

## **“Babies and Gifts Go Together”**

### **Matthew 2:1-12**

Preached by Dr. Robert F. Browning, Pastor  
Smoke Rise Baptist Church  
Stone Mountain, Georgia  
January 4, 2009

Did you read in yesterday’s paper about the first baby of the New Year born in Atlanta and perhaps the state of Georgia? It was Grant Garcia, son of Michael and Amy Garcia and grandson of our own Dan and Nancy Garcia. Michael grew up in our church and Nancy was our Nursery Coordinator for several years. By the way, Grant was born two seconds after midnight, which is why the media showed up the next day to take his picture with his parents and print their story. Congratulations Garcia family!

When babies are born, the press doesn’t always show up, but family and friends travel from near and far to see them, bearing gifts and goodwill. Most hospital rooms are filled with balloons, flowers, toys and clothes for the newborn. In many ways, it is a time of quiet celebration.

This is not new to our generation. Matthew mentions that visitors from the East, whom he refers to as Wise Men, came to see Jesus, bearing gifts of gold, frankincense and myrrh. You recall that after being warned in a dream not to return to Herod in Jerusalem, they traveled home by another route. Let’s look at this part of the birth narratives today for a word from the Lord on the first weekend of the New Year.

**Who were these Wise Men that visited Jesus?** They were mystics, astrologers, royal advisors, scientists and teachers skilled in philosophy, medicine and natural science. No doubt you understand why they were considered Wise Men. We don’t know exactly where they called home, but it was probably Persia (Iran) or Babylon (Iraq). For sure, they were not Jews, but Gentiles.

**Why did they travel so far to visit Jesus?** It appears that they wanted to see where God was at work in the world and take part in it. Their mission was a holy one.

**Why did Matthew include this story in the birth narratives?** It is a part of the overture to his gospel. In his first two chapters, Matthew highlights themes that are important to him in the entire book: the inclusiveness of the gospel, the struggle between good and evil that every generation faces, the need to speak truth to power and be an advocate for the voiceless and understanding faith as a journey.

It is this last theme that I wish to address this morning. This passage certainly depicts faith as journey, which leads to more questions I would like to explore.

**If faith is a journey, where is it leading us?** It is leading us to a deeper understanding of the meaning and purpose of life. It is also leading us to those places where God is at work in the world so that we may join Him.

This means that faith is a journey of hope and fear in search of wisdom, understanding, meaning, purpose and service. As Episcopal priest and author Tom Ehrich writes, “It is a journey that calls us to leave the certainties and comforts of home to discover a fresh word and new light.”

**Should we travel alone on this journey?** The Wise Men did not. We surmise there were three of them due to the fact that three gifts were presented to Jesus. The exact number is unknown, but we know there was more than one.

Do you like to travel alone? I don’t and am not sure I have ever talked to anyone who does. Trips are much more enjoyable with family and friends. Faith journeys are, too.

Whom do you need to invite to join you on your faith journey? Whose invitation do you need to accept?

Let me encourage you to link up with people that are both similar to you and different from you. Include family members and friends but also invite people to join you on your faith journey that look at life from different perspectives and enter into dialogue with them. I believe Matthew, the one who told us about the gentile Wise Men from the East, would encourage you to do this.

**What do you need to take with you along this journey?** Every major trip I take, such as my trip to Israel last summer, includes an orientation session. Each time I attend one, I hear the same message. “Pack light!”

We are instructed to lay out everything we think we need for the trip and then put half of it back in the closet or drawers. We are told to take a hard look at what remains and put half of it back. “Pack one-fourth of what you originally thought you would take,” tour guides usually say.

This is good advice for a faith journey as well. You need a lot more in your heart than your suitcase. As a matter of fact, the less “stuff” you have the better off you will be for this journey.

You will need guidance, discernment, courage, confidence, stamina, patience, passion, faith, hope and love. As I mentioned earlier, you will need good traveling companions who will enlighten you when you are confused, encourage you when you are discouraged, forgive you when you stumble, comfort you when you hurt and even carry you when you are weak.

**Where can I find this kind of support group for my faith journey?** I recommend this warm and affirming church. Here you will find fellow pilgrims that are in search of this deeper level of understanding and passionate about joining God where He is at work in the world. On their behalf, I invite you to join us on this journey toward Christlikeness. I can think of no better way to begin a New Year.