Jan. 8, 2017
EPHANY
IS 60:1-6; EPH 3:2-3, 5-6; MT 1:1-12

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Suggestion: Homilist goes to the crib/crèche. Ask the people what seems to be contradicted by this scene from the scene depicted in today’s Gospel.

Probably many of you have heard the joke about the child who was asked what happens on Groundhog Day. He or she replied: “Well it’s when Santa comes out of the hole in the ground and then doesn’t come back until Christmas.” Who of us doesn’t have a story about how two stories get merged together. If you want any further proof of this, just look at the Christmas crib/crèche.

We all know the story from Luke’s Gospel that was told on Christmas Eve: Mary gives birth to Jesus “in a manger, because there was no room for them in the inn.” Then we are told that the ones to whom Jesus’ birth was announced were shepherds. In that world shepherds were ranked among the despised and deplorable groups that were often considered thieves because many of them let their sheep graze on other people’s property.

But today’s gospel from Matthew is entirely different. We are told that the birth of the Christ came about not with shepherds but with some of the most esteemed people in the world: “magi from the east.” Furthermore they don’t find Jesus in the manger like we have depicted here but in “a house.”

This makes me ask: where will most of us find the new-born Jesus in our world today. I don’t think many of you came from mangers. No, you came here to Mass, to hear God’s word about Jesus’ epiphany for seekers and to break bread in the Eucharist. In other words, the only place we will find Jesus today is not in some manger that has nothing to do with our lives but in our own homes.

The scripture says that the magi followed “the star that they had seen at its rising” . . . “until it came and stopped over the place where the child was. They were overjoyed at seeing the star, and on entering the house they saw the child with Mary his mother.”

But then, what they did has everything to do with how we celebrate this Christmas season: they “opened their treasures and offered him gifts of gold, frankincense, and myrrh.” In other words they shared the best of what they had with the child and his Mother.

Luke’s Gospel was written for people in that world who were despised and rejected by the wider society. That’s why Luke talked about the shepherds being the ones to experience the in breaking of God-with-us in their lives. In other words, they were God’s chosen ones. But Matthew’s Gospel is different. He is writing it for an audience of people like us who don’t live in mangers, are not homeless, but who live in our comfortable houses.

The challenge Matthew’s gospel gives to all of us is this: 1) first of all, are we wise in the ways of God; 2) secondly, does this make us “searchers.” I think too many of us are comfortable Catholics: we are
settled into our faith and have stopped asking questions about it that make us keep searching to find more and more ways we can encounter Christ in our lives and world. 3) thirdly, have we created a relationship with Jesus Christ in our lives that invites us to reorder the gold, frankincense and myrrh of our lives that shows Jesus Christ, in our lives and our homes, is our bottom line. Finally, to come back to the crib/crèche the way it links the magi with the shepherds. Maybe, instead of saying we have two totally different stories, we just might work to really bring them together in the way we try to show we have found the newborn Jesus by making sure nobody gets dismissed by our society like the shepherds in the way we try to make sure we are free of society’s biases and stereotypes against people who are not like us or homeless people whom we don’t forget as we live in our comfortable homes?

I think that, when we can do this we will truly become the wise women and men who keep searching for the Christ Child in our lives and homes: in our families and in our world.