

Sermon for December 7<sup>th</sup>, 2025  
SECOND SUNDAY IN ADVENT

READINGS

Malachi 4:1-6

**1** “For behold, the day is coming, burning like an oven, when all the arrogant and all evildoers will be stubble. The day that is coming shall set them ablaze, says the LORD of hosts, so that it will leave them neither root nor branch. **2** But for you who fear my name, the sun of righteousness shall rise with healing in its wings. You shall go out leaping like calves from the stall. **3** And you shall tread down the wicked, for they will be ashes under the soles of your feet, on the day when I act, says the LORD of hosts.

**4** “Remember the law of my servant Moses, the statutes and rules that I commanded him at Horeb for all Israel.

**5** “Behold, I will send you Elijah the prophet before the great and awesome day of the LORD comes. **6** And he will turn the hearts of fathers to their children and the hearts of children to their fathers, lest I come and strike the land with a decree of utter destruction.”

Psalms 50:7-23

**7** “Hear, O my people, and I will speak;  
O Israel, I will testify against you.  
I am God, your God.

**8** Not for your sacrifices do I rebuke you;  
your burnt offerings are continually before me.

**9** I will not accept a bull from your house  
or goats from your folds.

**10** For every beast of the forest is mine,  
the cattle on a thousand hills.

**11** I know all the birds of the hills,  
and all that moves in the field is mine.

**12** “If I were hungry, I would not tell you,  
for the world and its fullness are mine.

**13** Do I eat the flesh of bulls  
or drink the blood of goats?

**14** Offer to God a sacrifice of thanksgiving,  
and perform your vows to the Most High,

**15** and call upon me in the day of trouble;  
I will deliver you, and you shall glorify me.”

**16** But to the wicked God says:  
“What right have you to recite my statutes  
or take my covenant on your lips?

**17** For you hate discipline,  
and you cast my words behind you.

**18** If you see a thief, you are pleased with him,  
and you keep company with adulterers.

**19** “You give your mouth free rein for evil,  
and your tongue frames deceit.

**20** You sit and speak against your brother;  
you slander your own mother's son.

**21** These things you have done, and I have been silent;  
you thought that I was one like yourself.

But now I rebuke you and lay the charge before you.

**22** “Mark this, then, you who forget God,  
lest I tear you apart, and there be none to deliver!

**23** The one who offers thanksgiving as his sacrifice glorifies me;  
to one who orders his way rightly  
I will show the salvation of God!”

Romans 15:1-13

**1** We who are strong have an obligation to bear with the failings of the weak, and not to please ourselves. **2** Let each of us please his neighbor for his good, to build him up. **3** For Christ did not please himself, but as it is written, “The reproaches of those who reproached you fell on me.” **4** For whatever was written in former days was written for our instruction, that through endurance and through the encouragement of the Scriptures we might have hope. **5** May the God of endurance and encouragement grant you to live in such harmony with one another, in accord with Christ Jesus, **6** that together you may with one voice glorify the God and Father of our Lord Jesus Christ. **7** Therefore welcome one another as Christ has welcomed you, for the glory of God.

**8** For I tell you that Christ became a servant to the circumcised to show God's truthfulness, in order to confirm the promises given to the patriarchs, **9** and in order that the Gentiles might glorify God for his mercy. As it is written,

“Therefore I will praise you among the Gentiles,  
and sing to your name.”

**10** And again it is said,

“Rejoice, O Gentiles, with his people.”

**11** And again,

“Praise the Lord, all you Gentiles,  
and let all the peoples extol him.”

**12** And again Isaiah says,

“The root of Jesse will come,  
even he who arises to rule the Gentiles;  
in him will the Gentiles hope.”

**13** May the God of hope fill you with all joy and peace in believing, so that by the power of the Holy Spirit you may abound in hope.

Luke 21:25-36

**25** “And there will be signs in sun and moon and stars, and on the earth distress of nations in perplexity because of the roaring of the sea and the waves, **26** people fainting with fear and with foreboding of what is coming on the world. For the powers of the heavens will be shaken. **27** And then they will see the Son of Man coming in a cloud with power and great glory. **28** Now when these things begin to take place, straighten up and raise your heads, because your redemption is drawing near.”

**29** And he told them a parable: “Look at the fig tree, and all the trees. **30** As soon as they come out in leaf, you see for yourselves and know that the summer is already near. **31** So also, when you see these things taking place, you know that the kingdom of God is near. **32** Truly, I say to you, this generation will not pass away until all has taken place. **33** Heaven and earth will pass away, but my words will not pass away.

**34** “But watch yourselves lest your hearts be weighed down with dissipation and drunkenness and cares of this life, and that day come upon you suddenly like a trap. **35** For it will come upon all who dwell on the face of the whole earth. **36** But stay awake at all times, praying that you may have strength to

escape all these things that are going to take place, and to stand before the Son of Man.”

Our text for meditation this Second Sunday in Advent is on our Old Testament reading.

Grace, mercy and peace to you from God our Father and our Lord Jesus Christ. Amen.

## Introduction

For today's meditation, let's talk about fire. After Malachi the prophet leads some of the people to repentance,<sup>1</sup> God makes a promise. He tells the children of Judah that a day is coming that *burns*, and He proceeds to remind them of certain men and the times of fire that are associated with them. This passage heats things up with language of ovens, blazes, ashes, and – oddly – even sunlight. What is going on here?

