

**Following a Star, but Finding a Stable!**  
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We are in a Christmas sermon series called Forward in Faith. Everyone in the Christmas story had to move forward in faith. And to move forward in faith, they all had to leave where they were to get to Jesus.

Mary and Joseph had to leave Nazareth to get to Bethlehem where Jesus was born.

The wise men had to leave their home and travel many miles for months to get to Jesus.

The shepherds had to leave their sheep in the field to get to Jesus.

Moving forward in faith will always require you to leave something or someone or somewhere to get to Jesus. There's always a cost to following Christ.

I noticed some other similarities between the people in the Christmas story. For instance, most of them heard the call from God while they were doing their regular, daily jobs.

The wise men were magi who studied the word of God and the stars. And God spoke to them through both.

Zechariah was a priest doing his job in the temple when the angel appeared to him and told him he was going to have a child.

The shepherds were doing their daily work of tending sheep when the angel appeared to them with the good news of the Messiah's birth.

Don't think that you have to quit your job and sit around doing nothing in order to hear from God. He speaks to us in our daily lives and through our daily work. So, keep your ears tuned in to Him throughout your day.

I also noticed that everyone in the Christmas story received some kind of surprise. Mary surprised that she was going to be pregnant even though she was a virgin. Joseph was surprised to hear that Mary was pregnant and then surprised again when an angel told him she was still a virgin.

The shepherds were surprised by the heavens opening up and a choir of angels appeared to them. But think about the wise men's surprise. Matthew 2:1-12 says:

*After Jesus was born in Bethlehem in Judea, during the time of King Herod, Magi from the east came to Jerusalem and asked, "Where is the one who has been born king of the Jews? We saw His star in the east and have come to worship Him."*

*When King Herod heard this he was disturbed, and all Jerusalem with him. When he had called together all the people's chief priests and teachers of the law, he asked them where the Christ was to be born. "In Bethlehem in Judea," they replied, "for this is what the prophet has written. Then Herod called the Magi secretly and found out from them the exact time the star had appeared. He sent them to Bethlehem and said, "Go and make a careful search for the child. As soon as you find him, report to me, so that I too may go and worship him." After they had heard the king, they went on their way, and the star they had seen in the east went ahead of them until it stopped over the place where the child was. When they saw the star, they were overjoyed. On coming to the house, they saw the child with his mother Mary, and they bowed down and worshiped him. Then they opened their treasures and presented him with gifts of gold and of incense and of myrrh. And having been warned in a dream not to go back to Herod, they returned to their country by another route.*

Have you ever noticed how life doesn't always turn out the way we expected or planned it to? Sometimes circumstances don't always follow our plans. At times, life can be a series of disappointments and shattered dreams.

Think about the Wise Men in the Christmas story. They had spent a lot of money and time following a star. To follow this star, they had left behind home and family. Along the way, they no doubt had to face perils and obstacles. Then, when they finally arrive at their destination, they find the star they have been following stops over a stable.

I preached a sermon about this on a Christmas Eve many years ago, but I felt led to preach part of that in this sermon today. I'm speaking on Following a Star, But Finding a Stable.

The Wise Men probably thought they would find the Messiah in a palace. That explains why they went to King Herod first. After all – think about it – the wise men were looking for a king – so they went to the place where the king lived – in Jerusalem. But Jesus was not there!

They thought they would find Jesus in the city of kings – but He was in the city of shepherds. You see -

Sometimes you follow a star and end up at a stable.

Sometimes you look for a palace and end up in a pig pen.

Sometimes you look for a mansion and instead you find a manger.

Sometimes you look for a king and instead you find a kid.

What the wise men found did not match their dreams. Yet – what they did in the stable showed that they were in fact – wise men!

Today I want to take a look at what they did so that we can learn how to keep moving forward in faith.

I want to help you know what to do when you follow a star, but find a stable.  
 So I want to ask you - What do you do with disappointment?  
 What do you do when you follow a star, but find a stable?  
 Do you give up or go back or do you keep moving forward in faith?

Following stars and finding stables is a common occurrence in human experience. Who among us has not at some time in our life fixed our gaze on some high and lofty star only to find it leads to a stable? We thought we were headed to a certain place, but we ended up somewhere else. For example:

Young people graduate with their diploma tucked under their arm, full of dreams - ready to go out and change the world. Some soon discover the job they wanted is not the one that they got.

