

December 10, 2023

2nd Sunday in Advent

“And He will be Called... Wisdom.”

Isaiah 11:1-5 (2-3)

Intro:

Our advent preaching series this year has been based on the O Antiphons, which were monastic prayers with origins in the early church. They were used in the week before Christmas to remind believers of the various titles, or names, that were given to the Messiah before the name of Jesus was given to Him.

Those monastic chants were later put into song, which we know today as the hymn “O Come, O Come Emmanuel”. There are seven of these O Antiphons – each title beginning with “O”, but we are only looking at the four which coincide with the four verses of the hymn in the red hymnal that we used to use in our church.

Last week we looked at the title: Desire of Nations. Today we look at the title: Wisdom.

Background:

We recently finished a sermon series from the book of Proverbs, which is commonly known as the wisdom book in the Bible. Proverbs is not the only book that falls under the category of wisdom. Psalms, Ecclesiastes, Song of Solomon, and Job also fall under the category of wisdom literature. Wisdom literature is primarily concerned with understanding how we fit within the larger context of creation and God, including our relationship with evil and suffering within that context. Proverbs gives us short, practical statements to help guide us in living with wisdom. But, in the book of Proverbs, wisdom is also personified as though she (as Proverbs identifies wisdom) is tangible and can be known personally.

Wisdom in the book of Proverbs is there to help us to know how to live, but doesn't give us a clear picture of what is meant when the Messiah is identified as Wisdom.

So, let's take a quick look at the author of much of the book of Proverbs, King Solomon. Solomon, king David's son, was accounted as the wisest person to have ever lived. This claim isn't made because he made perfectly wise decisions all the time, but because he was granted a greater measure of Divine wisdom than any other human being has ever received. Solomon's story is found in the early chapters of 1 Kings.

In 1 Kings 3, we find the relatively young and newly minted king Solomon beginning to set about strengthening Israel's political position through some strategic marriages and alliances. He is credited as someone who loves God. In a dream, God comes to Solomon and asks him, "What do you want? Ask, and I will give it to you" (1 Kings 3:5). We know the outcome of this: he asks for the wisdom to rule the people well and to know the difference between right and wrong so that he may judge justly. God grants him this request, as well as power and wealth, because he asked for something for the betterment of the people, not just for himself. In verse 16 and following, this wisdom is put to the test when two women come before him, both claiming one child as their own. Solomon offers to cut the child in half, thus each woman getting an equal share. One of the women says "go for it", while the other says "no, let the other woman have him so that his life will be spared". Of course, that was the child's real mother and the wise trick of Solomon uncovers the truth.

Solomon was a wise person. God gave him a "wise and understanding heart, such as no one else has ever had or ever will have" (1 Kings 3:12).

But he was not Wisdom personified. He had the capacity to understand creation and human nature on a level that no other human being has ever, or will ever have, but it was still limited. Solomon made many, what some would call "un-wise", decisions. He had wisdom, but he did not have the capacity to fully embody

it. If anything, the wisdom that he gained was detrimental to his outlook on life in the end. The book of Ecclesiastes, which is his essay on the created order, twice has Solomon commenting that everything is meaningless. That is the statement of a person who has grasped and seen all the corruption that sin has brought into the world, but who also sees no way out of it. Perhaps the ignorance of us less wise people is a blessing because while we still see the evils of sin in this world, we also see good and hope for better. But perhaps that is the gift of wisdom the Messiah brings with him.

Jesus is Wisdom:

And so we come to Jesus, who is the Messiah, and who is given the title of Wisdom in Isaiah. It might be more accurate to say that He is given wisdom, and that He *is* wisdom. Not just a part of it, as was given to Solomon, but the whole of wisdom.

Isaiah's words of Messianic prophecy say that the root of Jesse (imagery referring to the Messiah, who is Jesus) will receive the Spirit of wisdom. Let's read Isaiah 11:2 again "And the Spirit of the Lord will rest on him – the Spirit of wisdom and understanding, the Spirit of counsel and might, the Spirit of knowledge and the fear of the Lord."

We know, because we are reading Scripture and experiencing a Christian life after Jesus's death and resurrection, that Jesus (who is the Messiah) is God's son. This places him within the trinity – God the Father, God the Son, and God the Holy Spirit. All One God, but three distinct parts or roles in the divine order. So, as Jesus is fully God, he also fully made up of all that is the Father and the Holy Spirit. It is the Spirit that grants wisdom as we understand it. It is the Spirit dwelling in Jesus that not just grants wisdom, but makes Jesus to be wisdom.

How does this relate to us?

It helps us to understand that the future rule of the Messiah, of Jesus, will not be done under the motivation for power that is part of the human spirit, but through

the life giving breath of God. It will be characterized by wisdom, understanding, counsel, power, knowledge and fear of the Lord – which is given to the Messiah from God, not because there is intellectual understanding, but because there is experiential understanding of God. Jesus holds the fullness of the Spirit of Wisdom, and is Wisdom, because He has fully experienced God, because He is God. Because of this, his reign will be just and right. It will not be biased, based on how one person looks compared to another. He will make fair decisions. He will uphold the poor and needy, and everything will be subject to the unchanging standards of God, who is righteous. He will be able to do this because He knows God. This is not knowledge *about* God, but knowledge that comes from, that is born from, a close and personal relationship with him. This is what Jesus has and holds.

Conclusion:

Jesus is Wisdom. The temptation for us, and even some of the language of the O Antiphons, is to ask Jesus to give us the wisdom to make good decisions, to recognize what is right and what is not, to be able to know how to live justly. And while those are all good things, they do not give us the wisdom, or the knowledge, that we truly need. What we need, what the world needs, isn't to be wiser, to know more *about* God, but to actually know God. The miracle, the wonder, and the wisdom of God, is that through the Messiah (Jesus) it is possible for all people to actually know Him, to have a personal, close, and living relationship with Him. This is wisdom for us.

Let's pray.