

Grace, mercy, and peace be with you from God the Father and from the Lord Jesus Christ, the Son of the Father. Amen.

¹ *“Behold, I send My messenger, and he will prepare the way before Me. And the Lord, whom you seek, will suddenly come to His temple, even the Messenger of the covenant, in whom you delight. Behold, He is coming,” says the LORD of hosts.* ² *But who can endure the day of His coming? And who can stand when He appears? For He is like a refiner’s fire and like launderer’s soap.* ³ *He will sit as a refiner and a purifier of silver; He will purify the sons of Levi, and purge them as gold and silver, that they may offer to the LORD an offering in righteousness.* ⁴ *Then the offering of Judah and Jerusalem will be pleasant to the LORD, as in the days of old, as in former years.*

Text: Mal. 3:1-4 A 2nd Sun in Advent 12/9/18 Philip. 1:3-11 Lk. 3:1-6 Ps. 95 Resp. Ps.: 89
Hymns: 61, 63, 94, 87

THE SON OF GOD CAME TO SAVE US FROM OUR SINS

Dear fellow believers in Christ, who came to save us,

Last Sunday we heard about the time the Jewish people were being attacked by the Babylonians, and were defeated and taken into captivity. Our text takes place one hundred years after the end of the Babylonian Captivity when the Jews had returned to their homeland. At first, they experienced a period of spiritual revival. But as the years went by most of them had become indifferent toward God. It was in the midst of this setting that God’s Old Testament prophet, Malachi, served. It’s much like today, with so many people in the world lost and wandering further and further away from God. You and I must confess that as we look into our own heart, we see how prone we are to stray from God. Yet God in His grace seeks to save everyone. Our text for today from the book of Malachi reminds us once again of the message of Christmas, that **THE SON OF GOD**, Jesus Christ, **CAME** down to earth **TO SAVE US FROM OUR SINS**.

The preincarnate Jesus is speaking in our text. He says, *“Behold.”* Jesus was telling the people, the unbelieving who sorely needed to wake up, as well as the believing who were in such need of encouragement, *“Pay attention.”* The Son of God had something very important to say, and they needed to hear it. He was prophesying to His Old Testament people about His coming as the Messiah one day. *“I send My messenger”* (John the Baptist: Mt. 11:7-15; Mk 1:1-4; Lk. 7:24-28) *“and he will prepare the way before Me.”* Jesus was born after John the Baptist, yet Jesus sent John to tell people about Him. Jesus could do that because He is the eternal Son of God. Jesus said, *“...before Abraham was born, I AM!”* (Jn. 8:58a).

Malachi was the last of God’s Old Testament prophets. After Malachi there was four hundred years of silence from God until He sent His next prophet, John the Baptist. When John came, the spiritual condition of the nation of Israel as a whole was once again very bad. Most of the people were steeped in work righteousness – that you get to heaven by being good – as their scribes and Pharisees taught. Many either despaired of getting to heaven because they realized they weren’t good enough, or believed they were going to heaven because they truly thought they were good enough. And that is why Jesus sent John the Baptist to *“prepare the way before”* Him.

John prepared the people for Jesus by telling everyone, “*Repent!*” (Mt. 3:2). No one can get to heaven by the good things he or she does. John’s message to those who thought they couldn’t be saved was: Repent of your sins and believe in Jesus. Jesus will forgive all of your sins and save you! John’s message to the self-righteous was: You’ll never get to heaven by your own goodness. Understand that every one of us is sinful in God’s eyes. Repent of your sins. Don’t trust in yourself for salvation, trust in Jesus. Only Jesus Christ can save you.

“*For He*” – Jesus – “*is like a refiner’s fire and like launderer’s soap*” (speaking of Jesus cleansing us from our sins). “*He will sit as a refiner and purifier of silver.*” “*He will purify the sons of Levi*”: the priests. Jesus preached the same message John did: “*Repent!*” (Mt. 4:17). All the people, the priests and scribes and Pharisees included, needed to repent and be cleansed from their sins and made pure by Jesus’ blood. Jesus’ and John’s message is a humbling message: You are a sinner. You need to repent of your sins. You need Jesus to save you. But it’s also a message that brings hope. God forgives and saves every repentant sinner who believes in His Son, Jesus.

The Jews misunderstood what kind of Messiah God would send them, expecting him to be an earthly king or military leader. But Malachi had prophesied, “*The Lord whom you seek,*” – the Messiah they had been looking for – “*will suddenly come*” not to a throne as an earthly king, but “*to His temple*” as our Savior to deliver us from our sins. Like Malachi, John the Baptist told the people that the Messiah they should look for was a spiritual Savior. When the angel explained to Joseph about the baby Mary was carrying, he told him, “*You shall call His name, Jesus, for He will save His people from their sins*” (Mt. 1:21.) The name “Jesus” means “Savior.”

