

## Malachi for Advent 2021

*See, I am sending my messenger to prepare the way before me... Malachi 3:1*

Advent is a season of solemn preparation for the Coming of Jesus Christ in three ways: the celebration of the First Coming of Jesus in the Incarnation which we celebrate as Christmas; the participation in the Second Coming of Jesus through Word and Sacrament in the life of faith through the Church; and the longing and expectation of the Return of Christ in the Resurrection of the dead and the Life of the world to come.

The prophetic book of Malachi in the Old Testament is the source for several daily readings in the last half of the first week of Advent. "Malachi" roughly translates from Hebrew as "my messenger," (Mal. 1:1) and became the name of the book in the Scroll of the Prophets to distinguish it from Zechariah. The message to Israel was harsh and hopeful: God warned of dire consequences if faithful people continued to neglect regular worship, forget their tithes and offerings, and ignore the moral standards of the covenant. He holds the clergy to an especially demanding standard and envisions a heavenly Book of Remembrance in which "those who worshiped the Lord and thought on his name" are recorded. Malachi is an important book to read in Advent.

In 3:1 the title phrase is given a different and wider meaning. The messenger is now the one who comes just before the Day of Judgment, "to prepare the way before me, says the Lord." The Gospel writers and Jesus knew this messenger as John the Baptizer—the person who focuses our preparations for the Coming of the Lord in the second week of Advent. John intensified Malachi's call for more vigilant faithfulness and more faithful leadership: at great risk, he did not hesitate to criticize the abuses of power in the Roman legions and in the court of Herod the king. John's amplified echo of Malachi might sting as we hear it in the midst of how we are handling and mishandling pandemic response in our churches, our city and country, and around the world.

The prayer for the second week of Advent shows us our part and focuses on our unity and renewal: *Stir up our hearts, Lord God, to prepare the way of your only Son. By his coming give to all people of the world knowledge of your salvation through Jesus Christ our Saviour and Lord, who lives and reigns with you and the Holy Spirit, one God, now and forever. Amen*