

**Second Sunday in Advent
8 December 2024**

Presentation of the Offering

Oh, rich the gifts You bring, Yourself made poor and weak!/
O love beyond expression,
That thus can sinners seek!/
For this, O Lord, will we Our joyous tribute bring,
And to You ever gratefully Our glad hosannas sing. Amen.

Prayer of the Church—Responsive Form

O Lord, our God, You declared Israel to be Your people and brought them out of Egypt.
You desired their salvation even when they would not listen to Your voice. Since You
have called and gathered us also to be Your people, open our hearts to listen and gladly
submit to Your Word. Lord, in Your mercy, **hear our prayer.**

Almighty God, as You sent John the Baptist to prepare the way of the Lord, send forth
pastors and missionaries to declare Your saving Word to the nations. Preserve them from
temptation, protect them in suffering and equip them with every good gift to make known
the Christ who still comes to save. Lord, in Your mercy, **hear our prayer.**

Heavenly Father, as You call and gather us into Your family, so bless the households of
this congregation. Bless husbands and wives, fathers and mothers as they go about their
work of strengthening marriage and raising children. Let their love abound more and
more, with knowledge and discernment, and fill their homes with the righteousness that
comes through Christ Jesus. Lord, in Your mercy, **hear our prayer.**

Lord of hosts, St. John the Baptist counseled penitent soldiers to go about their military
duties according to Your Word. Remember those who serve in the armed forces,
especially Mandy and Richard Davila, Karl Flynn, Rylie Hallendorff, Casey Powers Jr.,
Brittany Loenser, and Luke and Nicole Thompson. Protect them from harm, give them
wisdom and courage, and grant that they fulfill their duties honorably. Lord, in Your
mercy, **hear our prayer.**

Merciful Lord, Your forerunner prepared the way for the One who is mightier than all:
Your Son, Jesus Christ. For His sake, we entrust to You those in need of healing, comfort
and rescue, especially Ellen, Elizabeth, Marty, Paula, Dawn, Joyce, Don, Betty, Arlyn,
Jessica, Lynne, Gary, Shandel, Linda, Don, Jodi, Shirley, Aaron, Justin, Drew, Paul,
Carolyn, and Marilyn. Have mercy upon them, deliver them according to Your will and
strengthen them in faith, that they might be assured of Your faithfulness. Lord, in Your
mercy, **hear our prayer.**

O Lord, remember Arlyn and Marcia Helke. Bless them in body and soul with all things
needful for this life and eternity. Lord, in Your mercy, **hear our prayer.**

Holy God, You sent Your Son to cleanse and refine us, that we might be righteous and
holy before You. Keep us from the love of sin, which defiles us and stains our works.
Purify our hearts by Your grace, so that we may delight in Your promises and our works

would be both many and pleasing to You. Lord, in Your mercy, **hear our prayer.**

All these things and whatever else You know that we need, grant us, Father, for the sake of Him who died and rose again and now lives and reigns with You and the Holy Spirit, one God forever. **Amen.**

Collect of the Day

Stir up our hearts, O Lord, to make ready the way of Your only-begotten Son, that by His coming we may be enabled to serve You with pure minds; through the same Jesus Christ, our Lord, who lives and reigns with You and the Holy Spirit, one God, now and forever.

Second Sunday in Advent

December 8, 2024

Text: Malachi 3:1-7b (Old Testament Reading)

Other Texts: Philippians 1:2-11 (Epistle); Luke 3:1-14 (Gospel)

“Malachi’s Message for Us Today”

Grace, mercy and peace be yours from God our Father through faith in the Lord Jesus Christ who has come, continues to come in His Word and Sacraments, and will come one last time in glory.

“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; and the messenger of the covenant in whom you delight, behold, he is coming, says the Lord of hosts.”

