

The Good Word

Published by St. Seraphim of Sarov and St. John of Kronstadt Orthodox Church, La Mesa, CA
with the Blessing of Bishop Auxentios of Etna and Portland



NATIVITY: SYMBOLS OF OUR JOY¹

By Protopresbyter James Thornton



Protopresbyter James Thornton serves St. Seraphim of Sarov & St. John of Kronstadt Orthodox Church in La Mesa, California. He holds the Diploma and Licentiate in Orthodox Theological Studies from the Center for Traditionalist Orthodox Studies and a doctoral degree in Advanced Pastoral Studies from the San Francisco Theological Seminary. He is a lecturer in the history of the Œcumenical Synods, Church history, and dogmatic theology for the Saint Photios Orthodox Theological Seminary, Etna, CA. Father James is the author of several books including the upcoming *MADE PERFECT IN FAITH: A THIRD VOLUME*, (CTOS, summer 2017).

There exists a thread of peculiarly somber colors that winds its way through that vast tapestry which is the history of Christian belief. Students of that history can trace that thread as far back as the fourth century, where it appeared as a sectarian movement called Manichaeism (after its founder Mani or Manichæus).

This religious view, a type of Gnosticism which opposed a world of pure good, which it identified with light, the soul, and spirituality, against a world of evil,

which it identified with darkness, the human body, and all material things. In theological texts this genre of religious thought is called “dualism,” since it postulates a world of spirit, identified with God, versus a world of matter, identified with Satan.

In contrast to dualism, Christianity holds that the spiritual and the material were both created by God. The first chapter of the Book of Genesis tells us that “*God created the heaven and the earth*” and all of the things on the earth, all of the plants, animals, fish, birds, and finally Man himself. The Scripture says that God blessed all of these things and that chapter concludes by declaring that “*God saw every thing that He had made, and, behold, it was very good.*” It is clear that matter, created, blessed, and affirmed as good by God, is not therefore evil.

We may add to that by remembering that in the New Testament Jesus Christ took flesh — that is, He took humble matter — lived life in our material world and by that life among the created, material things of this planet, won redemption for mankind.

Moreover, Christianity sees man as neither wholly matter nor wholly spirit but as a fusion of the material and the spiritual. Later, of course, after the creation, evil entered the world, according to Genesis, and we may summarize the Biblical teaching of that event by saying that evil consists not in matter itself, but rather in the misuse or abuse of the good things that God has created.

Manichæism died out sometime around the fifth century, but the dualistic inclination has surfaced from time to time, mostly for comparatively brief periods, within what we may call the broad mainstream of Christianity.

We see an example of that tendency in mid-seventeenth-century England, during the Cromwellian dictatorship, when Christmas was outlawed. Cromwell held that Christmas and all its customs were “heathenish,” that is pagan, either in origin or in flavor, and therefore, despite the fact that they had been part of Christianity for well over a thousand years, they were banned.

At the root of this notion there seemed to lurk a latent Manichaeism, for one of the things that vexed Cromwell was the joyousness and celebratory climate

1. Sermon delivered at St. Seraphim of Sarov & St. John of Kronstadt Orthodox Church, La Mesa, CA, Nativity, Dec 25/Jan 7, 2016

