

# SERMON FOR THE CONVENTION SERVICE OF CONVOCATION

## **Sixty-first Annual Convention**

of the

## *Concordia Lutheran Conference*

Seattle, Washington

by

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Text: **Malachi 3:1**

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In the Name of Jesus Christ, the only Savior and Head of His Church, dearly beloved hearers of His Word:

What a blessed privilege it is for us today, as Christian brethren, dwelling by God's grace in "*the unity of the Spirit in the bond of peace*" (Ephesians 4:3), to be gathered together here in Seattle for the Sixty-first Annual Convention of our beloved Concordia Lutheran Conference! For, although a conference (or other similar synodical organization) has NOT been ordained by God, either as a divine institution, as a "super-church" among and even over its member congregations, or even as a necessary agency for the preservation of true unity among Christians, we genuinely cherish this organization, not so much for its history of survival against the attacks of adversaries from within and without for now well over six decades, — not even as a vehicle through which we, as its constituent congregations, can accomplish specific goals which otherwise would be difficult at best for our little flocks to fulfill on their own, — not even because our Conference, by God's grace, is able by means of its official organ, our *Concordia Lutheran*, and by means of its presence on the "Worldwide Web" to hold forth the Lamp of God's precious Word before the world in these latter days of spiritual ignorance on the one hand and of rank apostasy on the other — but because of the *opportunity* it affords us as brethren, in the exercise of our Christian liberty, to confess to and with one another —for our mutual encouragement and edification— that, by God's grace and in the Name of our Lord Jesus Christ, we "*all speak the same thing and that there [are] no divisions among [us], but that [we are] perfectly joined together in the same mind and in the same judgment*" (I Corinthians 1:10) on the basis of God's inerrant, clear, authoritative, verbally-inspired Word.

This Word of God, as we well know from its own perfect and reliable testimony, is not just "a book," or even "the Good Book," of selected and collected human writings of Godly men who wrote at their own instance and pleasure by the same "inspiration" that moved great *secular* authors to write, or even the impetus that caused Luther to write volumes of treasured Scriptural works with a goose-quill pen. No, the Word of God, our Holy Bible, is God's own revelation of Himself to sinful men in His very own words, communicated by His Holy Spirit to holy men to write down word-for-blessed-word, so that by that God-inspired record we might be made "*wise unto salvation through faith which is in Christ Jesus*" (II Timothy 3:15) and be thoroughly equipped for a Godly life as the fruit and evidence of our confidence in Him as our Savior (v. 16).

Last year, as the motto of our *Sixtieth* Annual Convention, we focused on the **AUTHORITY of Scripture** as the fountain and foundation, the source and standard, of all Christian doctrine and

practice. This year we consider **Jesus Christ**, the Savior and Head of His Church, as the very **SOURCE** of the Word of God, the Eternal "*Word*" (John 1) even before His incarnation, who, by the agency of the Holy Spirit, caused it to be "*written for our learning*" (Romans 15:4). On the basis of the prophecy of Malachi before us this morning, a text that regrettably is often treated only in the holy *Advent* season, we observe

**Christ, our Divine Prophet — "*The Messenger of the Covenant*"**

revealed by the pre-incarnate Christ Himself (I) as to His divine **PERSON**, and (II) as to His divine **WORK**.

**I.**

Interestingly and significantly, the very name, in Hebrew, of the prophet who served as the Holy Spirit's amanuensis or secretary in recording these words means "My messenger," the messenger of the Lord God unto His people as His chosen prophet, the last prophet in the Old Testament canon. And yet, **Malachi** was not either of the "*messengers*" referred to in our text. Christ Himself is speaking, as He promises the coming of His **forerunner** in the fulness of the time to "*prepare the way before [Him]*." That forerunner was John the Baptist, prophesied even hundreds of years earlier by Isaiah as "*the voice of him that crieth in the wilderness: 'Prepare ye the way of the Lord! Make straight in the desert a highway for our God!'*" (40:3). THAT way-preparer was to be "**My messenger**," says the pre-incarnate Christ in our text, "*and he shall prepare the way before Me.*" And John, as he preached in the desert and baptized in the Jordan River, identified himself as that very messenger, saying to the people, as we find it recorded in John 1:23, "**I am** the voice of one crying in the wilderness, '*Make straight the way of the Lord,*' as said the prophet Esaias.'" It is for **our comfort** and **assurance** that God had so many "messengers" to proclaim "*repentance and remission of sins*" among all nations (Luke 24:47) as evidence that God indeed "*will have all men to be saved and to come unto the knowledge of the truth*" (I Timothy 2:4), the "*knowledge of salvation...by the remission of their sins through the tender mercy of our God, whereby the Dayspring from on high hath visited us to give light to them that sit in darkness and in the shadow of death, to guide our feet into the way of peace*" (*Benedictus*, Luke 1:77-79).

