

To those who have obtained like precious faith with us by the righteousness of our God and Savior Jesus Christ: Grace and peace be multiplied to you in the knowledge of God and of Jesus our Lord. (2 Peter 1:1-2) Amen.

Malachi 3:1-7 (NKJV) — 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 launderers’ 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. 5 And I will come near you for judgment; I will be a swift witness Against sorcerers, Against adulterers, Against perjurers, Against those who exploit wage earners and widows and orphans, And against those who turn away an alien— Because they do not fear Me,” Says the Lord of hosts. 6 “For I am the Lord, I do not change; Therefore you are not consumed, O sons of Jacob. 7 Yet from the days of your fathers You have gone away from My ordinances And have not kept them. Return to Me, and I will return to you.”

This is the word of the Lord of hosts.

Prepare – He is Coming

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| When? | ... When His messenger prepares the way |
| Who? | ... The Lord, the Angel of the covenant |
| Where? | ... To His temple |
| Why? | ... To purify the sons of Levi and for judgment |

Lord, sanctify us by Your Truth, Your Word is Truth.

In Jesus name, who is, who was, and who is to come, our Savior in flesh and in glory, dear elect of God and all who are redeemed by the universal atonement of Jesus Christ,

I remember in grade school memorizing the interrogatives: WHO, WHAT, WHEN, WHERE, WHY ... These questions are considered basic information gathering. In investigative reporting, the journalist uses interrogatives to gain an understanding of the whole story.

Peter writes of how Old Testament prophets did such investigative work concerning the coming of the Messiah –

Of this salvation the prophets have inquired and searched carefully, who prophesied of the grace that would come to you, searching what, or what manner of time, the Spirit of Christ who was in them was indicating when He testified beforehand the sufferings of Christ and the glories that would follow. To them it was revealed that, not to themselves, but to us they were ministering the things which now have been reported to you through those who have preached the gospel to you by the Holy Spirit sent from heaven—things which angels desire to look into. (1 Peter 1:10–12)

As the words of Malachi come to us today, we receive the report directly from the prophets. To us they were ministering. It is up to us to investigate. It is up to you to find the facts and relay an accurate report. On Wednesday we'll consider how Zacharias sings these words of the prophets in NT fulfillment. And so we ask the Spirit sent from heaven to teach us these things: *Father, send us your Spirit from heaven to report to us those blessed truths – the sufferings and glories of Christ. Amen.*

“Behold He is coming.” ... As we ponder and prepare for the birth of our Lord in Bethlehem, we too come with interrogatives and seek answers from the word. **Prepare – He is coming.**

1. WHEN? ... When His messenger prepares the way

“When” was perhaps one of the most challenging questions for the OT prophets and believers to answer. As we just referenced from 1 Peter, the prophets searched carefully to know “what manner of time” the suffering and glories of Christ would be revealed. Malachi was the last written work of the OT prophets. As the faithful in Israel waited and wondered when, they would consider carefully these words:

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.

Literally, “he will clear the way...” Isaiah speaks also of one who clears the way: *The voice of one crying in the wilderness: “Prepare the way of the Lord; Make straight in the desert A highway for our God. (Isaiah 40:3)* Through the Spirit, the prophets here speak of the same event. They speak of the Messiah King marching in on a clear path. They mark His coming by a forerunner who will prepare the way.

It would be some 400 years after Malachi before there would again be a prophet in Israel. It would be some 400 years before an angel would appear to Zacharias saying, *“you wife Elizabeth will bear you a son, and you shall call his name John ... And he will turn many of the children of Israel to the Lord their God. ... to make ready a people prepared for the Lord.” (Luke 1:16–17)*

On Wednesday we'll consider how Zacharias, full of the Spirit, speaks of the birth of his son, John, saying, *“And you, child, will be called the prophet of the Highest; For you*

will go before the face of the Lord to prepare His ways, To give knowledge of salvation to His people By the remission of their sins, (Luke 1:76–77)

Here, some 400 years later, comes the One who cries out in the wilderness. Here comes John the Baptist crying out: *“Repent, for the kingdom of heaven is at hand!” (Matthew 3:2)* He comes with a message of salvation through the forgiveness of sins.

