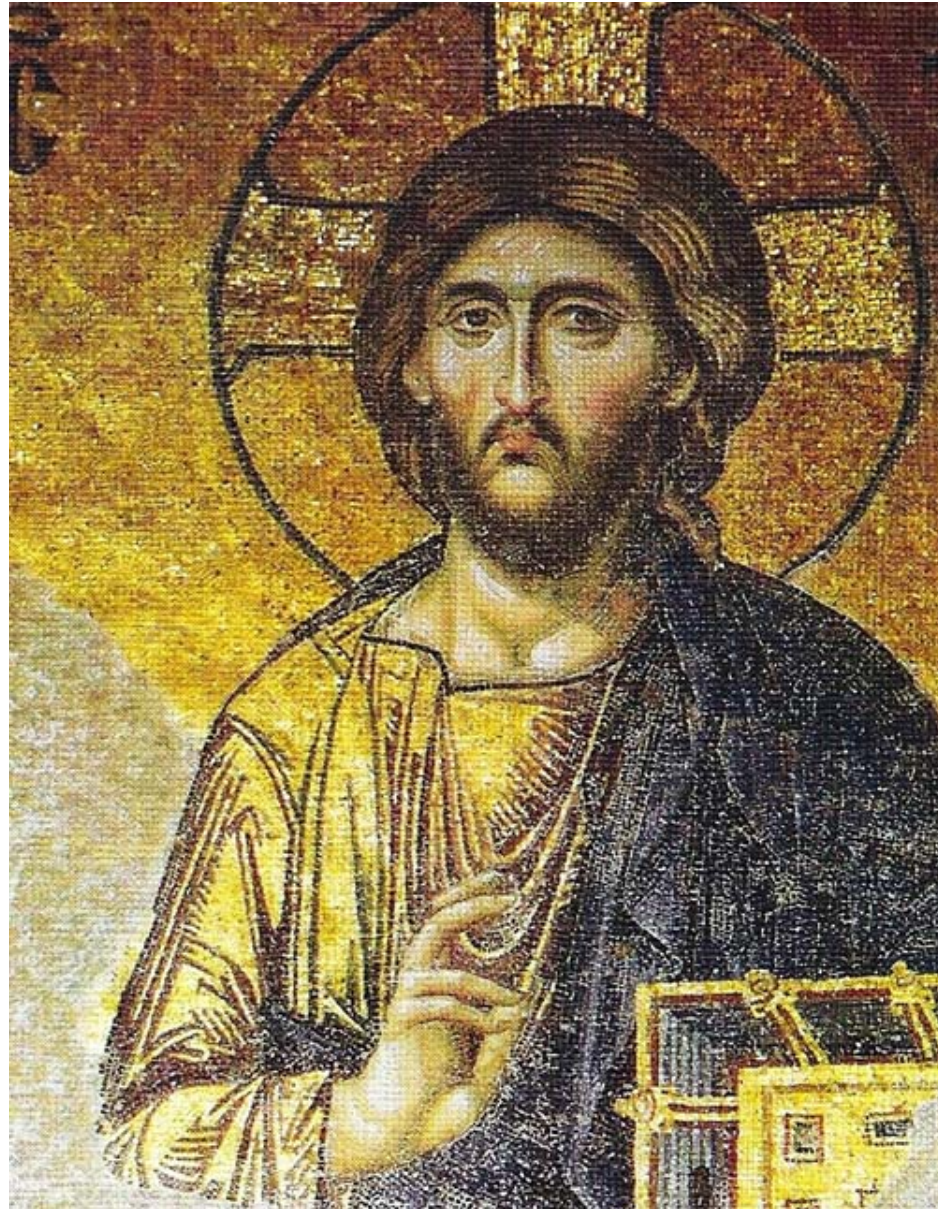


Jesus, the Wisdom of God



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Wisdom speaks of Order & Beauty

Human wisdom is an acquired skill in judging the best way of acting in the changing and often complex circumstances of life, and in putting decisions into operation.

What interests us here is that special wisdom which concerns the purpose of life itself and the way in which we relate to the source of life, God Himself. This is the gift of the Holy Spirit that is most relevant to contemplative prayer, for it gives us a special sensitivity and openness to receive God's revelation of God's Self to us. It enables us to savour and relish the divine.

‘From God and through God and to God are all things.
To God be the glory forever. Amen’ (Romans 11:33-36).

All things are from God,
for God is the origin and source of all wisdom.

All things are through God,
for it is through God’s action that we participate in divine wisdom.

All things are to God,
for all wisdom is directed towards God, the goal of our existence.

Isaiah speaks of the time when God entrusted him with his prophetic mission: ‘I saw the Lord sitting on a throne, high and lofty; and the hem of his robe filled the temple ... the whole earth is full of the Lord’s glory’ (Isaiah 6:1-3).



The Wisdom of Ben Sira (Sirach) 1:8-10

‘There is but one who is Wise,
seated upon his throne – the Lord.
It is the Lord who created Wisdom :
and poured her out upon all his works,
upon all the living according to his gift;
he lavished her upon those who love him’.

The order and beauty of the natural world is a reflection of divine Wisdom:

‘I grew tall like a cedar in Lebanon, Sirach 24:13-17

and like a cypress on the heights of Hermon.