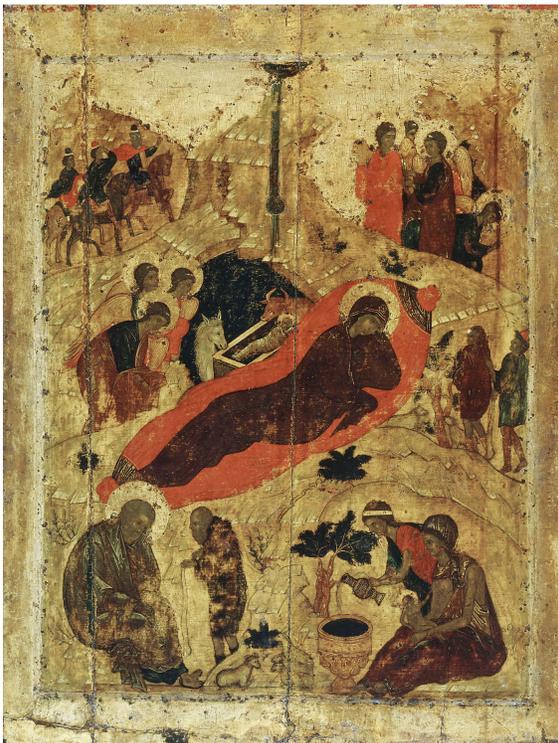


fostered by Christmas, the singing, the decorating, the unrestrained happiness, and the family feast. By Cromwell's decree, all shops and businesses were required to stay open, the singing of carols was forbidden, churches were locked up on that day, and any celebrations honoring the Birth of Christ were severely punished. Even private commemorations of the great day, if they came to the attention of the authorities, could mean imprisonment.

It has been said that prior to that period Christmas had sometimes been celebrated (as it sometimes is today) in a spirit of excess and with an immoderacy of drinking and feasting, and that Cromwell's injunction was in part a reaction to that excess.

But Cromwell, it seems, exchanged one form of excess for another, seeking to obliterate the occasion from public memory, rather than in taking steps to discourage overindulgence.

Happily, Christianity has, for the most part, avoided these pitfalls. Cromwell believed that the evil came from the material things themselves, from the things that by tradition marked the Christmas season. He failed to recognize that these things, used correctly and in moderation, were ways whereby abstractions, such as historical events of long ago or religious teachings, could be made more real and alive to ordinary believers not able to conceptualize the transcendent without some concrete assistance.



ICON: ANTON RUBLEV'S *NATIVITY OF CHRIST*, 1405.

Our beautiful Icons perform the same function. It is recognized that the things of this material world, properly used, are good, are indeed gifts from God, and that human beings have need of tangible expressions of intangible truths. In the case of Christmas, these tangible expressions testify, among other things, to the fact that Christianity is not a dour, grim religion like Manichaeism, but is a religion of joy.

How does one convey abstract notions such as the Incarnation, Nativity, Resurrection, and so forth, and the great joy that these supreme events in all of history have kindled in the hearts of Christian believers? One of the ways is that we celebrate, throughout the year, various special days that commemorate the story of Jesus Christ's life.

One of the chief among these is the remembrance of His Nativity on December 25th, the old-style of which is January 7th. Though Christianity was granted its freedom under Constantine in AD 312, it grew only gradually in the consciousness of the bulk of the ordinary people of the Empire. Among some people the new religion was accepted fully, among others only superficially, and in yet other cases it was not accepted at all.

A major problem for the church was that pagan practices, most of them going back centuries, were woven tightly into the very patterns of daily life. Now Christianity did not aim at an outward revolution, it did not seek to overthrow the whole of the old culture, civilization, economic system, government, and way of life, and replace it with something totally new.

Rather it sought to keep the best from the old traditions, to transform these things, to Christianize or "baptize" them, and in that way make these customs the bearers of something edifying and spiritually healthy by linking them to some component of Christian truth.

In that way the fabric of life and of imperial civilization was not torn or mutilated since, as we have noted, Christians wished to accomplish their goals by means of a gradual, inner revolution of the hearts of men and women.

The second half of December, in the years before the rise of Christianity, was a time of several pagan festival days. Saturnalia, dedicated to the god Saturn, began on December 17th and lasted until the 23rd. December 25th, considered by some early Christians as Christ's actual birthday, which it may have been, was also considered by the pagans the birthday of the Unconquered Sun (*Sol Invictus*), and in the north of Europe people celebrated the winter solstice with the Festival of Yule, which began on December 21st.



