

Worship Service “*Wise Guys*”

Christmas 2, Year A, 8th January, 2023

Sirach 24:1-12 NRSV / John 1:10-18 CEV

Prelude

Opening Music [Video] [Immanuel](#)

Michael Card, posted to YouTube by Easy Worship Resources, from the album *Promises*, Sparrow Records, 1987

Welcome Guests / Announcements

Pass the Peace

Opening Hymn *Holy Spirit, Come With Power* 26

Call to Worship [responsive]

One: Arise, shine, for your light has come,

All: **The glory of the Lord has risen upon you.**

One: Thick darkness covers the earth and the people,

All: **But the Lord will arise upon you, God’s glory appear over you.**

One: You shall see and be radiant;

All: **Your heart shall thrill and rejoice.**

One: The light of the world has come, and is with us;

All: **Shine your light, and proclaim the praise of the Lord!**

Invocation

O Word made Flesh, You have come into our midst as light and wisdom, desiring to be known to us in our lives and to be found in the world around us. Open our eyes and our ears and our hearts to recognize you where you dwell—in our midst—Challenging, heartening, lighting the way to truth, peace, justice. Amen

Apocrypha Reading (Video) [Sirach 24:1-12](#) NRSV

Sirach 24:1-12, Wisdom Lives Among God’s People A weekly bible reading, from the lectionary, narrated by Douglas Brown and Yvonne Quenet. This scripture quotation is from New Revised Standard Version Bible, copyright © 1989 National Council of the Churches of Christ in the United States of America. Used by permission. All rights reserved worldwide. <https://nrsvbibles.org/index.php/lice...> Pictures from commons.wikimedia.org For information about Yvonne Quenet, ex National Theatre actress, see <https://www.imdb.com/name/nm0703205/> 7

Wisdom praises herself, and tells of her glory in the midst of her people.

In the assembly of the Most High she opens her mouth, and in the presence of his hosts she tells of her glory:

“I came forth from the mouth of the Most High and covered the earth like a mist.

I dwelt in the highest heavens, and my throne was in a pillar of cloud.

Alone I compassed the vault of heaven and traversed the depths of the abyss.

Over waves of the sea, over all the earth, and over every people and nation I have held sway.

Among all these I sought a resting place; in whose territory should I abide?

“Then the Creator of all things gave me a command, and my Creator chose the place for my tent. He said, ‘Make your dwelling in Jacob, and in Israel receive your inheritance.’

Before the ages, in the beginning, he created me, and for all the ages I shall not cease to be.

In the holy tent I ministered before him, and so I was established in Zion.

Thus in the beloved city he gave me a resting place, and in Jerusalem was my domain.

I took root in an honored people, in the portion of the Lord, his heritage.

Light-giving God – We are magi on a caravan of lumbering hope, traveling through

A Time of Prayer Joys and Concerns

Pastoral Prayer

grinding wind and glaring sun, chill clear nights and skin-baking days. We come to seek Your light. We come lumbering in hope, each of us on our own life’s journey – traveling through times of loneliness and fear, through heartbreak and anger, through grief and loss, through economic uncertainty, through fear for loved ones caught up in war, through our own private crises, through the extended shock of horrific images of hurricanes and genocide, through struggles with the mental illness of a child, the disintegration of a parent, the simple letting go of a child more ready to be an adult than we are ready to allow their growth, through the changes in a new marriage, the welcoming of a new child, the completion of a degree, the vision emerging in a new work of art. We come lumbering in hope on a journey of joys and

sorrows. We come as magi to seek Your light. But Light-giving God, we admit that we are also Herod the King, trembling in fear at the news of the rising of Your light.

We admit that we are afraid that the light of Your truth may indeed rise, and it may be threatening to us.

Like Herod, we fear the rise of the truth of the harm we have done to others to build our own palaces and to fortify our own power; we fear the rise of the truth that lies beneath the political spin we put on our own lives; we fear to admit to ourselves the truth that may rise within us as we acknowledge the pain of what we have done to others and what others have done to us.

Light-giving God, we come as trembling Herod, afraid of Your light.

But Light-giving God, we are also magi wrapped in joy to arrive at the manger that cradles Your light. We greet the rising light that Herod so fears. We, too, fear this light, this truth. For here we meet Your light and truth, the truth of our own powerlessness.

We are magi, wise and respected sages. We are Herod the King, holding wealth and power. Yet we are no more than this helpless infant, no more than human flotsam on the tidal wave of time, human beings, no more and no less.