I grew tall like a palm tree in En-gedi,

and like rosebushes in Jericho;

like a fair olive tree in the field,

and like a plane tree beside water I grew tall.

Like cassia and camel’s thorn I gave forth perfume,

and like choice myrrh I spread my fragrance,

like galbanum, onycha, and stacte,

and like the odour of incense in the tent.

Like a terebinth I spread out my branches,

and my branches are glorious and graceful.

Like the vine I bud forth delights,

and my blossoms become glorious and abundant fruit.’

The Beauty of the Sacred Word

The beauty of creation should lead us to wonder at the Beauty and Wisdom of God.

‘If through delight in the beauty of creatures
people assumed them to be gods,
let them know how much better than these is their Lord,
for the author of beauty created them.

And if people were amazed at their power and working,
let them perceive from them
how much more powerful is the One who formed them.

For from the greatness and beauty of created things
comes a corresponding perception of their Creator.’

(Wisdom 13:3-5).

Wisdom 7:25-30

‘Wisdom is a breath of the power of God,
a pure emanation of the glory of the Almighty;
For Wisdom is a reflection of eternal light,
a spotless mirror of the working of God,
an image of God’s goodness.
Although but one, Wisdom renews all things,
in every generation passing into holy souls
and making them friends of God, and prophets;
for God loves nothing so much as the person who lives with Wisdom.
Wisdom is more beautiful than the sun,
and excels every constellation of the stars.
Compared with the light Wisdom is found to be superior,
for light is succeeded by the night,
but against wisdom evil does not prevail.’

Wisdom is personified (unique to Israel)

Proverbs 8:23-27

‘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 –
when he had not yet made earth and fields,
 or the world’s first soil.
When he established the heavens, I was there,
 when he drew a circle on the face of the deep.’

Proverbs 8:28-31

‘When the Lord made firm the skies above,
when he established the fountains of the deep,
when he assigned to the sea its limit,
so that the waters might not transgress his command,
when he marked out the foundations of the earth,
then I was beside him, like a master worker;
and I was daily God’s delight, rejoicing before the Creator always,
rejoicing in God’s inhabited world
and delighting in the human race.’

Proverbs 8:32-36

‘And now, my children, listen to me:

happy are those who keep my ways.

Hear instruction and be wise,

and do not neglect it.

Happy is the one who listens to me,

watching daily at my gates, waiting beside my doors.

For whoever finds me finds life

and obtains favour from the Lord.’

Creation reveals God (Wisdom 13:1; Romans 1:19-20). Creation is by its very nature facing towards God (John 1:1), drawn by grace into ever more intimate communion. The world made by God is also made for God and there is a cry at the heart of creation calling on God and yearning for closer union with God.

‘O God, you are my God, I seek you, my soul thirsts for you; my flesh faints for you, as in a dry and weary land where there is no water.
I have looked upon you in the sanctuary, beholding your power and glory.
Because your steadfast love is better than life, my lips will praise you.
So I will bless you as long as I live;
I will lift up my hands and call on your name.
My soul is satisfied as with a rich feast,
and my mouth praises you with joy’ (Psalm 63:1-5).

The splendour of God's being radiates throughout creation. This is why creation is full of the glory of God. In God 'we live and move and have our being' (Acts 17:28).

The being of every creature is an expression of God's love, made possible by the power of God's Word ('Let it be') and expressed in the Beauty that reflects divine Wisdom.

We are held in existence in order to enjoy divine intimacy: 'I was daily his delight, rejoicing before him always, rejoicing in his inhabited world and delighting in the human race' (Proverbs 8:30-31).

Teilhard de Chardin picks up something of the feeling of this:

‘By means of all created things the divine assails us, penetrates us and moulds us. We imagined it as distant and inaccessible, whereas we live steeped in its burning layers. ‘In him we live’. As Jacob said awakening from his dream, the world, this palpable world which we were wont to treat with boredom and disrespect, with which we habitually regard places with no sacred association for us, is in truth a holy place and we did not know it (see Genesis 28:17).

(The Divine Milieu (Harper&Rowe, 1970) page 89)

Sirach 24:1-33

‘Wisdom tells of her glory in the midst of her people. “I came forth from the mouth of the Most High ... 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.

My Creator said: “Make your dwelling in Jacob, and in Israel receive your inheritance.”



Sirach 24:9-12

‘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 honoured people,
in the portion of the Lord, his heritage.’

Ben Sira saw in the beauty of the worshipping community,
in the temple and the priesthood,
an expression of the Wisdom of God.

In revealing the Torah to Moses God made it possible for us to share in God's Wisdom.

‘Through your children the imperishable light of the law was to be given to the world’(Wisdom 18:4).

