



We Are Citizens - Holiday Traditions: Festival of Three Kings

The end of the calendar year typically brings about wishes of happy holidays.

But as Citizens embraces its diversity, it is important to recognize all holidays and make sure everyone feels a sense of belonging when celebrating holidays of their heritage and tradition.

Here is the final feature in a series of stories of employees and holidays they celebrate as part of their heritage and tradition.



Festival of Three Kings - The Epiphany



Yesenia Mercado, Customer Care Supervisor in the Consumer and Policy Services Division, is a native of Juana Diaz, Puerto Rico. Not unlike Christmas, El Día de Reyes – or Three Kings Day – is a holiday rooted in religion that people now celebrate with social gatherings, food and gift-giving.

While the entire island – and most of Latin America – celebrates this holiday, the most renown festivities are held in the southern town of Juana Díaz.

For over 135 years, Yesenia's hometown has celebrated this holiday with a festival and parade that gathers over 25,000 people. During the festivities, kids and adults alike are dressed as shepherds during the procession of the Three Kings riding on horseback, which are depicted by actors wearing colorful robes and thick beards.

The three wise men – Melchior, Caspar and Balthasar – were drawn to Christ's birth by a mysterious light, but they arrived late, which is why the 12 days of Christmas is celebrated following December 25 and culminates on January 6. El Día de Reyes, also known as Epiphany, or the Adoration of the Magi, celebrates the three wise men who brought gifts in the form of gold, myrrh and frankincense and is the basis behind the tradition of giving gifts.

Similar to the tradition of leaving cookies for Santa or food for his reindeer on Christmas Eve, on the night of January 5, kids put freshly cut grass and water in a shoe box and place it under their beds for the camels of the wise men. In exchange, the wise men leave gifts for the children.

"My family and I keep this tradition alive for our kids as we live in Florida," Yesenia said. "Since I do not live in Puerto Rico, it is imperative to me as a mother to keep my cultural traditions alive for my daughters. Occasionally, I make the trip to Puerto Rico to celebrate this very tradition that is dear to my heart."