

DIVINE WISDOM IS JESUS CHRIST AND HIS GOSPEL OF SALVATION BY GRACE THROUGH FAITH IN HIMSermon for the 2nd Sunday after Christmas

1 Kings 3:4-15

The grace of the Lord Jesus Christ, and the love of God, and the fellowship of the Holy Spirit be with you all. Amen.

The text for our sermon today is our First Reading from before, 1 Kings 3:4-15: ⁴ **The king went to Gibeon to offer sacrifices there, for that was the most important high place. Solomon used to offer a thousand burnt offerings on that altar.** ⁵ **At Gibeon the LORD appeared to Solomon in a dream by night. God said: “Ask Me! What shall I give you?”**

⁶ **Solomon answered: “You have shown great kindness to Your servant, my father David, while he lived in Your presence in truth, in righteousness and with an upright heart toward You. You have continued to show him this great kindness and You have given him a son to sit on his throne, as is so today.** ⁷ **Now, O LORD, my God, You have made me, Your servant, king instead of my father David, although I am only a little lad and do not know how to carry out my duties.** ⁸ **I, Your servant, am among Your people, whom You have chosen, a numerous people, too many to count or record.** ⁹ **Therefore, give me, Your servant, a mind that listens, so that I may judge Your people and distinguish between good and evil! For who can judge this great people of Yours?”**

¹⁰ **This request, which Solomon had made, pleased the LORD.** ¹¹ **God replied to him: “Because you have asked for this, have not requested a long life for yourself, have not requested riches for yourself and have not requested the lives of your enemies, but have requested understanding for yourself, to discern what is right,** ¹² **look! I have done as you have asked. See! I have given you a wise and understanding mind, so that there has been no one like you before you and no one will arise like you after you.”**

¹³ **Moreover, I have also given you what you have not asked for, both riches and honour, so that no other king will have been like you for as long as you live.** ¹⁴ **If you also live according to My Ways and keep My Prescriptions and My Commandments as your father David has lived, then I shall give you a long life.”**

¹⁵ **When Solomon woke up, he realised that it had been a dream. He went to Jerusalem, stood before the Ark of the Covenant of the Lord and offered burnt offerings and peace-offerings. He also made a feast for all his officials.**

Lord God, heavenly Father, sanctify us through Your truth, Your Word is truth. Amen.

Dear friends in Christ:

In today's Old Testament and Gospel lessons, we have two young men who are heirs to the throne of David and who are seeking wisdom from the LORD.

The first is Solomon, who was both the LORD's and his father David's choice to succeed him as the King of Israel. According to God's design, the crown fell to Solomon, who was undoubtedly very conscious of his comparative inexperience and inadequacies. He himself says that he is “**a little lad and (does) not know how to carry out (his) duties.**” Perhaps because of his pedigree, being the son of David and Bathsheba, and also because of his young age, there were a lot of people looking for a reason to find fault in him, hoping that he would fail as king so that another more worthy candidate could step in and do the job right. One can imagine that as Solomon stepped up to the plate to assume his role as king, he was under a lot of pressure.

Fortunately, he knew what to do with it. Rather than attempt to bear the burden himself on his own young shoulders, Solomon handed things over to the LORD. His reign began with a lavish display of worship and thanksgiving to God. Our text says that “**Solomon used to offer a thousand burnt offerings on that altar.**” Solomon made it clear: he intended to rule as a man under the LORD's authority, and he meant for his subjects to likewise dedicate themselves to serving the LORD. And lest we think that his over-the-top acts of devotion were merely window dressing to impress people with his religious piety, a few verses before our text we are told that Solomon was a young man who *genuinely loved the LORD*. His worship was sincere, and so was his inherent trust in the LORD.¹ He believed that the LORD who had graciously raised him to the office of king would also graciously equip him to serve well in that position.

Today, from our text, we hear how. The LORD appears to Solomon in a dream by night and says, “**Ask Me! What shall I give you?”** It is the ultimate blank cheque. Solomon can have anything his heart desires: instant fame, a vast fortune, a sprawling empire that surpasses anything ever seen in the ancient world - whatever he wants. Think about it: *what would you do with an offer like that?*

What would you ask for if the Lord told you He would give you *anything* you wanted? The impulse, of course, would be to ask for something selfish: “What *I* want is something that will serve *me*, make *my* life better, and put *me* on the top of the world.” It's the way we are. That's what makes Solomon's request so remarkable. He asks for something not for himself but rather that will enable him to better serve others. He says, “**O LORD, my God, You have made me, Your servant, king instead of my father**

¹ 1 Kings 3:3

David, although I am only a little lad and do not know how to carry out my duties.... give me, Your servant, a mind that listens, so that I may judge Your people and distinguish between good and evil! For who can judge this great people of Yours?"

