

**Sermon Notes – December 8, 2024**  
**Second Sunday of Advent**  
**The Holy Gospel of St. Luke 3: 1-6**  
**Peace Lutheran Church**  
**“A Dawn From On High”**

The Advent season announces the day of the Lord with some fearful imagery. Malachi promises that the Lord's righteousness will make what is crooked straight and what is rough smooth, although they have different emphases in describing the path to redemption from Israel's exile and pain. Pairing the gospel reading with Malachi will mean slight shifts in the interpretation of the Lord's appearing.

Malachi says the coming savior will “purify” (3: 3) the people because they will be in need. While the people look forward with “delight” to the coming of the “messenger of the covenant” (v. 1), the prophet knows the day will be hard to “endure” (v. 2). Malachi sees a people who need to be refined, as in metallurgical work that burns away impurities, leaving what is valuable. The people also need to be washed. He uses the image of Fuller’s soap that used lanolin oil from wool and also acid to remove dirt. If the wool is bereft of oil, it is easier to card (to straighten the fibers) and spin. Notice that this action of preparing the people is not an automated process, or one they can manage on their own. The one who refines and washes is present. The Holy Spirit does not abandon us even when we are not “pleasing to the Lord” (v. 4).

God is also present in the leveling and smoothing of John the Baptizer, except that there is no suggestion that the people need anything other than what God will give them. Interpreting the gospel image of John the Baptist, in light of an additional text from Baruch (5: 1-9), gives shape and substance (robe, diadem, name) that “Israel may walk safely” [5: 7] to the meaning of a “baptism of repentance” (Luke 3:3)

Each of the prophets offers an image of what it is to prepare for the coming of the Lord, to be prepared for baptism. Because Luke

located the preparation for the Lord's coming in a specific time and place, under particular Roman rulers and Jewish priests, the vision resides in our world in a tangible and graspable way. The primary action is God's. The "messenger" will "prepare the way." Repentance does not activate the Lord's coming; it only prepares the people for it. All along this journey, to the point when "all flesh shall see the salvation of God" (Luke 3: 6), the work is God's doing.