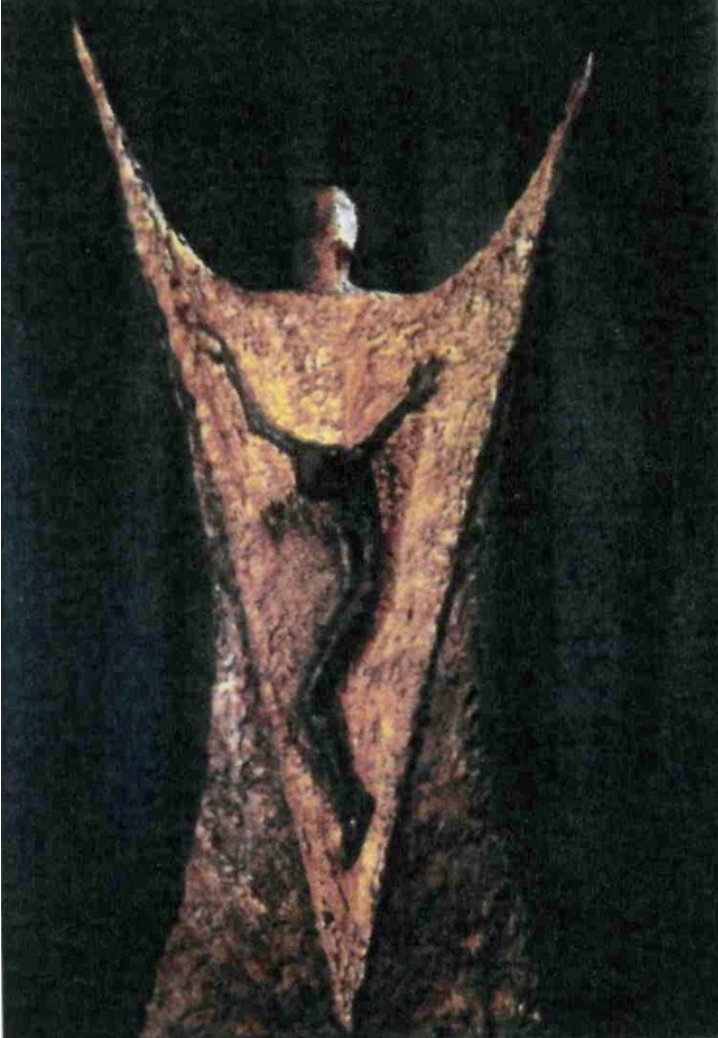
God appeals to us through Wisdom to live reflective lives. In this way we will play our part in ordering the world for God, and in building communities that will bring about the reign of God in this world.

‘Whoever loves Wisdom loves life,
and those who seek Wisdom from early morning are filled with joy.
Whoever holds Wisdom fast inherits glory,
and the Lord blesses the place Wisdom enters.
Those who serve Wisdom minister to the Holy One;
The Lord loves those who love Wisdom’(Sirach 4:12-14).

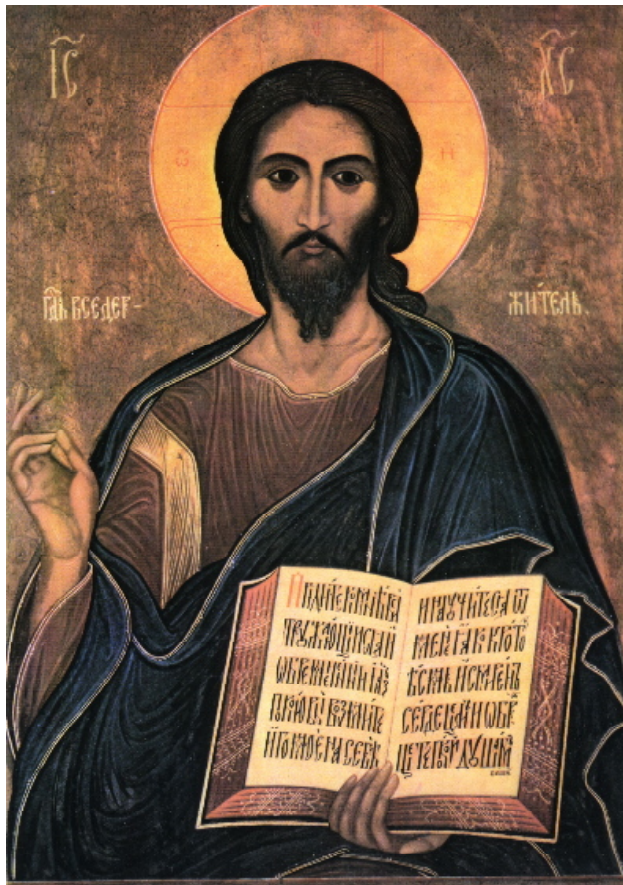
‘God gives to creatures themselves the capacity for the new. Because of God’s creative and redeeming presence to creatures, they can become something they were not. When matter comes to life on earth, when life becomes self-conscious and personal, this occurs through God enabling creation to transcend itself and become something new. Above all when one of us in the human and creaturely community, Jesus of Nazareth, is so radically open to God, so one with God, that we rightly see him as God-with-us, then we can say that in this person creation transcends itself into God’ (Denis Edwards, *How God Acts*, 158).



‘It is the very nature of God to be self-bestowing love. It is the very nature of divine power to enable the other to flourish in all the other’s integrity and proper autonomy ... What is true of divine action in the cross and resurrection of Jesus can be thought of as governing the other forms of divine action’(Denis Edwards, *How God Acts*, 33).