Here he comes to you. For the message he brings is to you also. This message of sin and salvation prepares you for the Lord’s coming. Clear the way. **BEHOLD, THE LORD COMES!**

2. WHO? ... The Lord, the Angel of the covenant

When telling a knock, knock joke, we ask “who’s there?” Well, this punchline is no joke. Here in the words of Malachi, the Lord stands knocking on the door, ready to be revealed. Who’s there? ...the Angel of the covenant is here.

The word “Angel” means “messenger.” Many times the Old Testament will refer to the pre-incarnate Jesus as “the Angel of the LORD.” Here He is called the “Angel of the covenant.”

That word “covenant” means “agreement.” Try to get this engrained in your head. Think of it in terms of a lease – two parties coming to a legal agreement. If you decide to rent out a bedroom in your house, you will likely want to write up a covenant to make sure the other party is held liable. If the second party lives up to the terms, they receive the benefits of the room; if not, they’re out. They may even receive a penalty or fine.

The Old Covenant is a lot like such an arrangement. To receive the benefits, you must keep the requirements. To receive heaven you must perfectly fulfill the terms that live up to God’s standard. If not, you’re out. You must pay the penalty of death in hell. The requirements of this lease are such that sinful humans could never keep them. This is why, out of pure love, God has written a NEW AGREEMENT, one that fulfills the requirements that you could not. This NEW COVENANT is not like the Old. In this agreement, God meets all requirements for you. He agrees to fulfill the terms of His Old Covenant. He keeps the Law in your place. And not only does He perfectly fulfill all requirements, but He also submits to the punishment we have earned. All this He does in order to freely give you the benefits. That is, under the New Covenant, God gives you heaven. All this He does through the birth, life, death, and resurrection of His Son Jesus Christ.

Therefore, in the Lord’s Supper, He gives us the blood of the New Covenant. Jesus is truly the Angel of the New Covenant. He brings a covenant of peace through the blood

He has shed. The first messenger prepares the way ... the second Messenger fulfills the way. Truly, this is the One in whom we delight. Behold, He is coming!

3. WHERE? ... To His temple

Under the Old Covenant, the Temple of the LORD was a symbol of God's presence among His people. It was the place where He would meet with Moses and the priests. It was the place where sin-sacrifices were offered for the forgiveness of sins. The Temple was the place where God was to be found.

v.1 And the Lord, whom you seek, Will suddenly come to His temple

When Jesus arrived, He did indeed come suddenly to His temple. In John's Gospel, it takes less than two chapter before he records the event where Jesus comes to the Temple and casts out the money changers. He condemns the false practices of the religious leaders. His coming is sudden and unexpected.

For John also records at that event how Jesus says: "Destroy this temple and in three days I will raise it up." John goes on to note that Jesus is not speaking of the physical Temple in Jerusalem, but of His own body which would be destroyed on the cross. Jesus' coming to the Temple in the flesh was not where He would take up permanent dwelling. He would prophecy of how at the hands of the Romans in A.D. 70, not one stone of this Temple will be left upon another. The veil would be torn in two as He is crucified. His unexpected coming would be that He would bring an end to the Old Covenant with its symbolic ritual and establish the substance in Him.

Here is that Old to New transition in action. The body of Jesus crucified is truly the death and burial of the Old Covenant and His body risen is really the birth of the New Covenant. As is written in Romans 10, *Christ is the end of the law for righteousness to everyone who believes. (Romans 10:4).*

The Temple that God dwells in under the New Covenant is the end of the work required lease and the beginning of the Temple of Christ. It is through faith in Christ that we are joined to His risen body, separated from sin and the world as One holy Church. As Paul writes, *we are members of His body, of His flesh and of His bones. (Ephesians 5:30).*

The Messenger of the Covenant comes to His Temple. He rebuilds it as a spiritual Temple where He would dwell among us eternally, where no corruption exists, where we are perfectly joined to Him and He comes to us with the eternal sacrifice of His body and blood, once for all. Here in our worship as we gather to hear His Word we find God dwelling among us. Jesus comes to His Temple through His presence in Word and Sacrament. For where two or three are gathered in His name, there He dwells.

