

HEARERS OF THE WORD

Sirach 24:1-2, 8-12; Psalm 147; Ephesians 1:3-6, 15-18; John 1:1-18

We saw his glory, as of the Father's only Son, full of grace and truth

John 1:1 In the beginning was the Word, and the Word was with God, and the Word was God. 2 He was in the beginning with God. 3 All things came to be through him, and without him nothing came to be. What came to be 4 through him was life, and this life was the light of the human race; 5 the light shines in the darkness, and the darkness has not overcome it. 6 A man named John was sent from God. 7 He came for testimony, to testify to the light, so that all might believe through him. 8 He was not the light, but came to testify to the light. 9 The true light, which enlightens everyone, was coming into the world.

John 1:10 He was in the world, and the world came to be through him, but the world did not know him. 11 He came to what was his own, but his own people did not accept him. 12 But to those who did accept him he gave power to become children of God, to those who believe in his name, 13 who were born not by natural generation nor by human choice nor by a man's decision but of God.

John 1:14 And the Word became flesh and made his dwelling among us, and we saw his glory, the glory as of the Father's only Son, full of grace and truth

15 John testified to him and cried out, saying, "This was he of whom I said, 'The one who is coming after me ranks ahead of me because he existed before me.'" 16 From his fullness we have all received, grace in place of grace, 17 because while the law was given through Moses, grace and truth came through Jesus Christ. 18 No one has ever seen God. The only Son, God, who is at the Father's side, has revealed him.

INITIAL OBSERVATIONS

The Prologue was already commented on for the third Mass of Christmas Day (see notes there). For today, a different translation (New American Bible Revised Edition) and a different commen-



tary will be offered.

KIND OF WRITING

This is a good example of Wisdom poetry with prose sections, breaking the flow. In all probability, it began as a Jewish Christian hymn to Wisdom.

OLD TESTAMENT BACKGROUND

It would be a great help to look up these passages about "Lady Wisdom": Job 28; Proverbs 1, 8, 9; Baruch 3:9-4:4; Sirach 24; Wis 7:7-9:18. One example is given here (from Baruch). The whole text is interesting; the key verses are 3:25-4:4.

Bar 3:9 Hear the commandments of life, O Israel; give ear, and learn wisdom!

10 Why is it, O Israel, why is it that you are in the land of your enemies, that you are growing old in a foreign country, that you are defiled with the dead, 11 that you are counted among those in Hades? 12 You have forsaken the fountain of wisdom. 13 If you had walked in the way of God, you would be living in peace forever. 14 Learn where there is wisdom, where there is strength, where there is understanding, so that you may

Thought for the day

We are at the start of the new civil year and beginning again is an invitation to look in two directions. What happened for me in the last year, both in my ordinary life and in my life as a believer, a person of faith? For what do I ask forgiveness? For what do I give thanks? We also look forward and the new beginning gives us a chance to start again on the Way of discipleship. Both thanksgiving and renewal are to be found in today's readings. The Gospel is an invitation to wake up, to keep watch, to live fully the present moment under God, in whom we live and move and have our being.

Prayer

Wake us up, O God, at the start of a new year and rouse us from the slumber of the everyday that we may recognise you in every moment and in every person every day of our lives. Through Christ our Lord. Amen.

at the same time discern where there is length of days, and life, where there is light for the eyes, and peace. 15 Who has found her place? And who has entered her storehouses? 16 Where are the rulers of the nations, and those who lorded it over the animals on earth; 17 those who made sport of the birds of the air, and who hoarded up silver and gold in which people trust, and there is no end to their getting; 18 those who schemed to get silver, and were anxious, but there is no trace of their works? 19 They have vanished and gone down to Hades, and others have arisen in their place.

20 Later generations have seen the light of day, and have lived upon the earth; but they have not learned the way to knowledge, nor understood her paths, nor laid hold of her. 21 Their descendants have strayed far from her way.

22 She has not been heard of in Canaan, or seen in Teman; 23 the descendants of Hagar, who seek for understanding on the earth, the merchants of Merran and Teman, the story-tellers and the seekers for understanding, have not

learned the way to wisdom, or given thought to her paths.

24 O Israel, how great is the house of God, how vast the territory that he possesses! 25 It is great and has no bounds; it is high and immeasurable. 26 The giants were born there, who were famous of old, great in stature, expert in war. 27 God did not choose them, or give them the way to knowledge; 28 so they perished because they had no wisdom, they perished through their folly.