*"The LORD, whom ye seek, shall suddenly come to His Temple... 'Behold, He shall come,' saith the Lord of Hosts."* This was not merely still another "*messenger*," another prophet who would come further to announce the advent of God's Messiah, the anointed Redeemer of Israel (Isaiah 43), indeed, the Redeemer of "*the world*" (John 1:29). For THIS "*messenger*," the "*Messenger of the covenant*," would be "**the LORD**" **Himself**! Remember how John the Baptist sent his own disciples to Jesus with this question: "*Art Thou He that should come, or do we look for another?*" (Matthew 11:3)? And the Savior confirmed **Himself** to John's disciples as **the true Messiah** on the basis of Isaiah's prophecy — on the basis of the miracles predicted of the promised Messiah in Isaiah 35:4-6. He showed them that **He Himself** was "*He that should come*," that **He Himself** was "**The LORD, whom ye seek**," the **Eternal Word**, who, John testifies in the first chapter of His Gospel, "*was made flesh and dwelt among us; and we beheld His glory, the glory as of the only-begotten of the Father, full of grace and truth*" (v. 14).

This was the **Messiah of God**, whom His people had been "*seeking*," Malachi writes in our text, "**the LORD**" for whom they had been waiting in confident anticipation for so many years as the fulfillment of God's promises. This was "*the Lord*" whom Eve had expected as her firstborn son (Genesis 4:1); this was the "*Seed*" of Abraham in whom all the nations of the earth would be blessed (Genesis 22:18); this was "*the Lord, our Righteousness*" who would be raised up unto David as a righteous Branch (Jeremiah 23:6).

Yes, this was “**the LORD**” who “[would] suddenly come to His Temple,” Christ says of Himself through Malachi — NOT to that temporal edifice in Judea, but to “[His] people” (Isaiah 40:1); to His Church, the “*daughter of Zion*,” with His “*salvation*” (Isaiah 62:11); to the “*Jerusalem*” that longed to be *comforted* by His coming and to be “*pardoned*” for her “*iniquity*” (Isaiah 40:2). —He came, as promised, to the company of believers who waited and longed for His appearing and who, “*when the fulness of the time was come*” (Galatians 4:4), “*suddenly*,” when they least expected Him, saw Him manifest Himself unto them, saying “*I am He*” (John 8:24).

And John writes, “*They received Him not!*” (John 1:11). In the *suddenness* of His coming, they “[knew] *not the time of their visitation*” (Luke 19:44) “*but... DENIED the Holy One and the Just*” (Acts 3:14), “*they denied the Lord that bought them*” (II Peter 2:1). Only by the grace of God did His disciples and a precious few others, recognize and embrace Him in His divine person, saying: “*Thou art that Christ, the Son of the living God!*” (John 6:69).

## II.

But when “**the LORD**,” the Christ of God, whom so many “*sought [in faith]*, ...when He “*suddenly [came]*” to His people, what **message** did He bring them? — Certainly NOT that He would be their temporal deliverer “*out of the hand of [their] enemies*” (Luke 1:74), out of colonization by Roman armies; certainly NOT that He would be their “meal-ticket,” feeding thousands of them with merely temporal food; certainly NOT that He would be their temporal king, on a temporal throne, “*restor[ing] again the [temporal] kingdom to Israel*,” as even His own disciples imagined in their sin-blinded weakness as late as the day of His ascension into heaven (Acts 1:6). — No, “**the LORD**” would be “*the Messenger of the Covenant*,” writes Malachi in the words of Christ Himself.

