

# Epiphany celebrations marked joyfully throughout Diocese

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The story of the Three Kings traveling great distances to visit the Holy Family and offer their gifts of gold, frankincense and myrrh was recounted in lively, festive and prayerful ways as parishes around the Diocese observed the Feast of the Epiphany, also known as "Little Christmas," the weekend of Jan. 7-8.

"We are continuing with the Church tradition in celebrating the Three Kings when they arrived with gifts for Baby Jesus, by following the star," said Blanca Chiriboga, who helped to coordinate the Epiphany celebration in Holy Spirit Church (Mother of Mercy Parish), Asbury Park, an event that drew more than 200 parishioners following the 11:45 a.m. Mass.

The celebration is a 15-year tradition organized by the parish's Hispanic Ministry, featuring dramatic activities and ethnic food set against the backdrop of a large, colorful Nativity scene. Three men colorfully clad as the Three Kings, depicted by Alex Santos, Javier Ginez and Guadalupe Reyes, presented children with donated, gift-wrapped presents (toys and pajamas).

At the Mass that launched the celebration, Father Paul Janvier, parochial vicar, gave a homily in which he asserted that our lives must be a "manifestation of the love of Christ... That is the mission."

"The Lord was born for all of you," Father Janvier noted. "The love of God



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**'FOR ME?!'** • Following Mass Jan. 8 to celebrate the Feast of the Epiphany, one of the three "magi" presents a gift to a child in Holy Spirit Church, a worship site of Mother of Mercy Parish, Asbury Park. The parish held an Epiphany celebration in the church's basement hall, with traditional Latin-American food and gifts for the parish children. John Blaine photo



**PAYING HOMAGE** • In St. Anthony Claret Parish, Lakewood, parents and parish religious education leaders dressed as the Magi and processed to the manger with gifts before Masses Jan. 7-8. From left are David Roman, Jesus Gonzales and Rene Salazar Flores. Photo courtesy of St. Anthony Claret Parish

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is strong – and he wants us to be people of good will; people of good hearts."

At the start of the 9 and 10:30 a.m. Masses, children in St. Anthony of Padua Parish, Hightstown, brought the feast to parishioners' minds with their own representation of the Three Kings. At each Mass, three boy volunteers dressed as the kings and processed into

the church, following a star carried in by a girl volunteer. The "kings" deposited at the manger their gifts representing the gold, frankincense and myrrh of the Magi.

"I always make sure when we are practicing with the children beforehand, to ask them, 'why are we doing this?'" said parishioner Joanne Tyne, who has helped lead the children's Liturgy of the Word once a month for the past 15 years along with her husband, John.

The Tynes discussed with the children the three gifts, and why each was given to the Infant Jesus. "It's so nice for the kids – it gives them a better

understanding of it all," Joanne Tyne explained. "They feel very important to act as a reminder for the feast day for the congregation."

Many children of the parish look forward to participating in the observance; often siblings want an opportunity to follow in their older brothers' and sisters' footsteps, Joanne related.

"We had a second grader who wanted to carry in the star, but her older sister wasn't ready to give it up just yet," Joanne recounted, "so they carried it in together."

At the 9:30 a.m. Children's Mass in St. Benedict Church, Holmdel, children were invited to dress as kings and participate in the Presentation of the Gifts, according to Denise Contino, director of faith formation. All families that weekend were invited to uphold a centuries-old tradition of blessing their homes with chalk. Each family was given a piece of chalk and a description of the house blessing and prayer. Contino explained, according to the custom, families mark their doorway entrance as a way to invite Jesus to be a daily guest in their homes.

The families would use the chalk to write 20+C+M+B+17 above the doorway entrance. The initials represent the names of the three magi: Caspar, Melchior and Balthazar and the abbreviation of the Latin phrase *Christus mansionem benedictat* which means "May Christ bless this home." The "+" sign represents the cross and 20 and



**WE HAVE SEEN HIS STAR** • Children in St. Anthony of Padua Parish, Hightstown, volunteered to dress as the Three Kings and to carry a star for the kings to follow, as part of a procession before Epiphany Masses Jan. 8. Joe Moore photo



**SERVING THEIR PARISH** • Religious education students in St. Benedict Parish, Holmdel, are hard at working packaging pieces of chalk and prayer sheets that were given to families on the Feast of the Epiphany. Photo courtesy of St. Benedict Parish