

MINISTRY BY MAIL
Lutheran Conference of Confessional Fellowship
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Second Sunday In Advent, December 4, 2022

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(Hymns found in The Lutheran Hymnal, CPH, 1941)

Hymns: 55, 58:1, 61, 371:1-4, 644.

Lessons: Malachi 1:1-14, Titus 2:1-15,

Luke 3:1-18.

Sermon Text: Malachi 3:1-4.

Sermon by Pastor Robert Mehlretter

In the name of Jesus Christ, Dear Fellow Redeemed,

Malachi's words make it clear that someone is coming who will strike terror into the hearts of men. And someone is coming who will bring great joy for men – if only they believe in the Savior. That is the same person – the God-Man Jesus Christ who will do all that.

God caused Malachi to write at a time when the very people God had chosen were thinking and talking and living like pagans, and rejecting what God had taught them.

Matters other than worshiping the true God had taken over their worship. They were tolerant of wickedness and evil even at the temple and in the people who were supposed to serve God at the temple. They were even praising wickedness. Even the Priests and the Levites, those who were 'leaders' in the congregation, were promoting and teaching and practicing ideas contrary to God's Word. Many in the nation of Judah in Malachi's time were Godless unbelievers, following false teachers and pagan lifestyles. It seems that God's faithful believers were few.

But we see hope in the

PROMISES GOD GIVES THROUGH MALACHI

- 1. A promise of the forerunner of Christ – John the Baptist.**
- 2. A promise of the first coming of Christ to earth.**
- 3. A promise of the second coming of Christ to earth.**

This is the last book of the Old Testament, written some 400 years before the Savior came. Think of that! They didn't know it would be that long before the Savior came, but that is a long time. For us, 400 years goes back to 1622, a time when Europeans were first coming to North America!

We can see hints of both the first coming of Christ and his second coming in our text.

But first we see this promise: ***“See, I will send my messenger, who will prepare the way before me.”*** We – and Jesus – recognize this person as John the Baptist, just as Isaiah had foretold ***“A voice of one calling: ‘In the desert prepare the way for the LORD; make straight in the wilderness a highway for our God.’”*** Isaiah 40:3 (NIV)

John is God's messenger, his ambassador to ***“prepare the way before”*** Jesus, God incarnate, God's only Son will begin his ministry. People recognized John as a prophet from God, and his message was to call men to repentance. ***“John said to the crowds coming out to be baptized by him, ‘You brood of vipers! Who warned you to flee from the coming wrath? Produce fruit in keeping with repentance.’”*** Luke 3:7-8 (NIV) Malachi in his last words points to John the Baptist and calls him Elijah, writing by inspiration: ***“See, I will send you the prophet Elijah before that great and dreadful day of the LORD comes.”*** Malachi 4:5 (NIV) John was only six months older than Jesus, but he was active in his ministry while Jesus was biding his time. Jesus started his public ministry at about 30 years of age.

We also have here prophecy of the appearing of the Messiah himself: **“suddenly the Lord you are seeking will come to his temple; the messenger of the covenant, whom you desire, will come, ’ says the LORD Almighty.”** The Messiah has been promised for a long time and he will come.

He is the Lord God, and **“He will be great and will be called the Son of the Most High. The Lord God will give him the throne of his father David, and he will reign over the house of Jacob forever; his kingdom will never end.”** Luke 1:32-33 (NIV)

Jesus is the one who was sent from heaven to bring peace between God and man. He is the Redeemer who was commissioned by the Father to bring man back to God with his covenant of grace. Christ, as a prophet, is the messenger and mediator of the covenant. **“This is what the LORD says: ‘In the time of my favor I will answer you, and in the day of salvation I will help you; I will keep you and will make you to be a covenant for the people.’”** Isaiah 49:8 (NIV)

At his first coming, when Jesus came to earth as an infant at Bethlehem, he came at a time unexpected. He came the first time to redeem mankind.

Malachi writes **“Then suddenly the Lord you are seeking will come to his temple; the messenger of the covenant, whom you desire, will come, ’ says the LORD Almighty.”** Jesus’ coming took people by surprise when he came, born in a barn in Bethlehem. Joseph and Mary were probably surprised – and probably not a little uncomfortable – when Mary’s child was born in a stable while they were far away from home. The shepherds were surprised by the light in the heavens and the angels telling them about the Savior.

The enemies of God were also surely surprised, as was wicked king Herod when he heard about the king of the Jews being born in Bethlehem. In fact, Herod was so upset when he heard about it that he ordered the slaughter of all children 2 years and younger in the Bethlehem area!

