***“Wisdom Was There***” by S. Finlan, at The First Church, August 15, 2021

[**Psal**](https://lectionary.library.vanderbilt.edu/texts.php?id=211)**m 111:7–10**

7The works of his hands are faithful and just; all his precepts are trustworthy.  
8 They are established forever and ever, to be performed with faithfulness and uprightness.  
9 He sent redemption to his people; he has commanded his covenant forever. Holy and awesome is his name.  
10 The fear of the Lord is the beginning of wisdom; all those who practice it have a good understanding. His praise endures forever.

[**Proverbs 8:1, 12–13,**](https://lectionary.library.vanderbilt.edu/texts.php?id=211) **22–23, 27, 30–31**

1Does not wisdom call, and does not understanding raise her voice?. . .

12 I, wisdom, live with prudence, and I attain knowledge and discretion. 13 The fear of the Lord is hatred of evil. Pride and arrogance and the way of evil and perverted speech I hate. . .

22 The Lord created me at the beginning of his work, the first of his acts of long ago. 23Ages ago I was set up, at the first, before the beginning of the earth. . . 27 When he established the heavens, I was there. . . 30 I was beside him, like a master worker; and I was daily his delight, rejoicing before him always, 31 rejoicing in his inhabited world and delighting in the human race.

In every season and every day we strive to complete those tasks that are before us. Some are routine and others are more involved. We all know from experience that having a helping hand can make the work more easy. What about God? Does God ever have a partner or a co-worker? Sometimes we assume that the Jews thought of God as operating all alone, with no divine partner, but in fact, the ancient Jews had several ideas of God having a divine helper. Jewish philosophers wanted to work out how the infinite and spiritual God interacted with the finite and material world. Surely God is not just isolated and aloof. But some kind of intermediary is needed. Something or someone needed to be imagined that was divine, but closer to the material level than was the infinite God. The divine Wisdom, *Hochmah* in Hebrew, or Sophia in Greek, is one of the ideas that filled this role.

You can see how Proverbs 8 would help with that idea. Wisdom was a partner of God “before the beginning of the earth,” and then was a “master worker” at creation itself (Prov 8:23, 30).

Probably the original author did not intend Wisdom to be seen as a separate person from God. The intention is probably to speak of Wisdom as a *quality* of God. The author personifies Wisdom, which is a literary device, the way a Romantic poet might personify love, or the moon, or Death. Emily Dickinson wrote “Because I could not stop for Death, He kindly stopped for me.”

But some people in the centuries leading up to Jesus took personified Wisdom more literally than just as a literary device. And there were other ideas besides Wisdom. The very important Jewish philosopher named Philo of Alexandria preferred to speak of Logos, the Word, as the near-personified feature of God, who was directly involved in creation. At one point he calls Wisdom the Daughter of God, and says it comes from the Logos (*Fug*. “*On Flight and Finding”* 50–52; <https://iep.utm.edu/philo/>), who can be called God’s son (*Mos*. *“The Life of Moses”* 2.134). He thinks of the Logos as God’s ambassador and mediator (*Quis Her*. “*Who is the Heir of Divine Things*” 205). The Logos brought about differentiation in the very beginning of creation: “It is the divine Word which divided and distributed every thing in nature”(*Quis Her.* 235–36), he says. So Logos and its by-product, Wisdom, played a role in creation.

Were there any other ways that thinkers used to approach the problem of the infinite God interacting with the finite realm? Yes. There was the idea of angelic helpers. There were several different ideas about a supreme angel or heavenly authority who assisted God in judgment, variously named Metatron, Michael, or Melchizedek. In the Dead Sea Scrolls, in two different documents, either Michaelor Melchizedek plays the role of a heavenly warrior leading the battle against evil forces. In the Jewish Talmudic literature, Metatron is a celestial scribe recording the deeds of humans.

So when early Christians said that Jesus was the divine Son, who worked hand in hand with God and revealed God’s will, they were saying things similar to what Jews had said before. There was a precedent among Jewish writers for thinking of someone other than the original Creative Father as divine. The Apostle Paul said “there is one God . . . *from* whom are all things . . . *and* one Lord, Jesus Christ, *through* whom are all things” (1 Cor 8:6), two divine persons working together. This may remind us of what Philo of Alexandria had said, that “God” and “Lord” represented two different aspects of the Godhead, “God” the gracious or creative power, and “Lord” the royal or chastening power (*Abr. “On Abraham”* 121; *Plant*. *“Concerning Noah’s Work as a Planter”* 86).

Proverbs 8 is one of the most important background passages when we ask the question: “How did some Jews come to think of Jesus as divine? Was there any precedent for God having a divine co-worker?” There were precedents, but none of them envisioned the warmth and approachability that this divine co-worker would have. None of the anticipations matched the reality of the friendly and generous Son of God who did appear. The best they could do is put forward some abstract ideas about a divine entity who partnered with God, but *we* know of a real person, a human being when he was here, and a heavenly personality now, who “has seen the Father” (John 6:46) face to face, who knows God and embodies God, and who really was the master worker at the creation along with God the Father. And this master worker also works on us, inwardly. Jesus asks us to join with him willingly, so he can help us understand God and grow into our own divinized nature.

Knowing Jesus makes it easy for us to affirm, with the psalm, that “The works of his hands are faithful and just; all his precepts are trustworthy” (Ps 111:7). We know there is suffering and injustice in this world, but, because of Jesus, we know that God joins with those who suffer, and seeks to uplift those who are unjustly treated. God celebrates with us in our moments of victory and joy.

Proverbs says Wisdom was “rejoicing in his inhabited world and delighting in the human race” (8:31). Jesus showed his love of nature in the many parables and images he used—birds in the trees, lilies of the field—and he showed his delight in humanity by his kindly ministry to needy people. Jesus really did delight in humanity. He had an amazing optimism about people. He said they could do the will of God, and thereby become, in effect, his brothers, and sisters, and mothers (Mark 3:35). He said they could take the Word, “hold it fast in an honest and good heart, and bear fruit with patient endurance” (Luke 8:15). What an optimistic thing to say! Nothing about people being fundamentally evil, and all their righteousness like filthy rags (Isa 64:6). He affirms that a person can have an honest and good heart, and treasure the truth in that heart. It’s up to us. “For where your treasure is, there your heart will be also” (Matt 6:21).

So whether you think of Jesus playing a role in the original creation, or fulfilling the role of revealer of God during his lifetime, or being the light of the world even now, you are seeing him in his divine role. His life and his person go so much further than any of the prophets was able to foresee, although some of them imagined God having a divine co-worker. We are so lucky that he showed up here, to reveal God to the world, and make spiritual growth seem so “doable” for us.

Whether we think of his divine nature or just of his human nature, we can be inspired by him. He does things divinely, but he also lived a human life with family and friends and co-workers and some difficult people, too. Part of his mission was to show us that there is life after death. His post-Resurrection appearances demonstrated this to his friends. Jesus is so much easier to relate to than the infinite, invisible God. We have a much easier time forming a concept of Jesus. God feels much closer when we think of God in the form of the Son. Paul says he “became for us wisdom from God” (1 Cor 1:30). And wisdom shows us the love of God.