

**Holy Trinity Lutheran Church
Des Moines, WA
December 9, 2012
Advent 2**

Malachi 3:1-4

Do You Hear the Echo?

- 1. Where does it come from?**
- 2. For whom does it go out?**
- 3. It is a call of warning, call to prepare and a call to repentance.**

**Hymns: "Lead Us to Your Light" – 14 – 32 –
Closing: 6**

All Scripture quotations from NIV 1984

"See, I will send my messenger, who will prepare the way before me. 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.

But who can endure the day of his coming? Who can stand when he appears? For he will be like a refiner's fire or a launderer's soap. He will sit as a refiner and purifier of silver; he 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. Malachi 3:1-4

Do you hear the echo? As we continue our advent preparation today, I'd like you to open your ears and listen. "Do you hear the echo?" It was ringing throughout the words of the lessons which we read just a few minutes ago. The echo that we hear during this time of Christmas preparation is the call of every one of God's messengers ringing down throughout the ages.

It began with the Old Testament prophets, who spoke to God's people long before Christ came into this world on that first Christmas. They spoke over the span of hundreds of years, yet their message was the same. From Elijah and Elisha to Isaiah and Jeremiah to Zephaniah and Zechariah, those prophets delivered an urgent message that echoed down from God himself. For over 1,000 years, God's Old Testament people heard that same message all the way to the day that Malachi, a man whose name is Hebrew for messenger, echoed the call. He was the

final prophet of the Old Testament, and after he spoke in 400 B.C., the echo seemed to stop. For nearly 400 years, God's people would not hear the same echoing call of the prophets that they had heard for so long. That silence tested faith, it caused doubt, it led people to search for other answers.

Yet the echo was not gone. Before going silent, God made a promise through his prophet. Malachi, in those final words of the Old Testament, pointed to a time when the call of God's messenger would echo again in his people's ears. Speaking for God, Malachi said, **"See, I will send my messenger, who will prepare the way before me."** And as we heard in the Gospel for today, that messenger would come as John the Baptist, who rekindled that message of God's prophets. His call echoed off the Jordan River into the desert wilderness and people flocked in amazement to listen as the echo returned.

After John the Baptist, it was the Apostles who then took God's message and made sure that it echoed to every corner of the world. Years would pass by, that call would continue to reverberate in people's ears, and then Martin Luther would stand up and make sure that this echo stayed in tune to God's will. So now today, by God's grace and goodness, I and many other pastors are privileged to keep that echo ringing in this world so that you can hear its important message.

The echoing call goes out to each and every sinner who has ever been born into this world. It went out to the stiff-necked people of Israel long ago; it went to the pagan citizens of the Roman world during the time of the early Christian church; it rang even in the dark, middle ages when men would try to damper its ring. And it still goes out in the world today to people like you and me, people who keep sinning and sinning and sinning. God's message will always have ears in which it needs to ring.

And so today, as we await Christ, the Anointed One who was promised by God, let us listen to the call that has echoed down for the people of this world for so long. Listen again to Malachi's version of that call, ***"Then suddenly the Lord you are seeking will come to his temple; the messenger of the covenant, whom you desire, will come. But who can endure the day of his coming? Who can stand when he appears? For he will be like a refiner's fire or a launderer's soap. He will sit as a refiner and purifier of silver; he 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."***

As we listen to that message, we need to first hear it as a call of warning. For Old Testament people who longed for the coming Messiah, it was easy to forget exactly why Christ, the messenger of the covenant,

was coming. And it was easy to forget how he would come.

In Malachi's time, the people of Israel had returned from Babylonian captivity just 100 years earlier. They had gone through a time of religious reform. But now, they had slipped once again into an impatient tailspin. They viewed the coming as something that was owed to them. They became so focused on looking for the fulfillment of God's covenant, that they really forgot why his coming was so necessary. It was because of their many, many sins.

And so, Malachi spoke these words to snap them back to reality. In speaking about the Messiah's coming, he said, "***Who can endure the day of his coming? Who can stand when he appears?***" Malachi pointed the people not just to the day when Jesus would come into this world the first time to save. At the same time, he had them looking to the day when Jesus would come at the end of the world to judge. With this warning, Malachi was reminding the people that they better think about their attitudes as they demanded this coming. Those who were found in the mess of their sins, those who were found without faith-filled hearts, they would not be able to stand before the perfect Judge on that day.

And what a warning that is that echoes down to us as well, as people who are certainly closer to that second coming of Jesus than those in the Old Testament. As we spend these few days each year waiting for Jesus to come on Christmas, we are also to spend each and every day waiting for Christ's second return. As we think about the Christmas joy that fills the air at this time of year, it is very easy to forget that it is because of the sins that we have committed that Christ needed to come into this world. As we are surrounded by the joyful sound of Christmas carols, it is easy to forget that these weeks are also a time of preparation in which we are to remember exactly what our sins have done to us and all the world. As we think about Christmas, we must also be cognizant of the end.

Who can endure the day of his coming? Who can stand when he appears?

Those words are to be a sobering reminder for us to think about. Are we truly ready? How many of us feel truly prepared for the sudden coming of Christ? And it is a message for us to spread. Think of all the people in the world whose Christmas joy is based on worldly things during this time of year. Think of all the people who have no clue why Christmas is a time of joy. Think of all those who give no thought to Christ's second coming as they live their lives. We might miss it often, but the Christmas season certainly brings with it a warning.

And so, this message that we hear echoing in the Christmas season also brings with it a call to prepare. For many of us, Christmas is all about preparation.

Do you have your own version of the *12 Days of Christmas*, a plan for all that you need to accomplish in the days that lead to Christmas morning? Perhaps it is a plan that involves buying the gifts, setting up all the decorations and making sure that all of the get-togethers make it onto the schedule. I don't believe that it is quite the preparation that God had in mind when he told his people to prepare for his Son. As God told his Old Testament people to prepare, he also tells us to be constantly preparing.

And to do that, God gives us a call to repent. As we think about our lives in this time before Christmas, every one of us should come before God with a dreadful reality. "Lord, we have failed." "Almighty God, how could we ever stand ready for your coming? How could we ever be confident to stand before you? Look at the sins that come into our lives each and every day. Look at how we fall short even in our preparation for Christmas. Look how we spend our time. Look how we use our resources. Look at how we are so willing to give gifts, but so unwilling to share your Word." Proper preparation for Christmas can only leave us being filled with disgust and despair. It has us looking at our sin and knowing the terrible results that we deserve. It has us falling before God and admitting how unprepared we truly are. That is repentance. That is preparation. That is listening to the echoing call of God's message for his people. See our sin. Know its result. Go to God, pleading for help.

And be fully confident that God will give it. It is not easy to look at our shortcomings and failures, but that is God working through the refining fire and launderer's soap. It is through that often painful process of seeing your sin and its results that God prepares you for His Son. And that Son came first at Christmas to completely remove the impurities of your errors. He came to remove the filth of your sins. And through the work of that first coming, you can be sure that you are ready to stand before Christ's throne at this second coming. You will be acceptable to the LORD.

So, dear Christians, do you hear the echo? Listen to that call closely in this Advent season, because it gives a call that we all desperately need. The echo that you hear brings the warning call of God's Law. Yet, it also brings the cleansing call of God's grace. It is the call of God's messengers, those who bring his eternal Word into this world. The message remains the same, it is repentance. See your sin, know the result; long for God's solution and know absolutely that he is coming soon. May that message continually echo in your hearts so that you continually prepare for your coming Savior. Amen.