

Sibyls' Service

Jesus the Wisdom of God

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Veni Sancte Spiritus

Taize song.

Opening Prayer

God, our creator and provider,
we bring you our thanks and praise.
Everything we have and all that we are
flow from your goodness.

Jesus, worker of miracles,
we bring you our thanks and praise.
When our faith or our imagination fail us
you have the power to bless and multiply and transform.

Spirit of life and joy,
we bring you our thanks and praise.
You draw us into community and friendship.
You invite and provoke and inspire.

Opening Prayer

Three-in-one God,

We bring you ourselves.

Knowing that our lives and our fears and our desires
are an open book before you.

Trusting in your unconditional welcome.

Confession

Most merciful God,
we confess that we have sinned against you
in thought, word, and deed,
by what we have done,
and by what we have left undone.
We have not loved you with our whole heart;
we have not loved our neighbours as ourselves.
We are truly sorry and we humbly repent.
For the sake of our Savior Jesus Christ,
have mercy on us and forgive us;
that we may delight in your will,
and walk in your ways,
to the glory of your Name. Amen.

Absolution

May the God of love and power
forgive us and free us from our sins,
heal and strengthen us by his Spirit,
and raise us to new life in Christ our Lord.

Proverbs 8

Does not wisdom call, and does not understanding raise her voice? On the heights, beside the way, at the crossroads she takes her stand; beside the gates in front of the town, at the entrance of the portals she cries out: 'To you, O people, I call, and my cry is to all that live. O simple ones, learn prudence; acquire intelligence, you who lack it.

All the words of my mouth are righteous; there is nothing twisted or crooked in them.

Take my instruction instead of silver, and knowledge rather than choice gold; for wisdom is better than jewels, and all that you may desire cannot compare with her.

I love those who love me, and those who seek me diligently find me.

Proverbs 8

The LORD possessed me at the beginning of his work, before His works of long ago. 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 bits of soil. When he established the heavens, I was there, when he drew a circle on the face of the deep, when he 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 his delight, rejoicing before him always, rejoicing in his inhabited world and delighting in the human race. '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; but those who miss me injure themselves; all who hate me love death.'

John 1:1–18

In the beginning was the Word, and the Word was with God, and the Word was God. He was in the beginning with God. All things came into being through him, and without him not one thing came into being. What has come into being in him was life, and the life was the light of all people. The light shines in the darkness, and the darkness did not overcome it. There was a man sent from God, whose name was John. He came as a witness to testify to the light, so that all might believe through him. He himself was not the light, but he came to testify to the light. The true light, which enlightens everyone, was coming into the world. He was in the world, and the world came into being through him; yet the world did not know him. He came to what was his own, and his own people did not accept him. But to all who received him, who believed in his name, he gave power to become children of God, who were born, not of blood or of the will of the flesh or of the will of man, but of God.

John 1:1–18

And the Word became flesh and lived among us, and we have seen his glory, the glory as of a father's only son, full of grace and truth. (John testified to him and cried out, 'This was he of whom I said, "He who comes after me ranks ahead of me because he was before me."') From his fullness we have all received, grace upon grace. The law indeed was given through Moses; grace and truth came through Jesus Christ. No one has ever seen God. It is God the only Son, who is close to the Father's heart, who has made him known.

Caritas Abundat

Hildegard Von Bingen

Karitas

habundat in omnia,

de imis excellentissima

super sidera

atque amantissima

in omnia,

quia summo regi osculum pacis
dedit.

Love

abounds in all,

from the depths exalted and excelling

over every star,

and most beloved

of all,

for to the highest King the kiss of peace
she gave.

Communion

On the night he was handed over to suffering and death, our Savior Jesus Christ took bread; and when he had given thanks to you, he broke it, and gave it to his disciples, and said, “Take, eat: This is my Body, which is given for you. Do this for the remembrance of me.”