Such occasions were deeply ingrained in the lives of the people and were stubbornly retained by the common folk long after Christianity became a major influence. It was decided, therefore, to absorb and transform this season of the year by Christianizing it. The idea of celebration on December 25th was retained, but the purpose for celebration was changed. In that way, holidays took on a Christian meaning and were used to impart certain Christian truths. The familiar and fundamental order of life was not altered, but the emphasis and the meaning definitely were.

The Orthodox Troparion for the Feast of the Nativity of Christ is a direct historical link to this period of the transformation of those feast days from pagan to Christian:

“Thy Nativity, O Christ our God, hast manifested to the world the light of knowledge. For by it, those who worshipped the stars didst learn from a star to worship Thee, the Sun of Righteousness, and to know Thee, the Dayspring from on high. O Lord, glory to Thee!”

This hymn was written to drive home the point that while on this day the pagans had worshipped the sun and the stars, Christians now worshipped the “Sun—S—U—N—of Righteousness” (a phrase from the Book of Malachi) and the “Dayspring [in some texts “Dawn”] from on high” (a quotation from the Gospel of St. Luke). Indeed, Christians sought to capture worthy aspects of the old cultures, but at the same time they strove to teach the new beliefs and new obligations that went with the new interpretations.

And so, while it is true that certain things that we associate with Christmas are actually older than Christianity, let us remember that these things are but vessels, the contents of which have been utterly transformed. Let us consider some examples.

Evergreens are a fine example of this transformation. Long before Christianity they were used as winter decorations, and so they are one of the oldest vestiges of pre-Christian customs.

Pagans decorated their dwellings with pine branches and holly in the winter because they imagined that these plants possessed some form of magical powers, with their ability to retain green leaves even in the harshest northern snow and cold.

Some even brought forth their fruit at this time of year, which amazed the pagans even more. St. Gregory the Dialogist, a man honored by the Church for both his sanctity and outstanding pastoral wisdom, encouraged his clergy in mission lands to adopt, where possible,

various local customs and to Christianize and reinterpret them, so long as they did not violate Christian dogmatic or moral teachings.

Holly, for instance, made beautiful garlands for the decoration of homes and public buildings in the winter. And so the red holly berries came to symbolize the blood of Christ, and the holly leaves, with their sharp points, the crown of thorns. All evergreens became symbols of eternal life.

Insofar as outward decorative symbols are concerned, none are so essential to modern Christmas as the Christmas tree. In fact, however, its use among the English-speaking people of the world is of recent origin. The Christmas tree originally appears as part of that pagan love of the mystery of evergreens.

As a Christian symbol, however, it comes from Germany. In the fourteenth century, it was the custom for troubadours to parade through the streets carrying huge, decorated pine branches that advertised special religious plays that were performed on the steps of the local church buildings.

This type of decorated branch eventually acquired the name *Christbaum*, literally “Christ-tree,” later transmuted into the English “Christmas tree.” The Christmas tree was brought to England by George I, a German prince of the House of Hanover who could not even speak the language of his new kingdom and who insisted on retaining all of his German ways in his private household. Few of his subjects were even aware of this German Christmas custom and, therefore, the tree failed to spread beyond the King’s quarters.

The Christmas tree finally achieved popularity in nineteenth-century England under Queen Victoria. Prince Albert, the Queen’s husband and a German prince, set up a decorated tree in the royal palace at Christmas.

The Queen allowed a picture of herself to appear in *The Illustrated London News* in which she and all her family were arrayed around a giant Christmas tree,



DETAIL OF THE ROYAL FAMILY’S CHRISTMAS TREE



alight with tiny candles and laden with gorgeous decorations.

Almost immediately, Christmas trees caught on with the public and within two decades became fixed parts of the British holiday. At roughly the same time, that is early in the nineteenth century, German immigrants brought the custom to America, and by mid-century the decorated tree had become entrenched here as well. The use of candles (nowadays electric lights) on the tree was thought by some to symbolize Christ as the Light of the World.

