

TEXT: Malachi 4:1-6

THEME: HAVE YOU PREPARED YOUR CHILDREN...

1. For the great and dreadful day of the Lord?
2. With the Word of God?

DATE: Sunday, December 11, 2011 – Advent 3

Dearly loved family of God:

Is your house prepared for Christmas? Are the lights up? Is the tree up and decorated? Do you have the Christmas cooking done? Do you have Christmas cards sent off? Did you buy all the gifts, special clothes, or food that you had wanted to purchase? In other words, are you ready for Christmas? Oh, just one more, is your family prepared?

Well, if not, you still have some time, don't you? Christmas will not arrive for another 14 days. It always comes on the 25th; no surprises there. But maybe it won't come on that day this year. Have you thought about that? What if Jesus comes this Wednesday instead or tomorrow even? Would your house, your family be ready then? Or since we've already begun another presidential election season, let's ask the popular political question: What about the children?! HAVE YOU PREPARED YOUR CHILDREN for Christmas and for Jesus' coming?

That's not only a political question, is a spiritual question which God had raised through the prophet Malachi. God wants all people to be prepared for Jesus' coming; it's the very thing he had tried to accomplish through the prophets Malachi and John the Baptist. The first thing God wanted his people to know was what the great and dreadful day of his final coming would be like. (READ v. 1-3).

Malachi and his audience would never see Christmas dawn. They would die soon in the 400 years that separated Malachi from Christmas and John the Baptist. For them, there would be only one great and dreadful day: the Last Day, Judgment Day.

Malachi described why it will be a dreadful day and for whom it will be a dreadful day. The Sun that dawns on that day will be a fiery, hot Sun. The day will heat up faster and hotter than the worst Santa Ana storm day you've ever experienced. The fire storms will blow across the land and devour every element in their paths. The Lord of angel armies will blow on the land and his hot breath will melt the earth and not leave so much as a charred branch or root to those who have rebelled against him and done what is wicked. So dreadful it will be for the wicked that it escapes every adjective in human vocabulary.

However, it will also be a great day. The Sun of Righteousness will dawn like the morning sun. The cool chill of the evening air will be gently warmed by his rays and the aching bones of God's people, the righteous believers, will feel the healing heat as their muscles and joints loosen up. That day will be so wonderful that each believer will run toward the horizon jumping like calves set free from the winter stables; they will jump and twist for the sheer joy of jumping – so great is the coming of their Savior and the joy he inspires. In their jumping and running the people of God will crush the wicked under their feet like stomping ashes into soft ground. That day will be so great for the faithful that it defies our ability to describe it.

That's it. There's only two ways the great and dreadful day of the Lord can go for you or anyone else: great or dreadful. By making you aware of that simple truth through his prophet Malachi, God is calling you, first, to prepare yourself and, secondly, to prepare the other members of your family both at home and at church.

Dear Christians, have you been doing that? This is not a seasonal call for seasonal preparations; it is a divine call that has no time or season. It is a call to be constantly prepared. So great, if you take time in your home for Advent devotions, but what about the other 11 months of your year and life? Great if you have prepared your home for Christmas, but what about the other 364 days of the year and of your life? Will you be prepared if Jesus comes on any day other than Christmas?

And what about the others in your home? What about your children? Great if you have purchased them new clothes for Christmas services, but do they possess the robes of righteousness? Great if you have let them share in the joy and privilege of decorating the house, or cookies or cards – all are wonderful family traditions – but have you by your words and attitudes taught them the joys and privileges of decorating their hearts and lives with treasures from God’s Word and the good works which faith in the Word produces? HAVE YOU PREPARED YOUR CHILDREN FOR THE GREAT AND DREADFUL DAY OF THE LORD, so that it will be a great day for them and not a dreadful one?

