

“Wisdom & Awe”

Sermon for SECOND SUNDAY AFTER CHRISTMAS - January 2, 2022

1 Kings 3:4–15

Ephesians 1:3–14

Luke 2:40–52

Gospel reading: The child [Jesus] grew and became strong, filled with wisdom. And the favor of God was upon him.

Now his parents went to Jerusalem every year at the Feast of the Passover. And when he was twelve years old, they went up according to custom. And when the feast was ended, as they were returning, the boy Jesus stayed behind in Jerusalem. His parents did not know it, but supposing him to be in the group they went a day’s journey, but then they began to search for him among their relatives and acquaintances, and when they did not find him, they returned to Jerusalem, searching for him. After three days they found him in the temple, sitting among the teachers, listening to them and asking them questions. And all who heard him were amazed at his understanding and his answers. And when his parents saw him, they were astonished. And his mother said to him, “Son, why have you treated us so? Behold, your father and I have been searching for you in great distress.” And he said to them, “Why were you looking for me? Did you not know that I must be in my Father’s house?” And they did not understand the saying that he spoke to them. And he went down with them and came to Nazareth and was submissive to them. And his mother treasured up all these things in her heart.

And Jesus increased in wisdom and in stature and in favor with God and man.

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Grace to you and peace to you from God the Father and our Lord and Savior Jesus Christ.

I want to begin with the gospel reading today. St. Luke has a structure in his writing, something that is well known about him. When Luke writes in his gospel, he does a lot of what they call [chiastic writing](#). “Chi” is the Greek word for the letter X. There's a thought here in what St. Luke was writing to

us, and it starts with a main point and that kind of comes down to a smaller point and then flares back out again, forming an X. We want to look at the structure because there's something there at the very center that I think St. Luke wants us to notice. Let's take a look.

It starts out with:

The child [Jesus] grew and became strong, filled with wisdom. And the favor of God was upon him.

And notice that the passage ends with:

And Jesus increased in wisdom and in stature and in favor with God and man.

You'll notice there's a repeat of an idea. Wisdom begins the story and wisdom ends the story. (We have an Old Testament lesson that's about Solomon asking for wisdom, so clearly in the lectionary they were picking up on the theme of wisdom.)

Now let's take a look at the stuff closer to the middle:

Now his parents went to Jerusalem every year at the Feast of the Passover. And when he was twelve years old, they went up according to custom.

It says they went *up* to Jerusalem because it doesn't matter what direction you're coming from, you always go *up* to Jerusalem. It's at the top of a mountain, so it doesn't matter what direction you're coming from. Notice how in the second half of this reading, that mirrors this section, he goes *down* to Nazareth with them:

And he went down with them and came to Nazareth and was submissive to them. And his mother treasured up all these things in her heart.

Now you have a narrative all about the dialogue, what they're saying to each other:

After three days they found him in the temple, sitting among the teachers, listening to them and asking them questions. And all who heard him were **amazed** at his understanding and his answers. And when his parents saw him, they were **astonished**.

And his mother said to him, "Son, why have you treated us so? Behold, your father and I have been searching for you in great distress." And he said to them, "Why were you looking for me? Did you not know that I must be in my Father's house?" And **they did not understand** the saying that he spoke to them.

It all builds to this point of astonishment. And the word here for astonished is pretty interesting: they were gobsmacked, nonplussed. It's not certainly what they were expecting.

If the whole thing is about wisdom and the center point is astonishment, then at the heart and core of what Luke is writing it's about wisdom, confusion and amazement.

I think when you really come across the wisdom of God it is truly astonishing.

True wisdom begins with God. Remember from the Old Testament, "The fear of the Lord is the beginning of wisdom." (Ps. 110:10) I remember walking into the old Holland High School entrance, a building that was converted into an administrative office, but still the first thing you would see written in stone on the wall was this verse. "The fear of the Lord is the beginning of wisdom." Wisdom truly begins with a relationship with our God. And scripture tells us that this wisdom, that comes down from above, is God's gift to us. And St. Paul will tell us it comes from the Holy Spirit.

18 For the message of the cross is foolishness to those who are perishing, but to us who are being saved it is the power of God. 19 For it is written:

"I will destroy the wisdom of the wise;
the intelligence of the intelligent I will frustrate."