‘Self-bestowing love is what characterises the divine act of creation, and it is this same self-bestowing love that is revealed with the fullness of its promise in the resurrection of Jesus. The resurrection is not an intervention of God from without, but the central revelation in our history of the act by which God creates, saves, and brings all to fulfilment’ (Edwards, 94).



It is by keeping our eyes on Jesus and by opening our souls to receive his Spirit that we learn wisdom: ‘There is one God, the Father, from whom are all things and for whom we exist, and one Lord, Jesus Christ, through whom are all things and through whom we exist’ (1 Corinthians 8:6).

In contemplating Jesus we see who we really are and we learn how to respond to the action of divine Wisdom in our lives. By his Spirit we are transformed, so that the life of Jesus becomes our life, his thoughts become our thoughts, his responses become our responses, his prayer becomes our prayer.

To speak of divine Wisdom is to speak of God's design for the world. Each of us is created and held in existence by God to be part of the beauty of this design. We will fulfil our purpose only by being open to the inspiration of grace. If we choose to resist grace, God can use even our resistance to further his mysterious designs. What a personal tragedy it would be, however, for us not to enjoy being part of the beauty of divine communion.

With the gift of contemplative prayer comes an invitation to surrender to God's loving action in our souls. If we respond in faith and allow the initiative to come wholly from God, then, and only then, all that we are and all that we do becomes suffused with divine Wisdom. Then we can begin to say with Saint Paul: 'I live, no longer I, but Christ lives in me' (Galatians 2:20).



It is a journey of faith, for we journey in darkness.
Our eyes are unable to take the brightness of God's light.

It is a journey of hope, for now we have only touches of the embrace
for which we are made and for which our hearts long.

It is a journey of love, for it is in being in trusting communion
with God that our souls find peace.

God's Wisdom is revealed in creation, for all to see: 'Ever since the creation of the world his eternal power and divine nature, invisible though they are, have been understood and seen through the things God has made' (Romans 1:20).



Knowing Jesus, Paul saw that this beautiful creation had been 'waiting with eager longing for the revealing of the children of God' (Romans 8:19).

Wisdom invites us to share in the communion God wants for us

Sirach 24:19-22

‘Come to me, you who desire me,
and eat your fill of my fruits.

For the memory of me is sweeter
than honey, and the possession of
me sweeter than the honeycomb.

Those who eat of me will hunger
for more, and those who drink of
me will thirst for more.

Whoever obeys me will not be
put to shame, and those who
work with me will not sin.’



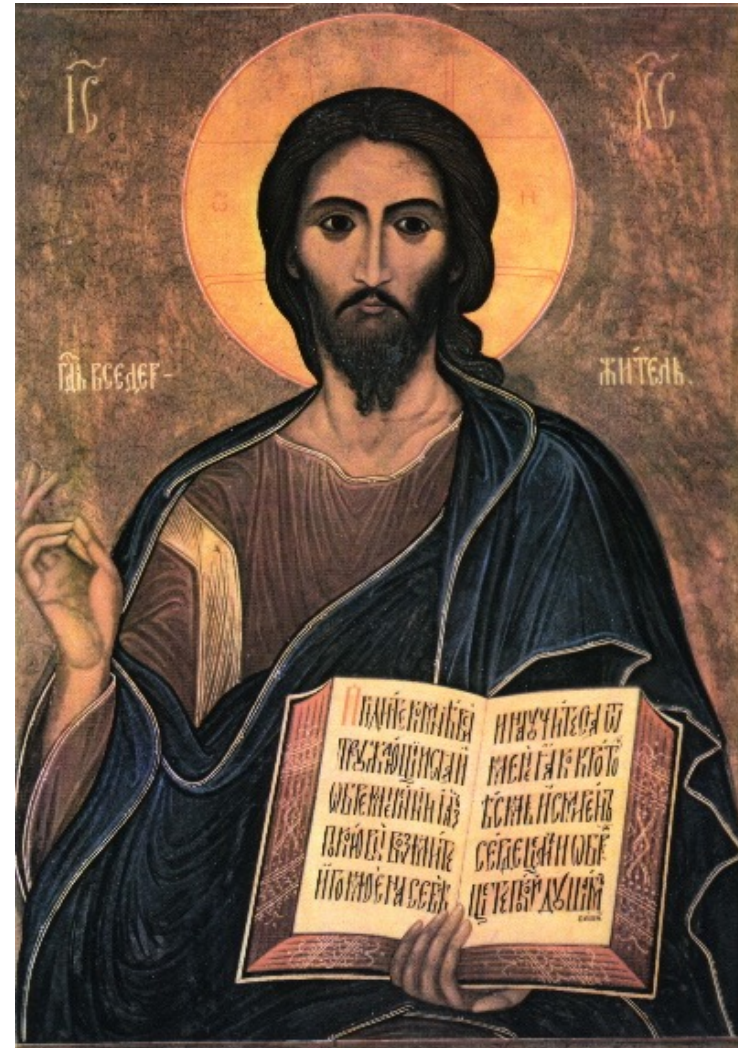
Sirach 31:23, 26, 29

‘Draw near to me ... Acquire
Wisdom for yourselves
without money.

Put your neck under her yoke.
May your soul rejoice in God’s
mercy, and may you never be
ashamed to praise God.’