29 Who has gone up into heaven, and taken her, and brought her down from the clouds? 30 Who has gone over the sea, and found her, and will buy her for pure gold? 31 No one knows the way to her, or is concerned about the path to her. 32 But the one who knows all things knows her, he found her by his understanding. The one who prepared the earth for all time filled it with four-footed creatures; 33 the one who sends forth the light, and it goes; he called it, and it obeyed him, trembling; 34 the stars shone in their watches, and were glad; he called them, and they said, "Here we are!" They shone with gladness for him who made them.

35 This is our God; no other can be compared to him. **36** He found the whole way to knowledge, and gave her to his servant Jacob and to Israel, whom he loved. **37** Afterward she appeared on earth and lived with humankind.

Bar 4:1 She is the book of the commandments of God, the law that endures forever. All who hold her fast will live, and those who forsake her will die.

2 Turn, O Jacob, and take her; walk toward the shining of her light. **3** Do not give your glory to another, or your advantages to an alien people. **4** Happy are we, O Israel, for we know what is pleasing to God.

NEW TESTAMENT FOREGROUND

We declare to you what was from the beginning, what we have heard, what we have seen with our eyes, what we have looked at and touched with our hands, concerning the word of life— this life was revealed, and we have seen it and testify to it, and declare to you the eternal life that was with the Father and was revealed to us— we declare to you what we have seen and heard so that you also may have fellowship with us; and truly our fellowship is with the Father and with his Son Jesus Christ. We are writing these things so that our joy may be complete. (1 John 1:1–4)

Beloved, do not believe every spirit, but test the spirits to see whether they are from God; for many false prophets have gone out into the world. By this you know the Spirit of God: every spirit that confesses that Jesus Christ has come in the flesh is from God, and every spirit that does not confess Jesus is not from God. And this is the spirit of the antichrist, of which you have heard that it is coming; and now it is already in the world. Little children, you are from God, and have conquered them; for the one who is in you is greater than the one who is in the world. (1 John 4:1–4)

ST PAUL

But when the appropriate time had come, God sent out his Son, born of a woman, born under the law, to redeem those who were under the law, so that we may be adopted as sons with full rights. And because you are sons, God sent the Spirit of his Son into our hearts, who calls "Abba! Father!" So you are no longer a slave but a son, and if you are a son, then you are also an heir through God. (Gal 4:4–7)

BRIEF COMMENTARY

The commentary takes the form of showing where the topics and images occur again throughout the Gospel. Thus, the function of the Prologue as a true introduction becomes clear.

Verse 1 New Creation: When Jesus had received the wine, he said, "It is finished." Then he bowed his head and gave up his spirit. (John 19:30) When he had said this, he breathed on them and said to them, "Receive the Holy Spirit." (John 20:22) Cf. Jn 20:1.

Verse 2 Union with the Father: The Father and I are one (John 10:30) So now, Father, glorify me in your own presence with the glory that I had in your presence before the world existed. (John 17:5)

Verse 3 Through him: No one comes to the Father except through me. (John 14:6) Indeed, God did not send the Son into the world to condemn the world, but in order that the world might be saved through him. (John 3:17)

Verse 4 Life and light: I am the way, and the truth, and the life. (John 14:6) Jesus said to her, "I am the resurrection and the life. Those who believe in me, even though they die, will live, and everyone who lives and believes in me will never die. (John 11:25–26) And this is eternal life, that they may know you,

the only true God, and Jesus Christ whom you have sent. (John 17:3)

Verse 5 Light and darkness: And this is the judgment, that the light has come into the world, and people loved darkness rather than light because their deeds were evil. (John 3:19) Again Jesus spoke to them, saying, "I am the light of the world. Whoever follows me will never walk in darkness but will have the light of life." (John 8:12)

Verses 6–8 John the Baptist: Cf. John 1:19–23)

Verse 9 Into the world: When the people saw the sign that he had done, they began to say, "This is indeed the prophet who is to come into the world." (John 6:14) She said to him, "Yes, Lord, I believe that you are the Messiah, the Son of God, the one coming into the world." (John 11:27) Pilate asked him, "So you are a king?" Jesus answered, "You say that I am a king. For this I was born, and for this I came into the world, to testify to the truth. Everyone who belongs to the truth listens to my voice." (John 18:37)