Here, of course, is the promise that the Lord would send His chosen messenger to prepare the way before Him which was fulfilled in John the Baptist. But there is more here as well. These words are actually God’s response to some challenges just leveled against Him. The people had accused God of being unjust, even being pleased with those who do evil. “Everyone who does evil is good in the sight of the Lord, and he delights in them.” They tested Him by asking, “Where is the God of justice?” Malachi records that God was actually *wearied* by these unbelieving and sinful words addressed to Him by those who claimed to be His people.

But are we not guilty of such unbelieving and sinful words as well, even if they did not leave our mouths (as God can certainly read the words of the very thoughts within our minds)? Do we not look around and wonder why God allows the wicked to so often seemingly not only get away with their evil, but even advance because of it? Now don’t misunderstand me, we do see times where justice finds the unrighteous and they are punished, whether through the legal system or just by consequences of their actions finally catching up to them, perhaps a combination of both. And there are those occasions when the perpetrators of evil are on the receiving end of the evil of others and so a sort of justice under God’s sovereign rule occurs.

But even as we acknowledge and are thankful for these acts of justice in this life, still it often seems “too little, too late” if it occurs. And more often than not they seem to get away with their sins, filth, wickedness, and crime in this life, enjoying the benefits their evil brought them even as others suffer in their wake. Others who are often innocent, who are even God’s people. Do not those who have struggled hard to walk the path of righteousness wonder why they even try when others who haven’t tried seem to receive no negatives, but instead do just as good if not better? Yes, we too, at one time or another, have chimed in with our forefathers complaining,

“It is vain to serve God. What is the profit of our keeping his charge or of

walking as in mourning before the Lord of hosts? And now we call the arrogant blessed. Evildoers not only prosper but they put God to the test and they escape.”

It is to statements like these and to the question, “Where is the God of justice?” *that the Lord replied*, “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; and the messenger of the covenant in whom you delight, behold, he is coming, says the Lord of hosts.” Not only will the messenger come, *but the God of justice will come as well*, and He will come *suddenly*. But even here, the Lord does something unexpected and, perhaps to be honest, undesired.

“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 fullers’ soap. He will sit as a refiner and purifier of silver, and he will purify the sons of Levi and refine them like gold and silver, and they will bring offerings in righteousness to the Lord.”

“Who can stand when He appears?” The answer, “No one!” The sons of Levi are God’s people. *They too stand in need of refining and cleansing*. John the Baptist proclaimed the message “Repent!” but to whom did he primarily preach? Yes, God’s people! *They* had wandered far from God’s ways. As they saw the wicked seemingly get away with evil, they gave into the temptation of apathy and even to open sin, justifying it by God’s seeming uncaring against the sins of others. Yet even as sin grew in them, they cried out all the louder to God that He is unjust for not punishing those “really wicked” people like the Romans and other Gentiles.

Recognizing that the Christian Church is Israel fulfilled, do we not see how John’s message is so needed by those who claim to be God’s people today? Whole denominations have embraced false teachings and sins of various sorts. There are those within our own denomination and churches who don’t care too much about pure teaching, who don’t want righteousness and wickedness declared too clearly lest they or a loved one might actually realize they need to repent of their apathy and sins. And there’s our own hearts and minds that question God’s justice, wondering why He allows so much evil, even as we downplay our own pet sins.

Yes, we see the need the Lord’s refining and cleansing in His Church, and within us if *we* are to bring offerings in righteousness. For it is very true that even as good fruit can only come from a good tree, so righteous offerings can only be offered by one who is already righteous.

And so our Lord’s double work is revealed. He is the messenger, literally *angel*, of the covenant, the Angel of the Lord who spoke from the burning bush saying, “I AM WHO I AM.” The covenant is the new one in His blood, shed on the cross, which like a fuller’s soap cleanses us from all sin. Though our sins are like scarlet, yet we are white as snow

when washed in the scarlet blood of Christ Jesus, God in the flesh. When the soap of His blood first washes us in Baptism, and then continues to wash us through the Gospel Word, Absolution, and the precious Communion of His body and blood, we have, by faith, put on the white robe of righteousness.