Mention of the ‘yoke’ recalls
Jesus’ invitation:

‘Take my yoke’(Matthew 11:29).



The opening words of John's Gospel repeat the opening words of the Genesis account of creation: *'In the beginning.'* *'In the beginning was the Word, and the Word was towards God, and the Word was God.'*



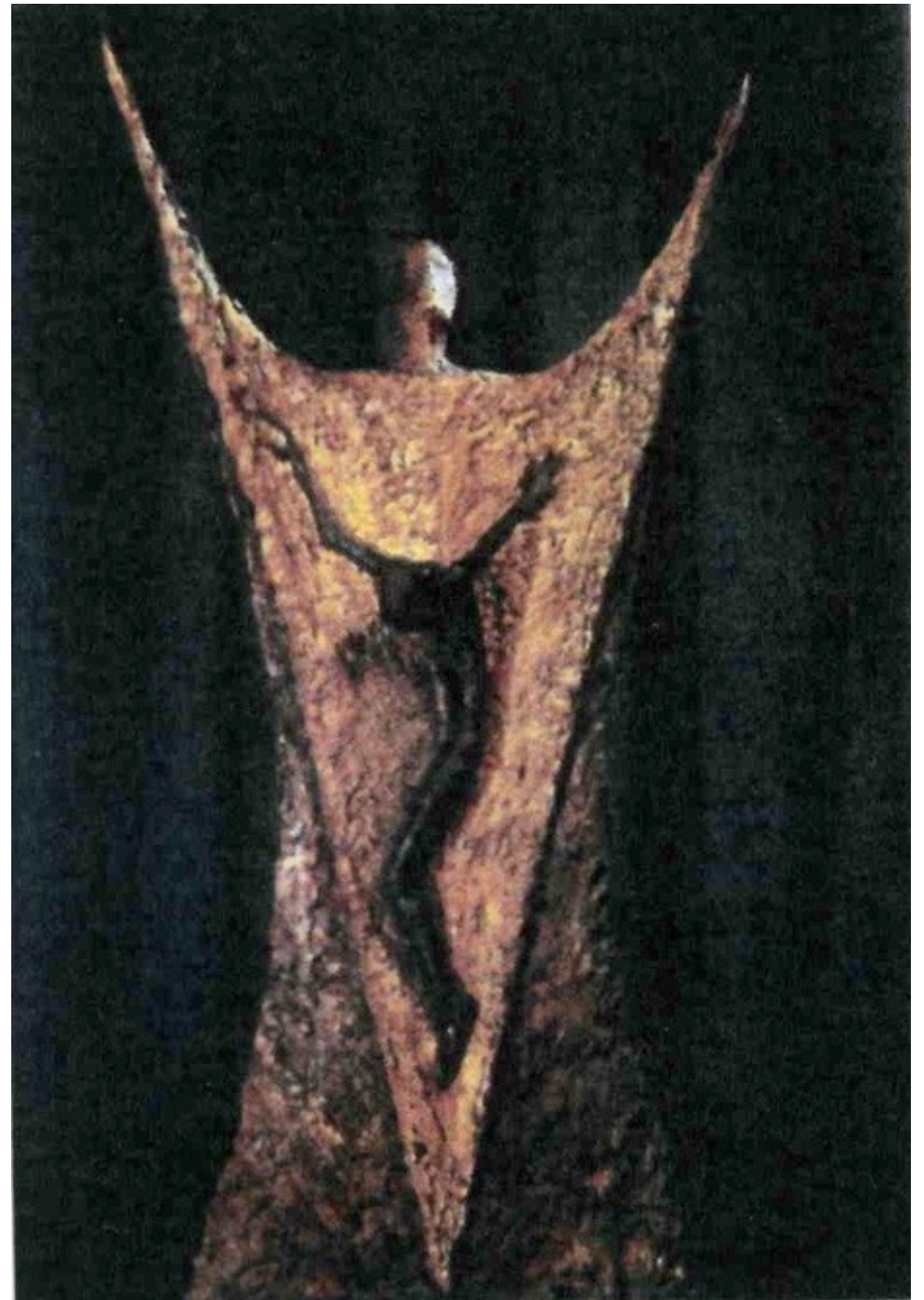
Wisdom is said to have ‘appeared on earth and lived with humankind’(Baruch 3:37). Wisdom was instructed by God to ‘pitch a tent in Israel’(Sirach 24:8). It is Wisdom’s role to ‘utter truth’(Wisdom 9:17) and so to enlighten us as to how we should ‘learn what is pleasing to God’(Wisdom 9:10). In this way Wisdom is to lead us to life (Proverbs 4:13), salvation (Wisdom 9:18) and immortality (Wisdom 6:18-19).

John uses a number of these images when speaking of God’s Word. Jesus is portrayed by John as having descended to earth from heaven (3:1), as having ‘pitched his tent among us’(1:14). He is the ‘light of the world’(8:12) who reveals the divine glory, the radiant beauty of God (1:14). He is ‘the saviour of the world’(John 4:32) who offers ‘eternal life’.

When Paul committed himself to persecute the followers of Jesus, he felt driven by what he experienced as fidelity to his Jewish faith and traditions. His enlightenment came when he recognised Jesus as the Messiah (the 'Christ'), the one whom God promised to send.