Verse 10 Did not receive him: This is the Spirit of truth, whom the world cannot receive, because it neither sees him nor knows him. You know him, because he abides with you, and he will be in you. (John 14:17)

Verse 11 Opposition of his own: The man went away and told the Jews that it was Jesus who had made him well. Therefore the Jews started persecuting Jesus, because he was doing such things on the sabbath. (John 5:15–17) The Jews then disputed among themselves, saying, "How can this man give us his flesh to eat?" (John 6:52) The Jews said to him, "Now we know that you have a demon. Abraham died, and so did the prophets; yet you say, 'Whoever keeps my word will never taste death.' (John 8:52) The Jews answered, "It is not for a good work that we are going to stone you, but for blasphemy, because you, though only a human being, are making yourself God." (John 10:33) The Jews answered him, "We have a law, and according to that law he ought to die because he has claimed to be the Son of God." (John 19:7)

Verse 12 Children of God: He did not say this on his own, but being high priest that year he prophesied that Jesus was about to die for the nation, and not for the nation only, but to gather into one the dispersed children of God. (John

11:51-52) While you have the light, believe in the light, so that you may become children of light." (John 12:36) Cf. John 21:5.

Verse 13 Born of God: Jesus answered him, "Very truly, I tell you, no one can see the kingdom of God without being born from above." Nicodemus said to him, "How can anyone be born after having grown old? Can one enter a second time into the mother's womb and be born?" Jesus answered, "Very truly, I tell you, no one can enter the kingdom of God without being born of water and Spirit. What is born of the flesh is flesh, and what is born of the Spirit is spirit. Do not be astonished that I said to you, 'You must be born from above.' The wind blows where it chooses, and you hear the sound of it, but you do not know where it comes from or where it goes. So it is with everyone who is born of the Spirit." (John 3:3-8) Cf. John 15:4-5)

Verse 14 Glory, grace, truth: Father, I desire that those also, whom you have given me, may be with me where I am, to see my glory, which you have given me because you loved me before the foundation of the world. (John 17:24) From his fullness we have all received, grace upon grace. The law indeed was given through Moses; grace and truth came through Jesus Christ. (John 1:16-17) But the hour is coming, and is now here, when the true worshipers will worship the Father in spirit and truth, for the Father seeks such as these to worship him. God is spirit, and those who worship him must worship in spirit and truth." (John 4:23-24) When the Spirit of truth comes, he will guide you into all the truth; for he will not speak on his own, but will speak whatever he hears, and he will declare to you the things that are to come. (John 16:13) Pilate asked him, "So you are a king?" Jesus answered, "You say that I am a king. For this I was born, and for this I came into the world, to testify to the truth. Everyone who belongs to the truth listens to my voice." Pilate asked him, "What is truth?" (John 18:37-38)

Dwell: note the Jewish festival of Booths (= *skēnopēgia*, matching *eskēnosen* "dwelt" in v.14) was near. (John 7:2)

Verse 15 He existed before me: This is he of whom I said, 'After me comes a man who ranks ahead of me because he was before me.' (John 1:30) Now a discussion about purification arose between John's disciples and a Jew. They came to John and said to him, "Rabbi, the one

who was with you across the Jordan, to whom you testified, here he is baptising, and all are going to him." John answered, "No one can receive anything except what has been given from heaven. You yourselves are my witnesses that I said, 'I am not the Messiah, but I have been sent ahead of him.' He who has the bride is the bridegroom. The friend of the bridegroom, who stands and hears him, rejoices greatly at the bridegroom's voice. For this reason my joy has been fulfilled. He must increase, but I must decrease." (John 3:25-30). Jesus said to them, "Very truly, I tell you, before Abraham was, I am." (John 8:58)

Verse 16 Fullness: I came that they may have life, and have it abundantly. (John 10:10) I have said these things to you so that my joy may be in you, and that your joy may be complete. (John 15:11) But now I am coming to you, and I speak these things in the world so that they may have my joy made complete in themselves. (John 17:13)

