



November 8th

THE NEW SHOFAR

**Blessed are those who persevere,
who remain faithful to the traditions of the Apostles**

God is an outward-reaching God, a God engaging with us

The Book of Wisdom was written just prior to the coming of Jesus. It was written (probably) for Jews living in Alexandria (Egypt). The author remains unknown, but it most certainly was not Solomon. As with so many of the writings of Judaism of the time, it was given the name of an illustrious figure from Israel's past. What better man to ascribe authorship than the wise king himself? He was a proud servant of the One True God and wrote to encourage and strengthen the Jews living amidst pagans in a land far from home. God's wisdom, he writes, is evident in the divine saving works in the nation's history and in nature itself. These are all beyond the powers of mere mortals to discern and appreciate and so anyone seeking a share in this heavenly Wisdom must maintain a life of covenant faithfulness. God is an engaging God, One who speaks at all times to those with an ear to hear and the commitment to finding a time and space to allow the divine voice to be heard.

Who is Wisdom?

It is truly difficult to pin a short answer to this question. Perhaps the best way is to see Wisdom as a personification of God, the all-pervading Spirit of God at work in the whole of creation. She is God's companion and can only be discovered and experienced through prayer. Wisdom is the way God reveals His deep and personal concern for His children, takes them by the hand and leads them to Himself.

As today's reading says, Wisdom seeks to illuminate the faithful person...*She hastens to make herself known to those who desire her.* This is not to provide knowledge about God but to bring about a union with God. Illumination is something she hastens to do. Even more, *she graciously appears to them (those who are faithful) in their paths, and meets them in every thought.* Wisdom is *God-at-work* illuminating the Way to life, the way to living and being as we were created to be. Not surprising then to see the early Church seeing in Wisdom characteristics of both Jesus and the Holy Spirit.

The author well understood the dangers of striving to live a Covenant life in the pagan hot spot of Alexandria. Egypt was a nation in which every aspect of daily life was shaped by their gods and the temptation was to bring Judaism "up to date" by taking on some of the Egyptian cultural and religious practices. In seeking to combine Judaism with the pagan culture in which they were living was the road to annihilation. Reading through the Book, it is clear there is only one Way to life and that Way is the Way of God – for Christians, as that way has been revealed in and through the life and ministry of Jesus.

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Wisdom is discerning the Divine presence in the world

Matthew chapter 24 is a powerful example of the work of Wisdom in creation and in human history. It is dominated by the theme of the End. It opens with an indication that the Romans were going to destroy the Temple. What was widely admired as a peak of human abilities was going to be reduced to rubble by marauding pagans. Without Wisdom that will most certainly seem like the end of their religion and their nation. If God's home on earth can be so easily torn down, what hope to the people have in the face of such an enemy?

Matthew does not let up the pressure and he then goes on to teach how a time of great persecution and suffering was imminent. Importantly, much of the doom and horror was going to be made worse because it will be fed by *false prophets*. When danger looms, there will always be people who have a quick fix, a new way forward; those who promise they know the "truth" and have been given insights into the world's woes as well as a solution. Again, we see the wisdom of Wisdom played out here. "Prophets" need to be tested and every "solution" put through the wringer of the *traditions of the Apostles*. "Beware" says Jesus. "Don't be fooled or led astray" by novelty. In the face of suffering and threat, enduring and fruitful hope can be found in God, through a union in Christ Jesus. It is hard to just find genuine hope, impossible without grace.

Don't believe those who say "there is our Messiah"

The Bible makes it clear. There is no Messiah, no Saviour other than the Lord Jesus who is God's Son. Matthew wrote his Gospel after the destruction of the Temple in 60 A.D. and so he is able to look back and understand the chaos and despair that filled the hearts of all Jews. Their situation was hopeless. There was no chance of them holding off and defeating Rome's legions. But as is always the case in any human community, there were plenty of people coming to the fore to declare *I am the anointed one. I have the solution, the way out of darkness*. There were many self-proclaimed messiahs in the 60's A.D. offering false hope where human hope was not to be found anywhere.

What Jesus does in this chapter is point the way to finding light in suffocating darkness. He was promising them that the toppling of man constructed icons and heroes was not an end. As the Temple was being destroyed as a building, God had given creation a new Living Temple – the Risen and Glorious Christ. What a challenge! To discern hope as all around there is destruction, death, suffering, rape, crucifixions and deep, deep pain.

This is what Wisdom does for us. It is not a false hope but the Spirit of God leading the faithful disciple of Christ to see in what is happening divine opportunities that extend beyond the immediate, beyond what is hurting us so much. It does not promise "she'll be right mate" for it is not going to be right. Suffering will continue through to the End. What Wisdom does is take us to the throne of God and enable us to see things from the timeless perspective of Heaven. Those searching in faith, in prayer and empowered by divine grace will find the Son of Man coming in unexpected and surprising ways.