

*Sages, leave your contemplations,  
brighter visions beam afar;  
seek the great Desire of nations;  
ye have seen his natal star:*

The name *Magi* in ancient times described a host of practitioners of magic, fortune-telling and alchemy. In Matthew's gospel the name is translated as *kings* or *wise men*. Our hymn writer focuses on the *sage* as someone who is full of wisdom. What is it that makes a person 'wise'?

Wisdom is important throughout the Bible. Often associated with the work of the Holy Spirit it features in some of the most beautiful poetry in the Bible praising God's wisdom which gives delight and beauty to the created world. As this passage from Proverbs shows:

*The Lord created me at the beginning of his work,  
the first of his acts of long ago.  
Ages ago I was set up,  
at the first, before the beginning of the earth.  
When there were no depths I was brought forth,  
when there were no springs abounding with water.  
Before the mountains had been shaped,  
before the hills, I was brought forth—  
when he had not yet made earth and fields,  
or the world's first bits of soil.  
When he established the heavens, I was there,  
when he drew a circle on the face of the deep,  
when he made firm the skies above,  
when he established the fountains of the deep,  
when he assigned to the sea its limit,  
so that the waters might not transgress his command,  
when he marked out the foundations of the earth,  
then I was beside him, like a master worker;  
and I was daily his delight,  
rejoicing before him always,  
rejoicing in his inhabited world  
and delighting in the human race.*

Wisdom and understanding is often given to people described being as *anointed with the spirit of Wisdom [Deuteronomy 34.9]* as when Moses anointed Joshua as his successor. In the Acts of the Apostles, Stephen was arrested and eventually killed because: *full of grace and power, he (Stephen) did great wonders and signs among the people. Then some of those who belonged to the synagogue ... stood up and argued with Stephen. But they could not withstand the wisdom and the Spirit with which he spoke.*

Wisdom in the form of the Holy Spirit was promised by Jesus in John's gospel. It is that Spirit which energised the disciples hearts and minds, giving them the knowledge and wisdom to empower their witness to Jesus and the coming of God's kingdom. Just as it continues to empower us today. *'I have said these things to you while I am still with you. But the Advocate, the Holy Spirit, whom the Father will send in my name, will teach you everything, and remind you of all that I have said to you.*

Throughout the Bible Wisdom expresses itself in many ways, such as the example of Peter in Act 10, where Peter is given spiritual insight that God's salvation is also for the Gentiles, and Paul in Ephesians reminds us that wisdom and understanding are also gifts which can be used to know and better serve God.

Like the shepherds, Sages are unlikely heralds of the birth of the Messiah. They represent God's bigger picture of this wonderful event. But we are not told when or even how they spread the word of Jesus birth. Wisdom it seems sometimes works quietly in the background. *In a dream, they were warned not to report back to Herod. So they worked out another route, left the territory without being seen, and returned to their own country.*

*[Matthew 2.11]*