

Welcome the Messenger

☆ Coming with the Covenant (v.1)

☆ Purifying the people (vv.2-4)

In the name of Jesus the Messiah, for whose Advent we prepare, dear hopeful Christians:

Sometimes our best hopes are misplaced. That was my painful lesson in a teenage memory. In Catechism class we were talking about a member injured in a fall from his hunting stand. I said I would rather build my own stand than trust something strapped to a tree but a student told me what his hunting class instructors are saying. Statistically, 80% of hunters injured or killed in tree stands made their own. That's when my teenage memory flooded back. We built lots of tree forts, carefully inspected by our dad in the early years. But the last one was my own. I tacked on a rail thinking I would nail it down later. I was the one who leaned on that rail, fortunately only about six feet above soft grass. But the scar on the back of my leg raking over the edge reminds me how the best do-it-yourself hopes can fail.

Why do we put so much confidence in our own skill? If we fail at what we can touch and feel, how will we succeed in spiritual matters beyond our sight and comprehension? Here is where our need for God's help is so glaring in earth's dark night. And here is where God's goodness shines in His Advent promises of deliverance. Get ready, dear hopeful Christians to **Welcome the Messenger**.

☆ Coming with the Covenant (v.1)

The last book of the Old Testament means: *My Messenger*. Malachi was inspired by God the Holy Spirit to record a dialog between God and His people – stubborn, belligerent in spite of all God's discipline in the Babylonian Captivity. This was a few generations after the Return. And we don't remember our own lessons very well, much less what God taught our parents and grandparents. Every generation needs God to teach sin's harsh realities in order to enjoy a life of repentance with God.

You can read the whole book of Malachi this evening before you turn out the lights. But let me mention just a couple examples. The first was problems God was having with the priests. Remember my story about all those worn out mattresses in a Campus Ministry my Vicar year? Kind hearted people donated for the students, but mattresses too old for anyone to want them. It took a couple work days to throw them out. In our early years we had a herd of broken vacuum cleaners until a few members bought commercial units for our volunteers. Someone told me the term for this is "Junk for Jesus."

In Malachi it was worse than junk from the priests. They gave crippled and diseased sacrifices to God. He said, ***"Try offering them to your governor!"*** (1:8) Then it the priests were surprised that the people brought contemptible offerings to the LORD's temple. But this bothered was their income stream. The LORD was angry: ***"Because of you [priests] I will rebuke your descendants; I will spread on your faces the offal from your festival sacrifices and you will be carried off with it....For the lips of a priest ought to preserve knowledge, and from his mouth men should seek instruction – because he is the messenger of the LORD Almighty."*** Failing priests meant God would soon send His own Messenger.

But God had more Advent admonitions. His people were marrying unbelievers worshiping idols and divorcing their Jewish wives. Then they cried that God paid no attention to their prayers. The LORD gave a stinging rebuke about marriage: ***"Has not the LORD made them one? In flesh and spirit they are his. And why one? Because he was seeking godly offspring. So guard yourself in your spirit, and do not break faith with the wife of your youth. 'I hate divorce,' says the LORD God of Israel, 'and I hate a man's covering himself with violence as well as with his garment,' says the Lord Almighty. So guard yourself in your spirit, and do not break faith."*** (2:15f NIV84)

Just when your heart is heavy with failed hopes, best efforts ruined, offerings in guilt, marriage difficulties messed up – God promises this: ***“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.*** Let me get this straight. All this sin arouses the Lord’s just anger at us, yet His response is Good News to send Jesus? He kindles our hopes of heaven with the promise of His New Covenant forgiveness? God has us “dead to rights” guilty, but He declares us innocent for Jesus’ sake! That’s Good News! **Welcome the Messenger.** Christ is **Coming with the Covenant** of pure grace and mercy in His sacrifice for us all.

☆ **Purifying the people (vv.2-4)**

“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.”

A women’s Bible class wondered about this. So one visited a silversmith without saying why. As she watched, he put a piece of raw metal in the crucible over the fire to heat it. He explained that refining silver means holding it in the middle of the fire where the flames are hottest to burn away the impurities.

The woman thought about God holding us in a hot spot as “He sits as a refiner and purifier of silver.”

She asked if he had to sit by the fire as the silver is refined. The craftsman answered, “Yes, I not only have to sit close holding the silver, but watch it close. If the silver goes too long, the heat will destroy it.”

Finally she asked, “How do you know when the silver is fully refined?”

The silversmith answered with a smile, “Oh, that’s easy. When I see *my image* in it.”

In the heat of life’s fire, remember that God has His eye on you and is watching closely. He feels the heat too. And He knows just how long to keep refining until He sees *His image* in you. ¹

Too many folks are like a telegraph operator during the Great Hinckley Fire of 1894. They try too hard and wait too long. As reported on the Hinckley website: Stationed at the St. Paul and Duluth Depot in Hinckley, Tommy Dunn remained loyal to his post and waited for orders. Eventually the train tracks burned, but no orders came. The young telegrapher was determined to save the people of this area. His last know message tapped out on his key to the agent in Barnum was “I think I’ve stayed too long.” Tommy Dunn waited until it was too late for his own escape. He perished in the fire. ²

Welcome the Messenger sent by God the first Christmas and coming once more on the Last Day. **Welcome Him** with repentant hearts. By His Word and sacrament our dear Lord Jesus is still **Purifying the people**. ***“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.”***

Many cultures have died trying to appease God. And our politically correct culture does not understand. A few years ago *National Geographic* reported the discovery of a mummified teenage girl in the Andes mountains of Peru. She had been a human sacrifice, and her body mummified in the extreme, dry cold of the high elevations. But the *NatGeo* reporters did not want to call this “wrong.” It’s just their culture, you know. And they can’t criticize culture unless it is the culture of Biblical Christianity.

Welcome the Messenger. First, God takes away our guilt by the willing, volunteer sacrifice of Jesus in our place. Then he frees our will to gladly give offerings in Jesus’ name as a grand privilege. For Jesus’ sake our God is pleased with two small copper coins from a faithful widow. When we see our sins, but we see our Savior coming with such generous grace, how can you help it? **Purifying the people, Coming with the Covenant – Welcome the Messenger** to your heart and home. Amen.

¹ Adapted from email received 10/17/2009. Author unknown.

² <http://www.hinckley.govoffice2.com>

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