If not, you have work to do. If you have, then you are to be commended, not because such good works save you – they do not – rather, because through faith the Holy Spirit has worked this good in you. Nevertheless, because of sin there are times when each of us are not as aware or prepared as we want to be or as God wants us to be. That is why we need this reminder from the Lord’s prophet. (READ v. 4-6).

After describing the dread and the greatness of the great and dreadful day of the Lord, the prophet encouraged God’s people to prepare themselves and their loved ones by calling to them, “Remember the words of Moses, both the demands of the law and the promises of the gospel.”

He pointed future generations to John the Baptist, the second Elijah, who, by preaching repentance for the forgiveness of sins, would prepare God’s people both for the revealing of their Messiah as well as for the great and dreadful day of the Lord. He would prepare them to such a degree that the hearts of parents and fathers in particular would again be turned in love to their children and the hearts of children would also be turned in love to their fathers and mothers. One of the fruits of repentance that gives evidence to faith is that the members of families love, honor and respect each other, not only at Christmas, but all year long.

It’s an unthinkable, sad and horrible blight on our human race, that fathers and even mothers have lost love for any but themselves and that abuse, neglect and even murder of their children is a common news item. Just as unthinkable is that children have become so openly defiant and disrespectful of their parents. Such behavior is without excuse. It is just as unthinkable, however, that in the Christian community adults and parents would neglect the daily spiritual care of their children or that members of a Christian congregation would not actively support with the donations of their time and money, the Christian education of our children. Unless we all repent of these sins and all our sins, we will meet the dreadful day unprepared. HAVE YOU PREPARED yourselves and YOUR CHILDREN WITH THE WORD OF GOD?

If not, the good news is that you still have time, but don’t put it off. Begin today. “Today is the day of salvation!” St. Paul reminds us. “Remember Moses’ words,” Malachi pleads. Confess your sins, your failures, your shortcomings to God and to one another. Come clean about your selfish attitudes and actions and about your lack of love, honor, respect and consideration for each other.

Again remember Moses and remember the preaching of John the Baptist! They were not only thunderous preachers of God’s law; they were angels of the everlasting gospel! These prophets in concert with all the other holy writers, sing to you of Jesus, your Savior! “The Lord will raise up from among you a great prophet like me,” Moses preached. “Believe what he tells you.” John the Baptist proclaimed, “Look, the Lamb of God who takes away the sin of the world, your sin included.” Isaiah declared, “He was pierced for your transgressions, he was crushed for your iniquity; the punishment that has brought you peace was on him and by his wounds you have been healed.” So the psalm writer sings, “God has not let his Holy One see decay in the grave, but has raised him up, so that you too will not die but live and proclaim what the Lord has done!”

It is a witness to God’s great mercy and love that there are still families who live together as families. There are still fathers who love their children and children who love their fathers. There are still congregations who willingly continue to support the Christian education of children despite the cost. Here you are, dear Christians, dear fathers and mothers, sons and daughters. For all your forgiven sins and shortcomings, you still love another. And you are here in this special place today, hearing the word of the Lord’s prophet. Now,

believe it and do what it says. Turn your hearts in love toward God and toward one another.

“We brought nothing into this world and it is certain that we can carry nothing out,” the Bible declares. However, according to God’s mercy and through his means of grace, which you people share with one another, especially you parents with your children, God may so bless you that upon arriving in heaven you will turn to greet the children who followed your example of faith. HAVE YOU PREPARED YOUR CHILDREN?

If it were true in the day of Malachi the prophet, it is all the more true for us. The great and dreadful day of the Lord *will* dawn soon. History’s long night is nearly over and we can see the lightened sky in the east. Soon the Sun of Righteousness will peak over the horizon and we will stream to him, running and jumping like calves released from the stall. Like children impatiently waiting for Christmas Day, we can hardly wait for that great day. Yet, even as we do, because of Christ’s Christmas coming, we enjoy the peace we have with our God. And the peace of God, which goes beyond all understanding, will guard and keep the hearts and minds of you and your children in Christ Jesus. Amen.