Light-giving God, let us sit in stillness in the light of this truth of our powerlessness, until we can see Your real light cradled here, until we are enveloped in the assuring light of this truth, until we shine in the light of the common humanity You reveal to us here.

Light-giving God. We lumber together in hope as Your church to lift Your Light. Let the light that we lift be this light visible in the manger. Let us lift not the light of our congratulation of ourselves, not the light of belief in our own superiority, not the light of our belief in our own narrow presuppositions, not even the light of our own church.

Let us lift the light from You that we can encounter here, the light of the power You make known to us in the truth of our powerlessness, the light we can see as we sit quietly as magi at the manger learning to be at ease with our common humanity, learning to be at ease with You.

Let this be the light we lift as a beacon in the darkness we know best. As we lift that light, may we too be lifted to know the true power that lies among us waiting to rise as a beacon of our true hope. **Amen.**

Hymn *Immortal, Invisible, God Only Wise*

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Gospel Reading (Video) [John 1:10-18 CEV](#) John [1:10-18](#), The Word Became Human

A weekly bible reading, from the lectionary, narrated by Douglas Brown.
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The Word was in the world, but no one knew him, though God had made the world with his Word.

He came into his own world, but his own nation did not welcome him.

Yet some people accepted him and put their faith in him. So he gave them the right to be the children of God.

They were not God's children by nature or because of any human desires. God himself was the one who made them his children.

The Word became a human being and lived here with us. We saw his true glory, the glory of the only Son of the Father. From him the complete gifts of undeserved grace and truth have come down to us.

John spoke about him and shouted, "This is the one I told you would come! He is greater than I am, because he was alive before I was born."

Because of all that the Son is, we have been given one blessing after another.

The Law was given by Moses, but Jesus Christ brought us undeserved kindness and truth.

No one has ever seen God. The only Son, who is truly God and is closest to the Father, has shown us what God is like.

Message ***Wise Guys***

We hear a lot this time of the year about light and word. The "light of the world," the "light that the darkness cannot overcome," "in the beginning was the Word," the "Word made flesh," to name just a few.

Themes and metaphors of "light" are infused and completely intertwined with the preparation of Advent, culminating in the candlelight service that transitions us to Christmas each year. Often we have different themes and programming for Advent and Christmas each year, but we never really lose that symbolism and metaphor of light and darkness, of Word becoming flesh. On the surface, it doesn't seem so complicated.

The Christmas story represents Jesus' arrival in this world bringing hope and promise, good news to those who had none. There's a sense that he brought something that was missing, a connection to the Divine, that would, in the course of time, bring about a resolution to the problems of those who suffered here and now. Certainly that is the whole meaning of gospel, or "good news," and the "incarnation," which is God appearing in human form.

Those are familiar terms and concepts for many of us. However there is much more to these concepts of light and word if we look a little deeper into our lessons this morning.

In the very beginning of the creation story in Genesis, we have darkness being broken by light. God came into the darkness and created light to break up and overcome it. God created light in the heavens to counter the darkness, whether the sun by day or the stars and moon by night. There is a sense of God's created order making sense of the negative chaos of darkness, or the absence of God's light.

But what exactly is the "light?" When we hear "light," most of us probably think in terms of illumination, like the sun or the moon, or our own invention, light bulbs. Those elements certainly drive away physical darkness and shadow. But from a scriptural perspective, starting in Genesis, there's a sense of light bringing order to disorder and chaos. God brings light and order to creation. All is ordered according to the divine plan and the result is Eden, perfection.

Our texts this morning introduce a different dimension to God, a different face. Our perception of God is often that of a fatherly figure, usually with white hair and a long flowing beard. Yet in Sirach, we are introduced to the Wisdom of God, a female persona. Like our initial image of God in Genesis, Wisdom, or Sophia in Greek, is portrayed as a mist covering the Earth, penetrating into every corner, then a pillar of cloud, mirroring the imagery from the Exodus story. However, Wisdom is desperate for a home, for a people in which to pitch her tent. God gives her Israel as her home.

Jewish tradition and scholarship considers the Torah to be the embodiment of the Wisdom persona of God. God's covenant with the people in Sinai was meant to bring them back into sync with the created order. However, the drawback to God creating people in the divine image is that they then also have free will. They want to make things according to their design, and soon strayed following their own interests, as they did in Eden. Soon the law was viewed as a burden, and the Wisdom it contained was no longer recognized and acknowledged as valuable. Likewise, in John, we have another image of the embodiment of this Wisdom persona in "the Word."

