

Epiphany (B) 01/04/2015

Two children are helping to take down their family's Christmas decorations and cards. As they do the little boy notices a difference. He says to his sister, *'I wonder why some of the cards show Joseph, Mary and Jesus, and on other cards only Mary and Jesus are in the picture?'*

His older and wiser sister quickly replies, *'That's easy, you dope. When Joseph, Mary and Jesus are in the picture, the shepherds are using the camera. When only Mary and Jesus are in the picture, Joseph is using the camera!'*

The gospel writers, **Luke** and **Matthew**, give us two pictures of the birth of **Jesus**. Like the **Christmas** cards in our opening story, there are different people in the picture. **Luke** includes in his picture **shepherds**. **Matthew** includes in his portrait **magi**. Both also have a **similarity**: those who are included in the scene **practice recognizing God in the created world**.

This is **odd** too, as the **shepherds** are **outcasts** in **Jewish** society. They are **unchurched**. They are **excommunicated** for some **nasty habits**. They are **uneducated**. They are **migrant refugees** who are **unwelcome** in most circles. They are **labelled** as **thieves** and **thought** less than human. The **magi** are **foreigners** who **practice** a way of life that is **banned** in **Israel**. They are not followers of **YHWH**. They are **magicians** and **astrologers**. They are not **trusted** and not **accepted** into in **Jewish** society. They are **labelled** as **sinners** and **thought** to be **nobodies**. Yet, it is to these two unlikely groups of people that **God is revealed as taking human flesh**.

Both **Luke** and **Matthew** make it very clear that those who we would expect to be sensitive to this event (church leaders, faithfully practicing

Temple and synagogue goers, priests, scholars of theology, and political leaders) are **oblivious**. They are more than **oblivious**, they are **obtuse**! Why? The gospel writers seem to say that they are **blinded** by their **unconscious addiction** to **rites, rituals**, and the pursuit of **intellectual perfection**. Each and all **lull** them into **forgetting** that the primary way in which **God** is revealed is through **creation**.

**Rites, rituals, the pursuit of knowledge, communal worship, and theology** are all **good**. They help provide us with a **container**. They can also cause us to become **addicted** to the **container** and **blind** us (when we are **unduly influenced** by the **container**) to the **Incarnation**. The **birth of Jesus** (God being revealed in **creation**) urges us to **practice a willingness** to be sensitive to **creation** that helps us to **become aware** that there is **more than the container...** that within the **container** the **content of God** is to be found.