

January 5, 2020 – Luke 2:40-52 & 1 Kings 3:4-15

Albert Einstein once said that “technological progress is like an axe in the hands of a pathological criminal.” He makes a good point. Humanity has forever been on a search for progress of one sort or another. Whether it's in technology and medicine or arts and entertainment. But for every great progress that makes life better, there seem to be ten that end up making life much, much worse.

To the point that people are fascinated as much today with looking into the past for answers as looking into the future. Ways of simplifying our lives. Getting rid of technology wherever possible. One of the most popular diets in the country is the so-called “paleo diet,” where you're supposed to eat like a caveman. And every day it seems like there's some sort of study released extolling the virtues of some very old cultural practice.

Progress is easy. But wisdom is fleeting. It's easy to just try new things for the sake of trying something new. But if you're looking for something that actually works. That actually has value and meaning. Well, for that progress isn't enough. You need to be wise to know those sorts of things.

It's no wonder that God seems pleasantly surprised by Solomon's request for wisdom in our Old Testament lesson today. I don't know of many leaders today who would ask for what he sought. Even good hearted, well-meaning leaders today would probably ask for something tangible. Peace with other nations. Prosperity for their government. In other words, victory over their enemies or wealth, like God suggests.

But Solomon goes a different direction. And in this, he kinda reminds me of the Scarecrow from the Wizard of Oz. Asking for a brain when he's already the smartest one in the group. Solomon asks God for wisdom, but that very request is already the wisest thing he could have done. Not simply because he desires wisdom, but because he knows that true wisdom only comes from God.

Solomon could have sought his wisdom from anywhere. He was the king of Israel, after all. He could have brought in his own scholars. He could have brought in scholars from other countries. He could have amassed a library of all the scholarship ever written in the entire world.

But he ignores all the world's standards and all world's progress. He turns to his Lord and says, “You teach me. You're the only one who knows right and wrong. You're the only one who can help me govern these people.” He looked to God, and he became wise.

But Solomon isn't alone in his wisdom. The Bible is full of wise people. Tomorrow is Epiphany. The day we celebrate the coming of the Magi. The wise men. And these men were certainly considered wise by their own people.

They were scientists and theologians. Astronomers and philosophers. But we, as Christians, call them wise men not because they stared up at the stars looking for meaning in a chaotic world, but because they traveled to Bethlehem and found meaning by worshipping at the feet of Jesus Christ. They looked to God, and they became wise.

Jesus himself models that very same wisdom for us at the age of only 12 years old. Jesus didn't need to learn at the temple. He was the son of God. The very fact that he calls it “His Father's house” shows that he knew of his divinity even at that young age.

But Jesus' entire life is spent modeling Godly behavior for us. In his humanity, Jesus teaches us how to live as humans. So when Jesus chooses to use his humanity to learn God's Word and worship in God's House, that tells us something about where our priorities should lie. Jesus looked to God, and he became wise. So that we will look to God, and we will become wise.

Which is all well and good and an admirable goal. And yet, what do you expect to find in the wisdom of God? Because the wisdom of God doesn't always look all that wise when it's revealed to us. Sometimes it looks pretty foolish, in fact. Sometimes it doesn't make any sense at all.

Solomon learned that the hard way. God gave him the wisdom he desired. And Solomon thought he could use that wisdom to understand... everything. Deity and humanity. Sin and righteousness. He thought he could figure out the mind and will of God Himself.

But we find in the book of Ecclesiastes that he can't. All his wisdom. All his years of searching. None of it did any good. None of it made any sense. The world and everything in it, wisdom itself, only looked more empty and meaningless after he had begun than when he started. The wisdom of God can reveal many things. But there are still things we'll only know by faith.

The wise men learned that too. They came from the east thinking that their wisdom would lead them to Jerusalem. To a palace. To King Herod himself. But when they got there, what did they find?

God's Word, pointing them to the little village of Bethlehem. To a poor couple in a meager home with a small child. Who looked nothing like a king. It made no sense to them at all. And yet, by faith, they bowed down and worshipped him.

I'm sure Mary and Joseph would learn that too. They looked at the great signs surrounding Jesus' birth. They saw Jesus increasing in wisdom and in stature and in favor with God and man throughout His life. And they probably thought to themselves, "Wow... our son is going to be a great man. A great teacher. A great prophet. A great savior for His people. That's what the angel promised us."

And yet, where did that wisdom before God and man lead Jesus? To a cross. To suffering and anguish the likes of which we will never know. To rejection and mockery. To death and the grave. I think of Mary, standing at the foot of Jesus' cross next to John. And I can almost hear her thinking, "You were so wise. How could this have happened?"

It happened because the wisdom of God is a mystery to us. It makes no sense when you look at it in human terms. Only when that mystery is revealed to us by faith does it start to have meaning.

Jesus' death on it's own is meaningless, just like Solomon said. But Jesus' death for you and the forgiveness of your sins? That's the wisdom of God at work. Good Friday on it's own is as confusing as a king being born in a stable. But Good Friday followed by Easter Morning? That is the purpose and plan of God uniting all things to Himself. Even sinners like us.

Whatever you're going through right now. Whatever suffering or hardship, pain or grief is afflicting you. It doesn't make any sense. Not right now. And, frankly, it may not make any sense in your lifetime. Or in your children's lifetime. It may never make any sense to anyone but God himself.

And yet, it has meaning and purpose in the mystery of God's will. For the simple reason that on the Last Day it will have been part of a life that is raised from the dead. We have that promise, that hope, that inheritance, that predestination from God.

That if we cling to His Word. If we cling to His wisdom. If we cling to God revealed to us in Jesus Christ. No matter what we go through in this life. God has a destination for us. And he already knows how he's getting us there. He has predestined us to eternal life through His Son.

How do we know that? Because we were sealed with the promised Holy Spirit. That's what St Paul tells us. We are sealed by the Holy Spirit in the waters of baptism. And that seal, that baptism, is a guarantee from God of our inheritance until we take possession of it. Like a government guaranteeing a loan, God has guaranteed our inheritance. And the seal of baptism is His signature on us.

When we look to God, we find wisdom. But when He looks to us, we find faith. Faith that answers the questions that wisdom can't. Faith that gives us hope where wisdom fails. When God looks to us. When God shines a star in our hearts. When God leads us to His Son, hanging dead on a cross, and then alive on the third day. That's when we know not just the depth of his wisdom, but the riches of his grace. And the good news of our salvation. Amen.