

Sermon Draft for January 4, 2026

Text: 1 Kings 3:4–15

Sermon: “An Understanding Mind”

Because there are only twelve days of Christmas, the Second Sunday after Christmas is not always celebrated, and thus is sometimes seen as unimportant or a filler. However, the Second Sunday after Christmas gives us the golden opportunity to consider the two natures of Christ in light of his active righteousness.

Hence, we see that Jesus’ ***“parents went to Jerusalem every year at the Feast of the Passover . . . according to custom”*** (Luke 2:41).

Jesus was obeying the Law and the will of the Father perfectly (Deuteronomy 16:6). While there, Jesus, the true Wisdom of God (1 Corinthians 1:24), is found ***“in the temple, sitting among the teachers, listening to them and asking them questions”*** (Luke 2:46). Jesus is faithfully hearing and studying the Scriptures (Deuteronomy 5:1). Those who hear him speak ***“are amazed at his understanding and his answers”*** (Luke 2:47).

Truly, he has the Spirit of wisdom, understanding, counsel, might, knowledge, and the fear of the Lord upon him (Isaiah 11:2).

Who is the wisest person you know? Your mother or father? A sibling? A friend? A college professor? A scientist: perhaps Albert Einstein, Isaac Newton, Galileo, or Copernicus? A philosopher: maybe Socrates, Plato, Aristotle, or Confucius? A theologian: Athanasius, Augustine, Martin Luther, Johann Gerhard, or C. F. W. Walther? Or it might be an author: Homer, Shakespeare, Tolstoy, Dickens? Whoever it is, I'm confident that you have a good reason for your choice and that this person has influenced you, inspired you, helped open your eyes to something you hadn't realized before, or contributed to the betterment of society in some unique way.

However, in our Old Testament Reading today we heard someone else: King Solomon. God gave to Solomon such great wisdom that it was said of Solomon, ***“none like you has been before you and none like you shall arise after you”*** (v 12).

Just what did God give to Solomon that made him so wise? Verse 9 says that God gave Solomon what he had prayed for, an **“understanding mind.”** But a more literal translation would be a **“listening heart.”** In essence, a heart that listens to God’s Word and his people’s issues and then acts in a way that both loves God and faithfully serves his neighbor.

Solomon prayed for a listening heart because he knew Israel’s history of hard-heartedness. The people of Israel had a history of not listening to God’s Word. When God told Israel to enter the Promised Land and take possession of it, they didn’t listen to him. So, they were forced to wander for forty years in the wilderness (Numbers 14:1–39). When they entered the Promised Land, they didn’t listen to God. They didn’t obey the voice of the Lord or serve him only. No, they abandoned God and worshiped Dagon, Molech, Baal, and Ashtoreth on twelve separate occasions over a period of three hundred years. Just read the book of Judges. And Israel’s kings were no better. They didn’t always listen to God’s Word either.

King Saul rejected God's Word by refusing to execute his judgment of death upon the faithless nation of Amalek (1 Samuel 15:1–20).

King David had committed adultery with Bathsheba and then had her husband Uriah the Hittite killed (2 Samuel 11). And right before today's text, in 1 Kings 1–2, one of David's sons, Adonijah, tries to seize David's throne, and Solomon puts him to death. This is why Solomon prays for a heart that listens to God's Word and faithfully serves his neighbor. And God, in his loving kindness, graciously gave Solomon a heart of wisdom and the rest as well.

But the sad reality is that even wise men still fall into grievous sin. Solomon didn't continue to listen to God's Word. God told Solomon not to marry women from foreign nations due to their practices of idolatry. But he loved many such—seven hundred wives and three hundred concubines (1 Kings 11:1–3)! Solomon's ***“listening heart”*** became hard as he turned away from the Lord and worshiped other gods (1 Kings 11:4, 9–12).

We don't always listen to God's Word either. We're told, ***"You shall have no other gods before me"*** (Exodus 20:3), but we abandon God and pursue the false gods of money, relationships, health, pleasure, status, and possessions. Our hearts become hard. And from them flow all sorts of grievous evil: "sexual immorality, theft, murder, adultery, coveting, wickedness, deceit, sensuality, envy, slander, pride, foolishness" (Mark 7:21–22).

Yes, even the world's greatest wise men do fall into grievous sin and abandon God and become fools in his sight. Our wisdom is never enough to gain us the kingdom of heaven. For that, we need the true Wisdom from on high. And so ***"the Word became flesh and dwelt among us, and we have seen his glory, glory as of the only Son from the Father, full of grace and truth"*** (John 1:14).

Christ, the very power and wisdom of God, listened to the Father's Word.

In our Gospel, Mary and Joseph find Jesus in his Father's house, the temple, faithfully hearing and studying the Scriptures (Luke 2:46). When Jesus is tempted by Satan in the wilderness, he will not abandon the Father to serve himself. He will remain faithful and confess that ***“man shall not live by bread alone”*** (Luke 4:4) and that ***“you shall worship the Lord your God, and him only shall you serve”*** (Luke 4:8). And when Satan tempted him again, with words of mockery on the cross, Jesus would not come down and save himself. No, he humbled himself by becoming obedient to the point of death, even death on a cross (Philippians 2:8).

And what's more, Jesus listened to the pleas of his neighbor in need, and he acted in love for them. Jesus was bruised with whips and crowned with thorns for our iniquities. And he was wounded with nails on the cross for our transgressions. For six hours, Jesus bore our grievous sins of idolatry as he hung upon the cross.

His heart pleaded also for you at his crucifixion, ***“Father, forgive them, for they know not what they do”*** (Luke 23:34), until he cried out in victory, ***“It is finished”*** (John 19:30). Jesus hears us and all sinners when we cry out as a tax collector did in one of Jesus’ parables, ***“God, be merciful to me, a sinner”*** (Luke 18:13). Where we are faithless, Jesus has remained faithful. He listens to the Father and loves him with all his heart, soul, and mind. And Jesus listens to his neighbor in need. He loves you, his neighbor, as himself (Matthew 22:37, 39). Jesus does all this so that we may gain the kingdom of heaven, that is ***“redemption through his blood, the forgiveness of our trespasses”*** (Ephesians 1:7–8), and the promised inheritance as God’s chosen adopted sons (Ephesians 1:3, 5, 13–14).

Brothers and sisters in Christ, how blessed we are this day! We know, we are some of the wisest people we know. I say that not because of some marvelous piece of knowledge or insight we have or because of some major societal contribution.

No, we boast not in ourselves. For I heard you say moments ago,
***“Most merciful God, we confess that we are by nature sinful and
unclean. We have sinned against You in thought, word, and
deed, by what we have done and by what we have left undone.
We have not loved You with our whole heart; we have not loved
our neighbors as ourselves. We justly deserve Your present and
eternal punishment.”*** You are wise because you fear the Lord and
you boast in him, the true Wisdom from on high, saying, ***“For the
sake of Your Son, Jesus Christ, have mercy on us. Forgive us,
renew us, and lead us, so that we may delight in Your will and
walk in Your ways to the glory of Your holy name.”*** See, in Christ,
God has given us a listening heart.

May God always grant you this listening heart, a heart of
repentance and faith, that loves God and loves your neighbor as
yourself, now and into life everlasting.

Amen