



UNIVERSITY OF
TORONTO

EPIPHANY

Inclusive Employer Guide

What is Epiphany?

Epiphany is a Christian holiday celebrated on January 6th, 12 days after Christmas in the Gregorian calendar, marking the end of the Christmas holiday.

What does Epiphany mean, and what does the day commemorate?

Epiphany, meaning “manifestation” or “showing forth”, has been celebrated since the end of the second century, before the Christmas holiday was established. It is commonly known as Twelfth Night, Twelfth Day, or the Feast of Epiphany. It is also called Theophany or “manifestation of God”, especially by Eastern Christians. The holiday commemorates the first two occasions on which Jesus’ divinity, according to Christian belief, was manifested: when the Three Kings or the Magi visited infant Jesus in Bethlehem, and when John the Baptist baptized him in the River Jordan. The Roman Catholic and Protestant churches emphasize the visit of the Magi when they celebrate the Epiphany, while the Eastern Orthodox churches focus on Jesus’ baptism.

How is Epiphany observed?

Epiphany is celebrated in various ways around the world. In some European countries, such as the Czech Republic and Slovakia, children dress as the three kings and visit houses. In France Le Jour des Rois (the Day of Kings), sometimes called the Fête des Rois, is celebrated with parties for children and adults. In Spain, the holiday is known as Kings’ Day or the Día de Los Reyes, and is celebrated just like a second Christmas, with feasting and the giving of presents. In Latin America Día de los Reyes Magos is the celebration of Epiphany, during which the three wise men bring gifts for children. Many Christians in Canada take part in Epiphany activities, such as attending special church services, sessions, luncheons or evening events that focus on the meaning behind Epiphany.

Mummers around the Christmas season until Epiphany is a 200-year-old tradition in Canada and is especially practiced in Newfoundland and Labrador. It involves people disguising themselves with masks or costumes to cover their identity and visiting friends’ or neighbors’ houses to perform songs or dances. Mummers may also include the custom of naluyuks, which are of the Inuit culture of northern Labrador. Naluyuks dress in loose-fitting clothes, mask their faces, and visit house after house to reward good children and frighten bad ones during this time of year. The children answer questions about their behavior during the past year and receive gifts from the naluyuks if they are happy with the answers.

The Three Kings Cake is another Epiphany tradition in Canada. A trinket is baked inside the cake, and whoever gets the piece of cake with the trinket (often a plastic bean, baby or crown) becomes the “king” or “queen” for the day. The tradition originated in France and is celebrated in many French-speaking parts of the world, including Quebec.

HOW CAN WE CREATE AN INCLUSIVE ENVIRONMENT?

1

Get educated. Ensure staff who supervise self-identified Christian colleagues are aware of Epiphany and how they can be supportive.

2

Intentional planning. Avoid booking meetings and scheduling events during Epiphany if possible.

3

Be flexible. Accommodate requests for time off for religious observances. If shift work is the norm, staff may want to swap shifts to observe Epiphany. Look for solutions that suit all parties.

4

Don't make assumptions. For personal reasons, not all Christian colleagues will take time off, but they may still observe in various ways.