Solomon's request was for his people's benefit, *not for his own*. **"This request, which Solomon had made, pleased the LORD."** It's easy to see why. It was said of his father, David, that he had a heart after the LORD.² Now we see it in the son as well: asking for a gift that equips one to serve others, reflecting God's own attitude and priorities. It's how He treats us - as Jesus Himself once said, *"the Son of Man has not come to be served but to serve and give His life as a ransom for many"* (Matthew 20:28).

God replied to Solomon, **"Because you have asked for this, have not requested a long life for yourself, have not requested riches for yourself and have not requested the lives of your enemies, but have requested understanding for yourself, to discern what is right, ¹²look! I have done as you have asked. See! I have given you a wise and understanding mind, so that there has been no one like you before you and no one will arise like you after you."**

The Lord happily granted Solomon's request and filled his heart and mind with wisdom from on high, but He also gave Solomon things he didn't ask for, namely **"both riches and honour."** Solomon received great wealth, fame, power, earthly splendour, and so on - Solomon got it all, but we need to focus on that first gift: divine wisdom. What exactly is it? To answer, in general, we distinguish between *knowledge* and *wisdom*. Knowledge has to do with *what* you know, the body of information you have amassed in your head. Wisdom, on the other hand, is more of an innate quality. It has to do with being able to *apply* what you know and to use it in *beneficial and efficient ways*. To say it another way: the opposite of knowledge is ignorance, but ignorance can be cured through education - you can learn what you don't know. The opposite of wisdom, however, is folly or foolishness, and that is much harder to cure. There are a lot of people who are very bright, who naturally learn quickly and know a great deal, but who display little or no wisdom. They consistently make bad decisions. Their sense of judgment is skewed. The choices they make are ruinous for themselves and others. Their plans never work out as intended. While it is true that some wisdom can be gained through experience - we learn from our mistakes - or at least we should, yet some people never seem to learn. They keep repeating the same foolish mistakes over and over again.

What we have said so far about wisdom applies to the earthly kind of it. Solomon received that, but more importantly, God had given him *divine* wisdom, which was a gift of the Holy Spirit. It's the ability to rightly understand the Holy Scriptures and properly divide God's Word of truth. It includes the ability to discern what is truly good and what is evil beyond the immediate appearance of things. Not everything that looks good is good, and not everything that appears to be evil really is evil. Certainly, we see this in the later ministry of Jesus. The Pharisees piously praying and scrupulously trying to keep the entire Law of God looked good on the surface. Everyone held them up as models of religious devotion, but their prideful self-righteousness was spiritual poison, leading them to destruction and blinding them to the truth. On the other hand, wretched sinners confessing their guilt and being baptised in the waters of the Jordan, or worse, Jesus Himself suffering on the cross, beaten, bloody, dying - these things do not appear so good, yet *they are life and salvation*.

Divine wisdom is the ability to see God's power hidden in weakness, to find His grace and purpose in suffering, and to behold the glory of God not in displays of brilliant splendour, but rather in loving, self-sacrificial service. In short, divine wisdom is Jesus Christ and His Gospel of salvation by grace through faith in Him. This is with what God filled young Solomon, enabling him to be the greatest king in Israel's history - at least until the final King came along.

That's what we have in today's Gospel reading,³ as young Jesus, only 12 years old, sits among the teachers in the Temple. He sits there like a sponge absorbing divine wisdom from the scrolls of Sacred Scripture as they are being read and explained. Many people misunderstand this story, assuming that Jesus, being God and the author of the Holy Scriptures, already knows everything there is to know about them. They imagine that young Jesus is teaching the teachers. But that isn't what the text says. It says that He is *"both listening to them and asking them questions"* (Luke 2:46). That is to say; He's the one who is learning. He is being filled with wisdom that's coming to Him from the outside. It's important that we understand this. Though Jesus is both true man and true God, the Scriptures tell us that during the time of His earthly life and ministry, Jesus largely emptied Himself of His divine powers and prerogatives. In order to be our Substitute, a man to die in our place on the cross, He had to live a perfect life as a man - a man with all of our human limitations *except without sin*. This is why the first of Jesus' miracles, changing water to wine at the wedding of Cana⁴, doesn't happen until He's already begun His ministry and He's over 30 years old. It's also why we never see Jesus performing miracles for His own benefit. He only uses His divine power on a limited basis to serve the needs of others and to make teaching points.