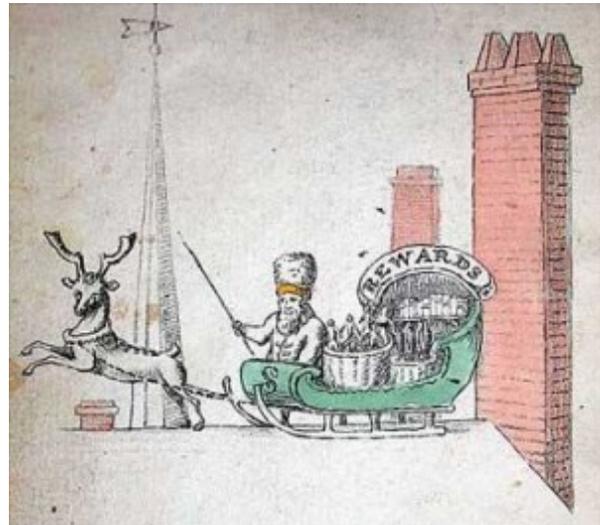
Christmas gift-giving too has a intriguing history. The pagan Romans exchanged symbolic gifts on New Years day. Later, after Christianity rose to a dominant position in Europe, it became the custom in certain countries to give gifts on Theophany, in remembrance of the gold, frankincense, and myrrh brought as gifts to Christ by the Magi.



ILLUMINATED GREETING CARD: *ADORATION OF THE MAGI*, FROM ST. GREGORY OF SINAI MONASTERY, GOC-K

In other countries, for instance Christian Greece, the practice until fairly recently was to give gifts on December 6th, St. Nicholas Day. It is revealing that American author Washington Irving, in his *History of New York*,² tells the story of St. Nicholas flying in a wagon over the Hudson Valley and dropping gifts for good children down chimneys on St. Nicholas Day, not on Christmas. This book was published in 1809, and it is therefore apparent from this story that it was not until

2. Washington Irving published his story under the pseudonym of Diedrich Knickerbocker, in Book II: "Treating of the New Settlement of the Province of Nieuw Nederlands," in *Diedrich Knickerbocker's History of New York from the Beginning of the World Until the End of the Dutch Dynasty*, London, Great Britain, 1809. He describes St. Nicholas as an elfin Dutch burgher, not a saint, thus beginning the emergence of a distinctive American figure.



ST. NICHOLAS FROM WASHINGTON IRVING'S 1809 EDITION OF *DIEDRICH KNICKERBOCKER'S HISTORY OF NEW YORK FROM THE BEGINNING OF THE WORLD UNTIL THE END OF THE DUTCH DYNASTY*

well into the nineteenth century that the giving of gifts on Christmas Day became prevalent. When Christmas gift-giving did gain in popularity it assumed very modest proportions at first since the gifts exchanged were simple and inexpensive. Not until the general increase in prosperity in the twentieth century did the relative extravagance, which is characteristic of today's gift-giving, establish itself.

Man is a creature with senses—sight, taste, hearing, smell, touch—and even in his most religious moments, when he is most prayerful and pious, he is nonetheless not a mere disembodied specter. The senses are among the things that make us human, they are gifts from God, and when combined with our human intelligence these faculties can be the means by which we are uplifted to the contemplation of spiritual realities.

There are many examples of this; the majesty of an old church building, the grandeur of its soaring arches or its great dome, the splendor of the art within, the resonant sounds of a choir, the fragrance of burning candles and incense, all of these things appeal to human senses, to human feelings, and tend to move the heart and elevate the mind towards higher things. So it is too with all of the wonderful traditions of Christmas.

There is no question that good things can be abused and that even Christmas can be the occasion for misuse of the gifts of God. At worst, Christmas can be a time of excesses. This was certainly the tenor of the *Sol Invictus* celebrations in pagan Rome where conduct was often a scandal to decent people.



