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Advent Devotional "Full of Wisdom"

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Advent Devotional, 1994

FULL OF WISDOM

Isaiah 11:1-3

What must those ancient Hebrews have thought of Isaiah's words about the shoot from the branch of Jesse? In Him would be unified, Isaiah promised, all three traditional divisions of Hebrew thought: law, which presented God's claims on human action; prophecy, which proclaimed God's judgment upon human actions; and wisdom, which encompassed human understanding of God's revelation. Did they, like we, inwardly scoff at the naivete of anyone who would actually believe that such a person of completed potential could exist?

The Hebrews knew wisdom as God's gift, but an understanding based on personal observation of man and nature. Wisdom proceeded from human experience and observation and produced wise counsel, expressed in the form of parable, precept, proverb, riddle, or story of real life and its lesson. God's gift lay in the ability to apprehend truth—to see as God sees and hear as God hears. Revelation was the extent to which religious truth was approved by the test of human experience, and its crux lay in the paradoxes of God's moral government and how that government squared with the suffering of the righteous and the prosperity of the wicked.

Isaiah's hearers would have likened the Promised One's wisdom to that of Solomon, whose name had even by that time become synonymous with wisdom and would be immortalized in the apocryphal *The Wisdom of Solomon*. Would the Promised One exceed Solomon's wisdom?

Matthew offers us another model of wisdom for comparison when he tells of the Magi. They were the

wise ones from the Medes' priestly caste who interpreted dreams and omens and whose fame was such that the Greeks called any sorcerer who employed Eastern methods and enchantments "magi-cian."

The Child in the manger calls us to a wisdom unfettered by the flaws of Solomon's and the manipulation implicit in that of the Magi. The Child whose Advent we celebrate calls us to engage our minds in the search for God and to recognize that wisdom originates in awe for God. He showed us that obedience to God's rules is an act of will rather than emotion, and that as Truth, God has no fear of our testing religious maxims by our experience and knowledge. Most of all, He resolved for us the paradoxes wisdom tests by demonstrating in His person that suffering and prosperity are human measures which appear differently to those who measure as God measures. The Child calls upon us, in this season of feelings, to pursue our own completeness by not forsaking wisdom.

PRAYER: Lord, you came to us as a child, with all a child's potential. You counseled us in wisdom, through riddles, proverbs, and parables. Help us to see as the Hebrews saw, the promise of a complete human, a human who reaches the potential planted there by God when He created us.

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Isaiah 11:1-3

In an old Dick Van Dyke Show episode, Dick's character Rob has won a prestigious broadcasting award, which elates him. Then he learns that the award will be presented at a banquet to be held at a local segregated country club. He finds himself in a dilemma, wanting to accept the award and wanting to boycott the ceremony because of the setting. "I wish I could be a bigot," he tells Mary's character, Lora; "then life would be so simple because you don't have to think!"

What has this to do with Isaiah's revelations about the Promised One, the shoot out of Jesse's branch? In Him would be unified, Isaiah promised, all three traditional divisions of Hebrew thought: law, which presented God's claims on human action; prophecy, which proclaimed God's judgment upon human actions; and wisdom, which encompassed human understanding of God's revelation. He would be, in other words, complete, an individual of completely-realized potential, a model of what God intended when He created humankind.

The Hebrews believed that wisdom proceeded from human experience and observation of man and nature, and produced wise counsel—expressed in the form of parable, precept, proverb, riddle, or story of real life and its lessons. God's gift lay in the ability to apprehend truth—to see as God sees and hear as God hears. Wisdom's revelation was the extent to which religious truth was approved by the test of human experience, and its crux lay in the paradoxes of God's moral government

and how that government squared with the suffering of the righteous and the prosperity of the wicked.

Isaiah's hearers would have likened the Promised One's wisdom to that of Solomon, whose name had even by that time become synonymous with wisdom. Would the Promised One exceed Solomon's wisdom?

Matthew offers another model of wisdom for comparison: the Magi, the wise ones from the Medes' priestly caste who interpreted dreams and omens and whose fame was such that the Greeks called any sorcerer who employed Eastern methods and enchantments "magi-cian."

So what has all this talk of wisdom to do with Rob Petrie? The Child in the manger calls us to a wisdom unfettered by the flaws of Solomon's and the manipulation implicit in that of the Magi. The Child whose Advent we celebrate calls us to engage our minds in the search for God and to recognize that the search is not a simple one epitomized by blind acceptance of religious maxims. He showed us that as Truth, God has no fear of our testing religious maxims by our experience and knowledge. When we test those maxims, when we dismiss the simplicity of the bigot, racial or religious, then we most closely approach Him. Then it is that we, like the Promised One, are full of wisdom.

PRAYER: Lord, you came to us as a child, with all a child's potential. You counseled us in wisdom, through riddles, proverbs, and parables. Help us to see as the Hebrews saw, the promise of a complete human, a human who reaches the potential planted there by God when He created us.

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