Malachi told the people, “*The Lord, whom you seek*” (from the original also, “*The Lord whom you desire*”) “*will suddenly come.*” It was thousands of years between the time God first promised Adam and Eve He would send a Savior, and the time Jesus finally came. God kept repeating His promise to His people through His prophets, assuring them that the Savior was coming. Although they must have sometimes wondered when He would ever come, “*suddenly*” Jesus came! And when He did the angel announced to the shepherds: “*Unto you is born this day in the city of David a Savior who is Christ the Lord*” (Lk. 2:11). Faithful Simeon, who had been longing for the coming of the Messiah, took the baby Jesus in his arms, praised God and said, “*My eyes have seen Your salvation which You have prepared before the face of all people*” (Lk. 2:30-31). Following the star, when the wise men finally reached Jesus they “*rejoiced with exceedingly great joy ... and fell down and worshipped*” Him (Mt. 2:10-11).

Malachi calls Jesus “*the Messenger of the covenant.*” The Old Testament, or old covenant, demanded of the people continual sacrifices and obedience to the Old Testament law. The Old Covenant pointed to, and was fulfilled by, Jesus Christ. Jesus said, “*I did not come to abolish the law, but to fulfill it*” (Mt. 5:17). This Jesus did through His perfect life of obedience to the Law and His sinless sacrifice on the cross. Jesus spoke of “*My blood of the new covenant ... for the remission of sins*” (Mt. 26:28). The Son of God lived a perfect life, and then gave His life on the cross for the salvation of the world. Scripture says that God’s “*covenant*” or agreement is that everyone who believes in His Son is saved! “*For God so loved the world that He gave His only begotten Son, that whoever believes in Him should not perish but have everlasting life*” (Jn. 3:16).

“But who can endure the day of His coming? Who can stand when He appears?” Sadly, when Jesus came, most of the people could not “endure” it. John says that Jesus “*came to His own and His own did not receive Him*” (Jn. 1:11). So few of the Jewish people believed in Jesus as their Messiah. There was a reason the Son of God wasn’t born in Jerusalem, the location of the great Jewish temple and the center of their religion. Their religion, like the hearts of so many of the people, had become empty. Simeon said about the baby Jesus, “*This Child is destined for the fall and rising of many in Israel, and for a sign which will be spoken against*” (Lk. 2:34). Jesus tried again and again to get the Jewish people to see that He is their promised Messiah, the Son of God who had come to save them from their sins. But most of the people rejected Jesus and the salvation He brings. He finally had to say, “*O Jerusalem, Jerusalem...! How often I wanted to gather your children together, as a hen gathers her chicks under her wings, but you were unwilling. Behold! Your house is left to you desolate*” (Mt. 23:38).

“But who can endure the day of His coming? And who can stand when He appears?” “*God did not send His Son into the world to condemn the world, but that the world through Him might be saved*” (Jn. 3:17). Jesus came to earth as the world’s Redeemer. How sad that most people reject Jesus and make Him their condemning Judge instead. The message of Christmas is that the Son of God has come to save our world of lost sinners. How many in the world are listening to this message? *“But who can endure the day of His coming? And who can stand when He appears?”*

There is a way to “endure” Christ’s coming and “stand” before Him! The psalmist says, “*If You, LORD, should mark iniquities*” – If the holy God held our sins against us – “*O Lord, who could stand?*” No one could stand before Him. “*But there is forgiveness with You*” – but God forgives us completely and unconditionally for Jesus’ sake – “*that You may be feared*” – and we stand in awe of God’s amazing grace! (Ps. 130:3-4). By faith in Jesus we sinners can “stand” before Him, forgiven, loved, and saved.

“They [will] offer to the LORD an offering in righteousness. Then the offering of Judah and Jerusalem will be pleasant to the LORD, as in the days of old, as in former years.” The scribes and Pharisees were wrong. We’re not saved by what we do for God. We’re saved by what the Son of God did for us. God’s love for us in Jesus changes us; moving us and enabling us, as we’re told, to “*offer to the LORD an offering in righteousness.*” The Bible says we “*offer up spiritual sacrifices*” – we gratefully, gladly live our lives as “*spiritual sacrifices*” – “*acceptable to God through Jesus Christ*” (1 Pet. 2:5). We are covered by Jesus’ “*righteousness,*” therefore God is well pleased with us and the things we do out of love for Him.

You and I are sinners. There is nothing we can do to save ourselves. How God loves us to send His only dear Son to earth to save us! How Jesus loves us to humbly, willingly come to earth as the baby in the manger and give His life for us on the cross! “Thank You, Jesus, for coming to us and saving us from our sins.” Amen.