After supper Jesus took the cup of wine; and when he had given thanks, he gave it to them, and said, “Drink this, all of you: This is my Blood of the new Covenant, which is shed for you and for many for the forgiveness of sins. Whenever you drink it, do this for the remembrance of me.”

Communion

We break this bread to share in the body of Christ.

Though we are many, we are one body,

because we all share in one bread

The Lord's Prayer

Our Father in heaven,
hallowed be your name,
your kingdom come,
your will be done,
on earth as in heaven.
Give us today our daily bread.
Forgive us our sins
as we forgive those who sin against us.
Lead us not into temptation
but deliver us from evil.
For the kingdom, the power,
and the glory are yours
now and for ever.
Amen.

God

God is infinite, while we are finite creatures. So there is an infinite distance between our understanding and the true nature of God.

It is impossible for us to bridge the gap: to seek God and find God by our efforts.

“Man’s search for God” is therefore a futile endeavour. As Aquinas put it:

“No created intellect can see the essence of God.” (ST I, q 12, obj 1)

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God is infinite, so *God* can bridge the infinite distance and communicate with us. God’s self-revelation gives us true knowledge of God: to the extent that our finite minds are able to comprehend. And our minds were created by God for the purpose of being in relationship with God.

God is Love

The revelation tells us that God is Love and God is a Trinity: one God in three Persons. At the heart of the Godhead, at the bedrock of reality, we find, not the “immutable, impassible, Alone” of the philosopher, but a community of love that overflows into the creation of the world.

The Personal God

C. S. Lewis writes:

Men are reluctant to pass over from the notion of an abstract and negative deity to the living God... The Pantheist's God does nothing, demands nothing. He is there if you wish for Him, like a book on a shelf. He will not pursue you.... An 'impersonal God'—well and good. A subjective God of beauty, truth and goodness, inside our own heads—better still. A formless life-force surging through us, a vast power which we can tap—best of all. But God Himself, alive, pulling at the other end of the cord, perhaps approaching at an infinite speed, ... that is quite another matter.

There comes a moment when people who have been dabbling in religion ('Man's search for God!') suddenly draw back. Supposing we really found Him? We never meant it to come to that! Worse still, supposing He had found us?"

—C. S. Lewis *Miracles*

By Way of Analogy

God is still infinite and we are still finite, so even God's self-revelation does not enable us to comprehend the entirety of God.

The Holy Spirit, in delivering to us the Divine mysteries, conveys its instruction on those matters which transcend language by means of what is within our capacity

(St Gregory of Nyssa, *Contra Eunomium*)

Therefore: all speech about God proceeds not literally but by way of analogy, God is more unlike than like any of our analogies.

By Way of Analogy

If we take any of these analogies and images literally, it become an idol. As C. S. Lewis says:

My idea of God is not a divine idea. It has to be shattered time after time. He shatters it Himself. He is the great iconoclast. Could we not almost say that this shattering is one of the marks of His presence?... And most are offended by the iconoclasm; and blessed are those who are not.

C. S. Lewis, *A Grief Observed*

By Way of Analogy

Let us, then, proceed by way of analogy, taking the revelation of God in all its forms as the primary source, and not treating any analogy or image as final and complete. God being more unlike than like any of our analogies.

For, the full paradox is that you cannot confine God in any way, including making God stay beyond everything. God does not! God overflows his limitlessness to touch, enter, affect, the limited. He does not stand on his dignity. The transcendent becomes immanent

(Jamie Moran)

Lady Wisdom

In Proverbs, Wisdom is described as giving life (Proverbs 3:16) and a “tree of life” (3:18).

She is pre-existent: “Yahweh possessed me at the beginning of His way before His works. From everlasting I have been established, from the beginning before there was ever an earth” (8:22–23)

(This passage is often translated “The LORD created me...”, but this interpretation implies that God initially did not have any wisdom, and so he created wisdom and then used wisdom to create everything else. This seems unlikely to me!)