Yet one must take care not to fall into Manichaeism where the human body is rejected, where the material world is looked upon as something dark and evil, and where joy itself is shunned. Christianity, in taking over pre-Christian festivals and transforming them, has always striven to transform the way these days were celebrated. It desired to make them both happy and holy, without the abuses typical of the pagans.

Therefore, it does not matter in the least that certain of these traditions can be traced to pagan times, any more than it matters that the names we use for the months of the year and days of the week are entirely pagan in origin. If sectarians should accost you with these accusations, you may respond that the things to which they refer have become transfigured, and that they are made eternally new.

May that eternal newness fill your hearts! May the joy of Christmas, the spirit of the Feast of the Nativity of our Lord and Savior, be with of each of you this day, and throughout the coming year!



THE WISDOM OF SOLOMON

By Dr. Seraphim Steger

The *Wisdom of Solomon*, one of the Biblical books in the *Septuagint* (LXX) Old Testament, was not translated from the Hebrew, but was composed entirely in Greek in the early 1st to 2nd century BC. The writer employed excellent Greek and made use of Hellenistic rhetorical as well as Hebraic styles.³ The book is part of the canon of Scripture for the Orthodox and the Roman Catholics but absent from the canon of the Jews and Protestants. Fr. James Thornton writes:

“In addition, the Synod of Jerusalem [AD 1672] is remembered for its defense of the ancient Orthodox Canon of Holy Scripture, which includes a number of Old Testamental books that detractors have

foolishly and ignorantly, or rather maliciously, called “Apocrypha”: The Wisdom of Solomon, Judith, Tobit,

3. Michael A. Knibb, “Wisdom of Salomon, To the Reader,” In *A New English Translation of the Septuagint (NETS)*, Oxford University Press, New York, NY, 2007, p. 697. [Note: Some authors postulate a date as late as between the reigns of the Roman Emperors Augustus and Caligula, even as late as AD 41. Others, on the basis of the Greek language used, have found a list of 35 terms which were not used before the Augustine era of Rome (27 BC - AD 14).]

the History of the Dragon [Bel and the Dragon], the History of Susanna, [the three (or four) books of] the Maccabees, and the Wisdom of Sirach.⁴

These words were particularly intended for those of a Protestant mind-set, as the Septuagint scholars Karen H. Jobs and Moisés Silva make clear:

Recognizing the esteem given these books by ancient Jews and Christians, the Roman Catholic and Eastern Orthodox churches consider them to be (deutero)canonical. The Protestant churches, however, refer to them as apocryphal; while they may be helpful and interesting reading, they play no authoritative role in the spiritual life of the church. Because the apocryphal books are not normally bound in the Protestant Bible, most Protestant Christians have, unfortunately, never heard of them, much less read them.⁵

Jobs and Silva further explain the significance of the difference between the terms “apocryphal” and “deuterocanonical”:

The term *apocryphal* means “hidden,” that is, unrecognized. Roman Catholics reserve this adjective for a large number of additional Jewish books otherwise known as *pseudepigraphic*.⁶

The term *deuterocanonical* reflects the fact that the Roman Catholic Church officially declared such books as canonical on a “second” occasion, that is, in the sixteenth century after a period of debate [at the fourth session of the Counter-Reformation Council of Trent (1545–1563)].⁷

In its own way, then, the Synod of Jerusalem, not unlike the Council of Trent, bestowed “deuterocanonical” status on these books (which are more typically referred to by Orthodox as *ἀναγιγνωσκόμενα*, “things that are read,” a term that implies their acceptability for ecclesiastical use) by stating explicitly what was already the long-standing unwritten tradition of the Orthodox Church regarding them.⁸

The oldest known Greek texts of the *Wisdom of Solomon* are found in the *Codex Sinaiticus*, *Codex Vaticanus* (both dating from the 4th century AD), and the *Codex Alexandrinus* (dating from the 5th century

4. “The Confession of Dositheus, or the Eighteen Decrees of the Synod of Jerusalem,” in *The Greek and Latin Creeds, With Translations*, Vol. ii of *The Creeds of Christendom, With a History and Critical Notes*, 6th ed., ed. Philip Schaff, rev. Davis S. Schaff, (Grand Rapids, MI: Baker Books, 1998), p. 435.