Paul came to see that it was Jesus who realised the hopes of Israel in his person and in what he revealed about God in what he said and in what he did. It was in his loving, especially evident in the way he gave his life, that Jesus fulfilled the mission given him by God to reveal who God really is, and in so doing to bring about the reign of God in this world. Paul accepted the call of the risen Jesus to take this revelation to everyone.



In his First Letter to the Christian community in Corinth, Paul speaks of Jesus as ‘the Messiah, the Power of God, the Wisdom of God’(1Corinthians 1:24).

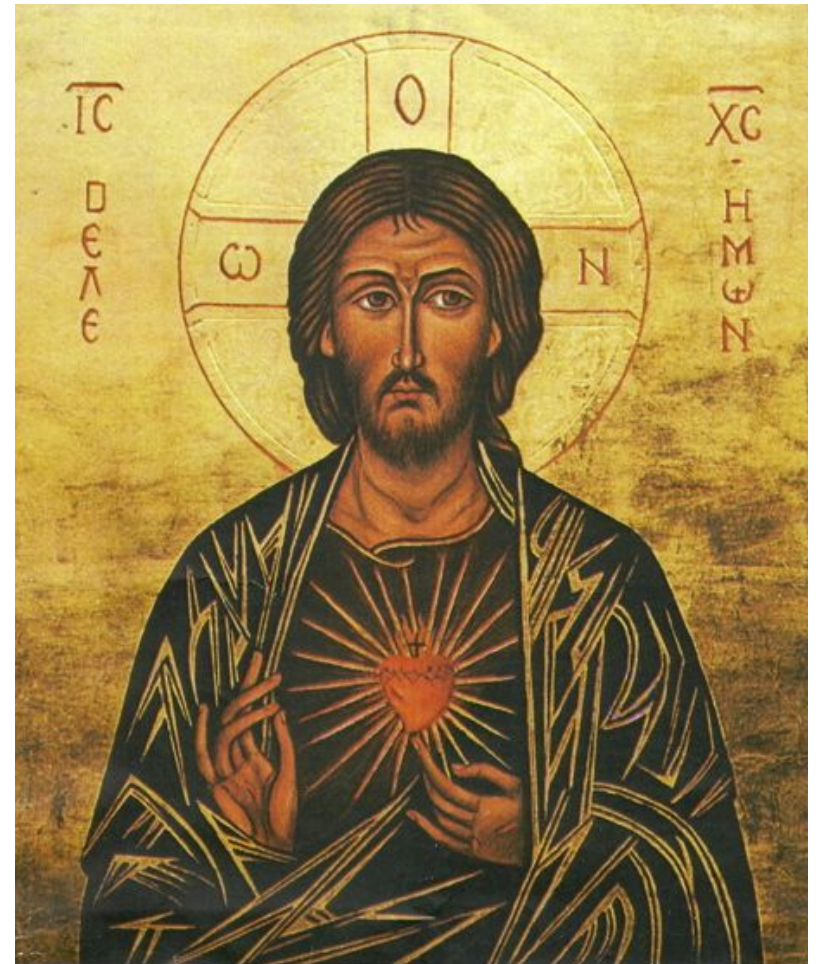
Paul goes on to state: ‘God is the source of your life in Christ Jesus. He became for us Wisdom from God’(1Corinthians 1:30).

And he explains: ‘We speak of God’s Wisdom, secret and hidden, which God decreed before the ages for our glory’(1Corinthians 2:7).

Caught up in wonder, Paul writes to the community in Rome:
‘O the depth of God’s riches and Wisdom and knowledge!
How unsearchable are God’s judgments
and how inscrutable God’s ways!’(Romans 11:33).

