

# A Sermon for DaySpring Baptist Church

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## “A Conversation with Dr. Wisdom”

Matthew 28: 16-20

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It was time for Adam to be baptized and he knew it. He'd been a believer all his life. He'd never... not believed. He'd been taught to love God and follow Christ. He'd been taught to pray and to have a personal relationship with God.

He understood the basic teachings of his church.

He knew all the Bible stories and had been a Bible drill champion.

His faith was important to him.

He walked with God...

And he knew it was time for him to say so and be baptized. So, two Sundays back, he'd walked the aisle. Everyone at First Church knew what was happening as the soon-to-be college student made his way to the front and took his pastor, Dr. Wisdom, by the hand.

After church, everyone made their way down front and with big smiles across their faces, extended Adam the “right hand of Christian fellowship.” He'd been raised in this church and he knew it meant a lot to them to see him make this decision before going off to school. Most congregations have trouble hiding their concern and hope when one of their own hasn't walked the aisle. They worry about what that means.

Adam had never worried about it really. He knew that he knew God and he knew he was a follower of Christ. He just wasn't one to do something because everyone, even a church he loved, expected it.

He wanted the decision to be his

and he wanted it to matter

and he'd always had more questions than answers...

So, it had taken him a while before he asked his church for Baptism.

After church, Dr. Wisdom, asked him to set up an appointment so that they could talk some about the event. Adam was glad for that... he still had questions and he was a thinker and he loved “getting deep” as he called it.

And he'd always liked his pastor and admired him. Dr. Logan Wisdom was near retirement... and had pastored First Church for nearly 30 years after spending the first part of his career in academic life. He taught philosophy and theology and Adam was pretty sure he'd written several books. He'd seen them on daunting display in the church library. They weren't the kind of books kids pick up to read in church.

Like the rest of the congregation, he looked up to his pastor and he appreciated that Dr. Wisdom seemed to look up to them. He spoke to them with an expectation. He seemed to believe in them and believe that they could stretch. This appealed to Adam and while the other teenagers were passing notes, Adam had always been tuned in during sermon time.

Here was someone who knew a lot about a lot.

He read... history and literature and often referenced the New York Times... He was aware of the world. He loved art and music and sport.

Logan Wisdom seemed strong to him, though he walked with a limp from the injury he had in the war. He was active... His eyes were alive and he kept his hair longer than most, like someone who never wanted to let go of the '60s. It was gray now... but there was lots of it.

Adam wasn't sure how old Dr. Wisdom was. It was obvious he'd been up to life and ministry for a long time. He knew he was older than his own grandfather. It made him excited but nervous all at the same time about their meeting. As far as he could remember, he'd never had Logan Wisdom all to himself.

The day came... and Adam had a mental list of things he wanted to ask. He'd never been in his pastor's inner study. The secretary took him in and handed him a Coke. Dr. Wisdom was on the phone and it gave him a chance to give the office the once over. Books everywhere... old books... you could smell the oldness.

On the limited wall space left there wasn't, to his surprise, any diplomas or certificates or plaques of recognition. There was art... intriguing art.

Stacks of things littered the floor. They circled the desk like electrons around a nucleus... tied to the desk, which was also a mess... a swarm of study and learning. Post-it notes stuck on everything. Pictures of grandkids... A hymnal... a calendar laid open... a laptop screen full of words.

A file folder...

on top of a magazine...

on top of a book...

obviously a sermon in progress.

**"I'll be in touch,"** said Dr. Wisdom as he put down the receiver and turned around to Adam. He smiled... **"I've been looking forward to this all day,"** he said.

Adam relaxed some. **"Me too."**

**"And we're all looking forward to your Baptism. I tell you what let's do..."** Dr. Wisdom jumped on in... **"Let's go over the logistics of Sunday and get that out of the way, then we can just have fun talking."**

**"Sounds good to me,"** Adam concurred, crossing his legs which were draped with baggy jeans but feeling funny about it like he wasn't really old enough to be sitting that way. But he found himself wanting to sit different than he normally would. His Old Navy shirt and dyed hair seemed at least three generations removed from Dr. Wisdom's coat and tie.