5. Karen H. Jobs and Moisés Silva, *Invitation to the Septuagint* (Grand Rapids, MI: Baker Academic, 2000), p. 85.

6. *Ibid.*, n. 31.

7. *Ibid.*, p. 81, n. 26.

8. Fr. James Thornton, *The Eumenical Synods of the Orthodox Church: A Concise History*, Center for Traditionalist Orthodox Studies, Etna, CA, 2007, pp. 144-5.



AD). An Old Latin version, now lost, reflected an ancient translation of the book made in northern Africa as early as the 2nd century A.D.^{9,10} Although the Dead Sea Scrolls contain the *Wisdom of Ben Sirah*, *Tobit*, and the *Epistle of Jeremiah* from the *Septuagint*, they do not contain any copies or fragments from the *Wisdom of Solomon*. The book was clearly known to Clement of Rome († c. AD 99), Tatian (c.120-c.180), Irenaeus (130-202), Tertullian (c.155-c.240), Clement of Alexandria (c.180-c.215), and Hippolytus. (170-235).¹¹

The oldest known listing of New Testament books is found in the Muratorian Fragment -- composed as early as AD 170. Although it does not provide a listing of Old Testament books, surprisingly, it mentions the *Wisdom of Solomon*. The fragment is preserved in a



The Muratorian Fragment
Lines 32-85

7th century Latin codex which was discovered in the Ambrosian Library in Milan by Fr. Ludovico Antioni Muratori (1672-1750) -- the most famous Italian historian of his day.¹² In the fragment's listing the *Wisdom of Solomon* appears sandwiched between the *Epistles* and the *Apocalypse*. In other words, the composer of the Muratorian Fragment placed the *Wisdom of Solomon* in the *New Testament*. Why would he do so? Roger Beckwith speculates that the writer knew that the book was not in the Jewish Bible, i.e., that it had not been accepted into the Jewish canon of Scriptures because it was written in Greek and not Hebrew. Nevertheless, he wanted to treat *Wisdom* as

9. Andrew T. Glicksman, *Wisdom of Solomon 10: A Jewish Hellenistic Reinterpretation of Early Israelite History Through Sapiential Lenses*, Walter de Gruyter GmbH & Co, DG, Berlin/Boston, 2011, p. 33.

10. Knibb, p. 697.

11. <http://www.internationalstandardbible.com/W/wisdom-of-solomon-the.html>

12. https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Muratorian_fragment

canonical, so he placed it in the listing of New Testament books, between the *Epistles of John* and the *Book of Revelation*.¹³ The English translation of this fragment (by Bruce M. Metzger) starting on line (68) reads: “Moreover, the epistle of Jude and two of the above-mentioned (or, bearing the name of) John are counted (or, used) in the catholic [Church]; and [the book of] *Wisdom*, (70) written by the friends of Solomon in his honour. (71) We receive only the apocalypses of John and Peter, (72) though some of us are not willing that the latter be read in church.”¹⁴



PAGE FROM THE *WISDOM OF SOLOMON*: ILLUMINATOR: MASTER OF THE BIBLE JEAN DE SY, FROM THE BRITISH LIBRARY'S ILLUMINATED ROYAL MANUSCRIPT 17E, VII, VOL. 2, DATE OF ORIGIN AD 1387, PLACE OF ORIGIN PARIS REGION, MATERIAL PARCHMENT, GUYART DES MOULINS: *LA BIBLE HISTORIALE COMPLÉTÉE (PSALMS-REVELATION)*.

