

**Zion Evangelical Lutheran Church (Columbus, OH)**  
**Advent Midweek 2 – December 8, 2021**  
**Malachi 4:1-6 – Jesus is Our Sun of Righteousness**  
**By Vicar Peter Wagner**

In the name of the Father, and of the Son, and of the Holy Spirit. Amen. Hear again from the Old Testament reading for the second Sunday in Advent, from Malachi chapter 4. **“For behold, the day is coming, burning like an oven, when all the arrogant and all evildoers will be stubble. The day that is coming shall set them ablaze, says the Lord of hosts, so that it will leave them neither root nor branch. But for you who fear my name, the sun of righteousness shall rise with healing in its wings. You shall go out leaping like calves from the stall. And you shall tread down the wicked, for they will be ashes under the soles of your feet, on the day when I act, says the Lord of hosts.”** This is our text.

Today’s text from Malachi 4 shares many similarities with last week’s text from Jeremiah 23. Last week, Jeremiah described the coming days of the wise king, the Messiah. Under him, the people would enjoy peace and salvation. We read, **“Behold, the days are coming, declares the Lord, when I will raise up for David a righteous Branch, and he shall reign as king and deal wisely, and shall execute justice and righteousness in the land. In his days Judah will be saved, and Israel will dwell securely.”** Today, Malachi also speaks of a coming day, the great and awesome day of the Lord. For the righteous, that day will be one of rejoicing, of triumph over the wicked. But for the unrepentant, that day will be a day of wrath, burning like an oven, reducing the arrogant and evildoers to stubble, cleared away and burnt up.

Not only do both of these texts speak of the coming day of the Lord, but both mention a branch. Last week we heard that the coming king would arise as a Branch from the dead stump of David’s throne. Today Malachi mentions a branch in the exact opposite context, not of restoration, but of destruction and judgement. **“The day that is coming shall set them ablaze, says the Lord of hosts, so that it will leave them neither root nor branch.”** Unbelievers will be left with nothing to hold on to, no root or branch, no possibility to spring up again. For they were never joined to the true Branch. They did not abide in Christ, as branches of the righteous vine.

Consider one more similarity between Jeremiah and Malachi. Jeremiah mentioned the Exodus under Moses, and he described a new and greater Exodus and Passover feast under Christ, the new Moses. He said, **“Behold, the days are coming, declares the Lord, when they shall no longer say, ‘As the Lord lives who brought up the people of Israel out of the land of Egypt,’ but ‘As the Lord lives who brought up and led the offspring of the house of Israel out of the north country and out of all the countries where he had driven them.”** Today Malachi also points us to Moses and the Exodus, saying, **“Remember the law of my servant Moses, the statutes and just decrees that I commanded him at Horeb for all Israel.”** But then Malachi focuses in on another major Old Testament figure, Elijah. While Jeremiah spoke of a new and greater Moses, Malachi speaks of a new and greater Elijah. Malachi says, **“Behold, I will send you Elijah the prophet before the great and awesome day of the Lord comes. And he will turn the hearts of fathers to their children and the hearts of children to their fathers.”** Before the day of the Lord, a new and greater prophet will come to turn God’s people to repentance, so that they might be forgiven and accounted righteous.

All these similarities show that the two texts – Jeremiah and Malachi – speak of two sides of the same coin, the same event, the same savior, the same coming of Christ. As a matter of fact, today I’m pointing out connections to last week’s text, and next week I’ll make more connections back to today, to bridge all three weeks of Advent preaching.

