

“O Wisdom ”

Proverbs 8:22-27; 1 Corinthians 2:6-10; 1:30

December 1, 2019
Advent

First Sunday in

What you want for Christmas? This is a question we will hear repeated over and over again in the next few weeks. Back in the old days, when I was a child, the arrival of the annual Christmas catalogs from Sears & Roebuck or Montgomery Wards started us thinking about what we wanted for Christmas. We would pour over those catalogs, drawing circles around the things we wanted, inserting bookmarks on the pages where those items could be found, and making sure that the catalogs were left in places where parents would find them and, hopefully look. Then, the seemingly interminable waiting period would begin to see if you got what you wanted for Christmas. Now, it's all different. It's so easy. Children can do a few Google searches, copy website addresses where their desired gifts can be found, and email them to parents. Waiting doesn't have to be an issue with free two day shipping from Amazon Prime. Easier yet, parents can just give gift cards and the children can buy the things they want themselves.

Although this “wanting something for Christmas” and nervously waiting for it sound very commercialized and non-spiritual, it is, in a way, what this season of Advent is all about. For millennia before the first Christmas, the people of God wanted something badly – the coming of the One promised by God to be their Savior. They wanted and they waited, wondering who He was and what He would do when He did come.

First on their list was something that I'm sure was never on the Christmas list of my friends or me and that is wisdom. Maybe it should have been. What you and I really need for Christmas and throughout the year is not something from a toy catalog, in the electronics store, or on the Internet. What we need is what the first O Antiphon prays for and that is, *“O come, Thou Wisdom from on high.”*

At first, this doesn't seem to exciting. When we think of wisdom, we probably think wisdom equals knowledge. However, that is not true. You probably know people in life who have lots of knowledge and academic degrees, but aren't very wise. Wisdom is the application of knowledge so that we make the right decisions or are able to discern between good and bad. That's good as far as human wisdom goes. But that good old common sense wisdom is not what the people of God are praying for here.

We pray for Wisdom *from on high*. However, this is more than an attribute, a quality, or a virtue. Scripture personifies wisdom. That is, it speaks of wisdom as though it were a person. In the eighth chapter of the book of Proverbs, Solomon speaks of wisdom in almost the same terms as John speaks in the first chapter of his Gospel. Solomon writes (as if wisdom was speaking), “The Lord possessed me at the beginning of his work, the first of his acts of old. Ages ago I was set up, at the first, before the beginning of the earth. When there were no depths I was brought forth, when there were no springs abounding with water. Before the mountains had been shaped, before the hills, I was brought forth, before he had made the earth with its

fields, or the first of the dust of the world. When he established the heavens, I was there; when he draw a circle on the face of the deep.” (Proverbs 8:22-27)

Wisdom personified is identified clearly in the New Testament when Paul talks about true wisdom. Paul writes in 1 Corinthians, “And because of [God] you are in Christ Jesus, who became to us wisdom from God, righteousness and sanctification and redemption.” It turns out that the wisdom God wants to give to us isn’t just the ability to make good decisions or to discern right from wrong. Rather, it is a person, Jesus Christ, the Wisdom of God. So, when we pray for wisdom from on high, God answered that prayer by sending us Jesus. *He* is the Wisdom we need.

Years ago, some Christian groups placed billboards along the highways of our country, intending to catch people’s attention so that they might want to know more about Christianity. One of these billboards said, “Jesus is the answer!” This begs the question: if Jesus is the answer, what is the question? If Jesus is Wisdom, then what is this wisdom for?

This Wisdom from on high is not just about advice for personal relationships, priorities, and discerning right from wrong. It’s not just about how to find the best job, how to pay the bills, and so on. Jesus is not just some sort of divine Magic Eight Ball. Remember that toy which was shaped like a black eightball? You shook it, asked a specific question, turned it over to receive a vague answer, and then take that as guidance.

Jesus is Wisdom from on high for a far more serious situation. But how? The hymn tells us, “O come, Thou Wisdom from on high, Who ord’rest all things mightily.” God made everything that exists and pronounced it to be “very good.” Everything was run in a good and orderly way. Humanity was the high point of His creation and were in perfect harmony with Him. Adam and Eve lived in perfect harmony with each other.

What we call “sin” is more than simply a moral failure, a transgression of the commandment, or the failure to obey a law. Sin threw everything out of order. God’s good creation was thrown into disorder. Because of our sin, a barrier went up between us and God. Because of our sin, we construct our own barriers with other people.

When something is “out of order,” (like a vending machine, for example), it cannot do that which it was intended to do. A disordered creation could not do what it was intended to do. It could no longer serve the purpose for which God had created it. No longer could humanity serve God in holiness and humility. No longer could we live together in love for him and in service to each other.