**"On Sunday, I want you to be ready in the robing area by ten till. You'll want to bring a change of clothes... a hair dryer... and a towel... There'll be someone there to help you. I'll come up after I get the service started and put on my waders and the robe."**

**"Now,"** Dr. Wisdom stepped out from behind the desk and motioned for Adam to join him. **"I'll walk out into the water first and then you'll join me. We'll both be facing forward while I say a few words and then I'll ask the congregation for their affirmation and then I'll ask you for your commitment."**

The old pastor continued, obviously having been through this countless times. **“After you say, ‘I will,’ I’ll turn you this way and say, ‘Adam, my brother in Christ, I baptize you in the name of the Father and the Son and the Holy Spirit.’”**

Just then, without even thinking about it, the word “why” jumped out of Adam’s mouth.

**“Why what?”** Asked Dr. Wisdom

**“Why will you baptize me in the name of the Father and the Son and the Holy Spirit.”**

Dr. Wisdom smiled a sly smile and said, **“Well, because in Matthew 28 Jesus told us to,”** knowing full well that wouldn’t suffice for Adam and knowing full well that the two of them were about to get into it. He’d heard about Adam’s questions in youth group.

**“Well,”** Adam gulped, **“Why did Jesus tell us to do that? Why not ‘Baptize them in my name’ or why not ‘Baptize them in the name of the One God.’ Why the Father, Son, and Spirit? Do all Baptisms have to be like that...?”**

The dam had broken and the questions poured out in an adolescent flood...

**“I don’t really understand the Trinity anyway... what’s the deal there?”**

**“No one’s ever given me a satisfactory answer...**

**How can God be One and Three?”**

**“Isn’t that, what do you call it, polytheism?”**

**“Some have said so,”** replied Dr. Wisdom taking a seat in the rocker and motioning Adam to the couch. **“There’s been a great deal of conversation and debate and fighting about that very thing, since the early days of the church.”**

**“That’s not surprising,”** Adam almost interrupted with relief. **“It’s just really weird-sounding, to me. Can you explain it to me... since you’re going to baptize me that way, can you explain it now?”**

**“In an hour?”** Dr. Wisdom laughed. **“Augustine wrote 15 books on the Doctrine of the Trinity.”**

**“Well, that’s another thing...”** Adam was leaning forward now with his legs uncrossed, **“It’s a doctrine right? That means it’s something we’re all supposed to believe in, right?”**

Dr. Wisdom was careful with his answer... **“Well.... it’s a way of helping you to understand what you believe in. Doctrines are simply descriptions of a mystery. They don’t explain it. As a Christian you “believe in,” place your trust in, God... not the doctrines about God.”**

**“But I heard a TV preacher once say that the Doctrine of the Trinity is necessary to Christian belief.”** His voice sounded weighty with the idea of it.

Logan Wisdom picked up on the tone and took a deep breath. He’d been at this point in this conversation a million times... *“Where to start and how deep to go,”* that was always the question. He plunged in.

**“It might help you to realize that before we had a Doctrine of the Trinity, we had a problem of the Trinity.”** Adam sat silent.

**“What I mean by that is that the early Christians began to realize that they had experienced the Divine in three particular ways... as Father, Son, and Spirit... This, of course, was a predicament for those who believed in one God. But there was no denying their experience. They’d known God as a mystery beyond us, with us, and within us. (F. Buechner’s line) ... Three forms.”**

Adam jumped in, **“That reminds me of how Mrs. McHan, our 8<sup>th</sup> grade Sunday School teacher, explained it. She said that she was a daughter, a wife, and a mom but she was the same person.”**

Dr. Wisdom made one of those faces that seemed to be saying, *“Well... sort of, but not really.”*

**“Lots of folks have thought of it that way and that’s not a bad place to begin but let’s modify the metaphor some. Rather than thinking of three different people relating to your mom (a parent, a spouse, a child), let’s talk about the ways you’ve known her.”**

**“Your mom worked primarily in the home, right?”**

Adam nodded and took a swig of his Coke.

