

These comments present one interpretation of today's readings; other interpretations may be possible. Comments are best read with the readings.

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Sirach 24:1-12

NRSV

To followers of Judaism, the created world is God's, so faith and reason go hand in hand; learning about creation is learning about God; reasoning is done in the context of God. They and we seek knowledge of God as we pursue faith. In the last centuries BC, people saw that the acquisition of knowledge about God led to wisdom. The author of Sirach, Jesus ben Sira, understood wisdom as leading to prosperity. 1:1 says: "all wisdom is from the Lord ...". In our reading, ben Sira, has wisdom (abstracted, personified – but in a metaphorical way) introduce herself "in the midst of her people" (v. 1), Israel. She does so in the presence of the heavenly court ("the assembly ...", v. 2). Wisdom "came forth" (v. 3) by the word of God, and permeated the earth ("like a mist") as the spirit of God. She existed before creation. (Genesis 1:1-2 says in a Jewish translation: *At the beginning of God's creating ... rushing-spirit of God hovering over the face of the earth ...*) Wisdom was involved in the "pillar of cloud" (v. 4), the way God showed his presence during the Exodus. Wisdom is present and active throughout creation, (from heaven to "the depths of the abyss" (v. 5), Sheol, the repose of the dead in Jewish thinking), and throughout history, to all people and with them.

God commanded Wisdom to dwell among the people of Israel (v. 8). Her earthly residence is the Temple at Jerusalem, the home of Mosaic Law; she gives rules for the appropriate worship of God (v. 10). Jerusalem is God's "beloved city" (v. 11). Wisdom "took root" (v. 12) in Israel, inheritors of God's blessing. In vv. 21-22, she concludes by offering an unusual meal, in which the more one eats, the more one desires. Wisdom leads to godly living.

Psalm 147:12-20

NRSV

This hymn is an invitation to praise God for his universal power and providential care. In vv. 1-11, God is praised for rebuilding Jerusalem, gathering the people, healing, creating, and providing for the needs of those he creates. V. 5b says that there is no limit to his wisdom. In vv. 12-14, worship is due to him for protecting Jerusalem, for blessing her children, and for bringing peace and prosperity. Vv. 16-18 tell of the activity of God's "word" (v. 15) in the phenomena of nature, from the winter cold to the spring thaw. Only to Israel has he declared his covenant.

Ephesians 1:3-14

NRSV

Our reading begins immediately after Paul's greeting to his readers. "Blessed be ..." echoes Jewish and early Christian prayers. God has brought us, by way of Christ, "every spiritual blessing in the heavenly places", blessings in our hearts which are unseen and eternal, which bring together the physical world and God,

"just as" (v. 4, or *because*) (before time) he planned for Christ to come to us, for Christ's followers (us) to be holy, set apart for him, living "in love", for his followers (the church) to be made members of his family ("for adoption as his children", v. 5), and to be able to appreciate and reflect the Father's splendid gifts to us ("to the praise ...", v. 6). God gave this to us freely; it was his will and his "pleasure" (v. 5). (After Jesus' baptism, a voice from heaven says "You are my Son, the Beloved; with you, I am well pleased.", Mark 1:11)

It is through Christ's death that we are set free, rescued ("redemption", v. 7) and forgiven our deviations from God's ways ("trespasses"). Being now "holy and blameless" (v. 4), we have intellectual knowledge of God ("wisdom", v. 8) and are able to apply it ("insight"); so we can know and participate in his plan for creation – which he disclosed in the *Christ-event* (Christ's life, death and resurrection.) This plan, which will come to fruition when God's eternal purposes are completed, is to unite ("gather", v. 10) all creation ("heaven" and "earth") in Christ. In Christ, we Christians have been adopted by God ("inheritance", v. 11), per his plan, so that we, forerunners ("the first", v. 12) of many to "set our hope on Christ", may live to praise God's manifest power ("glory"). In Christ, the recipients of this letter, having heard the gospel and believed in him, were baptised ("marked with the seal of the ... Holy Spirit", v. 13), incorporated into the Church. The inner sanctifying presence of the Spirit is a guarantee ("pledge", v. 14) that God will carry his promise to completion.

John 1:(1-9),10-18

NRSV

Our reading is the continuation of the book's prologue, or the whole prologue. The Word, God, Christ, has been born into this imperfect world – a world that per v. 3, "came into being through him" – but most people did not embrace him as who he is. (To *know*, to a Semite, involves personal commitment as well as awareness.) He came to Israel, but its people generally rejected him, but some did receive him for who he is; some became committed to him. (To *know someone's name* meant more than it does today.) These received the power to be adopted as sons and daughters of God: they were *reborn* into God's family, through the Holy Spirit ("of God", v. 13).

"Flesh", humanity, per Isaiah 40:6-8, was seen as weak, imperfect and transitory. Christ does an amazing thing: he becomes a human being (albeit, being God, a perfect one). The author is a witness to the divine presence shown in Jesus ("glory", v. 14). John the Baptizer was the first of this gospel's witnesses of the *Christ-event*, God become human.

From all that is in God ("fullness", v. 16), we have received gift after gift ("grace upon grace"). The Mosaic Law was given by God, and Christ brought the full revelation of God's ways. Judaism said that God could not be seen (v. 18). (Even Moses, in Exodus 33:30-44, was not permitted to see God's face.) It is through Christ, who is in complete intimacy with the Father, that we have been given access to the Father.