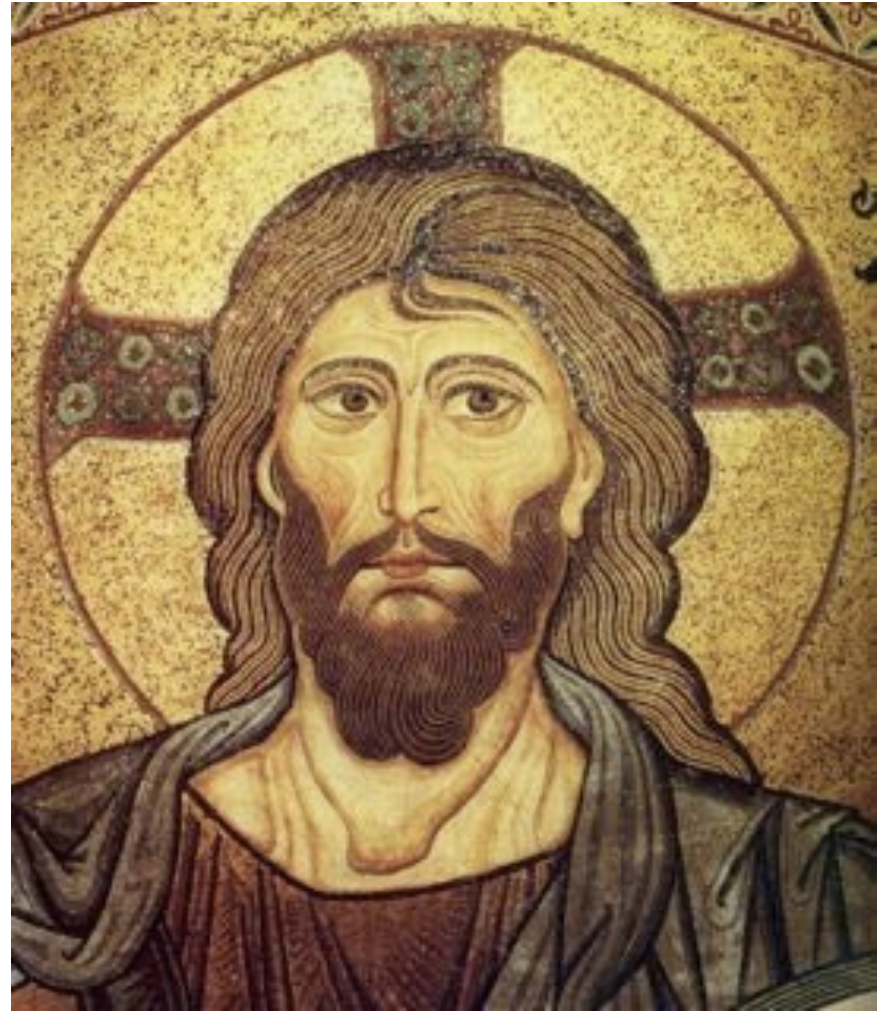
‘For us there is one God, the Father, from whom are all things and for whom we exist, and one Lord, Jesus Christ, through whom are all things and through whom we exist’ (1 Corinthians 8:6).

‘All things have been created through Christ Jesus and for him. He himself is before all things, and in him all things hold together’ (Colossians 1:16-17).

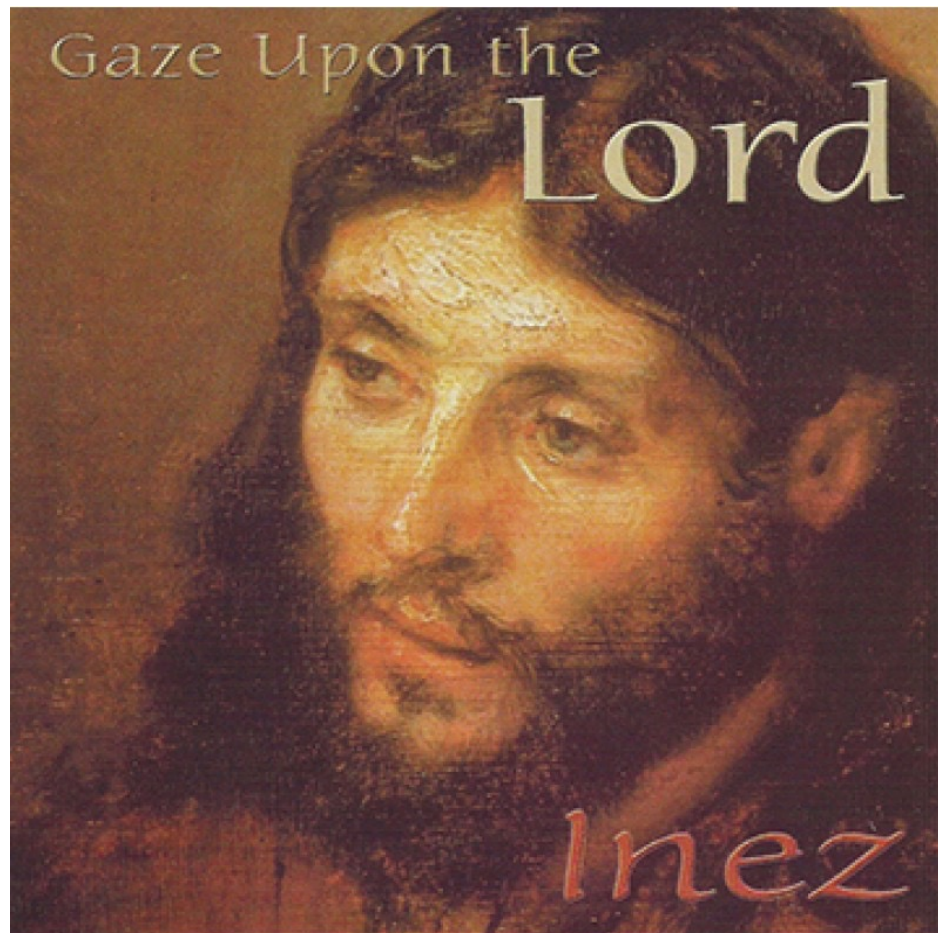


If the whole of creation shares in God's Wisdom, what can we say about Jesus, the perfect human expression of God's Word and God's Wisdom? The author of the Letter to the Hebrews writes:

‘Long ago God spoke to our ancestors in many and various ways by the prophets, but in these last days he has spoken to us by a Son, whom he appointed heir of all things, through whom he also created the worlds. He is the reflection of God's glory and the exact imprint of God's very being, and he sustains all things by his powerful Word’ (Hebrews 1:3).