Lady Wisdom

She dwells with God and is the one He delights in (8:27–30).

Wisdom is involved in the creation of everything (8:30).

Wisdom calls out in the street inviting all to come to her and find life and understanding (1:20–23, 8:32–34, 9:3–6).

She is the cosmic giver of the transforming feast who sends her servant-girls out to proclaim from the highest places, so that all may hear, that there is space at the table (9:3–5).

Lady Wisdom

Wisdom offers knowledge, understanding, insight, life and peace (1:23, 2:6, 3:13,16–18, 8:5–10,33,35, 9:5–6), as she speaks, calls, challenges, warns, invites, serves and nourishes.

Wisdom invites everyone to feast at her banquet that she has prepared (Prov 9:1–5), offering bread and wine in abundance.

To know her is better than gold (Prov 8:10,19, 16:16, cf 1 Peter 1:7).

Wisdom is the one who sends prophets and apostles, some of whom are killed and persecuted (Luke 11:49).

Lady Wisdom

Where have we seen a figure like this before?

In John 1, “the Word” was in the beginning, with God, and was the one through whom all things were created, who gives life. This “Word” became incarnate and lived among us (1:14).

The people came to Jesus to find wisdom and were astonished at his teaching, because he taught with authority (Lk 4:32)

Lady Wisdom

Jesus is the one who offers life (Jn 10:10)

Jesus offers a feast (Mt 22:2–10) and sends out his servants to gather the guests to the feast.

Jesus provides bread in abundance (Mt 14:20 etc) and wine in abundance (Jn 2:6) along with wise words of teaching.

Jesus has the words of eternal life (Jn 6:68)

Jesus is close to the Father's heart (Jn 1:18), the Beloved that He is pleased with (Mk 1:11, 9:7, Lk 3:22)

Jesus is the one who sends prophets and apostles, some of whom are killed and persecuted (Mt 23:34)

When he was criticised for being a friend of tax-collectors and sinners, Jesus directly identifies himself with Wisdom: “Wisdom is vindicated by all her deeds/children” (Lk 7:34–35 and Mt 11:19)

Lady Wisdom

Some have claimed that Lady Wisdom is simply a personification of an attribute of God. But there seems to me to be far too much detail in the figure of Wisdom to be a mere personification.

Although *any* divine figure can be treated as a “personification”—if you try hard enough! For example:

- God is a personification of a motivating power of a value system
- God is a personification of an archetype
- God is a personification of discipline and excellent spiritual reasoning
- God is a personification of Reality
- God is a personification of Love, Power and Wisdom
- God is a personification of the energies and forces which permeate this universe

...and so on ...

Lady Wisdom

How was the divine figure of Wisdom understood at the time of Jesus?

The book *The Wisdom of Solomon*, or the *Book of Wisdom* is generally dated between 30 BC and 40 AD. It is part of the canon of the Catholic Church and the Eastern Orthodox Church, and part of the Apocrypha for the Protestant Church. Origen in the 2nd century AD refers to uncertainty about its canonicity.

Athanasius includes it among the books which “were appointed by the Fathers to be read”.

Regardless of its canonical status, the book has much to tell us about how Lady Wisdom was understood at the time of Jesus.

Lady Wisdom

In Wis 7:25, Wisdom is described as “a pure emanation of the glory of the Almighty” and in 7:26 as “a reflection of eternal light, a spotless mirror of the working of God and an image of his goodness”.

In Col 1:15–20 Jesus is the “image” of God, the “firstborn of all creation”, the one through whom “all things ... were created”, who “is before all things, and in him all things hold together”.