So many times I have stood before an altar and married a couple, everything looks so promising. Everyone thought this marriage was made in heaven; only to find out a few years later it was ending in divorce court.

A man comes to retirement age. He thinks of all the good things he's going to be able to do. After a few weeks, however, he begins to discover that retirement is not exactly what he thought it would be.

All of us at some time in our life follow a star only to discover a stable.  
 Sometimes life is nothing like what you had anticipated it would be.

The question that I have for you is this: How do you respond when you've been following a star, and it leads you to a stable? The beautiful part of the Christmas story of the wise men is what they do when they followed a star and found a stable.

Stables represent the disappointing messy times of life. Through their actions, the wise men teach us four things that we should do when to move forward in faith when we follow a star and find a stable. We find this in Matthew 2:10-12

*When they saw the star, they were overjoyed. On coming to the house, they saw the child with His mother Mary, and they bowed down and worshiped Him. Then they opened their treasures and presented Him with gifts of gold and of incense and of myrrh. And having been warned in a dream not to go back to Herod, they returned to their country by another route.*

So – when we follow a star and find a stable - (a disappointing messy place or situation) – here's what we should do:

### **1- To move forward in faith, look for God in the stable!**

The Wise Men did not expect to find a king in a stable. But that's where the star led them – and that's where Jesus was!

When you are expecting to end up in a palace, but you end up in a stable, look for God in the stable. That means start looking for God in the situation you are in right now!

Some people expect God to show up only in certain ways in certain places – and its always some other place and some other time! Proverbs 17:24 says:

*The perceptive find wisdom in their own front yard; fools look for it everywhere but right here.*

The thing about God is that sometimes He is found in the unlikeliest of places and in the most unexpected circumstances:

- Moses countered God in a burning bush on the backside of a desert
- Gideon encountered God while he was hiding in a winepress
- Daniel encountered God in a lion's den
- Jonah encountered God in the belly of a whale
- Two thieves encountered God while hanging on a cross
- Saul (the apostle Paul) encountered God on a road to Damascus on his way to persecute Christians
- The apostle John encountered God in prison

And every single one of these lives was dramatically changed by encountering God!

However, too often our tendency is to give up when we follow a star and end up at a stable. Our tendency is to give in to feelings of frustration and despair and hopelessness. Yet when we look for God in the stable – He can turn our stable into a moment of salvation, a moment of victory, a moment of triumph!

So – don't give up if you find yourself in a stable. Instead – move forward in faith and look for God in the stable. Look for God in your current circumstances. He's there, even if you don't know it!

You might be in a stable time – a tough time of life. Some people tend to turn FROM God in tough times. They backslide. But wise people turn TO God in tough times! They move forward in faith.

I'm encouraging you to do what God said to do in Deuteronomy 4:29

*But if from there you seek the Lord your God, you will find Him if you look for Him with all your heart and with all your soul.*

From there – where is there? In this case, God was telling Israel what to do if they backslid and ended up in a bad place. For us it there means right where you are right now – seek the Lord!

That's how you turn the stables of life into moments of victory! When you find yourself in a stable – look for God there.

One main difference between an immature Christian and a mature Christian is that immature Christians see God only in the good times. Then – when they experience a tough time – they think God has abandoned them! But mature Christians see God in good times and bad! In blessings or barnyards! In mansions or mangers!

Here's the message I have for you today. You may have been following a star and everything was looking so good. Then all of a sudden you are disappointed to find yourself in a stable. You find yourself asking questions like: "Is this it? Is this all there is to the Christian life?" OR "How did I end up here?"

Remember, wise men (mature believers) have the ability to see God in the stables of their life. When your star leads to a stable - Look for God, He will be there!

## **2- To move forward in faith, worship God in the stable!**

The Bible says that when the wise men saw the star they rejoiced with exceedingly great joy. But when they saw Jesus, they bowed down and worshipped.

When the wise men got close to Jesus – they rejoiced. And the closer you get to Jesus – the more you will rejoice! But the wise men were not satisfied with praising God from a distance! They sought out Jesus and when they finally found Him – when they got into His presence - the Bible says they fell down and worshipped him.

