

Epiphany Quiz



1. What does the word “Epiphany” mean?

(“Epiphany” comes from two Greek words—a verb that means “to shine” and a preposition that means “on.” So the noun “Epiphany” literally means “a shining on” and is sometimes translated “an appearing” or “a manifestation.”)

2. What does Epiphany celebrate?

(For Christians Epiphany celebrates the “shining” of God on Jesus—the “showing forth” or “manifestation” of Jesus’ divinity—as shown in the visit of the Magi at his birth and at his baptism.)

3. In what New Testament book do the Magi visit the baby Jesus?

(Only the Gospel of Matthew records such a visit. The other books about Jesus’ life—the Gospels of Mark, Luke, and John—do not.)

4. What other names do people call the Magi?

(People call them the “Wise Men” or the “Three Kings.” The Bible doesn’t name them, but tradition calls them Caspar [of Gaspar], Melchior, and Balthazar.)

5. How does the visit of the Magi “shine” divinity on Jesus?

(It shows that these kings from far away—through their long trip to visit Jesus, their highly valued gifts to him, and their worshipping of him—acknowledge Jesus as the King of all kings.)

6. Were the Magi Jews or Gentiles?

(According to tradition outside the Bible [which some scholars have questioned], the kings were Gentiles who came from “the East.” Though our word “magician” is related to “Magi,” the Magi of the Gospel of Matthew weren’t thought to be magicians in our sense of the word—they were thought to be astronomers and philosophers.)

7. How does God “shine” on Jesus at his baptism?

(After Jesus comes up from the water God says from heaven, “You are my beloved Son; in you I am well pleased,” and the Holy Spirit comes down “like a dove” and rests on him.)

8. On how many days is Epiphany celebrated?

(Some Christian traditions—the Catholic Church and Eastern Christian [Orthodox] churches, for example—celebrate Epiphany as a single day, the Feast of Epiphany. Many Protestant churches celebrate Epiphany as a season that begins on January 6 [12 days after Christmas] and ends the day before Ash Wednesday and the start of Lent. Since Lent starts on a different day from year to year, the number of days in the season of Epiphany is also different from year to year.)

9. For churches that celebrate Epiphany as a season, what is the last Sunday in Epiphany called?

(It is called Transfiguration Sunday, which remembers the story of Jesus’ going to the top of a mountain with Peter, James, and John and being “transfigured” by God in manifestation of Jesus’ divinity. The Gospel of Matthew says that Jesus’ “face shone like the sun, and his clothes became as white as the light.” When Jesus asks the apostles who they believe he is, Peter replies, “You are the Messiah, the Son of the living God.”)

10. What other names do people call Epiphany?

(Other names include Theophany [“manifestation of God”], Blessing of the Waters Day [used especially by Eastern Christian [Orthodox] churches], Three Kings’ Day [referring to the Magi or “Wise Men”]. The associated Baptism of the Lord Sunday is celebrated on the first Sunday after Epiphany.)

11. Since when have people celebrated Epiphany?

(Epiphany has been celebrated since before Christmas was celebrated! The Feast of Epiphany is one of the oldest Christian feasts and has been celebrated since the end of the second century—before the year 200 A.D. As with Christmas, Christians started celebrating Epiphany on the day [January 6, in the case of Epiphany] that a pagan celebration used to be held.)

12. What Shakespeare play has a title that relates to Epiphany?

(William Shakespeare’s play “Twelfth Night, or What You Will” is believed by many to have been written as entertainment for the close of the Christmas season (January 6th, the twelfth day/night after Christmas—in other words, Epiphany), though the theme of the play has nothing at all to do with Jesus’ birth, baptism, or Epiphany!