Wisdom is described as the radiant light of God (Wis 6:12, 7:25, 26), she is “more beautiful than the sun, and excels every constellation of the stars”, “Compared with the light she is found to be superior” (Wis 7:29, cf Jn 1:4–5), while Jesus is “the true light, which enlightens everyone” (Jn 1:9)

Lady Wisdom

In Prov 2:10 “Wisdom will come into your heart”. In Wis 7:27 “she can do all things...she renews all things; in every generation she passes into holy souls and makes them friends of God, and prophets”. Jesus says “I have called you friends, because I have made known to you everything that I have heard from my Father” (Jn 15:15)

In Prov 3:19, and Wis 7:22 Wisdom “founded the earth”, and is “fashioner of all things”, while in Col 1:16 “in him (Jesus) all things were created” and Jn 1:3 “All things came into being through him, and without him not one thing came into being”

In Prov 8:30–31, Wisdom was beside God like a master builder (or a beloved child), “daily his delight”. At Jesus baptism the voice from heaven declared “This is my Son, the Beloved, with whom I am well pleased”.

Lady Wisdom

In Heb 1:3 Jesus is “the reflection of God’s glory”, while Wisdom is “radiant and unfading” (Wis 6:12) and “a pure emanation of the glory of the Almighty” (Wis 7:25) and “a reflection of eternal light, a spotless mirror of the working of God, and an image of his goodness.” (Wis 7:26).

Jesus says “My sheep hear my voice” (Jn 10:27) and “the sheep follow him because they know his voice” while Wisdom is “easily discerned by those who love her, and is found by those who seek her” (Wis 6:12)

Jesus embodies “all the treasures of wisdom and knowledge” (Col 2:2–3) and “in him the whole fullness of deity dwells bodily” (Col 2:9), while Wisdom offers knowledge to all who come to her (Prov 8:10–12) “she is an initiate in the knowledge of God” (Wis 8:4), “she knows the things of old, and infers the things to come” (Wis 8:8)

Lady Wisdom

In Mark 6:2 when Jesus returns to his home town the people ask “What is this wisdom that has been given to him?” which could even be translated “Who is this Wisdom...”

In the transfiguration (Mk 9:1–8) Jesus is called “Son” and “beloved” and becomes dazzling white, just as Wisdom is described as radiant (Wis 6:12) The voice from the cloud commands the disciples to “listen to him” (9:7) just as Lady Wisdom repeatedly calls all to listen to her and thus gain life (Prov 1:20–23, 8:1–21, 9:4–6).

Lady Wisdom

In Luke 11:49 Jesus says “Therefore also the Wisdom of God said, ‘I will send them prophets and apostles, some of whom they will kill and persecute...;’”

In Matthew 23:34 Jesus says “Therefore I send you prophets, sages, and scribes, some of whom you will kill and crucify...”

Lady Wisdom

Jesus calls his disciples “no longer servants but friends” (Jn 15:12–15). Wisdom brings people into friendship with God (Wis 7:12–14, 27–28).

In Ephesians, Jesus is “the Beloved” (Eph 1:6 cf Col 2:10) and the one who fills “all in all”. Wisdom “pervades and penetrates all things” (Wis 7:24). The “plan of the mystery” is that “the wisdom of God” might be made known to all through Jesus (Eph 3:9–12). The image of Jesus as the one who descended and ascended (Eph 4:10) reflects Wisdom who “reaches mightily from one end of the earth to the other, and she orders all things well” (Wis 8:1).

Lady Wisdom

How do we reconcile all these passages together?

The simplest solution is that Jesus is the incarnation of divine Wisdom!

In fact, Paul explicitly says that Jesus is “the Wisdom of God” (1 Cor 1:24)

John in his prologue calls Jesus “the Word” (Greek: Logos) rather than Wisdom (Greek: Sophia), but Logos and Sophia are closely connected in Greek philosophy, which John is using here.