Behold, He is coming. Let us prepare.

4. WHY? ... To purify the sons of Levi and for judgment

The when, who, and where really have answered this last question for us already. The stage is set. The pieces are in place. He comes. For what purpose?

The Lord is coming for judgment against sorcerers, adulterers, perjurers, extortioners. This is not because they commit sins that you and I have not committed, but, as it says in v.5, *"because they do not fear Me."* What these lack is a humble admission of these sins. What they lack on the Last Day is faith in the purifying work of God's Son. He comes for judgment. He comes to purify.

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.

So the Lord must refine. He will not dwell in eternity with things which are corrupt. To offer before the Lord offerings that are tainted by sin simply will not be accepted. As it says, "He will purge them as gold." The sons of Levi must be purified before they can come near this holy God. Jesus came to purify.

Our great God and Savior Jesus Christ ... gave Himself for us, that He might redeem us from every lawless deed and purify for Himself His own special people, zealous for good works. (Titus 2:14)

You endure the day of His coming not because you have committed lesser sins than the adulterers who are cast out. *v. 7 Return to Me, and I will return to you.* You endure because you return to that which purifies you from those sins. You endure because you fear this Savior God, casting off these sins, and condemning them in the death of Christ. You believe in Jesus.

This faith makes you a son of Levi. Levi was one of the twelve sons of Jacob. His tribe was given the priesthood. These were the spiritual leaders and caregivers for God's people. Under the New Covenant, the calling of Levi has come to us, to all believers – a kingdom of priest, a holy nation.

As Peter writes, ... *you are a chosen generation, a royal priesthood, a holy nation, His own special people, that you may proclaim the praises of Him who called you out of darkness into His marvelous light; (1 Peter 2:9)* Our Lutheran confessions rightly declare, "... the offerings of the sons of Levi ... are the proclamation of the Gospel and its good fruits." Ap. XXIV 34

Malachi writes in chapter 2, *"For the lips of a priest should keep knowledge, And people should seek the law from his mouth; For he is the messenger of the Lord of hosts."* (Malachi 2:7-8)

The calling to faithfully teach the Word, to forgive sins, lies not in the pastor's hands alone – it is yours, the priesthood belongs to the congregation. As our confessions go on... "The New Testament requires sacrifices of the heart, not the ceremonial sacrifices for sin offered by a Levitical priesthood." Ap. XXIV 34

The offering you offer to the LORD is pure and righteous in Christ. This is not mere money, as if the Lord were concerned with such outward things. The psalmist writes – *The sacrifices of God are a broken spirit, A broken and a contrite heart— These, O God, You will not despise. ... Then You shall be pleased with the sacrifices of righteousness, With burnt offering and whole burnt offering; Then they shall offer bulls on Your altar. (Psalm 51:17–19)*

It is through a broken heart, prepared by the Word of Christ, that your offering is purified and acceptable to God. This is your whole life. Hence Peter says, *you also, as living stones, are being built up a spiritual house, a holy priesthood, to offer up spiritual sacrifices acceptable to God through Jesus Christ. (1 Peter 2:5)*

Let us return to days of old, as mentioned in v.4. Let us return to a time when the faith based offerings of believers were acceptable. A time when Abel, Abraham, Moses, and Ruth offered sacrifices of faith. Let us join this offering of Judah and Jerusalem, an offering that is pleasant to the LORD.

The purpose of journalists and detectives is to interrogate. They ask the important questions in order to get an accurate report. We are in much the same situation. The Bible has been written in order that we can know the story of God and His righteousness that comes through faith alone. Apart from this our story is fabricated, erred, and without the whole report. God has given us the Old and New Testament so that you can know the when, who, where, how, and why of His coming. Having accurately investigated these things, you are prepared. You now are the reporter who can tell others of this wonderful event – your children, a spouse, a friend ... Tell others the simply facts of the case so they too can be purified and prepared through faith in the coming Lord Jesus.

Amen.