Verse 17 Moses: Do not think that I will accuse you before the Father; your accuser is Moses, on whom you have set your hope. If you believed Moses, you would believe me, for he wrote about me. (John 5:45-46) Then Jesus said to them, "Very truly, I tell you, it was not Moses who gave you the bread from heaven, but it is my Father who gives you the true bread from heaven. (John 6:32) Moses gave you circumcision (it is, of course, not from Moses, but from the patriarchs), and you circumcise a man on the sabbath. If a man receives circumcision on the sabbath in order that the law of Moses may not be broken, are you angry with me because I healed a man's whole body on the sabbath? (John 7:22-23) Then they reviled him, saying, "You are his disciple, but we are disciples of Moses. We know that God has spoken to Moses, but as for this man, we do not know where he comes from." (John 9:28-29)

Verse 18 Make known: Not that anyone has seen the Father except the one who is from God; he has seen the Father. (John 6:46) I do not call you servants any longer, because the servant does not know what the master is doing; but I have called you friends, because I have made known to you everything that I have heard from my Father. (John 15:15) "I have made your name known to those whom you gave me from the world. They were yours, and you gave them to me, and they have kept your word. (John 15:15; 17:6) I made your name known to them, and I will make it known, so that

the love with which you have loved me may be in them, and I in them." (John 17:26)

POINTERS FOR PRAYER

1. John opens his Gospel with a profound reflection on the meaning of creation, of life and of Jesus. Remember when you had a special awareness of the gift of life that filled you with gratitude to God for creation and the beauty and wonder of the world: 'All things came into being through him and without him not one thing came into being.'

2. We hear the gospel message frequently. Sometimes it goes in one ear and out the other. Then there are occasions when it made us feel more alive, times when it helped us see the way ahead, like a light that shines in the darkness. Recall when the gospel gave you hope in the midst of anxiety or sadness and helped you to see what action would be most life giving for you and for others

3. Bring to mind people who have had a prophetic voice in the world - speaking the truth for the world to hear, like as a witness to testify to the light. Some of these may have been public figures. Others were ordinary people who have helped you see the 'light' by the witness of their own lives and words.

4. "No one has ever seen God. It is the only Son of God, who is close to the Father's heart, who has made him known." Jesus came to us to teach us about God and put a human face on God for us. For the people of his day, and for us, that was a mission of getting us to think again about how we see God and to believe in a God who is a God of love. Recall how the life and ministry of Jesus have changed your picture of God.

PRAYER

God most high, your only Son embraced the weakness of our flesh to give us the power to become your children; your eternal Word chose to dwell among us, that we might live in your presence.

Grant us a spirit of wisdom to know how rich is the glory you have made our own, and how great the hope to which we are called in Jesus Christ, the Word made flesh who lives and reigns with you in the unity of the Holy Spirit in the splendour of eternal light God for ever and ever.

Blessed be our God and Father!

Eph 1:3 Blessed be the God and Father of our Lord Jesus Christ, who has blessed us in Christ with every spiritual blessing in the heavenly places, 4 just as he chose us in Christ before the foundation of the world to be holy and blameless before him in love. 5 He destined us for adoption as his children through Jesus Christ, according to the good pleasure of his will, 6 to the praise of his glorious grace that he freely bestowed on us in the Beloved.

Eph 1:15 I have heard of your faith in the Lord Jesus and your love toward all the saints, and for this reason 16 I do not cease to give thanks for you as I remember you in my prayers. 17 I pray that the God of our Lord Jesus Christ, the Father of glory, may give you a spirit of wisdom and revelation as you come to know him, 18 so that, with the eyes of your heart enlightened, you may know what is the hope to which he has called you, what are the riches of his glorious inheritance among the saints, 19 *and what is the immeasurable greatness of his power for us who believe, according to the working of his great power.*

INITIAL OBSERVATIONS

This reading offers us another opportunity within the Christmas season to reflect once more on what the birth of Jesus could mean for us today. While both parts of the reading do this, there is a special fervour in the second prayer. The air is invitational: come and see what the Lord has done...

KIND OF WRITING

In the genuine letters from Paul, the epistolary format has been adjusted to include a longer thanksgiving for the faith of the recipients. In 2 Corinthians this takes the form of a “blessing” prayer. In Ephesians, both styles are present.

vv. 3-14 Blessing prayer
vv. 15-23 Thanksgiving report

Our reading takes in excerpts from both. The entire passage should be read; it seems a pity that the lectionary needlessly omits v. 19. Sensibly, the Revised Common Lectionary offers vv. 3-14 as the reading. In contrast to the genuine letters, there is no implied account of what is happening in the community.