God had promised the Savior’s coming since the first sin, about 3500 years earlier. God had repeatedly, as well as in this last book of the Old Testament, promised that the Savior would come. People hoped for the Savior’s coming, and when he did come, many of the Jews expected and hoped for an earthly deliverer who would set them free from the rule of the Romans. But he came with a much more important mission – to bring eternal salvation for mankind.

But Jesus will also come a second time to judge the living and the dead, and Malachi also makes reference to that. Malachi gives us different pictures of the cleansing used to prepare for God’s Day of Judgment. The day of God’s judgement is coming, and we read: **“Who will be able to stand when he appears? For he will be like a refiner’s fire and like launderer’s bleach. He will be like a refiner and purifier of silver.”** These are pictures of great turmoil, of great pain, of great upheaval. Jesus spoke of earthquakes and famines and love growing cold and great distress before he comes in judgment. He tells us in Matthew chapter 24 of the last days, including these words: **“For then there will be great distress, unequalled from the beginning of the world until now--and never to be equaled again.”** Matthew 24:21 (NIV)

A refiner’s fire is really hot. To refine gold you must have a heat greater than 1,948 degrees, and to refine silver you must have a heat greater than 1,761 degrees! And we cook things at 300 or 400 degrees! A refiner’s fire is heat that separates the pure gold and silver from the slag and waste by melting the rocks.

Malachi also gives us the picture of **“a launderer’s soap”** or bleach. That is also something which is very caustic and will cause great cleanliness. We today have such delicate fabrics and ease of washing clothes that it is hard to imagine having to clean heavy, filthy woolen clothes by hand! This kind of cleaning is literally, from the Hebrew, a rubbing, kneading, and beating to make cloth soft and clean and pliable. Remember the pictures of beating clothes on rocks to clean them?

Christ by the Word of God shall purify and cleanse his church – all believers – with the washing of water by the Word, as we read in Ephesians: **“to make her holy, cleansing her by the washing with water through the word.”** Ephesians 5:26 (NIV) We also read in Titus about Jesus **“who gave himself for us to redeem us from all wickedness and to purify for himself a people that are his very own, eager to do what is good.”** Titus 2:14 (NIV)

He will make them clean so as to make them a precious people to himself.

“But who can endure the day of his coming? Who can stand when he appears?” It is the work of God, who shall wash us in the blood of the lamb, that we may stand clean and righteous before him on judgement day.

Because the leaders of the Jews were so wicked, this drastic cleansing was necessary. And every one of us is by nature just as wicked! When you read the entire book of Malachi – and it is only four short chapters – you see the wickedness of the people who claimed to be God’s people. For example, in the verses just before our text we read of Malachi telling the people: ***“You have wearied the LORD with your words. ‘How have we wearied him?’ you ask. By saying, ‘All who do evil are good in the eyes of the LORD, and he is pleased with them.’”*** Malachi 2:17 (NIV)

And purification was necessary, starting with the priests and the Levites. We read that God ***“will purify the Levites and refine them like gold and silver. Then the LORD will have men who will bring offerings in righteousness, and the offerings of Judah and Jerusalem will be acceptable to the LORD, as in days gone by, as in former years.”***

The Psalmist says this about our God: ***“You do not delight in sacrifice, or I would bring it; you do not take pleasure in burnt offerings. The sacrifices of God are a broken spirit; a broken and contrite heart, O God, you will not despise.”*** Psalm 51:16-17 (NIV)

It is only from pure and believing hearts that God wants offerings! It is only with such drastic cleansing that any offerings to God can be acceptable to him.

God wants pure gifts and offerings from pure and holy people. He tells us: ***“Be holy because I, the LORD your God, am holy.”*** Leviticus 19:2 (NIV) And of course, how can anyone be pure and holy? It is only through the work of God. ***“It is by grace you have been saved, through faith--and this not from yourselves, it is the gift of God--not by works, so that no one can boast. For we are God's workmanship, created in Christ Jesus to do good works, which God prepared in advance for us to do.”*** Ephesians 2:8-10 (NIV)

And why are Levites mentioned here? Because the Priests and Levites – those responsible for leading people in worship and service to God were included in Malachi’s judgement from God. Judgment begins at the house of God, so that all the members of the New Testament priesthood, that is, all believers, might serve him in holiness and righteousness.

This is what God wants. Malachi looks back to when the children of Israel were still in truth his Church, and they served him with acceptable offerings.

Notice that Malachi uses the word ***“offerings”***, not the word “tithes” which the law demanded, but offerings of love. And such offerings of love are acceptable because of hearts of faith in those who are really God’s children.

Yes, Malachi, just like many Old Testament prophets had some harsh words. People deserved it. But we are not without hope. Jesus came to redeem us, to give us life eternal and a sure, certain hope for each day here on earth. Lord, purify us that we may serve you in all righteousness here and hereafter! Amen.