THREE KINGS DAY

The Epiphany, Dia de los Reyes Magos, La Befana, Araw ng Tatlong Hari. It goes by many names and it is celebrated all around the world. For many, Three Kings Day, which for most falls on January 6th, is considered the official end of the holiday season. While the holiday is celebrated in the United States primarily by diasporic communities, it is largely considered one of the most important Judeo-Christian holidays in other countries. Three Kings Day celebrations can be found throughout Latin America, Europe and even the Philippines. But what exactly does this day commemorate, and why does it take place so soon after Christmas?

Three Kings Day commemorates the biblical story of the Three Kings, also known as the Three Magi or the Three Wise Men, who upon receiving word of the birth of Jesus, traveled for days to bestow the child with various gifts. Each gift hinted at stages in the child’s life: gold to represent the infant’s kingly status, frankincense as a symbol of his divinity, and myrrh—a common embalming agent at the time—to foretell of his demise. Tradition holds that the three men, Melchior, Caspar, and Balthazar arrived in Bethlehem about twelve days after the infant’s birth, placing their arrival on January 6th.

(Excerpt and observance info from https://www.nationalgeographic.com)

OBSERVING THREE KINGS DAY

While primarily associated with Latin American communities in the United States, Three Kings Day celebrations can be found globally. In many countries, the tradition of gift giving is carried out by the Three Wise Men, not Santa Claus, and is usually reserved for this day. Celebrations in the Philippines are similar to those found in Spain and some Latin American countries: children leave their shoes out the night before, sometimes stuffed with straw, and wake up to find gifts or candy in them the next morning. In Puerto Rico, children leave boxes stuffed with straw or grass under their beds and wake up the next morning to find that the men’s camels have “eaten” the grass and toys have been left in exchange. In Ethiopia, Timkat is celebrated two weeks later. It is believed the Three Wise Men brought the Ark of the Covenant to Ethiopia, so a model ark is created and placed on each altar.

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