

# Little Christmas

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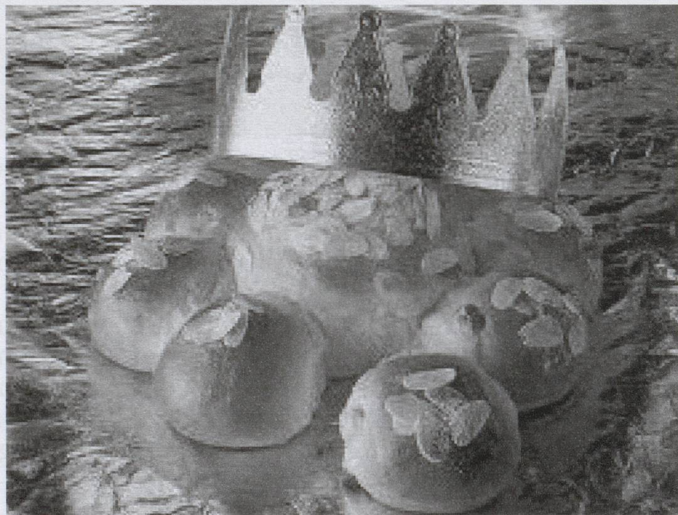


## Traditions around 6<sup>th</sup> January

In Spanish speaking countries, the three kings receive wish letters from children and magically bring them gifts on the night before Epiphany. According to the tradition, the Magi come from the Orient on their camels to visit the houses of all the children; much like Santa Claus with his reindeer, they visit everyone in one night. Children prepare a drink for each of the Magi and food and drink for the camels, because this is the only night of the year when they eat. In Puerto Rico and the Dominican Republic, children cut grass or greenery on January 5 and put it in a box under their bed. The grass is for the camels.

A tradition in most of Central Europe involves writing the initials of the three kings' names above the main door of the home to confer blessings on the occupants for the New Year, for example, 20 + C + M + B + 11. The initials may also represent "Christus mansionem benedicat" (Christ bless this house). In Catholic parts of Germany and in Austria this is done by so-called *Sternsinger* (star singers), children, dressed up as the Magi, carrying the star and singing Christmas carols. In exchange for writing the initials, they collect money for charity projects.

In France and Belgium a cake is shared, which contains a small figure of baby Jesus (in Switzerland it is definitely the figure of a king!). Whoever gets the figure is "crowned" king/queen for the remainder of the holiday and wears a cardboard crown purchased with the cake.



Swiss Dreikönigskuchen

This tradition also exists in Spain and in Portugal, but with one small variant: The cake, in this case actually a ring-shaped pastry, is most commonly bought, not baked, and it contains a small figurine of a baby Jesus and a dry broad bean. The one who gets the figurine is crowned, but whoever gets the bean has to pay the value of the cake to the person who originally bought it.

*from the internet*

## 6<sup>th</sup> January: Dreikönigstag or Epiphany?

The Eastern Orthodox Church celebrates the visit of the Magi on 25 December. Epiphany is celebrated by both the Eastern and Western Churches, but a major difference between them is which event the feast commemorates. For Western Christians, the feast primarily commemorates the coming of the Magi; Eastern churches celebrate the Baptism of Christ in the Jordan. In both traditions, the essence of the feast is the same: the manifestation of Christ to the world (whether as an infant or in the Jordan), and the Mystery of the Incarnation.

## Kings – magi – priests – astrologers?

The Magi are popularly referred to as wise men and kings. The word Magi is a Latinization of the Greek word magos. The term refers to the priestly caste of Zoroastrianism. As part of their religion, these priests paid particular attention to the stars, and gained an international reputation for astrology, which was at that time highly regarded as a science. Their religious practices and use of astrology caused derivatives of the term Magi to be applied to the occult in general and led to the English term magic.

## Little Christmas

Little Christmas is one of the traditional names in Ireland for January 6, more commonly known in the rest of the world as the Celebration of the Epiphany. It is so called because it was the day on which Christmas Day was celebrated under the Julian calendar, before the adoption of the Gregorian calendar. It is the traditional end of the Christmas season and the last day of the Christmas holidays for both primary and secondary schools in Ireland.

Little Christmas is also called Women's Christmas and sometimes Women's Little Christmas. The tradition, still very strong in Cork and Kerry, is so called because of the Irish men taking on all the household duties for the day. Most women hold parties or go out to celebrate the day with their friends, sisters, mothers, and aunts. Bars and restaurants serve mostly women and girls on this night. Children often buy presents for their mothers and grandmothers.

While originally a rural tradition, Women's Christmas is enjoying something of a revival, both in Ireland and abroad. It is becoming popular in the Irish-emigrant communities in Australia, Britain, New Zealand, and North America.