But the Lord is not yet done with us. For what good is it to cleanse someone from sin only for them to foul themselves again? Is that not the dog returning to its own vomit and the pig jumping back into the filthy mud which God warns us against? So the Lord Jesus works to keep us from returning to evil and to make us ever more pure. He has baptized us with the Holy Spirit and fire, that is, the refiner's fire by which we are disciplined and tested so that the impurities are ever more removed as we increasingly recognize the sin within us and our disgust over it. And being righteous through faith, with sin not controlling us, and being refined by our minds being transformed to follow the Word and not the world as we are filled with the mind of Christ, we bring our offering in righteousness. Offerings of good works, prayer, serving Him by serving others, loving our enemies, bearing our cross in patience, and growing in all godly virtues.

Now do not misunderstand this to mean that there is no judgment upon the wicked, as if God does not care about what they do, much less approves of them. Scripture declares, "You hate all evil doers," and again, "[The Lord's] soul hates the wicked." God *will judge* sinners. But before He condemns them He would give them the chance to heed His messenger's message of "Repent!" He desires most of all to judge them *in His mercy*, to declare them righteous through faith in Jesus' cleansing blood. But those who will not heed His gracious call to return to Him in repentance, who reject His mercy in Christ Jesus, they shall then reap the full judgment that is their due, yes, doubly due, first by their sinful nature and sins and second, and worse, by their rejecting His cleansing forgiveness and refining fire of sanctification in Christ Jesus.

"Then I will draw near to you for judgment. I will be a swift witness against the sorcerers, against the adulterers, against those who swear falsely, against those who oppress the hired worker in his wages, the widow and the fatherless, against those who thrust aside the sojourner, and do not fear me, says the Lord of hosts."

This is exactly what St. John witnessed in the Revelation, "Outside [of new Jerusalem] are the dogs and sorcerers and the sexually immoral and murderers and idolaters, and everyone who loves and practices falsehood." Of them the Word declares, "the smoke of their torment goes up forever and ever, and they have no rest, day or night." This is the end of those who despise God. How much worse will it be then for those who claimed to bear His name but did such open evils and by such blaspheme His holy name before both believers and unbelievers?

St. Paul wrote that the Law was a guardian for God's people until Christ came, but that now we should no longer need a guardian. That one who knows Christ Jesus by faith should need the beatings of the Law to keep them from falling into open sin is shameful;

Christians do not let sin rule them. That God gives those who were saved and who return to sin the chance to repent once more is pure grace upon grace! So do not let that grace be offered in vain!

Do we really think that if one gets away with a sin here on earth that they will truly get away with it? Scripture warns that judgment begins at the household of God. What is this but hearing the Word of Law the Lord's messengers, His pastors, continue to speak so that we would know God's just judgment upon our sins and repent, *and thereby escape His wrath*. We must take this call to repent seriously, for while the rolling thunder of the Law warns of the coming storm, the lightning strike of Christ returns will be sudden and then it will be too late. So repent, not once in the past, but daily, for we surely daily sin much. And then bear the fruits in keeping with repentance, works of sacrificial love towards others, works of restitution towards those whom your sins have hurt, and the work of readily forgiving those who have sinned against you.

Yes, Dear Christians, repent; *but do not despair!* The Lord says, "For I the LORD do not change; therefore you, O children of Jacob, are not consumed." He grows weary of our sins and our accusations against Him, and He will not change from punishing sin, for He is just and holy. But He is also gracious and merciful, slow to anger, abounding in love. He does not desire the death of the sinner, but that they would repent. And He will not change from this either!

So never fear that it is too late to return to the Lord, that He will not take you back. He has shed His blood that you might come back to Him, for in Him is full and free forgiveness of all your sins. More, He promises to avenge our suffering and reward our faithfulness to Him. Truly, we delight in His first coming in grace and, remaining cleansed and refined, we will delight when He comes again to bring us into heaven. So we pray, "Come Lord Jesus!" Amen!