

Following a Star and Finding a Shack
Matthew 2:1-12
January 8, 2017

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: " 'But you, Bethlehem, in the land of Judah, are by no means least among the rulers of Judah; for out of you will come a ruler who will be the shepherd of my people Israel.'" 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.

Did you ever open a box of breakfast cereal looking for the prize inside? On the outside of the box there was a large picture of the treasure hidden inside. When the booty was finally found, it turned out to be a cheap little piece of plastic. Life doesn't always turn out as planned. Sometimes, life seems like just a series of shattered dreams.

The Wise Men spent two years following a star. Undoubtedly, they had hopes and dreams. To follow this star, they left home and family behind. They became pilgrims. They faced perils and hardships along the way. They even ended up with an audience before the ruling king of Israel.

When they finally arrive at their destination, they find the star had led them to nothing more than a humble house. I think it's reasonable to assume these Wise Men pictured finding the Messiah in a palace. That would explain why they stopped to see king Herod. Surely they expected at least luxury and a nice home.

Whatever they expected, I'm sure they didn't expect to find the King of kings in a peasant home – probably not much more than a shack. It must have been a shock to have their dreams shattered. Yet, in the rubble of their torn and twisted dreams, these men found some things in that humble setting that changed their lives.

Life certainly has a way of destroying our dreams and plans. Today we want to study how the Wise Men handled their surprise ending so we can find some help when we follow a star only to find a shack.

Lesson one: Wise men recognize God in the shacks of their lives.

What the Wise Men found wasn't what they went looking for, but they came to worship and worship is what they did. They saw God in that shack. More important, they saw God in the baby Jesus. They looked passed the wreck and ruin and found a Savior.

When life shatters your dreams, your first duty is to find the Lord. If you are his, then nothing can happen in your life that he has not permitted. Everything that happens in this world, whether we see those things as good or evil, have passed through God's hands. We don't always understand, we don't always agree, but God has either brought these things into your life or he has allowed them in your life.

Consider the life of Job. The richest man in the land who had everything taken away. God brought the blessings into Job's life. He also allowed Satan to strip Job's life clean. How did Job respond to losing everything in life: *Naked I came from my mother's womb, and naked I will depart. The Lord gave and the Lord has taken away; may the name of the Lord be praised* (Job 1:21 NIV).

When your star leads to a shack, remember that God is doing one of three things:

Correction: The author of the book of Hebrews tells us: *The Lord disciplines those he loves, and he punishes everyone he accepts as a son* (Heb 12:6 NIV). To the Christians at the church of Laodicea, Jesus send this message through the apostle John: *Those whom I love I rebuke and discipline. So be earnest, and repent* (Re 3:19 NIV). God is the best of fathers and he will do whatever is necessary to keep us as his children – including correcting us.

Instruction: Sometimes God uses a “shack” experience to reveal himself to us in a new way. We can always trust God to be working in our lives. *We know that in all things God works for the good of those who love him, who have been called according to his purpose* (Ro 8:28 NIV).

In the 6th chapter of the Gospel according to John, Jesus uses two “shack” experiences to reveal himself as God. He used the hunger of a crowd of over 5,000 people and showed himself by feeding them with a few loaves of bread and a couple of fish. He also used the fear generated by a great storm on the Sea of Galilee to show his power over the forces of nature, thereby strengthening the disciples' faith.

Perfection: God can use “shack” experiences to mold you into his image. God has a mission for you and sometimes he uses the disappointments in your life to prepare you for the service he has chosen for you.

Moses is a good example of God's perfecting power. Moses grew up in the court of Pharaoh. He never would have dreamed that life would take him to Midian to tend sheep in the desert for 40 years. However, if Moses wouldn't have had that “shack” experience, he would never have been able to lead the Israelites through the desert for 40 years.

When you end up in one of life's shacks, start looking for God. He will be there.

Lesson two: Wise men render gifts in the shacks of life.

It would have been very easy for the Wise Men to have turned around, packed up all their belongings and their gifts, and headed home. Who would have blamed them? Things certainly didn't turn out as they had expected. But they didn't do that. They gave to Jesus what was rightfully his as the true Son of God.

They gave him gold to show his kingship. They gave him frankincense to show he was to be worshiped as God. They gave him myrrh to foretell his death and burial as our Savior.

When your star leads you to a shack, it's time to give to God. Most people stop giving when they encounter a "shack" experience. That's the wrong response. Scripture tells us that the way to receive from God is to give to God.

Malachi 3:10 *Bring the whole tithe into the storehouse, that there may be food in my house. Test me in this," says the Lord Almighty, "and see if I will not throw open the floodgates of heaven and pour out so much blessing that you will not have room enough for it.*

Luke 6:38 *Give, and it will be given to you. A good measure, pressed down, shaken together and running over, will be poured into your lap. For with the measure you use, it will be measured to you."*

2 Corinthians 9:7 *Each man should give what he has decided in his heart to give, not reluctantly or under compulsion, for God loves a cheerful giver.*

The Wise Men received back much more than they gave. That's always the way it is with God. It is impossible to out-give God. When we give to God a shovelful, he gives back to us with a landslide of blessings. The Wise Men gave offerings of gold, frankincense, and myrrh, and they were blessed with being in the company of God himself. The surest way to receive a blessing is to be a blessing.

Wise men receive grace in the shacks of life.

In that Bethlehem shack, the Wise Men experienced two kinds of grace; saving grace and sustaining grace. When they worshiped and accepted Jesus as the King of kings, saving grace was theirs. Beyond that, God's sustaining grace was theirs when they submitted their lives and plans to God and returned home without seeing king Herod.

When your star leads to a shack, you can expect to find God's grace in your hour of need. Paul was afflicted by what he described as a "thorn in the flesh." When he took this life "shack" to the Lord, God told him: *My grace is sufficient for you, for my power is made perfect in weakness* (2 Co 12:9 NIV).

Life is seldom fair. Many times life is not what we expect it to be. But even when life lets us down, we can be sure that God will never let us down.

Hebrews 13:5 *Keep your lives free from the love of money and be content with what you have, because God has said, “Never will I leave you; never will I forsake you.”*

Hebrews 4:15-16 *For we do not have a high priest who is unable to sympathize with our weaknesses, but we have one who has been tempted in every way, just as we are – yet was without sin. Let us then approach the throne of grace with confidence, so that we may receive mercy and find grace to help us in our time of need.*

When your star leads to a shack, you can expect God’s guidance if you allow God to lead. Jesus promises the leadership of God in our lives: *When he, the Spirit of truth, comes, he will guide you into all truth* (Jn 16:13 NIV).

As God’s children, we are never alone and never without God’s love and care. God will always make a way through every “shack” of our lives. There is no experience in life where God is not found. All we must do is look, give, and receive.