PROPHECY ON OUR LORD JESUS CHRIST FOUND IN WISDOM OF SOLOMON 2:10-24:

13. Roger Beckwith, *The Old Testament Canon of the New Testament Church and Its Background in Early Judaism*, William B. Eerdmans Publishing Company, Grand Rapids, MI, 1985, pp.390-391.

14. <http://www.earlychristianwritings.com/text/muratorian-metzger.html>





In the Liturgical services of the Orthodox Church passages from the *Wisdom of Solomon* [especially chapters 3-9 and 16] are regularly encountered among the Readings from the *Old Testament* during Great Vespers--in the *Menaion* [and the *Prophetologion*¹⁵ (Slovonic: *Паремийник Paremijnik*)]. However, Chapter 2 is not among those passages read. Yet, it contains the most profound prophecies of our LORD Jesus Christ's ministry here on earth and of His interactions with the Sadducees, Pharisees, and Scribes. His life is portrayed as they saw Him, as they thought about Him, and as they experienced Him. Their portrait of Christ is as clearly etched here in their musings in *Wisdom* as He is portrayed in the *New Testament* by the four Gospel writers. And we need to remember, these passages in the *Wisdom of Solomon* were prophetic! They were written down by a Greek speaking Jew as early as 200 years before Christ was incarnate and walked among us:

*Wisdom of Solomon (Lxx) 2:10-24, Let us oppress the poor righteous man, let us not spare the widow, nor reverence the ancient gray hairs of the aged. 11 Let our strength be the law of justice: for that which is feeble is found to be nothing [of] worth. 12 Therefore let us lie in wait for the righteous; because He is not for our turn, and He is clean contrary to our doings: He upbraideth us with our offending the law, and objecteth to our infamy the transgressions of our education. 13 He professeth to have the knowledge of God: and He calleth Himself the child of the Lord. 14 He was made to reprove our thoughts. 15 He is grievous unto us even to behold: for His life is not like other men's, His ways are of another fashion. 16 We are esteemed of Him as counterfeits: He abstaineth from our ways as from filthiness: He pronounceth the end of the just to be blessed, and maketh His boast that **God is His father**. 17 Let us see if His words be true: and let us prove what shall happen in the end of Him. 18 For if the just man be the **Son of God**, He will help Him, and deliver Him from the hand of His enemies. 19 Let us examine Him with despitefulness and torture, that we may know His meekness, and prove His patience. 20 Let us condemn Him with a shameful death: for by His own saying He shall be respected.*

21 Such things they did imagine, and were deceived: for their own wickedness hath blinded them. 22 As for the mysteries of God, they knew them not: neither hoped they for the wages of righteousness, nor discerned a reward for blameless souls. 23 For God

*created man to be immortal, and made him to be an image of His own eternity. 24 Nevertheless through envy of the devil came death into the world: and they that do hold of his side do find it.*¹⁶

Here in the *Wisdom of Solomon* we witness the inner reasonings of Christ's adversaries, their spiritual darkness, their conniving, their mocking, their hatred of Christ, and their love of their own wicked ways. Why did they hate Him? Let me count the reasons!

1. He was clean, pure of heart, One Who loves His neighbor, i.e., quite unlike the conspirators whose doings were harmful to their fellow Israelites.

2. They hated Christ because He pointed out how they broke the Law of Moses, upbraiding them for it, and reminding them of how they were transgressing their Torah instruction both in thought and in deed.

3. He identified Himself as a Child of God--indeed, the Son of God. He professed to have knowledge of God [the Father] and boasted that God was His Father. They were jealous and contemptuous of Him that He would make such a claim.