So, going back to His childhood, this means that He had to learn how to walk and talk and read and write, just like every other child. It also means He had to learn about God's plan and purpose for His life by hearing and reading the Sacred Scriptures

² 1 Samuel 13:14

³ Luke 2:40-52

⁴ John 2:1-12

because that's what they're all about: God's plan to redeem the world by the death of His Son. This explains why Jesus was so hungry to sit among the teachers and learn from them. Prior to this time in His life, when worshipping at the Temple in Jerusalem, He would have had to stay with His mother, Mary, on the court of Jewish women. But now, having come of age, He was allowed to go with Joseph onto the court of Jewish men. We know that the family was there to celebrate the Passover. So this is the first time Jesus would have actually seen sacrifices being offered to the LORD. It fell to the men of each household to act as priests on behalf of their family. They would take their lambs to the priests who served at the Temple. The fathers would confess their sins and the sins of their family members to the priest who would then transfer those sins and place them upon the heads of the lambs which were then slain by a quick slice of a knife across the throat.

Jesus is seeing this for the first time - and by it, He's gaining insight. He's coming to understand what this form of worship is all about. It's dawning on Him that each of these lambs bleeding and dying represents Him: that just as they are being declared guilty for sins they didn't commit and being slaughtered as substitutes, so also *that is what's going to happen to Him.*

This is what He was born to do. So, naturally, He wants to know more, and it just happens that another advantage of coming of age means that now Jesus can go to that part of the Temple where the renowned rabbis and teachers hold forth with their teachings.

The thing to see is that when they teach, Jesus, in hearing them, is being filled with divine wisdom, and based on what was said before, that divine wisdom *is* Jesus and His Gospel of salvation, then we understand that to a certain extent Jesus is being filled with Himself. Part of what was emptied from Him in His entering our flesh to become our Substitute is now coming back to Him by means of the spoken Word. Just as Solomon was filled with divine wisdom that had equipped him to serve the LORD's people in the office of king, now Jesus is being filled with divine wisdom that will equip Him to serve God's people in the role of Saviour.

Now, that's not to say that everything He's hearing from the rabbis is helpful. Not all Bible teaching is sound Bible teaching. Back then, just as today, a lot of it was just plain wrong. But Jesus had the advantage of having a mind unclouded by sin and its corrupting effects. When He heard God's Word, He was able to immediately ascertain its true meaning. He could separate the wheat from the chaff and quickly discern which teachers were speaking God's truth correctly. Perhaps that's why "*All those who heard Him were astonished at His understanding and answers*" (Luke 2:47).

This is more of a challenge for the rest of us. We can be deceived. But that's all the more reason we should be hungering and thirsting to be filled with divine wisdom so that we may be cleansed of sin and given the gift of spiritual discernment. This is vital, for God hasn't called any of us to serve His people as king. Neither does He need any of us to serve in the role of Saviour. Jesus has already taken care of that for us. But God has called all of us to serve in other roles. Maybe you're a spouse, a parent, a grandparent, or a child growing up in the home. God assigns certain responsibilities to each of these roles in the family. Maybe you're a baptismal sponsor, a Sunday school teacher, or you hold an office in the church. There are responsibilities for serving God's people in these roles too. There are other jobs and vocations, whatever they happen to be. We serve people in those roles too.

While the Lord doesn't necessarily come to us and make the same offer that He made to Solomon, "**Ask Me! What shall I give you?**" - probably because He knows most of us don't have the good sense to ask for what we should - He does very much want to fill us with divine wisdom by which He will equip us to serve others in the roles He has assigned. It pleases Him when, recognising our own limitations to serve as we ought, we ask Him to give us wise and understanding minds. And where do we seek this wisdom? In the teaching of His Holy Word. This is what will fill us with the very mind and wisdom of Christ.

A couple days ago we began a new year. Traditionally, it's a time for evaluating the past and making resolutions for the future. My hope and prayer for all of us is that in the coming year we make the prayer of Solomon and the eagerness of Jesus to hear God's Word our own that we too would be filled with wisdom from on high and equipped and empowered by God to serve others. In Jesus' name. Amen.