20 Where is the wise person? Where is the teacher of the law? Where is the philosopher of this age? Has not God made foolish the wisdom of the world? 21 For since in the wisdom of God the world through its wisdom did not know him, God was pleased through the foolishness of what was preached to save those who believe. 22 Jews demand signs and Greeks look for wisdom, 23 but we preach Christ crucified: a stumbling block to Jews and foolishness to Gentiles, 24 but to those

whom God has called, both Jews and Greeks, Christ the power of God and the wisdom of God. (1 Corinthians 1:18-24 NIV)

You can't know God simply by figuring it out on your own, you have to be told. That's why we have the Word of God, it's why we have the Scriptures.

St. Paul goes on:

26 Brothers and sisters, think of what you were when you were called. Not many of you were wise by human standards; not many were influential; not many were of noble birth. 27 But God chose the foolish things of the world to shame the **wise**; God chose the weak things of the world to shame the strong. 28 God chose the lowly things of this world and the despised things—and the things that are not—to nullify the things that are, 29 so that no one may boast before him. 30 It is because of him that you are in Christ Jesus, who has become for us **wisdom** from God—that is, our righteousness, holiness and redemption. 31 Therefore, as it is written: "Let the one who boasts boast in the Lord."

When it comes to wisdom, I am reminded of the Serenity Prayer:

"God, grant me the serenity to accept the things I cannot change, courage to change the things I can, and wisdom to know the difference."

I have often told the story of my Dad's passing, when we got the news that his cancer was terminal. He was given the choice to have one more surgery, to open up his bowels which had been sealed off by scar tissue. Without the surgery, he would starve to death. If he had it, he could go on living for a while. But he had cancer, which had spread to his bones. He asked the doctor, "What is death by starvation like?"

"Well, you get tired and go to sleep?" he said.

"What's death by bone cancer like?"

"It's very painful."

He made the decision not to have the surgery.

My mom was very upset with him. "Bob, how could you make a decision like that so easily? You've agonized over every decision you've ever made. Why is this one so easy?"

"It's not in my hands."

It's a wonderful lesson I learned from my father, that when we think we're in control that's when we worry, that's when we fret; it's when we know we're not in control that we can put it in God's hands.

Here's another quote about wisdom from the 'gospel' of Jimi Hendrix:
"Knowledge speaks but wisdom listens."

We watched "Dead Poets Society" the other night. I had never seen the movie before. If the father in the story had listened to his son, the tragic ending that takes place might not have happened. But the father did not have enough wisdom to hear what his son was dealing with. Wisdom listens.

Well, that drove me back to the Old Testament lesson for today, Solomon asking for wisdom.

And Solomon said, 'You have shown great and steadfast love to your servant my father David, because he walked before you in faithfulness, in righteousness, and in uprightness of heart towards you; and you have kept for him this great and steadfast love, and have given him a son to sit on his throne today. And now, O Lord my God, you have made your servant king in place of my father David, although I am only a little child; I do not know how to go out or come in. And your servant is in the midst of the people whom you have chosen, a great people, so numerous they cannot be numbered or counted. Give your servant therefore an understanding mind to govern your people, able to discern between good and evil; for who can govern this your great people?'

It reminded me of this quote, a German proverb: "When God means to punish a nation, He deprives its leadership of wisdom."

Notice that after King David's death, Solomon – the son of David – became king himself and the Lord appeared to Solomon and told him to ask of Him anything he wanted; Solomon asked for wisdom so he could lead his people well, that he could be a good king for the people. The son of David asked for God's wisdom. That's the Old Testament. What do we have in the New Testament but the personification of the son of David, the wisdom of God. The other Son of David, Christ our Lord, reveals himself in wisdom.

I also came across this quote from Solomon:

In wisdom is much grief. He that increases in knowledge also increases in sorrow. (Ecclesiastes 1:18)

So here we are in New Year's, a good time to reflect, to look back, because some sorrows in our life can't be fixed, they can only be carried. It reminds me that St. Paul writes to the Galatians, "Carry one another's burdens." But later he says each one of us has to carry our burdens alone. Because there are *some* burdens I cannot take off your shoulders. I use the example of a woman going through labor; I cannot take that pain from her, she has to do that alone, but she doesn't have to *be alone*. On the other hand, I can help you move your things into a house, I can carry and help lighten the load. That's one of the reasons we exist as a congregation, brothers and sisters, to share the load.

I believe the word at the center of this story is astonished, so it's not simply about wisdom but about being astonished at who Jesus was, and is, and is to come. And this is who He is to us, as we come into His presence with fear and awe, to treasure what He has done for us in taking our sins away.