



UNIVERSITY OF
TORONTO

EPIPHANY IN THE WORKPLACE

Inclusive Employer Guide

EQUITY · DIVERSITY · INCLUSION

WHAT IS EPIPHANY?

Epiphany is a Christian feast day that celebrates the revelation of Jesus Christ as the incarnation of God. The holiday is commemorated 12 days after Christmas.

In 2023, the holiday of the Epiphany will take place on Thursday, January 6 (a date which falls 13 days later for those, including many Orthodox Christians, following the Julian Calendar).

WHAT DOES EPIPHANY 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, Protestant, and Anglican 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.

Mumming 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. Mumming 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 significant Epiphany tradition in Canada. A trinket is baked inside the Three Kings Cake, and the person who gets the piece of cake with the trinket (often a plastic bean, baby or a crown baked inside the cake) then 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 and accommodations.** Update your scheduling tools to reflect religious observance dates and to support the planning activities. Avoid booking meetings and scheduling events on Epiphany if possible.

The University of Toronto recognizes its obligation to prevent discriminatory impacts on members of its community that arise from the failure to accommodate based on religion or creed. It is the responsibility of both the Manager and the individual seeking accommodation to work cooperatively and respectfully to explore and implement appropriate accommodation options.

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

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