

Big Questions, Big Answers Pt 2

2 Advent C

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First Reading: Malachi 3:1-4

God announces a covenant with Israel. A messenger like Malachi (his name means “my messenger”) will prepare the way for the coming of the Lord by purifying & refining God’s people, as silver & gold are refined.

¹See, I am sending my messenger to prepare the way before me, & the Lord whom you seek will suddenly come to the temple. Indeed, the messenger of the covenant in whom you delight is coming, says the Lord of hosts. ²But who can endure the day of his coming, & who can stand when he appears? For he is like a refiner’s fire & like fullers’ soap; ³he will sit as a refiner & purifier of silver, & will purify the descendants of Levi & refine them like gold & silver, until they present offerings to the Lord in righteousness. ⁴Then the offering of Judah & Jerusalem will be pleasing to the Lord as in the days of old & as in former years.

Gospel: Luke 3:1-6

John the Baptist is a herald of Jesus, whose way is prepared by “repentance for the forgiveness of sins.” As we hear the careful record of human leaders, we sense the spectrum of political & religious authority that will be challenged by this coming Lord.

¹In the 15th year of the reign of Emperor Tiberius, when Pontius Pilate was governor of Judea, & Herod was ruler of Galilee, & his brother Philip ruler of the region of Ituraea & Trachonitis, & Lysanias ruler of Abilene, ²during the high priesthood of Annas & Caiaphas, the word of God came to John son of Zechariah in the wilderness. ³& John went into all the region around the Jordan, proclaiming a baptism of repentance for the forgiveness of sins, ⁴as it is written in the book of the words of the prophet Isaiah, “The voice of one crying out in the wilderness: ‘Prepare the way of the Lord, make straight the paths of the Lord. ⁵Every valley shall be filled, & every mountain & hill shall be made low, & the crooked shall be made straight, & the rough ways made smooth; ⁶& all flesh shall see the salvation of God.’”

Introduction

Forerunners & messengers advance the advent of our God. While John the baptizer’s voice in the wilderness may be the principal focus of the day, Malachi’s prophecy could as easily herald the coming Christ as forerunner of the Lord of hosts. Finally, all the baptized are called to participate in the sharing of the gospel. In so doing we prepare the way for the coming of Jesus & assist all people in capturing a vision of the “salvation of God.”

Overview - Your Kingdom Come on Earth

Luke sets the preaching of John the Baptist clearly in the midst of the political & religious environment of his day. We are told the names of the emperor, governor, & other political rulers of the day. They are the ones who are supposed to care for the welfare of the citizens of their territories. Although John gave his message while he was in the wilderness, it was intended to have its impact in the farms, villages, & cities where the ordinary & the powerful live out their daily lives. John is not satisfied with the way things are, & his words help prepare us for the coming of one who will turn the world upside down. John's words tell us to examine our own lives & the world around us. We should not be complacent in the face of injustice, but instead seek forgiveness & strive for lives that bear fruit according to God's vision for the world.

We all have the potential to "over-spiritualize" the Bible & our faith, so that they become disconnected from the real needs of the world around us. This potential can be even greater in the days around Christmas, as we may seek to justify over-spending on gifts, excessive eating & drinking, or simply desire to escape from the difficulties of ordinary life for a time. John provides a warning about ignoring the truth about our sinfulness & the brokenness in the world. But John also repeats the promise that God ultimately will not settle for the way things are in the world, & that God's salvation will be made known in the one who is to come: Jesus.

Current Event

The gospel writer Luke is intentional about locating the advent of John the Baptist in a particular time & place. This provides a backdrop for one of Luke's main points: John the Baptist, & the one he proclaims, differs greatly from the rulers of the day, both in appearance & in focus. Consider reflecting on some of the leaders in our world today. Rather than being critical, try to find examples of people who lead & act in ways that connect with God's life-giving work of caring for the vulnerable & loving the neighbor.

Sensory Idea

Mary's song echoes the scripture from Isaiah that John the Baptizer references in Luke 3. These texts speak of God's salvation coming for all people & God's light breaking into our lives in unexpected ways. There is a sense of praise as well as prophecy. These verses provide an opportunity to look back at God's promises in our lives & in the lives of God's people throughout time, while also looking forward with expectation.

