

Advent 2

December 5, 2021



PROCLAMATION POINTS

The following are some thoughts and questions to be used for a text study on the weekly lessons, or for jump-starting the imagination of the preacher and hearer in preparing for the proclamation event.

Repentance is begun when we acknowledge our sins and are sincerely sorry for them; it is completed when trust in the mercy of God comes to this sorrow and hearts are converted to God and long for the forgiveness of sins.

– Martin Luther –

On Hosea 14:3

Malachi 3:1–7b

The prophet Malachi proclaimed the word of the Lord to those who had perpetually sinned against God, questioned God's justice, and even accused God of siding with those who were evil by rewarding them materially. What they failed to grasp was the consequence of their own sin. It was their unfaithfulness to the Lord that caused them serious trouble. Their offerings in the temple were no longer pleasing to God. They insisted on counting themselves among the "righteous," even though they had turned away from the Lord repeatedly.

- How often do we hear the lament of those in self-caused trouble say, "Where is God in the midst of my trial?" Is God to blame for all our hardship and pain?

Malachi prophesied that the Lord would send a messenger to the people to prepare the way for the Lord. This one will be like a refiner's fire in which precious metals are heated to high temperatures so that impurities are removed and the pure metal is left.

- How is the call of God on our lives like a refining fire that purifies us for God's work in the kingdom?

As Christians we hear this prophecy as the call of John the Baptist. The Messianic advent is a two-fold process: 1) The arrival of the messenger in John; 2) The arrival of Jesus as the incarnate Word of God.

- Why would God send a harbinger to announce the coming of the Lord rather than simply coming?
- Why do we often need multiple messages about important things before we are willing to believe or take action?

Psalms 66:1–12

In popular slang, the word "awesome" has become a colloquialism for "cool" or "amazing" in the last 25 years. As the psalmist sang God's praises he encouraged the congregation to sing, "How awesome are your deeds!" (v.2).

The word awesome is exactly what God is: One in whose presence we can only stand in awe. In Hebrew the word is *yay-reh* which is associated with fear and trembling. (*Yahweh is yayreh!*) In our culture, we sometimes have an issue with the Old Testament notion of "fearing" God in the sense of being afraid of him. Yet, if we are honest with ourselves, there is something very intimidating about the all-powerful, all-knowing, all-seeing God of Israel.

- Why are we so quick to dismiss the frightening aspects of God's personality and being? (Or maybe we appreciate it when it's

not directed at us?)

- Isn't a God who can refine our lives like silver and gold at the smith's shop a bit intimidating? Why would we want God to be less than God is?

Philippians 1:2–11

A goal only remains a goal if it never comes to fruition. Just like potential is only potential if the talent that presents itself is never used to accomplish something.

Sometimes parents and other adults work with young people who have great potential in their lives and just need someone to nudge them along to use their lives to make a difference. Sadly though, there are those in whom we see tremendous potential who are lazy, unmotivated, or just hardened by self-pity, low self-worth, or pain that prevents them from striving to fulfill their potential. For those, it seems there is no amount of prodding that can be done to convince them of their value and their potential is wasted.

Paul and Timothy wrote a letter of encouragement to the Philippians. They were thrilled to be partners in the work of the Gospel and gave thanks to God for the work their friends had already accomplished. But there was more to do. Paul said, "He who began a good work in you will be faithful to bring it to completion" (v.6).

- What good work has God begun in all believers? How is he faithful to bring that goal to completion in our lives? Is this the same for everyone?

Luke 3:1–14 (15–20)

The evangelist Luke drew from Isaiah 40:3–5 to connect the work of John the Baptist to Jesus. Isaiah's prophecy asserted that all things will be leveled out with the coming Messiah of Israel: mountains will be brought low, valleys filled in, and all the rough places will be smoothed out. It sounds like Jesus is a Messianic bulldozer.

- How does this image of leveling all terrain grant hope that all people will be on equal footing with the Lord?
- In what way did Jesus fulfill this prophecy like an excavating machine levels all ground? Was Jesus' mission one of physical or spiritual transformation?

John was very direct in his message calling many in the crowd a brood of vipers. He directed them to bear the fruits of repentance.

- Why do spiritual fruits always involve giving something away to another?