

THE PRESENTATION OF THE LORD

LECTIONARY #524

READING I Malachi 3:1-4

A reading from the Book of the Prophet Malachi

Thus says the Lord God:
Lo, I am sending my messenger
to **prepare** the way **before** me;
And **suddenly** there will come to the temple
the **LORD** whom you **seek**,
And the **messenger** of the covenant whom you **desire**.
Yes, he **is coming**, says the LORD of hosts.
But who will **endure** the day of his coming?
And who can **stand** when he appears?
For he is like the **refiner's fire**,
or like the **fuller's lye**.
He will sit **refining** and **purifying** silver,
and he will **purify** the sons of Levi,
Refining them like gold or like silver
that they may offer **due sacrifice** to the **LORD**.
Then the sacrifice of Judah and Jerusalem
will **please** the **LORD**,
as in the **days of old**, as in **years gone by**.

Malachi = MAL-uh-kī

This strongly worded prophetic reading from Malachi focuses on the purification that the Lord's messenger will bring. Use a firm voice for these opening words of God's message.

Focus your attention on the words of time: "prepare," "suddenly," and "coming."

The messages continues to be firm and filled with warning.

After the phrase "due sacrifice to the Lord," pause. Stress the word "Then," as a brighter future appears.

Judah = JOO-duh

READING I Malachi is the last book of a collection called the Twelve Prophets, who are also known as the Minor Prophets. The title of the book, *mal'ākī* (in Hebrew), means "my messenger" or "my angel," but it is unclear if it is a proper name or merely a title referring to an anonymous author. This short book, which concludes the Old Testament in Christian Bibles, consists of six oracles dating from the early post-exilic era (ca. 500 BC). While Malachi shares prophetic concerns with the pre-exilic prophets (for example, idolatry, easy divorce, and social injustice), his focus on

the reconstructed Second Temple, the priesthood, and the system of sacrificial worship clearly identifies him as a post-exilic prophet. For Christians, Malachi is an important bridge between the Old Testament and the New Testament, especially due to the way the Gospels connect Malachi's reference to Elijah with John the Baptist as the forerunner of the Messiah (see Malachi 3:23-24; Matthew 11:13-14 and 17:10-13; Mark 9:9-13; and Luke 1:17).

Today's reading from the fourth oracle speaks of "my messenger" (*mal'ākī*) who prepares the day of God's visitation. There

are four named figures in the passage: "my messenger" (*mal'ākī*), "the Lord" (*hā'ādōn* in Hebrew), "the messenger of the covenant" (*malāk habbērīt* in Hebrew), and "the Lord of hosts" (*YHWH sēbāōt* in Hebrew). Understanding who these four figures are will help to understand the meaning of this passage. A careful reading of the text reveals that the oracle is spoken by God, who is variously identified as "I," "the Lord," and "the Lord of hosts." It is also clear that "my messenger" is a human agent sent by God. What is unclear is the identity of the "messenger of the covenant." Some equate this

For meditation and context:

Read this passage with a sense of gratitude for the suffering Christ endured for us. Stress the phrase “likewise shared,” which focuses on Jesus’s full humanity. Then, emphasize the contrast between death and life.

Stress in this section the words “like,” “every,” and “himself,” which again draw our attention to Jesus’ humanity.

messenger with the one already mentioned, and others view the “messenger of the covenant” as Jesus Christ. Most scholars, however, view the identity of the “messenger of the covenant” as referring to God. Following this understanding, then, God is the refiner and purifier who is described in the second half of the reading and who will “purify the sons of Levi” so that they might offer right worship. The image of purification and refinement is connected by Christians and the Gospel tradition with the message of John the Baptist (who can be understood as “my messenger”). John

RESPONSORIAL PSALM Psalm 24:7, 8, 9, 10 (8)

R. Who is this king of glory? It is the Lord!

Lift up, O gates, your lintels;
reach up, you ancient portals,
that the king of glory may come in!

Who is this king of glory?
The LORD, strong and mighty,
the LORD, mighty in battle.

Lift up, O gates, your lintels;
reach up, you ancient portals,
that the king of glory may come in!

Who is this king of glory?
The LORD of hosts; he is the king of glory.

READING II Hebrews 2:14–18

A reading from the Letter to the Hebrews

Since the **children** share in blood and flesh,

Jesus likewise shared in them,
that through **death** he might **destroy** the one
who has the **power of death**, that is, the devil,
and **free** those who through **fear of death**
had been subject to slavery all their **life**.

Surely he did not help **angels**

but rather the **descendants of Abraham**;
therefore, he had to become **like** his brothers and sisters
in **every** way,
that he might be a **merciful and faithful high priest** before

God

to expiate the sins of the **people**.

Because he **himself** was **tested** through what he **suffered**,
he is able to **help** those who are being tested.

announces the coming of the mightier one—the incarnate God, Jesus—whose baptism will purify and refine (see Matthew 3:11–12, for example).

READING II The theologically influential Letter to the Hebrews, an anonymous work from the second half of the first century, asserts that Jesus is the high priest of a new and superior covenant (Hebrews 8:1–10:18). To make this assertion intelligible to an audience who knew of the role of the human high priest, the letter carefully distinguishes Jesus’ high priest-

hood from that of Israel’s high priest. Today’s reading is part of that argument.

In an initial series of clarifications (Hebrews 1:5–2:18), the author explores how Jesus could serve as mediator between God and human beings in a way that is superior to that of earlier mediators, the angels. He demonstrates this superiority by discussing how Jesus’ participation in suffering made him a perfect mediator (2:10–18). In the first part of that demonstration, God’s Son is shown to have a common origin with all humankind, whom he views as brothers (2:10–13).

