

## “The Gift of Love” Malachi 3:1-4 Purification of Mary 2025

As much as people love seeing Christmas movies and Norman Rockwellesque nostalgia, we tend to find out that the life that we have now never seems to live up to that ideal. For those who have lived long enough, they tend to say that life has always been hard, and those depictions were always just ideals. But are those ideals then something to just amuse ourselves, or are these ideals to be desired? A new study from the non-profit Angus Reid Institute finds that some traditions are changing, and for many, some of the true meaning of Christmas has been lost. In 1988, 27 per cent of Canadians said this season was primarily “a religious celebration”. Today, just one-in-ten (10%) say the same.

In Malachi 3, even though the people of God had returned to the Promised Land and the temple had been rebuilt, many were distressed at the apparent failure of the prophetic promises of restored prosperity, international prominence, and wealth. Instead, Israel was experiencing only continued social and political oppression and economic. Still worse, it had been promised that God would return to Jerusalem and to His temple, which he would again inhabit with His own glorious presence. Haggai 2:9 promised that the rebuilt temple would be filled with an even greater measure of glory than Solomon’s. But far from enjoying such radiant glory, the temple of Malachi’s day was devoid of any visible manifestation of God. Yet it would not always be so, for Malachi promised, “the Lord whom you seek will suddenly come to his temple”. Simeon witnessed at least a partial fulfillment of this prophecy when he encountered in the temple the infant Jesus, who had come “for glory to your people Israel.” The NT unfolds further fulfillment, for only the glory of God in the person of Jesus Christ would be this greater glory.

When our homes and Christmas gatherings fail to materialize the idealized love based life that we either once had or envision, what do we do?

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We are tempted to have a grander gathering, buy more expensive gifts or make greater promises. "The Gift of Love" in the coming of Christ reminds us that it is Him and Him alone that will bring glory to our lives and those to whom we care about. When we consider the promise and fulfillment of His coming, we see how His glory can restore what the failure of human effort can never achieve.

First, we see the Father's "Gift of Love" in the promise of His Son through the Coming Lord. The beginning of verse one is a call of attention, with the word: Behold, literally 'Behold me'. God is saying: 'Here I am, about to send my messenger'. God's promise to send his messenger calls attention to the name Malachi, which in Hebrew means "my messenger." He probably lived at the same time as Ezra and Nehemiah, around 450 B.C. While Malachi serves as God's spokesman to communicate his will to his people, he is also pointing toward another messenger who will prepare the way before the Lord. It was a custom of the Near Eastern kings to send messengers before them to remove obstacles to their visit. Employing a wordplay on the name of Malachi, ("the LORD's messenger"), the Lord Himself announced He was sending one who would "prepare the way before Me." That He would "prepare the way before Me" establishes a significant identification between the First and Second persons of the Trinity.

Christ came to the temple, first as a baby to be dedicated, then at least yearly for the festivals. Most notably he came the last week of his life. We cannot read these words without thinking of the ministry of John the Baptist, who called himself "A voice of one calling in the desert, 'Prepare the way for the Lord, make straight paths for him' " That God would "suddenly come to his temple " points to unexpected coming of Christ. The skeptics in Malachi 2 had asked, "Where is the God of judgment?" The Lord is about to come, the God

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of judgment whom the skeptics were seeking. The announcement of Jesus' birth and the commencement of His ministry some thirty years after his birth were both unexpected. The Lord who would suddenly come to his temple is further identified as “the messenger of the covenant.” This is the only place where this title is employed. Apparently, this “messenger of the covenant” is the same as “the angel of Yahweh” who appears throughout the Old Testament as a visible manifestation of God. The “covenant” would be that New Covenant announced by Jesus and ratified by his shed blood.

Finally, we see the Father's "Gift of Love" in the promise of His Son through the purifying Lord. The third prediction of Malachi 3 is preceded by an illustration. We are told to picture a metalworker seated at his work. Such will be the Lord's activity as He purifies the Levites. Here the Lord is compared not with the fire as in v. 2 but with the artisan. As a silversmith purifies silver, the Lord will purify the sons of Levi, that is, the priests. Whereas v. 2 expresses the unpleasantness of the process, this verse suggests the skill and attentiveness of the divine artisan seated at his work. Already in the New Testament we begin to see the firstfruits of such a work among the “sons of Levi,” for in Acts 6:7 Luke remarks that “a great many of the priests were obedient to the faith” and believed that Jesus was the promised Messiah.

This is the purpose of Jesus' refining of us: The more our hearts and actions are changed from sinfulness to righteousness, the more Christ will be reflected in us. God's refining of his people always involves a concrete goal or purpose, i.e., cleansing and purification. Something precious will result from the process. God didn't wait until we became a good people to then join us. He came in the person of the Son to accomplish what we could not do on our own. Through the coming of Christ, believers become spiritual sons of Levi, a holy priesthood, who He refines to make us suitable for His service.

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All Christians are called to offer the sacrifices of praise and of good works. Participating in the new covenant will make “the offerings of Judah and Jerusalem” acceptable to the Lord. In this context, then, the term Jerusalem should be understood in its new covenant sense: the “heavenly Jerusalem,” the “church of the firstborn.” It is not the offering that makes the worshipper acceptable; it is the worshipper that makes the offering acceptable

This is the moment at which the Blessed Virgin Mary enters the picture. The virgin gives birth and now brings her Son to the temple to present Him as well as to purify herself. It is not through her own actions that she is blessed above all women, it is through her child, our Lord Jesus Christ. Mary, blessed beyond all our understanding in the immaculate conception, offers the ultimate service by presenting our Lord Jesus Christ as a sacrifice in the temple. Something that Jesus would complete 30 years later just outside the city gates on the hill of Golgotha. And through that sacrifice, all of us – including the blessed virgin Mary – are blessed and clothed with white for all eternity. May the gift of purification that we all received through Jesus bring you strength to offer God good works and thanksgiving all your days on this earth. Amen.