Just what was the “**Covenant**” that caused His people to “*delight in [Him]*,” to “*seek*” Him, to look forward to His coming with joyful anticipation? This was the “good news” or **Gospel** “**Covenant**” of redemption, reconciliation, justification and salvation which God prepared for sinful men and declared for them in love “*before the foundation of the world*” (I Peter 1:20). Having foreseen but not willed the disobedience of His foremost visible creatures and their rebellion against Him — the transgression of Adam and Eve in the Garden of Eden which brought sin, wrath and death upon all mankind — God “*foreordained*” or chose and anointed ahead of time His only-begotten Son to be the Substitute and Scapegoat for sinners under His justice; to take their place under the **requirements** of His holy Law — demands which they could never fulfill; to suffer in their stead the **punishment** they deserved and thus to **earn** and **secure** for them, as a free, unmerited gift, reconciliation with God, peace with Him in the forgiveness of their sins, and ultimately the “*inheritance*” of life in heaven instead of “*the wages of sin*” in hell (Romans 6:23a).

This “eternal decree of redemption,” this “**covenant of peace**” (Is. 54:10), was communicated or announced to mankind already in the Garden of Eden with the first promise of the Savior; it was repeated down through the Old Testament in unmistakable prophecies of the Savior’s coming; and, “*when the fulness of the time was come [and] God sent forth His Son*” (Gal. 4:4), that “**Covenant**” continued to be proclaimed by Jesus Himself, by His evangelists and apostles, and still today in the preaching of the Gospel, as He sends forth pastors in His office as our Divine Prophet, as “*the Messenger of the Covenant*,” as “*the only-begotten Son, which is in the bosom of the Father [from all eternity]*” and “*hath declared Him*” (John 1:18) and His will of grace, His “**Covenant of peace**,” for all the world.

As we shall hear in the two-part essay delivered on Saturday and Sunday at our Convention this year, **Christ, our Divine Prophet**, anointed from all eternity to His Messianic threefold office as our Redeemer — His office as our Prophet, Priest and King— functioned as *“the Messenger of the Covenant”* already before His incarnation in the Virgin Mary, long before the onset of His public ministry in His *state of humiliation*. For in the Old Testament, the pre-incarnate Christ was identified as our Divine Prophet by His name *“the Angel of the Lord”* — the word “angel” [*ma · LÁCH* in Hebrew] being the very same word as “messenger” in our text— the Lord’s eternal Messenger of peace, His *“Messenger of the Covenant”* of peace, to poor, lost and condemned sinners. Listen to His “message” of **peace** in the **Old Testament**: *“The mountains shall depart and the hills be removed; but My kindness shall not depart from thee, neither shall the Covenant of My peace be removed, saith the LORD that hath mercy on thee”* (Isaiah 54:10).

And the very same message of enduring peace, *“peace with God through our Lord Jesus Christ”* (Romans 5:1), Christ Himself, *“the Messenger of the Covenant,”* declares in John 14:27, saying: *“Peace I leave with you; MY peace I give unto you. Not as the world giveth give I unto you: Let not your heart be troubled, neither let it be afraid!”*

From all eternity, God *“remembered His holy covenant, the oath which He swore”* (Luke 1:72-73) in His eternal decree to grant forgiveness, reconciliation, justification and peace to all lost and condemned mankind for the sake of the perfect propitiation of Christ offered *“for our sins and not for ours only but also for the sins of the whole world”* (I John 2:2). Thus, true to His Word, to His holy Covenant, *“God was in Christ reconciling the world unto Himself, not imputing their trespasses unto them, and hath committed unto us the **Word of Reconciliation**”* (II Corinthians 5:19), the good news, the Gospel declaration, of the covenant of His peace for Christ’s sake, *“as He spake by the mouth of His holy prophets, which have been since the world began”* (Luke 1:70), yea, as He proclaimed it very particularly by His Divine Messenger, *“the Angel of the Lord,” “the Messenger of the Covenant,” **Christ, our Divine Prophet***, for our knowledge unto salvation (I Timothy 2:4).

May we ever gladly and gratefully hear and heed that blessed message of salvation brought to us by our precious Savior, with ears and hearts opened by His Holy Spirit to treasure it as our most priceless possession, so that, *“being justified by faith, **we have peace with God through our Lord Jesus Christ**”* (Romans 5:1), *“the Author and Finisher of our faith”* (Hebrews 12:2), unto life everlasting! Amen.

***Soli Deo gloria!***