The peace of God which passes all understanding, keep your hearts and minds in Christ Jesus. Amen.

SECOND SUNDAY AFTER CHRISTMAS

Father in heaven, You have sent Your Son, Jesus Christ, to show Your great love to us, and to lavish Your limitless mercy on us. We thank You for all the blessings He has brought us, especially for the assurance of the forgiveness of our sins. Open our eyes to see Your glory and truth revealed in Him. Since He is our true Wisdom, grant that we may continue to cling to Him in faith, that we may know the joy of being Your sons and daughters, and continue to have the

peace of being heirs of eternal life. Renew us by Your Holy Spirit, and lead us by the light of Jesus Christ to increased knowledge and wisdom, that we may gladly walk in His steps. And if we must suffer because we are Christians, help us to face it with joy, for we bear Christ's name.

Bless Your Church, O God, and give Your people fervent faith and power. Free them from all unrighteousness, and help them to walk on holy paths. Direct their lives that they may bring honour to Your name, and show forth Your

praise among all people.

Extend Your rule over all lands and nations. Give wisdom to all in authority, that the nations may be governed in peace, justice, and mercy. Give parents grace and wisdom to bring up their children to fear and honour You, that they may avoid the lies of Satan and be guided by Your truth. Comfort the sick and suffering, and give strength and compassion to all who bring help and healing to them in hospitals and homes. In all places of industry and commerce, give people a vision of Your Word and will, that

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Ephesians 1:3-14

³ Praise be to the God and Father of our Lord Jesus Christ, who has blessed us in the heavenly realms with every spiritual blessing in Christ! ⁴ For before He made the world, His love led Him to choose us in Christ to be holy and blameless in His sight. In love ⁵ He predestined us to be adopted as His own sons through Jesus Christ, in accordance with the good pleasure of His will. ⁶ He did this in order that His glorious grace, which

all, whatever their work or position, may seek to serve You.

Be with all who travel, with all in danger of body or spirit, with all who are imprisoned, and with all who face any temptation. Grant them the joy and strength of Your presence and help.

In these and in all other things that we need, give us, O Father, Your help and mercy, for we pray in the name of Your beloved Son Jesus Christ, who with You and the Holy Spirit lives and reigns, one God, for ever and ever. Amen.

He bestowed on us in His dearly loved Son, might be praised. ⁷ In Him we have redemption through His blood, the forgiveness of sins, because of God's rich grace. ⁸ He caused His grace to abound toward us in all wisdom and understanding, ⁹ when He made known to us the mystery of His will. According to His good pleasure it was His purpose in Christ ¹⁰ to manage everything, both in heaven and on earth, in such a way that, when the right time came, He might summarise all things in Christ. ¹¹ In Christ we have also obtained an inheritance. He who carries out everything exactly as His will plans it has predestined us according to His purpose. ¹² He did this so that we, who were the first to hope in Christ, might praise His glory. ¹³ When you heard the message of the truth, the Good News that you have been saved and when you became believers, you were also sealed in Him by the Holy Spirit, whom God promised. ¹⁴ That Holy Spirit is the guarantee of our inheritance until God redeems us to be His very own, so that His glory may be praised.

Luke 2:40-52

⁴⁰ The Child grew and became strong, being filled with wisdom and the grace of God was on Him.

⁴¹ Every year Jesus' parents used to go to Jerusalem for the feast of the Passover. ⁴² When He was twelve years old, they went up to the Feast, according to the custom. ⁴³ When they had spent the days there and while they were returning, the Boy Jesus stayed behind in Jerusalem. His parents were unaware of this. ⁴⁴ They thought He was with the others who were travelling with them. After travelling for a day, they began to look for Him among their relatives and acquaintances. ⁴⁵ When they did not find Him, they went back to Jerusalem, looking for Him. ⁴⁶ After three days they found Him in the Temple, sitting among the teachers, both listening to them and asking them questions. ⁴⁷ All those who heard Him were astonished at His understanding and answers. ⁴⁸ When His parents saw Him, they were astonished. His mother asked Him, "Son, why have You done this to us? Look! Your father and I have been anxiously searching for you."

⁴⁹ He asked them, "Why have you been looking for Me? Did you not know that I had to be about My Father's business?"

⁵⁰ However, they did not understand what He said to them. ⁵¹ Then He went down with them and came to Nazareth and He was obedient to them. His mother kept all these things in her heart. ⁵² Jesus grew wiser and taller and increased in the approval of God and of people.