



— BLESSING OF THE CHALK —

St Matthew tells us that when the wise men arrived in Bethlehem to visit Jesus, they found him and his mother in a house, not the stable where they had found their first temporary shelter. This is a cue that our Epiphany celebration should focus on our own houses, and it is a very old custom to bless houses on Epiphany. In the East, in particular, it is the custom for the parish priest to go through the parish blessing houses — not the elaborate blessing of a new home, but a special blessing that is also often given at Easter, a renewal of the homes in which the people of God dwell and live out the mystery of faith day by day. In recent years, this custom has been revived in some places in the West, and *The Book of Occasional Services of the Episcopal Church* provides forms for this blessing.

However, there is another way of blessing homes at Epiphany that begins in church, but does not require the priest to go from house to house — something that would be quite impossible in many non-geographical parishes in the modern world. This custom involves chalk that is blessed by the priest and taken home by families to mark the doors of their homes.

Today, we bless chalk to be used to hallow all our homes. The chalk will be available in a basket under the overhang of Kimball Hall after today's livestream service, so please come pick up and take one piece home with you along with these instructions. The initials of the legendary names of the wise men are written with blessed chalk on the lintel above the front door of the house, framed by the numbers of the new year, in this way:

**20 + G + M + B + 21**

After making the inscription, the following prayer is offered:

Leader: The Lord be with you.

People: And also with you.

Leader: Let us pray.

O Lord, holy Father, Almighty, everlasting God, we beseech you to hear us and vouchsafe to send your holy Angel from heaven to guard and cherish, protect and visit, and evermore defend all that dwell in this home. I call upon your Saints Gaspar, Melchior and Balthasar, to protect my family, friends, and all who enter here from every harm and danger, and I place this mark over my door to remain as a reminder to us that my home is truly the house of the Lord. O God, make the door of my house the gateway to your eternal Kingdom. Through Jesus Christ our Lord.

**All: Amen.**