Luke is very attentive to the context of a story; this is what makes him such a gifted storyteller. Allow your voice to convey a sense of wonder, and open with an even tone and speed as you set up the backdrop for the narrative.

Simeon = SIM-ee-uhn

The word “now” signals a transition in the narrative. Highlight the words that show Simeon’s devotion and patience. Then, as you continue, focus on the words in bold that show his relationship with the Holy Spirit.

The image of the child Jesus in the arms of the old man is a tender one, so use gentle emotion as you describe Simeon here, holding Jesus and praising God.

Gentiles = JEN-tīls

Having established this common origin, today’s reading then deepens Jesus’ connection with humanity by referring to his share in blood and flesh and pointing to their common fate: enslaving death and the fear it unleashes. In solidarity with humankind and in response to this fate, Jesus destroyed the devil, “the one who has the power of death,” thus freeing humankind from fear of death. The reading goes on to clarify that Jesus did this for his brothers and sisters (“the descendants of Abraham”) and not for angels or other divine beings. Because he became “like his brothers and

GOSPEL Luke 2:22–40

A reading from the holy Gospel according to Luke

[When the days were completed for their purification according to the law of Moses,
Mary and Joseph took **Jesus** up to Jerusalem to **present** him to the **Lord**, just as it is **written** in the law of the Lord,
*Every male that opens the womb shall be **consecrated** to the **Lord**,*
 and to **offer** the **sacrifice** of *a pair of turtledoves or two young pigeons,*
 in accordance with the **dictate** in the law of the Lord.

Now there was a man in Jerusalem whose name was **Simeon**.

This man was **righteous** and **devout**,
awaiting the consolation of Israel,
 and the **Holy Spirit** was **upon** him.

It had been **revealed** to him by the **Holy Spirit**
 that he should not see death
 before he had seen the **Christ of the Lord**.

He came in the **Spirit** into the temple,
 and when the **parents** brought in the **child Jesus**
 to perform the custom of the law in regard to him,
 he **took** him into his **arms** and **blessed God**, saying:

“**Now**, Master, you may **let** your servant go
 in **peace**, according to your **word**,
 for my eyes have seen your **salvation**,
 which you prepared in the sight of all the **peoples**:
 a **light** for **revelation** to the **Gentiles**,
 and **glory** for your **people Israel**.”] >>

sisters in every way” yet also retained his full divinity as he took on the familiar role of the high priest, he was truly able to “expiate the sins of the people.” Through his own testing and suffering, he saved humankind.

GOSPEL Through a series of vignettes, Luke demonstrates that while Jesus comes from a family that is deeply committed to their Jewish faith, God is working something new in salvation history that will transcend their religious boundaries. This overwhelmingly positive

portrait of God’s work in the world is painted on the canvas of tradition, as Mary and Joseph bring their child to the temple to fulfill religious obligations related to the birth of a first-born son and the purification of the mother.

In addition to Mary and Joseph embodying Israel’s piety in their action, there are two others in the temple who embody its prophetic vision: Simeon and Anna. Described in terms that recall other righteous Jews of Israel’s past (Abraham) and present (Zechariah and Elizabeth), Simeon and Anna highlight and interpret

There is a blessing and a somber prophecy. Allow the tension and compassion of his words to come into your proclamation, particularly when he speaks of the sword.

Phanuel = FAN-yoo-ehl or fuh-NYOO-uhl

Luke does not provide Anna's actual words, so we are left to guess at what she might have said. You can, however, emphasize her immediate response to the sight of Jesus, especially her praise of God and her witness to all who were awaiting Jerusalem's redemption.

The child's **father** and **mother** were **amazed** at what was said about him,

and **Simeon blessed** them and said to **Mary his mother**,
 "Behold, this child is **destined**
 for the fall and rise of **many** in Israel,
 and to be a **sign** that will be contradicted
 —and **you yourself a sword will pierce**—
 so that the thoughts of many **hearts** may be **revealed**."

There was also a prophetess, **Anna**,

the daughter of Phanuel, of the tribe of Asher.

She was **advanced** in years,

having lived seven years with her husband after her marriage,
 and then as a widow until she was eighty-four.

She **never left the temple**,

but **worshiped** night and day with **fasting** and **prayer**.

And coming forward at that **very time**,

she gave **thanks** to **God** and **spoke** about the **child**
 to **all** who were awaiting the **redemption** of **Jerusalem**.

When they had fulfilled all the prescriptions
 of the law of the Lord,

they **returned** to Galilee, to their **own town** of Nazareth.

The child **grew** and became **strong**, filled with **wisdom**;
 and the **favor** of **God** was **upon** him.

[Shorter: Luke 2:22–32 (see brackets)]

Jesus' future significance by connecting this event to its future fulfillment. Because of their righteousness and devotion, God reveals to Anna and Simeon what has not been revealed to others. Anna's prophecy is expressed indirectly: "she gave thanks to God and spoke about the child to all who were awaiting the redemption of Jerusalem." Simeon's words, on the other hand, invite further examination.

Having been promised that he would see the "consolation of Israel" (that is, the Christ) before his death, Simeon is led by the Spirit into the temple. Like Anna, he

blesses God and then prophesies. One of the most striking elements of the prophecy is that the salvation embodied in the child is not only for the glory of God's people Israel, but that the child will embody salvation for "all the peoples: a light for revelation to the Gentiles." This is a salvific scope that will only become clear following Jesus' death and resurrection. The prophecy continues and becomes more somber as Simeon turns to the child's mother. Mary's life, like the life of Israel itself, will be pierced by the sorrow of division, for the child will reveal the hearts of many as they

are faced with the sign of his presence. How this will occur remains in the shadows of the future. For the moment, it suffices that the child grows in strength, wisdom, and "the favor of God." S.L.