4. They believed that He was there to reprove their thoughts, that His purpose was to reveal their duplicity.

5. His manner of life was totally distinct from theirs. He was meek, patient, humble. He was holy and called them to be holy as well. But they were not holy. Rather, He considered their ways filthy and counterfeit--a far cry from how the children of Abraham instructed in the Mosaic Law should behave. Thus, He was a constant reminder to them of their own hidden inner wickedness and sinful ways of life.

6. His knowledge of the blessed end of the righteous rubbed their godless human hearts the wrong way and pricked their consciences, exposing their lives as materialistic and without purpose. They neither hoped for nor sought a blameless and eternal life. They lacked any true spiritual appreciation of the terrible final judgment and their fate in the afterlife. Rather, they disregarded both as being fanciful tales, and, thus, they were of no practical value to them.

So what was the strategy of these Jews to deal with this troublesome upstart? They desired to rid themselves of Him through torturing Him and by having Him condemned to death--but not just any death, rather a shameful death! Then, if He were truly God's Son, they mockingly reasoned, that only then

16. *Wisdom of Solomon* 2:10-24, Lxx. Note: The translators of the KJV of the Bible also translated the deuterocanonical books. Their translation of this passage into English was used verbatim by Brenton and Asser but not the *NETS* translators. The earlier *Lxx* translator, Charles Thompson, did not translate the deuterocanonical books.

15. <http://almoutran.com/pdf/PROPHETOLOGION-Full.pdf>





THE GOOD WORD

c/o St. Seraphim of Sarov & St. John of Kronstadt Orthodox Church
6063 Lake Murray Blvd.
La Mesa, CA 91942-2506,
U.S.A.

would God help Him and deliver Him from His enemies. But as the writer of the *Wisdom of Solomon* continues, these imaginings were indeed delusions which deceived them, darkening their their reasoning--blinding them to their own wickedness.

Although Patristic commentary on chapter 2 of the *Wisdom of Solomon* is rather scant, there are several affirmations of this interpretation. In his Treatise II “Three Books of Testimonies Against the Jews” St. Cyprian (c. AD 210 - 258 AD), the great Latin speaking Bishop of Carthage martyred by beheading during the persecutions under Emperor Valerian I, quoted most of our passage above as proof “that He was the Righteous One Whom the Jews should put to death.”¹⁷ St. Hilary (c. AD 310 - c. 367), Bishop of Poitiers¹⁸ and St. Cyril (c. AD 376 - c. 444), Bishop of Alexandria¹⁹ similarly affirm this interpretation as being of Christ.

We will end with the comments of Lactantius (c.AD 250-c.325), a Christian writer and advisor to St. Constantine the Great, who in his *Divine Institutes*,

provides the clearest and most articulate commentary of the prophetic nature of these verses:

...the rulers and priests of the Jews, excited with anger because they were rebuked by Him as sinners, and perverted by envy, because, while the multitude flocked to Him, they saw themselves despised and deserted, and (that which was the crowning point of their guilt) blinded by folly and error, and unmindful of the instructors sent from heaven, and of the prophets, they caballed against Him and conceived the impious design of putting Him to death; and torturing Him: of which the prophets had long before written.

“For both David, in the beginning of his Psalms, foreseeing in spirit what a crime they were about to commit, says, *Blessed is the man who hath not walked in the way of the ungodly*; and Solomon in the book of *Wisdom* used these words: ... --[Lactantius then proceeds to quote *Wisdom* 2: 12-22a verbatim as prophetic proof!²⁰]

17. St. Cyprian, Treatise XII “Three Books of Testimonies Against the Jews”, Bk II, §14 [Title of this Section], in *ANF* Vol. 5.

18. St. Hilary of Poitiers, *Homilies on the Psalms*, 41:12.

19. St. Cyril of Alexandria, *Commentary on the Gospel of John*, 11.12.

20. Lactantius, *Divine Institutes*, Bk IV. Chapter 16, *Ante-Nicene Fathers*, Vol. 7, Hendrickson, Publishers, Peabody, MA, 1994, p. 117.