

20 ✠ C ✠ M ✠ B ✠ 17

A BLESSING FOR THE HOME

This is an ancient blessing in the Catholic tradition that transcends cultures and continents. Legend holds that the letters correspond to the initials for the names of the Three Magi: Caspar, Melchior and Balthasar. More importantly, these letters abbreviate the Latin phrase “Christus Mansionem Benedicat” – “May Christ bless this house”. The year “2017” is divided by this phrase as a reminder to keep Jesus at the center of our lives and our relationships, wherever we go. In the Year of Faith, the four crosses signify the four corners of the world to which we the Baptized are commissioned to proclaim the Gospel. The crosses also remind us that in the Year of Faith that we are called to:

- ✠ grow in faith
- ✠ witness to our faith
- ✠ share our faith
- ✠ and be transformed in faith

Traditionally this blessing is done on Epiphany but it can be done at any time. The spirit of resolutions that accompanies the New Year is a unique opportunity to open our hearts to Christ and accept his leadership in our lives. The chalking ritual below is as a way to encourage every household of faith to begin the New Year in faith. This is a simple and versatile way to include family members of varied Christian denominations. The blessing can be adapted for Catholic schools, faith formation classrooms, shelters, nursing homes, hospitals, or hospitality rooms.

On Epiphany, bless chalk and distribute it to the people of the parish to use in blessing their home along with this explanation and prayer. Adapt the *Order for Blessing of Missionaries Sent to Proclaim the Gospel* from the Book of Blessings (Part I, Chapter 3) for blessing the chalk. The short prayer that follows can be shared at the main entrance of the home.

Chalking Entranceway Prayer

Begin by singing a refrain of familiar a Christmas song (e.g. “What Child is This?”)

Leader: The Lord be with you;

ALL: And with your spirit.

Leader: May Christ dwell in this house and bestow peace to all its inhabitants!

ALL: And all who enter it!

Leader: Let us pray. O God, you once used a star to lead wise ones and all people of good will to your Son. May the light of Christ guide us to recognize him in the epiphanies of our lives, each

and everyday. As we cross this threshold each day for work, study or play remind us of our true purpose - to love your people, do your will and lead others to you just as did the wise men of old. May all who enter here find your gracious hospitality in our company and may all who dwell here seek you in the face of every guest.

ALL: Christ bless this house.

Invite each person present to chalk the door way with the phrase: 20 ✕ C ✕ M ✕ B ✕ 17. Provide a step ladder and assistance so that younger family members can participate. If possible, conclude by singing another song (“O Come All Ye Faithful” or “We Three Kings”)

Leader: May Christ dwell with us, keep us from harm and make us one in mind and heart, now and forever We pray for this and all good things in the name of your son, Jesus Christ.

ALL: Come, Lord Jesus, into our homes and our hearts and remain with us now and always.

A Year of Faith Twist

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Mark Up the Neighborhood – Since evangelical churches do so little with Epiphany, this offers Catholics a distinct opportunity to showcase the richness of our faith. Epiphany is the *Twelfth Night* of the Christmas Season. The holidays are well-known for the emotional slump that follows for many people. “Chalking Doors” can warm the heart of someone who feels especially lonely at this time of year. This may be the last opportunity for caroling at a local nursing facility or for those who are newcomers or who have lost a family member in the past year. You will be surprised how many will be touched by this simple gesture.

Young people are especially fond of marking up their neighborhood with a sign of faith. Go out with others from your church (e.g. prayer group, bible study program, youth group or with other families) to *reveal* Christ in the neighborhood. Just bring some chalk and a plate of cookies. Knock on doors and explain the reason for the ancient tradition and offer to mark the homes of any home open to receive Christ. You may even leave a welcome card for your parish.

Host a Party with a King Cake –A King Cake tradition are rooted in the Feast of the Kings at Epiphany. The cake has a small trinket of a baby (Jesus) or a king hidden inside to remind us of the kingship of Christ in our lives. Part of this tradition holds that whoever gets a piece of cake with the trinket inside is treated as ‘king for the day’. This person might also be asked to give a brief witness (“Why I follow Jesus”, “Why I am a Catholic” or “Why I belong to My Parish”) or just host the next party (perhaps at Mardi Gras). Let us go forth to give witness to the kingship of Christ in our lives!

For more ideas in the Year of Mercy and every year, visit www.evangelizebuffalo.org, or contact the Office for Evangelization and Parish Life at 716-847-8393.