ORIGIN OF THE READING

It is not quite sure if this letter should be addressed to the Ephesians, because some important manuscripts lack the expression “in Ephesus.” It has also proved difficult to establish the context in community which occasioned the writing. (i) Is it to do with the famous and flourishing Artemis cult? (ii) It is to do with proto-gnostic mythologies? (iii) Or perhaps, some combination involving Jewish speculation on the heavenly journey? A clue is provided by the Dead Sea Scrolls, suggesting a Jew with a background in Jewish sectarianism. At the same time, the writing is very polished, so a Jew who enjoyed a good Hellenistic education (not unlike the apostle himself). Perhaps in a context of flourishing Judaism, the writer tries to bolster Christian identity. In any case, the vision is breath-taking, taking us well beyond the limits of the Roman empire to a global expansion of the Gospel.

RELATED PASSAGES

In our prayers for you we always thank God, the Father of our Lord Jesus Christ, for we have heard of your faith in Christ Jesus and of the love that you have for all the saints. (Colossians 1:3-4)

When I remember you in my prayers, I always thank my God because I hear of your love for all the saints and your faith toward the Lord Jesus. (Philemon 1:4-5)

BRIEF COMMENTARY

Verse 3 Praise is the foundational attitude of prayer in the Bible, often taking the form “blessed be God.” The expression “every spiritual blessing” is especially rich: in contrast to human givers, God’s gift is everything we need. It also places the Ephesians on the same level as the angels. The prayer will go on to describe Jesus in cosmic language; nevertheless, it begins with Jesus the Messiah.

Verse 4 Christian vocation itself is to be found in the pre-existence of Christ, in whom we were already chosen. The divine will is underlined in vv. 4-5, 9 and 11. The idea that all humanity is in view is also found in the Dead Seas Scrolls. “In love” will be echoed in the “beloved” of v. 6.

Verses 5-6 Here the writer takes up the Pauline theme of adoption (Romans 8:15-23; Galatians 4:4-7). In contrast with Qumran, there is no reference at all

to the predestination of the wicked. Predestination texts are also found in Paul: Rom 8:29-30 and 1 Corinthians 2:7. The pronouns are indicative: he and his. All is centred on God, a highly theocentric presentation of salvation. V. 6 tells us why all this took place: to the praise of his glorious grace.

Verses 15-16 The reputation of the recipients is not boasting or flattery but a means of evangelisation, leading naturally to thanksgiving. Cf. 1 Thessalonians 1:3-12 and 2 Corinthians 8:1-2.

Verse 17 The writer moves from thanksgiving report to intercession. God’s wisdom was already mentioned: In him we have redemption through his blood, the forgiveness of our trespasses, according to the riches of his grace that he lavished on us. With all wisdom and insight he has made known to us the mystery of his will, according to his good pleasure that he set forth in Christ, as a plan for the fullness of time, to gather up all things in him, things in heaven and things on earth. (Ephesians 1:7-10) The Spirit of wisdom probably ought to have a capital letter, pointing to a more than human wisdom.

Verse 18 The language here is very close to that of the Essenes: May He enlighten your mind with wisdom for living, be gracious to you with the knowledge of eternal things, and lift up His gracious countenance upon you for everlasting peace. (1Qs [= The Community Rule] 2:3-4) The eyes of your heart is unparalleled elsewhere but seems to suggest moral conduct. The content of that enlightenment is expanded in terms of Christian hope. Saints means simply fellow Christians, as opposed to angels.

POINTERS FOR PRAYER

1. How would my own prayer of blessing unfold? For what would I give thanks from the bottom of my heart?

2. The reputation of any community of faith is important—for the sake of the Gospel. Where does my community stand?

PRAYER

God of wisdom and light, send your Holy Spirit into our hearts that we may be your children in name and in fact and thereby draw others into the great adventure of faith, hope and love in you. Through Christ our Lord. Amen.

