

**Delight in the Lord**  
Proverbs 8:1-4, 22-31

Wisdom calls out to us. She takes her stand. She calls for people everywhere to listen to her voice. What is so stunning and powerful in this passage is that wisdom – *Sophia* – is personified. Holy Wisdom, which emanates from God’s own being, is personified in feminine form – *Lady Wisdom*. I love the way one Presbyterian Pastor paraphrases this lesson:

*I was out shopping yesterday, and whom did I run into? Wisdom. Yeah, there she was. She called me over and we began talking, Wisdom and I. Then I went down to the courthouse, and there she was again, making a plea for justice in some dingy courtroom where somebody had been unjustly accused. After that I dropped by the school, and she had gotten there before me, calling for students and teachers alike always to seek truth. Then I went for a walk in the woods, moving along the trail in quiet meditation. Wisdom snuck up on me and said, “Now that we are alone, I have something I want to share with you, a present I want you to enjoy. You know, I have been around a long time, really before the beginning of time. I have been whirling and dancing with God all along. I am God’s delight, laughing and playing. I want you to know the lightness of spirit and gladness that come when you welcome me. Will you set aside those thoughts, words and deeds that make life heavy and sad for you and others? Will you come and laugh and play with me? Will you come and dance with me? Will you? (Jeff Paschal, *Homiletic Perspective, Feasting on the Word, Year C, Volume 3*, David L. Bartlett & Barbara Brown Taylor, Editors, 2010, Westminster Press, Louisville, KY, pp. 30-31)*

Wisdom invites us to partake of her gifts delighting in her as she delights in God and God delights in her.

This interesting scripture passage and the tradition of personified wisdom, have a deep connection with the development of the Christian theology of the Holy Trinity. Is Holy Wisdom presented to us as a personification of an attribute of God or is Holy Wisdom actually a “*hypostasis*,” an independent personal being? The Early Church Fathers thought that she was a *hypostasis*. They understood Wisdom’s pre-existence as a description of Christ. We find this stunning image in the prologue of the Gospel John – “*In the beginning was the Word and the Word was with God and the Word was God,*” The Apostle Paul in Colossians 1:15 also describes Christ’s pre-existence – “*He is the image of the invisible god, the firstborn of all creation.*” The author of Hebrews articulates a similar idea:

*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 has 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 1:1-3)*

In the fourth century CE the choice of translations for a verb in verse 22 separated the Arians from the Orthodox. The Arians translated the verb as “*created.*” “*The Lord*

*created me at the beginning of his work.” Arias understood Jesus as a *created* being and thus not part of the Godhead. The orthodox party preferred the translation as “*possessed*” or “*begat*,” “*the Lord begat me at the beginning of creation.*” It was through this understanding that the words in the Nicene Creed were established (*Exegetical Perspective*, pp. 27-31, *Feasting on the Word*):*

*We believe in one Lord, Jesus Christ, the only Son of God, eternally begotten of the Father, God from God, Light from Light, true God from true God, begotten, not made, of one Being with the Father. Through him all things were made.*

So, this key passage of scripture helped shape the Church’s understanding of the Second Person of the Trinity.

For me the key part of the passage is that we are invited us to *delight* in Wisdom and to delight in God. There is a playful delight between Wisdom and God as creation unfolds. “*I (Wisdom) 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.*” (Prov. 8:30-31) I like to think of Wisdom dancing, whirling with God, as the creation unfolded. We are invited to share in this dance.

I believe that the Holy Trinity is far more than a theological construct or doctrine. It is really, like these words from Prov. 8:30-31, an invitation to share in the life and the delight of God. Nowhere is that invitation offered more poignantly than in the Eastern Orthodox icon of the Holy Trinity.

You have a small 4 by 5 image of the Holy Trinity in your bulletins. It is a print of an icon *written* by iconographer Nicolai Tsai (<http://www.nikolait sai.us/photos/IndexFolder/fatima/holy-trinity-icon.jpg>), intentionally patterned in the style of the great 15<sup>th</sup> century icon of the Holy Trinity written by the Russian master Andrei Rublev.



The icon does not pretend to represent what God looks like. Icons always seek to portray the inner theological meaning in that which was visible and seen by the human eye. In this case the icon is an image of the “*three men*” who came to Abraham in Genesis 18 to tell Abraham and Sarah that within a year Sarah would give birth to a son. The passage says first that “*the Lord appeared to Abraham*” and then goes on to describe that meeting through the visitation of the three *men* or angels. Some of that scene is pictured – the oaks of Mamre, Abraham’s house, a mountain, the three angels and an offering or sacrifice. The rest of the details of the story have been dropped to focus on the three angelic visitors.

The Eastern Orthodox Church sees the three visitors who represent the Lord as an archetype of the Holy Trinity. What is symbolically pictured is not the Godhead, which no human can see, but the relationships of Father, Son and Holy Spirit. In fact Orthodox art is forbidden to represent God the Father and the Holy Spirit is normally presented symbolically as a dove. But here, through the three visitors to Abraham, we get a glimpse of what the relationships God as three persons yet One Being might look like.

The central and most distinct of the three angels is Christ, whose humanity shows us in a visible and understandable form what God is like. Jesus wears the red clavium on his shoulder revealing his royal authority. He is the King in his Father’s Kingdom. He is holding his hand in blessing of the sacrifice on what looks remarkably like an altar. Abraham will be asked to sacrifice his son Isaac and God will substitute Abraham’s willingness with a ram caught in the thickets. But God himself offers the life of his Son for the sins of the world. Jesus’ hands extend in blessing of his own sacrifice for us, the banquet of eternal life.

The Father is represented by the angel on the left and the Holy Spirit by the angel to our right. Note how both Jesus and the Spirit lean and defer to the Father. The Holy Spirit wears the clavium of transparent green, the symbol of his life giving power. The Father’s robe are shimmering and multi-hued. He cannot be pinned down and clearly identified. As the other two defer to Him he sits with a deep and utter stillness.

Notice how the three are in intimate relationship – in Communion – with each other. They are three and yet they are One. They are persons, but cannot be clearly seen as male or female. They are present in this moment but transcend the moment. There’s clearly a circle representing their unity around the Table, but that circle is open ended. You and I, the viewers, are included and invited in.

Andrew Tregubov writes,

*We must realize that this Icon shows us the very heart of the Kingdom of God, where the Holy Trinity opens itself so that the Church, gathered in front of this altar table, may enter into the Holy of Holies of God in the fulfillment of the prayer of Christ: “I do not pray for these only, but also for those who believe in me through their word, that they may be one; even as Thou, Father, art in me, and I in Thee, that they also may be in us.” (John 12:20-21) (The Light of Christ Iconography of Gregory Kroug, Andrew Tregubov, St. Vladimir’s Seminary Press, Crestwood, NY, 1990, p. 48)*

Like Holy Wisdom calling out to invite us to share her gifts and enter more deeply into her life – a life shared eternally with God from the beginning – the icon of the Holy Trinity invites us into the fullness of God. I invite you to take this icon home with you and to spend some time gazing or meditating in prayer before it. Let the holy image center your life, your longing, your heart in God's presence, in God's holy life. Let yourself be included in God's holy circle. Receive God's invitation to share at the banquet. Share in God's love, God's Peace.

In the name of the Holy Trinity, one God, Father, Son and Holy Spirit. Amen.