You see there's a time for singing – shouting – dancing. But there's a time when the only appropriate response is to fall at His feet and give your frankincense – your worship - to Him.

I want you to understand that worshipping in a stable is costly. It can be a sacrifice! But when wise men follow a star and end up in a stable – they offer God a sacrifice of praise.

And I encourage you to praise God even when things don't turn out like you thought they would. Worship Him even when you don't feel like it! No matter what you go through – He is always worthy of your worship!

Here's the third thing the wise men did:

## **3- To move forward in faith, give to God in the stable!**

When the wise men followed a star and found a stable, it would have been easy for them to just turn around and head home. After all, who would blame them?

It hadn't turned out like they had planned. But, they didn't give up ON Jesus! Instead, they gave up their treasure TO Jesus!

When we find a stable instead of a palace, we're often tempted to hold back from giving our best. The mind of the flesh says, "If this is all God is giving to me, why should I give to Him!" That's why most people stop giving when they get in the stable. That is the wrong response! When your star leads you into a stable - that is the perfect time to give! The way you receive FROM God is determined by how you give TO God.

Even though the wise men in the Christmas story followed a star and ended up in a stable – Matthew 2:11 says:

*Then they opened their treasures and presented Him with gifts of gold and of incense and of myrrh.*

They didn't reduce their giving because they were in a stable rather than a palace. Instead, they gave their treasure. They gave valuable, costly gifts. They could very easily have said, "This baby isn't going to amount to anything. Look where he was born! Is it really worth it to give these gifts to Him? Does He really deserve our best?"

That's what many people do when they find themselves in the stables of life. They reduce their giving or don't give at all. They think – God knows I have it tough right now, so He doesn't expect me to give. Oh really? There were many offerings given in the Bible – but some of the most memorable are those that were given in tough times.

Some people had very little, yet they gave all that they had in faith. And God blessed them! The Bible memorializes those who gave in faith during a tough time. The worst of times you live are the best of times to give!

#### **4- To move forward in faith, seek God's guidance in the stable.**

When the Wise Men met with King Herod – he told them to let him know where they found Jesus. But because they sought Jesus in the stable, worshipped in the stable, and gave in the stable – God gave them divine guidance. Matthew 2:12 says:

*And having been warned in a dream not to go back to Herod, they returned to their country by another route.*

So many people miss God's guidance because they expect Him to speak to them exactly like He did last time. But the wise men were led to the stable by a star – They were led away from the stable by a dream. Because they were now willing to hear from God in a different way - God led them to a different place.

And history is full of people who received new direction in their lives because of what happened in their “stable” experiences.

Joseph had a dream from God that did not come to pass for years. Yet he was faithful through those years of tough times, and was elevated from the prison to the palace.

David was faithful through years of obscurity and God took him from leading sheep to leading all of Israel.

So stay faithful in the tough times and God will lead you through them. He has promised to never leave us or forsake us. Listen closely – how you handle time in a stable will determine the future direction of your life! When we obey God and stay faithful in tough times, He will give us new direction in life. Proverbs 3:5-6 says:

*Trust in the Lord with all your heart, and lean not on your own understanding; In all your ways acknowledge Him, And He shall direct your paths.*

Always acknowledge God and He will always direct your path.

I want you to know that the stables of life don't have to be places of defeat or frustration or confusion or anger. They can be a place of salvation and victory and guidance.

So – if you've followed a star, but ended up at a stable - if you are surrounded by the debris of a shattered dream - I want to encourage you to look for God in your stable. Worship Him. Give Him your best. Have faith that He is working now on your behalf right now!

The wise men followed a star and found a stable – but they did not stay in the stable forever! Jesus was born in the stable – but He did not stay there forever!

And if you handle it wisely, where you are right now is not where you will always be! You followed a star and found a stable – but the stable does not define your life!

The stable is not the end of your life!

What you thought was the end of the road is just a bend in the road.

What you think is over can be resurrected.

Or – God can lead you a different way to a different place that will exceed your wildest dreams!

Can you thank Him for that?

Can you offer up a sacrifice of praise from your stable?

Can you give your treasure to God in your stable?

Can you seek the Lord in your stable? If you do, you will find Him!