**“Okay, lets imagine that you’re 10 years old again and I want you to picture her day. What was her day like after you left for school?”**

Adam offered a ‘stay-at-home-mom’ litany. **“She cleaned and cooked and moved furniture and decorated and shopped and paid bills.”**

**“Now...”** Logan Wisdom was leaning forward, **“You never saw her doing those things, but when you came home everything was different. It’s like the house had been prepared for you... recreated. Things were in their places... roast was in the oven... maybe a new picture was hanging over the sofa... all this reflected not only who your mom was and what mattered to her but also her love for you. She didn’t do this on her best days out of some obligation or compulsion; she did it because she wanted home to be right and to be a place of goodness...**

**So, she brought order from chaos in your bedroom.**

**She seasoned the meat so it wouldn’t be bland.**

**She cleaned the bathroom to make it safe.**

**She decorated for delight.**

**This was your mom as creator... got it?”**

**“Got it,”** Adam agreed.

**“Now, what happened after school typically?”** Dr. Wisdom sat back.

**“Well, she picked me up and took me to soccer practice and even helped coach a few years. She’d drive me to guitar lessons. Sometimes we’d sit in the swing in the back yard and she’d help me with homework. Occasionally, she’d take me places, to get ice cream or something. Sometimes she’d make cookies for me and my friends.”**

Dr. Wisdom was smiling. **“Sounds like your mom was really with you.”**

**“Yep!”**

**“That’s your mom, incarnate... your mom entering into your experience and all that it involved.”**

**“Like Jesus did with us?”** Adam was on to it now.

**“Right. She listened to you... she taught you... and set an example for you. She told you to do your studies... she told you when it was time to brush your teeth and go to bed. Mom with you.”**

**“Now... there was another way mom was mom during your day and you may not even be aware of it. After you were asleep, she would come into your room... sometimes because she wanted to be sure you were okay... Or sometimes because you’d had a dream... Or sometimes just to watch you sleep. She’d sit there quietly and you wouldn’t know it but she’d stroke your hair or kiss your head. She’d say tender prayers over you.**

**Also... usually, while you slept, while you were unaware... she’d do something for you.**

**Look over your homework and straighten up your folder...  
call and talk to a teacher...**

**talk to your father about some trouble you were having.**

**Your mom was a source of comfort and nurture and life that you couldn’t even see. She never left you... And there is also a sense in which you never left her.”**

**“Did you ever find yourself thinking, ‘What would mom do’? Or do you ever hear her voice inside you saying, ‘Adam, you know you ought not be doing that!’?”**

Adam was nodding... **“I still do... and more often than I’d like to,”** he confessed. **“So what you’re saying is that I experience my mom in three ways... just like we do God. ... One God, but three different experiences with God. So... that’s the Trinity.”**

**“Well, no... that just helps you have a metaphorical handle for how you’ve experienced your God because of what was true with your mom. And...”** Dr. Wisdom rocked his head in concession... **“There were and are plenty of folks who stopped there in understanding the Trinity... but that’s not all the church has concluded. It wasn’t simply one person with three functions.”**

Adam finished the sentence with a moan... **“There were three persons, weren’t there?”**

**“One essence... one being... three persons,”** Dr. Wisdom concurred.

**“So... that means I’m pretty lost again.”**

**“You’re in good company, Adam. We’re all lost, but not alone and not lost in meaninglessness. We’re lost in a mystery and that can be sort of exciting. It’s a great adventure... the final frontier.”** Adam was surprised to hear his pastor start doing the Star Trek theme song. He was pretty good at it.

