

The Story of KING CAKE

by Ken Richard

King Cake has been a part of the celebration of Epiphany and Carnival in France and its former colonies since the 12th Century. Epiphany or Twelfth Night celebrates the arrival of the Magi (also called the Three Kings) to worship the Christ Child and present him with gifts. In predominantly Catholic populated countries, Epiphany also marks the beginning of the Carnival season which leads us to Lent.

The word *carnival* means farewell to flesh and refers to the Lenten fast that is rapidly approaching. It is also the season when King Cakes or Galette des Rois would be eaten.

The King Cake can look very different in different countries, but it is almost always round and (in New Orleans at least) often braided or twisted. It often will have a small trinket or baby hidden inside. In the United States, particularly in New Orleans, the cake is often decorated with colored sugar of purple, green and gold.

What many people don't realize is that the King Cake actually has a religious significance:

- It is round and twisted to show the extreme and lengthy out of the way route the Magi took to hide the location of the baby Jesus from Herod who wished to kill him.
- The baby hidden in the cake represents baby Jesus himself. Whoever finds the baby is crowned the "king" of the party and is sometimes expected to host the next King Cake party.
- The colors also have significance: purple stands for justice, green for faith, and gold for power.

Where Carnival is celebrated, it begins with Epiphany and ends with Mardi Gras. Mardi Gras is the last celebration before the season of Lent begins on Ash Wednesday.



A King Cake Prayer

Lord bless this King Cake,
may those who share in it
share in the joy of the Epiphany and may its
sweetness sustain us during the time of fasting
that is to come at Lent.

May its shape remind us of the journey
the Magi made to pay you homage.

May its colors lead us to seek justice in our world,
to live a life of faith and to recognize
the awesome power of God.

Finally, though but one of us will find
the baby hiding within,
may each and every one of us seek you
wherever we go.
Amen.