubruiel, and Amy Welborn. *Christmas Joy: From Christ's Birth to His Baptism* (Our Sunday Visitor, 2009).

Ball, Ann. *Catholic Traditions in the Home and Classroom* (Our Sunday Visitor, 2005).

———. *Crafty Catholic Kids* (Our Sunday Visitor, 2008).

Dowgiallo, Robert and Carol. *On That First Christmas Eve* (Our Sunday Visitor, 2005).

Thigpen, Paul and Leisa. *Building Catholic Family Traditions* (Our Sunday Visitor, 1999).

More Christmas features and reflections:

<http://www.osv.com/OSV4MeNav/SeasonsoftheChurch/CelebrateAdvent/tabid/1721/Default.aspx>

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Celebrating the  
Season as Catholics

As last year's magical Christmas Day came to a close, did you lament that it was all over so quickly? Did you wish for the joy and goodwill of Christmas to survive a little longer?

It can — and, according to Catholic tradition, it should. The Catholic Church honors the time from Christmas Day to January 6; you can, too. Keep the “merry” alive this holiday season by making each day special.

*On the first day of Christmas*

Continue the joy of celebrating Jesus' birth from Christmas Mass by reading the Christmas story as part of your celebration (see Luke 2:1-21). Take turns reading parts of it with your family. Sing some traditional carols, too — “Silent Night” is a beautiful and reverent classic.



*On the second day of Christmas*

The feast of St. Stephen, who was stoned to death shortly after Jesus' crucifixion to become the first Christian martyr, is a major holiday in parts of the world. It's also commemorated in the Christmas carol “Good King Wenceslas,” written by John Mason Neale about the duke of Bohemia (now part of the modern-day Czech Republic), who was known for his almsgiving and for promoting Christianity.



Good King Wenceslas looked out  
On the feast of Stephen,  
When the snow lay round about,  
Deep and crisp and even.

*On the third day of Christmas*

December 27 is the feast of St. John the Evangelist. St. John was called by Jesus from his fishing boat to become one of the founders of the Church. By Jesus' side in life and at his crucifixion, John carried the faith far and wide.

Today, consider ways you might be an evangelist. Pray for those in the religious orders who devote their lives to spreading God's word, or contribute to a Catholic charity bringing the love of Christ to the world.



*Remembering the Holy Family*

The feast of the Holy Family is another of the “days of Christmas,” celebrated each year on the Sunday between Christmas and New Year's Day. You might write a few after-Christmas notes to family members, describing your fondest memories from this holiday season and your hopes for each family member in the coming year. Include a prayer — perhaps an Our Father or Hail Mary — in honor of your family.

*Prayer for Our Family*

Heavenly Father,  
you have given us the model of life in the Holy Family of Nazareth.  
Help us, O Loving Father,  
to make our family another Nazareth  
where love, peace, and joy reign.

May we love one another  
as God loves each one of us,  
more and more each day,  
and forgive each other's faults  
as you forgive our sins.

Help us, O Loving Father,  
to take whatever you give  
and give whatever you take with a big smile.

— Adapted from a prayer by Bl. Teresa of Calcutta

*On the fourth day of Christmas*

The Holy Innocents are remembered on December 28. These were the infants slaughtered throughout Bethlehem at Herod's order when he learned that a new king, Jesus, had been born whom he feared would challenge his throne.

Many pro-life groups observe this day as a special day of prayer for the unborn. You can consult Web sites such as Priests for Life ([www.priestsforlife.org](http://www.priestsforlife.org)), Women Affirming Life ([www.affirmlife.com](http://www.affirmlife.com)), or Teens for Life ([www.teensforlife.com](http://www.teensforlife.com)) for other ways to support pro-life initiatives.

*On the fifth day of Christmas*

Surprise someone today with a Christmas gift, something they won't expect at all. It doesn't have to be big — mittens, lip balm, or maybe sunscreen if you live in the South — but it should have a festive bow. Demonstrate that the spirit of Christmas generosity and the remembrance of God's greatest gift — his Son — lives on.



*On the sixth day of Christmas*

Light all the candles of your Advent wreath today — or, if you don't have an Advent wreath, light another candle and pray this prayer to keep the light of Jesus shining in your home.

O Radiant Dawn, splendor of eternal light,  
sun of justice:  
come, shine on those who dwell in darkness  
and the shadow of death.  
— “O Antiphon” from December 21



*On the seventh day of Christmas*

In preparation for a fresh start in the new year, seek the Sacrament of Reconciliation. Follow through with apologies to anyone in your life who is owed one. Pray and ask for God's grace and guidance in the coming year.

*On the eighth day of Christmas*

January 1 is the Solemnity of Mary, Mother of God. Think about what this very young woman not only endured, but accepted with incredible grace. Start your day by praying the Hail Mary.

Later, as you sort through Christmas cards, set aside those with Mary on the front and use them to make Mary ornaments:

Trace a shape around her image on the card and cut out the picture. Strengthen it by gluing a piece of poster board in the same shape to the back. Use a hole punch to make a hole at the top, insert a ribbon in the hole, and tie it. You've preserved a memory of the person who sent you the card and created a memory of Mary's love for next year.



*On the ninth day of Christmas*

Charitable giving increases around the holidays, but the need is great every day. Remember those less fortunate in prayer today and consider how you might find new ways to give of yourself often during the coming year.