Adam had to interrupt him he was enjoying himself so much. **“Uhum... You were about to tell me about three persons.”**

**“Ah... sorry.”** Logan Wisdom dove in and began to speak faster and with more animation. It was almost like Adam had flipped some switch inside his pastor and this pastor’s passion began to pour out. Dr. Wisdom was doing most of the talking now... but Adam didn’t mind and he never felt like he wasn’t connecting with him.

**“Here’s the thing of it Adam... the Trinity is not only an explanation of Divine history it’s an explanation of Divine reality. In other words, this is the way God is... God is relationship... God is communion. Father with Son, Son with Spirit and so on.”**

**“God...”** the pastor paused wanting to make sure Adam was following, **“is the source of all things, right?”**

Adam nodded.

**“Well, then... God is the source of all communion and if the very heart of God is communal, relational, then reality is relational. That’s why when you truly love another person you will be experiencing God. John said, ‘When we love we are born of God’.”**

Dr. Wisdom was completely excited about what he was saying and Adam was completely enjoying the sermon. And it was making sense... Adam was peppering the monologue with lots of **“Yeah, I see what you mean”** kinds of responses.

Particularly when his Pastor pointed at him and said, **“Adam, if you’ll look inside you’ll know this is true... You are a trinity. You are mind, body, and soul. Don’t you have a relationship to yourself... Don’t you talk to yourself? Don’t you love yourself? So, there is a lover and a beloved and the loving itself... A trinity, but one being, all the same.”**

Adam was beginning to feel something of what Logan Wisdom was going on about. God is the center of all things and creator of all things... and so God’s nature must be reflected in all things. This made sense to him when Dr. Wisdom had reminded him of what it was like when Adam had gone to his grandmother’s house after her funeral service... how he could see and feel and smell his grandmother everywhere in the house. Dr. Wisdom had said, with joy between every word, that life was like that... and that every nook and cranny of it revealed God and that the God revealed is a Trinity. God as Trinity proclaimed unity and uniqueness ... not only in Himself, but in all things. Adam was unique but united to all.

The hour passed quickly and Adam felt like he was being inducted. His wise pastor would quote teachers and he even grabbed a book or two off the shelf from which he read about how early Christian worship was Trinitarian. He pointed to the large Celtic symbol hanging on the wall.

**“That’s a Triquetra... try to say that ten times real fast.”**

Adam did and they had a great laugh... and Adam said, still finishing up his laugh, **“I never figured I be laughing about the Trinity.”**

**“Adam,”** said Logan Wisdom, **“The Trinity is a thing of joy... In fact, some in the early church called it a dance rather than a doctrine.”**

**“So, back to your original question... Sunday, we’ll be baptizing you into a great dance... into a way of being, a joyful mode of existence. God is ultimate goodness and love and wholeness. God is Creator... Redeemer... and Friend.”**

Dr. Wisdom paused... **“Adam, I’ve said a lot but what I’m about to say is the most important...”**

The pastor instinctively waited just a bit then continued slowly. **“If God is this way and God is whole, then we must be this way to be whole. There is no wholeness, no abundant life, unless we are creative as God is and unless we give ourselves away in love as Christ did, and unless we enliven others and unite with them as the Spirit is united with us and enlivens us.”**

Adam sat there... knowing, but still not knowing. He couldn't explain the Trinity to anyone, but he found himself believing in it in that moment. And it wasn't because of the arguments Logan Wisdom had made really or his explanations... though they were helpful. It was he himself. Here was this man who seemed to be so together... so wise. Someone who had loved people and God... who had studied and read so much. He not only believed it, but his eyes sparkled when he spoke of it. It wasn't the Doctrine that was drawing him, but a person who seemed to be reflecting what the Doctrine was about.

**“I guess I'd better be getting on, Dr. Wisdom. I can't tell you how much I've enjoyed our talk.”**

**“Me too, Adam! Now, like I said over an hour ago...”** Dr. Wisdom stood and extended his hand, **“Sunday, because Jesus said so, I'll baptize you, my brother, in the name of the Father and the Son and the Holy Spirit. And I'm quite certain that all God's people will say... Amen.”**