But to understand what that really means, we need to take a closer look at what "word" means in this context. For many, when they hear "Word" in this prologue to John, they think of the written scripture. And while the Bible certainly gives insight into "the Word," that is not what is being referred to. In Greek, the scriptures are biblos, which is the word for book. However, in John, what is translated as "word" is the Greek word logos. Literally translated as "reason or plan," logos is the divine reason in creation, ordering it and giving it form and meaning. In other words, logos is the reason, or wisdom of God.

If we work with this definition, this first chapter of John makes a lot more sense. It would only be natural for "the Word" to be with God from the beginning, and through "the Word," all that is was created. And similar to our story of Wisdom from Sirach, the Word also was

ultimately rejected by most of his people. Throughout scripture, there are those few who recognized the importance of the wisdom in their midst, but those prophets often also faced the same scorn. John the Baptist is the example given in John. However with the Word, not only truth and wisdom was embodied, but also grace. When the people cast off and crucified the Word, he sent yet another embodiment of Wisdom to the people, in the form of the Spirit. This act of grace made wisdom available to the individual and the body of believers without restriction or reliance on physical manifestation.

The last link in an unbroken chain of wisdom and truth since the very beginning. The question is, do or will we avail ourselves of this wisdom so readily available to us? We always seem to rely on ourselves for all the answers. Yet where has that gotten us? Are we any closer to being in sync with God's created order, in any more in tune with God's wisdom and providence? Or are we still stuck on our own chaotic path? We have a choice.

We can keep marching to our own drummer and keep finding ourselves coming up short, or we can actually start paying attention to that still small voice, the Spirit that so desperately wants to be among us, to set up her tent within us. And not just as individuals, but as a community of faith. For too long, churches have mimicked the same structure and concerns of the world around them, catering to our own flawed logic of revenue and attendance, building maintenance and keeping up appearances, that the Spirit, the wisdom has been relegated to the background, or lost altogether. We see the results just by looking around. When the church no longer is much different than the world around them, what purpose do they have, why bother spending our time there when there are other more engaging things to do on a Sunday morning?

There's a story about Bible teacher F. B. Meyer, who once had a firewood factory that employed prisoners. Meyer would give them a job to do, good wages, a place to live, and when possible, spiritual encouragement. In exchange, he expected them to render good employment. They didn't work well together as a team, and he lost money. Finally he fired them all and purchased a circular saw powered by a gas engine. In one hour, it turned out more work than the combined efforts of all the men covered in the course of one day. One day Meyer had a little conversation with his saw. "How can you turn out so much work?" he asked. "Are you sharper than the saws my men were using? No? Is your blade shinier? No? What then? Better oil and lubrication against the wood?" The saw's answer, could it speak, would have been, "I think there is a stronger driving power behind me. Something is working through me with a new force. It is not I, it is the power behind." Meyer later observed that many Christians and many ministers are working in the power of the flesh, in the power of their intellect, their energy, their enthusiastic zeal, but with poor effect. They need to become linked to the power of God through the Holy Ghost."

How many of us does that apply to? I must confess it strikes home for me. How often do we rely on ourselves, and our human limitations, and miss opportunities because they don't make sense to us, because they go against what we consider to be normal or rational?

This morning, let's reflect on how we as individuals, and as a faith community, can seek to be more Spirit-led, and less reliant on our own reason and intellect. What practices might we use to be more in tune with the Divine wisdom we are graced with? May we seek out Wisdom and Word in every aspect of our lives, and work together to bring each other back to the perfection of God's order. Amen.

A Call to Serve

The Love of God is born new in the world as often as we embody that love in the works of compassion, peace and justice. Let us offer our gifts in a spirit of generosity and hope.

A Time for Reflection - *Musical Interlude*

The Prayer of Thanksgiving

With these gifts, dear God, accept the praise and thanksgiving of our hearts, which rejoice in your goodness and love. Let our gifts point to your presence in the world, and further your dream for the world through Jesus, Emmanuel, God-with-us. Amen.

Hymn ***Be Thou My Vision*** **545**

Benediction

The world you go into is a world filled with challenges, with crises, with pain, with disappointment.

You go as people who know these things intimately because you have felt them, experienced them, and railed against them. Go now as those who would wisely see not only what the world is but what we can make it be, and may your hands, your heart, your voice be turned toward making it so. Go in peace!

Postlude