Make your dwelling in Jacob, and in Israel receive your inheritance

Sir 24:1 Wisdom praises herself,
and tells of her glory in the midst of her people.
2 In the assembly of the Most High she opens her mouth,
and in the presence of his hosts she tells of her glory:

8 “Then the Creator of all things gave me a command,
and my Creator chose the place for my tent.
He said, ‘Make your dwelling in Jacob,
and in Israel receive your inheritance.’
9 Before the ages, in the beginning, he created me,
and for all the ages I shall not cease to be.
10 In the holy tent I ministered before him,
and so I was established in Zion.
11 Thus in the beloved city he gave me a resting place,
and in Jerusalem was my domain.
12 I took root in an honoured people,
in the portion of the Lord, his heritage.

INITIAL OBSERVATIONS

Sirach 24 is one of the great texts for the personification of Lady Wisdom. Passages like this were certainly in the mind of the evangelist when he was writing the Prologue (1:1-18) of the Fourth Gospel. It is very helpful to read such passage and reflect on them.

KIND OF WRITING

The poem is laid out in three stanzas, with an introduction and a series of conclusions.

- vv. 1-2 Introduction
- vv. 3-7 (I) Pre-existent wisdom
- vv. 8-12 (II) Wisdom dwells in Jerusalem
- vv.13-17 (III) Horticultural metaphors
- vv. 18-22 Viticulture and its fruits
- vv. 23-29 Prose reflection
- vv. 30-34 The poet’s authority
- Vv. 23-34 help us grasp the writer’s goal.

Prose reflection

All this is the book of the covenant of the Most High God, the law that Moses commanded us as an inheritance for the congregations of Jacob. It overflows, like the Pishon, with wisdom, and like the Tigris at the time of the first fruits. It runs over, like the Euphrates, with understanding, and like the Jordan at harvest time. It pours forth instruction like the Nile, like the Gihon at the time of vintage. The first man did not know wisdom fully, nor will the last one fathom her. For her thoughts are more abundant than the sea, and her counsel deeper than the great abyss. (Sirach 24:23–29)

The poet’s authority

As for me, I was like a canal from a river, like a water channel into a garden. I said, “I will water my garden and drench my flower-beds.” And lo, my canal became a river, and my river a sea. I will again make instruction shine forth like the dawn, and I will make it clear from far away. I will again pour out teaching like prophecy, and leave it to all future generations. Observe that I have not laboured for myself alone, but for all who seek wisdom. (Sirach 24:30–34) Old Testament background

For the sake of brevity, only the references are given: Isa 58:8, 10; 59:9; 60:1, 3, 19–20 (all from Third Isaiah).

ORIGIN OF THE READING

Sirach is a late Wisdom book, emphasising “God in everything.” It was written in Hebrew—only partially extant—but it survives in its integrity in Greek.

RELATED PASSAGES

The passage seems to draw upon Proverbs 8:22-31, Baruch 3:36-41, Wisdom 7:21-8:1 and our passage here, Sirach 24:8-12. Each of these portrays a different “presence” of Wisdom: in creation, in the Torah, in the Temple and in King Solomon. The richness helps us to understand the Prologue better.

BRIEF COMMENTARY

Every religion has to “negotiate” the beyond and the nearness of God, his transcendence and his immanence in technical vocabulary. Judaism achieved this by speaking of Wisdom, from the beyond in God, but present in all that exists.

Verse 1 Praising yourself might seem strange but such poems are found widely (“aretologies”). “Her people” will eventually be Israel and not just humanity.

Verse 2 Initially, we are in the heavenly court, where Wisdom exists already.

Verse 8 The reading was chosen in part because of the word tent (*skēnē*), also found in John 1:14 above. The language of dwelling etc. is picked up in the Prologue very well. Cf. Prov 8:22. For a contrasting understanding: Wisdom could not find a place in which she could dwell; but a place was found (for her) in the heavens. Then Wisdom went out to dwell with the children of the people, but she found no dwelling place. (So) Wisdom returned to her place and she settled permanently among the angels. (1 Enoch 42:1–2)

Verse 9 In other writings, Wisdom seems to pre-exist before creation and even be the very mind of God. In any case, there is something of the divine about her.

Verse 10 God’s presence is recognised in the Temple in Jerusalem (a special interest of Sirach).

Verse 11 Concretely, Wisdom—the *shekinah* in the *skēnē*—is found in the Holy City, in the Holy of Holies.