## Fire

Why so much emphasis on fire, burning, and heat? Our world is an electric one these days, so the message does not reach our hearts as readily as it did in Malachi's day. It is easy, in our world of light bulbs and electric heaters and flashlights, to forget just how *central* fire was to people even just a hundred years ago. Without fire, you could not see at night. Without fire, you could not cook your food. In most places without fire you could hardly survive the winters and keep your home livable. Fire was an indispensable part of life for everyone back then, and though it still is for some, the significance of it has been somewhat *extinguished* for modern people today. Nonetheless, fire is a blessing.

Fire was once more important, but at the same time it was also more dangerous. Occasionally you will hear about a forest fire in some state, or some poor soul gets burned, but modern life has afforded us efficient ways of mitigating the hazards of open flames. Our buildings are made of flame-retardant materials. Most of our cities have firefighters with great big red trucks that have big hoses for drenching any blaze and stopping the danger. Whenever someone gets burned we have new medicines that help heal them. The ancients had none of that. A single spark could cause a great blaze, and in a moment a healthy man is completely disfigured from burns. Fighting fires was often a fruitless proposition, as little could be done to keep a village from burning down entirely. Sure, people got around these hazards in different ways, but there was only so much one could do to keep the danger at bay.

It was not lost on our ancestors that the same thing which helped was also that which harmed. Fire kept life going and made great things possible, but it also had the potential to destroy entire civilizations and ruin mankind's greatest efforts. It is the same fire, the same heat, the same light being given, but with a wide spectrum of good and bad things that come with it. It is no coincidence that so many pagan religions include worshiping fire, for even the dumbest pagan understands the danger and blessing that come with it.

In our reading, Malachi's oracle makes the same point. The Day of the Lord will come, he says, burning like an *oven*. And what is God cooking? The wicked! He is burning them to a crisp with His fury against all their sin and arrogance. Yet at the same time, the heat that burns the wicked to ashes is a gentle healing sun for the righteous. Those who entrusted themselves to the Lord are going to be “leaping like calves from the stall” - that is, they will rejoice in the warmth, the light, and the vitality that comes with it like a calf jumping at sunrise. This is the same event. Like fire, it will destroy some while preserving others. Like we see with fire, those who treat God with reverence and honor will see their lives preserved, while those who treat God with contempt and carelessness are to be tormented and destroyed.

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1 Malachi 3:16-18

## Times of Fire

God drives the point home by calling the children of Judah to *remember*. He tells them to remember the Law, in particular the Law that was spoken at Horeb (or, Mount Sinai),<sup>2</sup> where God came down to earth *in fire*.<sup>3</sup> Oh yes, the people were terrified, and anyone who touched the mountain would die, but they received the Ten Commandments that day, a holy and righteous guide for all living – the Will of God for all men revealed! Our Lord calls them to remember when His presence was made known in the blaze upon the mountain, showing them that both judgment and blessing had arrived.

He also tells them that an Elijah figure shall come. As men and women of the Church era, you and I can easily remember that the “Elijah who was to come” is John the Baptist,<sup>4</sup> who announced the arrival of Christ to the world at the beginning of our Savior's ministry. But Malachi's original audience, hearing all of this talk of burning and ovens and Horeb and ashes, the first thing that would have been on their minds is Elijah's relationship with *fire*. God sent Elijah the prophet to clear away idolatry in Israel, and he did so by calling down fire from Heaven, just before getting the people to slaughter the prophets of the false god baal.

Like the giving of the Law at Horeb, and like the days of Elijah, the promised Day of the Lord is a day in which God's Presence is made known. These are times of fire, when the Lord asserting Himself means blessing for the good, punishment for the wicked, the destruction of false worship, and the proclamation of Truth to all people. When God institutes times of fire, things change, and not just for a moment or a generation, but the trajectory of the future is adjusted, history is made, and the impact goes out into eternity. Malachi promises to the people that this shall happen once more.

## When the Fire Arrives

And indeed, God kept His promise. If fire represents the Presence of our Lord, this most certainly happened when Christ was born. And our Lord Jesus, God in the flesh, has for two thousand years acted as that very central “fire” by which men are either warmed in saving faith, or burned in the flames of damnation. He set the stage with John the Baptist, who warned children and fathers to be united in repentance lest God destroy everyone without the slightest hint of mercy. Thankfully, they heeded that call, and we have the Gospel with us today because of God acting through men like John.

And the fires of God's Presence shall make themselves known once more my friends. The Same Jesus who spoke through the fires to the Israelites at Sinai is the same Jesus who set Elijah's offering ablaze, and He is the same Jesus who was born in a manger that He may grow and die for our sins; this same Jesus shall return, just as He promised, to judge the living and the dead at the Resurrection. The message remains for us just as it did for the children of Judah: *remember, for more fire is coming*.

Now the Peace of God, which surpasses all understanding, guard your hearts and minds in Christ Jesus our Lord. Amen.

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2 Sinai and Horeb are synonymous names for the same mountain, as shown when Sinai is called Horeb in Psalm 106:19 and Deuteronomy 9:8

3 Exodus 19:16-18

4 Matthew 11:11-15