Creation could not be simply adjusted or tweaked. It had to be placed back in order again. The Wisdom from on high came to order all things mightily; to put all things back in order. Jesus did this by becoming part of creation, born a human child from a virgin mother. Jesus took our place of disorder that He might order all things mightily. He lived a perfect life that we did not and could not, thus fulfilling the Law of God for us. He suffered the death which we, by our sin, deserved, thus making sacrifice for the sins of the world and gaining forgiveness for them. He was raised from death to the life God intended for us to have in Eden, thus opening the way to everlasting life in Paradise to all who believe.

None of that makes any sense according to human wisdom. But that is exactly what Paul was referring to when he wrote to the Corinthians, “Yet among the mature we do impart wisdom, although it is not a wisdom of this age or of the rulers of this age, who are doomed to pass away. But we impart a secret and hidden wisdom of God, which God decreed before the ages for our glory.” This wisdom is not hidden from us because of a lack of God’s love. This wisdom is hidden by us because of the blindness of our sin. It is not a plan which we could find on our own, learn on our own, or believe in our own because of that sin.

Therefore, we continue to pray of that Wisdom, “To us the path of knowledge show, And teach us in her ways to go.” This divine reordering of creation is something that can only be revealed to us by the power of the Word of God. As it is written, “I am not ashamed of the gospel for it is the power of God unto salvation for all who believe.” The Gospel shows us the way to peace with God through the forgiveness of our sins, the presence of God in our lives by the Word of God and Sacraments, and the hope of everlasting life with Him in heaven through His promise, “I am the resurrection and the life. Whoever believes in me, though he die, yet shall he live, and everyone who lives and believes in me shall never die.” (John 11:25-26)

The Wisdom from on high does more than simply show us the path of knowledge but teaches us in her ways to go. The Word of God, the Wisdom from on high, creates faith in us in our Baptism against all odds and empowers us to believe God’s promises and receive God’s blessings, despite all criticism and rejection. This faith is reinforced and strengthened by our participation in Divine Service and in the Lord’s Supper.

But God’s Wisdom from on high is more than having one’s heart and mind filled with the knowledge of Jesus and God’s Word and allowing that knowledge to direct our ways. This hymn is an Advent hymn. And most people forget that Advent isn’t just about the coming of Jesus Christ, the Wisdom from on high, as a baby in Bethlehem. It is not even about Jesus Christ coming to die on the cross and rise from death to life. It’s only been in recent centuries that we focused on that.

Historically, Advent was about preparing for the coming of God’s Son in power, glory, and judgment on the Last Day. Advent used to be a darker season, one in which the colors were dark purple, instead of the lighter blue. It was a time for contemplation of the wrath of God, a season for repentance from sin and for fasting. Christmas has always been that bright, happy season, but not Advent. Note the assigned readings for the weeks ahead and the familiar Advent hymns, often written in minor keys, and you’ll see that this is not a “happy clappy” time. So praying for the coming of God’s Wisdom from on high isn’t just about welcoming a baby, but it’s also about welcoming the Judge of the world who comes to destroy evil and make his creation new again.

Judgment – that is what we are preparing for during Advent. Yes, we want God’s Wisdom from on high to guide and direct us in daily life through His written Word and the teaching and example of Jesus. But we especially want God’s Wisdom from on high to prepare our hearts to meet Jesus through repentance and faith, that we might joyfully spend eternity with him.

In the meantime, we pray for God’s Wisdom to come from on high to make us watchful and ready for His appearing. Jesus has said, “Watch therefore, for you know

neither the day nor the hour.” (Matthew 25:13) Since we know not the day or the time, this is a call to consistent and constant waiting and watching. Therefore, especially during this time of Advent, read the Word, heed the Word, hear the Word, and do the Word. Accompany all of this with prayer, especially for wisdom – the Wisdom from on high.

Maybe the answer to our question about wish lists is for each of us to prepare an Advent wish list, too. At the top of that list will be wisdom. This is not knowledge, not earthly wisdom, and not divine wisdom for trivial matters. It is the Wisdom from on high who is Jesus Christ. It is the Wisdom who carried out the plan of salvation by His birth, death, resurrection, and return. It is the Wisdom who reveals the knowledge of that plan to us. It is the Wisdom which creates faith in our hearts to believe and trust in that plan. And it is the wisdom which allows us to apply that knowledge of salvation to our lives. This wisdom – Wisdom from on high – will ultimately prepare us for Jesus to come again. Therefore we stand and sing that prayer to begin the Advent season here. (Sing the hymn verse.) Amen