Jesus the Wisdom of God

Jesus	Lady Wisdom
Existed from the beginning With God from the beginning Creator of all things Calls us friends Sustains all things Sent the prophets Fills all in all The image of God Close to the Father's heart Light of the world	Existed from the beginning Possessed by God at the beginning Fashioner of all things Makes us friends with God Orders all things well Sent the prophets Pervades and penetrates all things A spotless mirror and image of God The one He delights in Radiant light of God

The Risen Jesus

Finally, in Revelation 1:13 John has a vision of the risen Jesus: “in the midst of the lampstands I saw one like the Son of Man, clothed with a long robe and with a golden sash across his chest.”

The word here, often translated “chest”, as in this version, is the plural Greek word *mastois* meaning “breasts” (as in mastitis and mastectomy). Later in Revelation the seven angels have “golden sashes across their chests” (15:6) and the Greek word is *stethe*, which is the usual word for “chest” (as in “stethoscope”)

The Risen Jesus

The only other appearances of *mastois* in the NT are clearly to women's breasts and are in the context of breastfeeding. These are Lk 11:27 "Blessed [are] ... the breasts that nursed you" and Lk 23:29 which refers to "the breasts that never nursed".

In 1 Peter the author uses the image of Jesus breastfeeding us:

1 Peter 2:2–4 "Like newborn infants, long for the pure, spiritual milk, so that by it you may grow into salvation if indeed you have tasted that the Lord is good. Come to him, a living stone, though rejected by mortals yet chosen and precious in God's sight"

But Jesus was a man!

How can Jesus, a man, also be the incarnation of divine Wisdom, a woman?

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How can Jesus, a man, also be the incarnation of divine Wisdom, a woman?

Well, anyone who is transgender, or who knows what it means to be transgender, will understand that a person's gender identity can differ from their physical sexual characteristics and assigned sex at birth.

But Jesus was a man!

How can Jesus, a man, also be the incarnation of divine Wisdom, a woman?

Well, anyone who is transgender, or who knows what it means to be transgender, will understand that a person's gender identity can differ from their physical sexual characteristics and assigned sex at birth.

In other words: Jesus was transgender.

Wisdom in the Church Fathers

In 1 Clement (70 AD or 96 AD), Wisdom is described as “all-virtuous Wisdom” According to this text, it is by heeding Woman Wisdom that one is able to abide in the holy name of God. Jesus is described as the Creator’s “beloved child” (59:2,3) and “your child” in a prayer to God (59:4).

Justin Martyr clearly identifies Wisdom with Jesus:

But this Offspring, who was truly begotten of the Father, was with the Father and the Father talked with Him before all creation, as the scripture through Solomon clearly showed us, saying that this Son, who is called Wisdom by Solomon, was begotten both as a beginning before all His works, and as His Offspring.

(Dialogue with Trypho 62; see also 126, 155–160 AD)

The claim that Jesus is Woman Wisdom incarnate is pivotal to Justin’s debate with Trypho.

Wisdom in Christian History

Brother Lawrence writes:

My most typical approach is this simple attentiveness and general loving awareness of God, from which I derive greater sweetness and satisfaction than an infant receives from his mother's breast. Therefore, if I may dare use the expression, I would gladly call this state the "breasts of God," because of the indescribable sweetness I taste and experience there

(Brother Lawrence, Letter 2 to a spiritual director)

Wisdom in Christian History

St John of the Cross says of Jesus:

There He gave me His breasts,
There He taught me the science full of sweetness.
And there I gave to Him
Myself without reserve;
There I promised to be His bride.

(The Spiritual Canticle of St. John of the Cross, 27)

Wisdom in Christian History

Among a number of references to the Motherhood of God, Julian of Norwich writes:

The human mother suckles her child with her own milk, and with the utmost tender kindness our beloved Mother, Jesus, feeds us with himself through the blessed sacrament, which is my life's precious food.

(Chapter 60)

The human mother puts her child tenderly to her breast, and our tender Mother, Jesus, leads us intimately into his blessed breast, through the sweet open wound in his side, and there gives us a glimpse of the Godhead and the joy of heaven, with the inner certainty of eternal bliss.

(Chapter 60)

Laudate Dominum

Taize song.