



Malachi 3.1-4 and Luke 3.2-20 Advent Bible Study

This week's readings focus on our preparations for the coming of the Lord. We think about the words of two prophets, who lived 400-500 years apart.

First we look at Malachi 3.1-4.

Malachi was probably a contemporary of Ezra and Nehemiah and his prophecies are addressed to the Jewish people who had been allowed to return from exile in Babylon. From the focus of his prophecies it seems that although they were very religious, their religion was only skin deep. At heart they were self-centred and corrupt.

Q1 Why do people go through the motions of participating in a religion, without having any real commitment at heart? Have you ever been in this position yourself?

Q2 What two predictions does Malachi make in 3.1? What is the identity of the two people referred to in this prophecy?

Q3 Comparing verses 1 and 2, it seems the people wanted God to come to them but were quite unprepared for his coming. What do the images of refiner's fire and launderer's soap teach us to expect when we encounter God? Is this something we should desire or run away from?

Q4 What do you know about the Levites? Why does the prophet single them out here in verse 3? Who are the equivalent of the Levites today?

Now let's turn to Luke's gospel. The writer clearly sees John the Baptist as fulfilling Malachi's (and Isaiah's) prophecies of someone who would prepare the way for the incarnation, for the coming of God in human form (Luke 1.17, 1.76).

Now we read Luke 3.2-6

Q5 What prompted John to begin his ministry? The core of his message is in verse 3. How would you express this in your own words?

Now we read Luke 3.7-9

Q6 Why did John speak so harshly to these people who were coming to him seeking baptism?

Q7 What do you make of the references to Abraham's children in verse 8?

Q8 How does verse 9 fit in with your understanding of judgement? Are we judged for our beliefs or our actions? Is this fire a destroying or a refining fire?



Next we look at verses 10 to 14

Q9 How do the examples John gives here relate to the biblical concept of justice, which we discussed in last week's study on Jeremiah? What examples might he use if he were speaking today, to people like us?

Finally we read verses 15 to 20

Q10 Why did some people think John might be the Messiah?

Q11 What is 'baptism with the Holy Spirit and with fire' all about? Who or what is to be burned with unquenchable fire? Is this 'good news' or bad news?

Q12 What was the result of John's ministry of fearless truth-telling? Are there any particular lessons you can learn from him?