Connections with Creation

John the Baptist calls us to prepare the way of the Lord. He is on fire with hope for God's coming, confident that the Savior of the world will come at last with power. John refuses to settle for apathy, despair, phony optimism, or living grimly in an unjust status quo. He faces the evils of the world: he grieves, protests, & does everything in his power to bear witness to God's call for repentance, conversion, & transformation. In the end he's willing to endure imprisonment & even death for the sake of the light that is coming into the world. Today's prophets push leaders to make a swift transition to renewable sources of energy such as sun & wind, & to build a more just & regenerative society. As prophets who stand up for the long-term future of this planet, what policies or legislation can we support?

E-formation

On the second Sunday of Advent, we light two candles on the wreath, & we listen to John the Baptist, preaching, baptizing, & urging also us to prepare for the coming of Christ. Come to worship, to see "the salvation of our God."

[Luke 3:1-6](#)

Written in the late 80s, Luke's treatment of John the Baptist omits mention of his clothing & diet & instead, in the manner of classical Greek authors, dates his narrative at about 27 ce by pinpointing John during the administrations of Emperor Tiberius, the prefect Pilate, the tetrarchs Herod Antipas, Philip, & Lysanias, & the high priests Annas & Caiaphas. Throughout his two volumes, Luke cites historical data. Contemporary scholars debate how much of this data is historically precise versus theologically useful. This list of authorities lends gravity & credence to the narrative of John the Baptist, who parallels (but does not cite) Isaiah. Jordan is only metaphorically "in the wilderness." By listing authorities in the Roman Empire & in Jerusalem's temple staff, & by setting John the Baptist next to Isaiah near the Jordan, Luke presents a detailed setting for Jesus' adult life & ministry. Christ stands within human history, fulfilling in unexpected ways the religious expectations of his people. Also today, the body of Christ lives in the real world & shows to "all flesh" God's salvation. We are to reorder the world & build a royal triumphal highway for the coming of the Lord, in the present & the future.

Second Sunday in Advent

The origin of Advent as a season of fasting to prepare for baptisms at Epiphany is evident on the Second Sunday, which introduces the preaching & baptismal ministry of John the Baptist. God comes, in the past in the history of Israel & the incarnation of Jesus, in the present in the word & sacrament of each Sunday, & in the future at the

end of all things. The preaching of John the Baptist calls us to prepare for God—perhaps in many ways quite different from our preparing for Christmas.

Malachi 3:1-4

A person named Malachi, which means “my messenger,” is unknown from other records. The post-exilic author addresses the people’s expectation that their return to Jerusalem was supposed to ensure their prosperity by calling for more devout worship, more worthy priestly activity in the restored temple, & more pervasive justice in the community. In chapter 3, the prophet anticipates a “messenger” who will inspire the people to improve their worship & communal justice. The passage from Malachi is chosen as an example of the religious expectation that a messenger would urge the people to prepare for the messiah. Christians hear Malachi’s messenger, like the voice of John the Baptist, speaking also to us, calling us to keep the covenant of our baptism & to purify our lives from sin.

(Thanks to Sundays&Seasons.com)

This ADVENT season at LCR we are looking at BIG Questions & BIG Answers in our faith. Advent is an in-between time: Jesus has secured & confirmed the promises of God yet the world continues in much the same way it has for centuries. How as people of faith are we to understand this? People have been invited to share & submit faith questions & have them addressed as much as possible as part of the sermons in Advent. Tune in to see how the conversations go. The format for each of the 4 weeks will be similar: A brief explanation of the emphasis of the day & scriptures will be shared & then we’ll proceed to addressing the BIG Questions. Keep in mind theologians are highly learned, aware of these questions & write books about these topics & even have some differing views. There is often a wide gap in understanding present between those who stand on a Conservative Evangelical foundation of faith & those who have more of a Classic Main-line perspective. Until we see God face-to-face & not in a mirror dimly we have to be content with the spiritual struggles that are part of wrestling with these questions. Faith does give us some information, handles, directions, guidance & always hope as we address these topics.

Submit yours! Just send them to Admin@MyLCR.org to be sorted & formatted. Pastor will try & address as many as possible.