

# dear Padre

January 8, 2012

## When is Epiphany?

*When did we stop celebrating the Epiphany on January 6?*

*Does that affect the length of the octave of Christmas?*

Kelly

Dear Kelly,

The *Code of Canon Law* says that Sundays are to be “observed as the foremost holy day of obligation in the universal Church” (1246). That canon also allows national conferences of bishops to “abolish certain holy days of obligation or transfer them to a Sunday.”

In November 1983, the United States Conference of Catholic Bishops approved the transfer of the solemnity of the Epiphany (January 6) to the first Sunday after January 1. It was reviewed by the Holy See (Vatican) and promulgated in March 1984.

Liturgical celebrations are distinguished as solemnities, feasts, and memorials according to their importance. The two greatest solemnities, Easter and Christmas, continue for an octave (eight days). Since the octave of Christmas runs from December 25 to January 1 (the solemnity of Mary, the Holy Mother of God), it’s not affected by the transfer of the Epiphany celebration.

Liturgically, the days after January 1 through the Baptism of the Lord are part of the *season* of Christmas even though they’re not part of the *octave* of Christmas.

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