

Populus Zion 2024
Mal. 4:1-6 (ESV)

“But for you who fear my name, the Sun of righteousness shall rise with healing in its wings.”

In the name of the Father, and of the Son, and of the Holy Spirit. Amen.

The Lord’s blessings to all of you on this Second Sunday in Advent, dear ones. By now, the season of Advent is well underway as we anticipate celebrating our Lord’s humble, beautiful nativity. And by now, some of you may also be wondering why we’re hearing Scripture lessons about the advent of our Lord in glory and of the vastly different experiences people will have on that great day. What is the meaning of this, dear ones? What is the connection?

The prophet Malachi says, “Behold, the day is coming, burning like an oven, when all the arrogant and all evildoers will be stubble. The day is coming that shall set them ablaze.”

For them, Lord’s arrival in glory will be absolutely unbearable—it’ll be terrifying to the extreme—a day when all works of darkness will be exposed and the people who do them will be consumed by the Lord’s fiery wrath as if they suddenly found themselves near the surface of the sun. they won’t be able to stand before Him. They will not endure.

And yet, others will experience the very same event very differently—completely different in fact.

“But for you who fear my name,” the prophet says, “the Sun of righteousness shall rise with healing in its wings.”

For these others, being in the presence of this same Lord on that same day will be like feeling the warm kiss of the sun on your skin on a beautiful spring day and wanting to spend all day out in the sunshine.

The wicked, though, won’t want any part of it. The wicked will flee in terror. The book of Revelation even depicts them running into caves, calling to the rocks of the mountains saying, “Fall on us and hide us from the face of him who is seated on the throne and from the wrath of the Lamb, for the great day of their wrath has come and who can stand?”

But for Those who fear His name, the prophet Malachi goes on to say, they will go out leaping like calves from the stall.

And if you’re unfamiliar with seeing the sheer happiness of a calf going out from the stall, do yourself a favor see if you can find a video of this somewhere. See if you don’t smile and laugh watching them jumping around and running for joy. And you should know this is what will come for all the faithful who fear His name and long for His appearing.

They'll be absolutely euphoric on that blessed day—a day of joy and healing and perfect peace coming into His presence,

So again, why has the holy church, in her wisdom, seen fit to have us hear of the Lord's advent in glory *now* during *this* season, the season before Christmas, before we celebrate our Lord's arrival in humility? What are we to make of these things?

Well, they're very much related to one another. And what we'll experience then, when He arrives in glory, will correspond to how we receive Him beforehand, in His advent among us in humility.

Growing up, I remember my family and I going to a certain restaurant enjoy some Asian cuisine. There were different raw ingredients to pick out and put in a bowl, and then the cooks would stir fry it all for you, and bring it to your table when everything was cooked.

And when they did for our family, some of us were as happy as we could be, enjoying ourselves, and being delighted by what we received.

But one of my family members was very clearly not happy or enjoying himself. His face had turned red, his eyes were watering, his nose was running, and soon he angrily pushed his food away and complained, "Why did we come here? The food is just way too hot. I can't eat it."

And after we reminded him that he didn't end up with anything he didn't start out with, we asked him what he might have put in to make it so hot—at which point he confessed he brought it on himself! He had put the volcano sauce on there!

He didn't have any problem ignoring the warning labels beforehand saying, "eat at your own risk," but he certainly did have a problem taking the heat afterwards.

The experience each of us ended up with in the end, good or bad, was very much related to how we started out.

And there's a similar dynamic at work when we consider both our Lord's Advent in glory and His advent in humility.

Because the same incarnate Lord Whose divine majesty will soon be manifest for all to see has come beforehand in the lowliness of a manger, born of a poor, humble Virgin, all of which, to the proud and arrogant evildoers seems negligible, contemptible, and even shameful.

Likewise, they scoff and pay no attention to any talk of humility, or the most solemn and serious warning of God's Word, that we must all turn from our evil ways and the evil in our hearts to the Lord, in sincere repentance and faith.

The arrogant exalt themselves and pay no attention. But Jesus puts them all to shame by

humbling Himself, even to the point of death on a cross, where He paid for our sins in full, accomplishing the salvation of the world—something the arrogant never could or would do.

And Because the Lamb of God Whose way John the Baptist prepared, shed His blood for us to forgive us, we've been covered and baptized in His grace. The record of sins that stood against you and I has been blotted out, and by His grace through faith, we will not shrink back from Him in shame, but we'll stand before His majesty with gladness and without fear.

His advent in glory will not bring down destruction and terror on us, dear ones, but healing and joy as the warm rays of His peaceful light rest upon us.

And this same Lord who will come to meet us in such a way *then* also comes to meet us even here today at the communion rail, in the lowliness of bread and wine.

But here too, dear ones, as before, there's a most solemn and serious warning for us that we ignore to our own great harm.

Here too, if anyone thinks they don't need to humble themselves in genuine repentance and faith before coming to partake in holy communion, it will not be well with them.

If anyone thinks they can benefit from the Sacrament while persisting in sin, while nursing grudges and hatred against their brother, while planning on continuing in their evil ways, apart from a sincere desire to amend their life, they will *not* benefit from their eating and drinking in the Sacrament.

Because even if no one else sees or knows the condition of your heart, the Lord does see; He does know and He will be not mocked.

And such a person who would be so arrogant as to commune at His table with a hard, impenitent heart will not be able to take the heat of His wrath that will come down on them.

Because as the Lutheran Confessions rightly teach, in the Sacrament, "the body of Christ is not only received...by believing, godly Christians, but also by the unworthy, unbelieving, false, and evil Christians" (FC SD VII 66). He who has ears to hear, let him hear.

Because those who dare to partake unworthily sin against the very body and blood of the Lord, eating and drinking judgment upon themselves.

But why should it come to that, dear ones? Why should we not repent of the evil in our hearts, turning away from our lust, our greed, our grudges and truly forgive one another from our hearts as Christ has forgiven us?

Why should we not come properly prepared to enjoy that genuine peace with God and one another, which Christ has died to give us?

Let us drink deep of this peace and reconciliation with one another then.

And Let us come to the communion rail in such a way that we receive our Lord *now* according to how we want to receive Him *then* in His advent in glory on the last day.

To Christ be all the glory forever and ever. Amen.