24th Sunday after Pentecost / November 8th

First Illumination: Wisdom (6:12-16)

The Wisdom of Solomon was written in Greek, probably in Alexandria, Egypt, roughly two thousand years ago, for Jewish readers living among Greek philosophers. It speaks in Solomon's voice, though he did not write it. Here Wisdom is a person, Sophia in Greek, and she is not hiding. Notice who moves first. She is easily found, and she goes about looking for us. Listen for where Wisdom sits, and for who is doing the seeking.

Response Illumination: Wisdom (6:17-20)

In place of a psalm, we read together a small staircase. Each line picks up the last word of the line before it: desire, instruction, love, laws, immortality, nearness to God, and finally a kingdom. Ancient teachers loved this kind of chain, each link catching the one behind. Notice where the climb begins: not with an achievement, but with a wanting. Listen for the first step, and for the last.

Epistle Illumination: 1 Thessalonians (4:13-18)

Paul wrote this letter around the year 50, which makes it among the earliest writings in the New Testament. He had been forced to leave Thessalonica after a short visit, and he learned that some believers there had died while the Lord had not yet returned. They feared the dead had missed everything. Notice that Paul's Greek word for the dead is not death but sleep. And the word he uses for "meet" was often used when a city's people streamed out through the gates to greet a visiting king and walk him home. Listen for who goes first, and for who is left behind.

Gospel Illumination: Matthew (25:1-13)

Jesus tells this parable on the Mount of Olives, in his last teaching before his arrest. In his day, a wedding procession came at night, and a late bridegroom was not unusual. Lamps were carried to light the way. Matthew's word for wise means sensible, the kind of mind that looks ahead. Wise and foolish are the very words Jesus used at the end of the Sermon on the Mount for two builders, one on rock and one on sand. Listen for what all ten bridesmaids do, and for what only the wise five have.

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