Verse 12 Thus Wisdom is present not only in the Temple but also in the Torah. Cf. All this is the book of the covenant of the Most High God, the law that Moses commanded us as an inheritance for the congregations of Jacob. (Sirach 24:23)

POINTERS FOR PRAYER

1. God in all that is: recall your own awareness of how near the Lord is to us all—and give thanks.

2. Recall your own deep moments when the presence of God was somehow “apparent” to you in his living word.

PRAYER

God, closer to us than we are to ourselves and yet always greater than our hearts. Help us to remain in your presence: through your Wisdom in all that is and through Jesus, our wisdom, righteousness, sanctification and redemption. Through the same Christ our Lord. Amen.

THE LITURGY

Sirach 24:1-2, 8-12; Psalm 147; Ephesians 1:3-6, 15-18; John 1:1-18

READINGS 1 AND 3

The reading from Sirach and the Prologue of John inhabit the same spiritual and poetic world, the world of biblical wisdom speculation. Both are attempts to talk of the “beyond” of God (his transcendence) and the “nearness” of God (his immanence).

THE RESPONSORIAL PSALM

While the psalm is not a wisdom psalm, nevertheless it is appropriate as a response on account of the words, “He makes his word known to Jacob, to Israel his laws and decrees.”

FIRST READING

Sirach 24:1-2, 8-12

Our first reading is both mystical and poetic. It is poetry — elevated speech. It is mystical because it talks of God present in creation.

SECOND READING

Ephesians 1:3-6, 15-18

While the Gospel will reflect again on the Word made flesh, the reading from Ephesians takes this for granted and goes on to ask: if that is so, then who are we? An inspirational prayer closes the reading.

GOSPEL

John 1:1-18

You may wonder how it is we are hearing this reading again! After the fuss and rush of Christmas, we have a second opportunity to listen and take to heart this wonderful passage.

Monday 5 January

St Charles of St Andrew, priest

1 John 3:11-21

Today’s reading illustrates the richness of the First Letter. It is highly realistic — *the world hates you*. At the same time, it is very inspiring — *our love is not to be just words or mere talk, but something real and active*.

John 1:43-51

Our Gospel today contains a large number of descriptions of Jesus. If we were to describe what Jesus means to us, what

would we say today? (The mention of the fig tree can puzzle. One explanation goes like this. In rabbinic tradition, it had been concluded that the tree of knowledge of good and evil was a fig tree, given that the fig is the first species mentioned. It became a symbol of the Torah, the later “tree” of knowledge, guidance on the part of goodness. Thus, seeing Philip under

Tuesday 6 January

The Epiphany of the Lord

(See special notes for the feast.)

Wednesday 7 January

1 John 3:22-4:6

Something of the difficult situation of the Johannine community comes to expression here. Clearly, there has been a split over doctrine and there is great anxiety that the true believers might be “contaminated” by false teaching.

Matthew 4:12-17, 23-25

Just before the feast of the Baptism, we are presented with the teaching of John the Baptist. Jesus was a follower of John and accepted his baptism. He also took up the teaching of John about the coming kingdom and about conversion / repentance.

Thursday 8 January

1 John 4:7-10

When we speak of the love of God, it could mean two things. The foundational gift is God’s love for us first of all and in the strength of that love we are able to love in turn.

Mark 6:34-44

All the miracles are to be read at two levels. There is the level of a story in the life of Jesus. Then, there is the level of the story in my life today. Already, we hear echoes of the Eucharist in the telling: Jesus said the blessing; then he broke the loaves and handed them to his disciples. We are those disciples today.

Friday 9 January

1 John 4:11-18

Continuing from yesterday, how could we best respond to God’s astonishing love of us? 1 John explores in a very

helpful way the many dimensions of the love affair between God and us.

Mark 6:45-52

One more, the miracle story is to be read at two levels. This is true especially of the walking on them water. When the later community felt the absence of Jesus, this story served to remind them: ‘Courage! It is I! Do not be afraid.’ We are the same today: we too need this word of presence and encouragement.

Saturday 10 January

1 John 5:5-13

1 John 4:19-5:4

How would you know your love of God was genuine? Here’s a practical test. The letter of John — highly spiritual — is also highly practical: *man who does not love the brother that he can see cannot love God, whom he has never seen*.

Luke 4:14-22

Today we hear Luke’s telling of Jesus’ visit to his hometown and synagogue. Again, Luke “locates” the proclamation of Jesus, using another mighty citation from Isaiah. There can be no separation of the Gospel and the social teaching Jesus — these are one and the same.