When Jeremiah prophesied that the Messiah would be a new and greater Moses, he was looking forward to the coming of Christ. But when Malachi foretells the coming of the new Elijah, he is looking at events immediately before Christ’s coming. Elijah was God’s messenger who called Israel to repentance in the time of king Ahab. John the Baptist fulfilled Elijah’s role of preaching repentance. The angel Gabriel quoted Malachi when he told John’s father Zechariah, **“He will turn many of the children of Israel to the Lord their God, and he will go before him in the spirit and power of Elijah, to turn the hearts of the fathers to the children, and the disobedient to the wisdom of the just, to make ready for the Lord a people prepared.”**<sup>11</sup> As the new Elijah, John the Baptist exceeded Elijah by pointing directly to forgiveness in Jesus. He said, **“Behold, the Lamb**

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<sup>11</sup> Luke 1:16-17

**of God, who takes away the sin of the world.”<sup>2</sup>**

When Jeremiah prophesied about the days of eternal peace and security under David’s Branch, he was speaking about the peace we have in Jesus, and especially about its perfection and consummation in heaven. But Malachi writes of a day of terror and wrath for the wicked, of utter destruction, stripping them bare. Malachi is turning back the clock, looking not at the outcome of peace and eternal rest for believers, but to what comes before, to the final judgment and the moment of Christ’s return.

So while Jeremiah wrote of the outcome of salvation, our eternal heavenly rest, Malachi focuses on the moment of Christ’s coming. Malachi points us to John the Baptist, to Advent themes of repentance and preparation, to being ready for the day of judgment lest we be destroyed in Christ’s wrath. Jeremiah promises salvation; Malachi warns about judgment.

But if we think that Malachi is only about judgment, we’ve missed the point. We’ve missed the most important similarity between Jeremiah and Malachi, the similarity at the heart of both texts. Both prophets speak of coming righteousness through the Messiah. In Jeremiah we heard about the coming king, **“And this is the name by which he will be called: ‘The Lord is our righteousness.’”** Now in Malachi we hear similar language of hope and righteousness, **“But for you who fear my name, the sun of righteousness shall rise with healing in its wings.”** In Jesus, God’s righteousness shines on his people, to deliver them. The Lord becomes their righteousness for them, to clothe them in his righteousness. He imputes righteousness to them for Christ’s sake. That’s why Malachi describes Jesus as our sun of righteousness. Just as the sun is the source of light, Jesus is our source of righteousness. The wings of the sun are sunbeams, rays of light. Jesus rises like the dawn from on high with healing in his wings. He breaks upon us in new day, coming with rays of righteous light to bring healing from all sin, corruption, suffering, and death.

This is what Zechariah prophesied in his song at the birth John the Baptist – we call it the Benedictus in our Matins liturgy. Zechariah sings, **“And you, child, will be called the prophet of the Most High; for you will go before the Lord to prepare his ways, to give knowledge of salvation to his people in the forgiveness of their sins, because of the tender mercy of our God, whereby the sunrise shall dawn upon us from on high to give light to those who sit in darkness and in the shadow of death, to guide our feet into the way of peace.”<sup>3</sup>**

Therefore, for you, Malachi’s prophecy is not a prophecy of wrath and judgment. For you, he prophesies comfort and rejoicing. **“You shall go out leaping like calves from the stall.”** Think of a young calf, kept penned up all winter, finally set free to romp in green pastures. Since the sun of righteousness has risen upon you, since your righteous Lord has died for you, since God has declared you righteous for his sake, you are truly free. You have your faithful king, you have security, you have eternal justice and peace. You shall not be struck with a decree of utter destruction. For by the preaching of the prophets, by hearing the gospel, your hearts have been turned back to God. Your hearts have been reconciled to God in repentance and forgiveness; you are children reconciled to the Father. Jesus, your deliverer, is coming soon on that day. Your new Moses is coming to bring you out of this evil world, this place of slavery to sin, into his heavenly kingdom. So as we heard in the Gospel reading on Sunday, **“Straighten up and raise your heads, because your redemption is drawing near.”<sup>4</sup>**

In the name of Jesus our righteousness. Amen.

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<sup>2</sup> John 1:29

<sup>3</sup> Luke 1:76-79

<sup>4</sup> Luke 21:28