This revelation came through Jesus, the new 'Adam'(1Corinthians 15:45), 'the image of the invisible God, the firstborn of all creation'(Colossians 1:15). It is through Jesus that 'creation will obtain the freedom of the glory of the children of God'(Romans 8:21).



James, the brother of the Lord, wrote: 'The Wisdom from above is first pure, then peaceable, gentle, willing to yield, full of mercy and good fruits, without a trace of partiality or hypocrisy' (James 3:17).

This is how he saw God's Wisdom as revealed in Jesus.

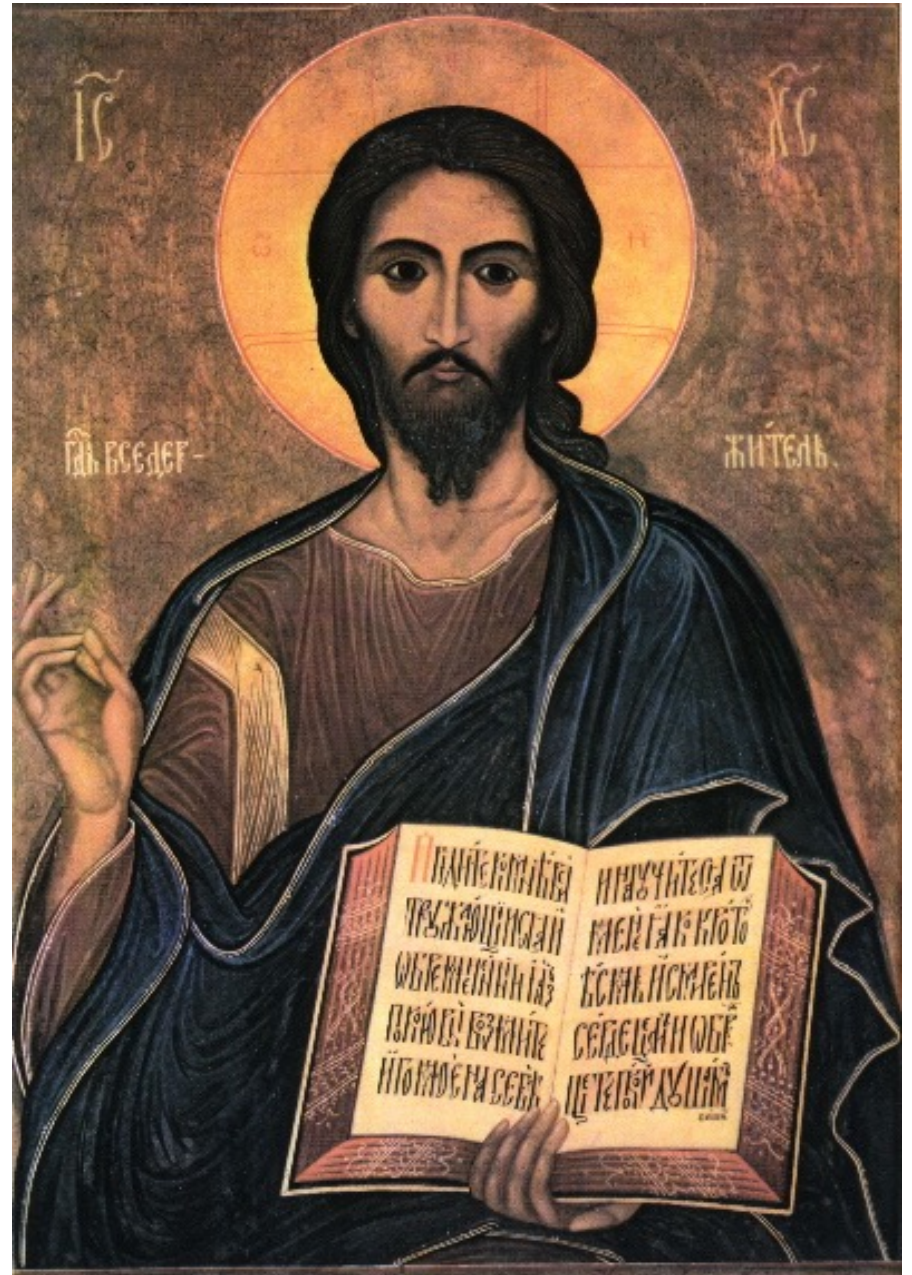


‘Everyone who thirsts, come to the waters;
and you that have no money, come, buy and eat!
Come, buy wine and milk without money and without price.
Why do you spend your money for that which is not bread,
and your labour for that which does not satisfy?
Listen carefully to me, and eat what is good,
and delight yourselves in rich food.
Incline your ear, and come to me;
listen, so that you may live.
I will make with you
an everlasting covenant’(Isaiah 55:1-3).



This invitation is echoed in the Gospel of Matthew. To a prayer of gratitude that is recorded in Matthew and Luke, Matthew adds the following invitation spoken by Jesus, the Wisdom of God (Matthew 11:28-30):

“Come to me, all you that are weary and are carrying heavy burdens, and I will give you rest. Take my yoke upon you, and learn from me; for I am gentle and humble in heart, and you will find rest for your souls. For my yoke is easy, and my burden is light.”





All you need to know