

Rev. Dan Welch Advent Midweek 2 12-7-22 Text-Malachi 4:1-2 "Stir Up Our Hearts"

What an evening! What a blessing to listen to and participate in such wonderful praise to Christ, our Savior born for us at Bethlehem and who will come again to take us into eternal life in heaven!

These days leading up to Christmas are a wonderful time, but they can also be a very *exhausting* time. After all there is so much to do! There's the rush to get ready for family gatherings, the cleaning, decorating, baking meals and cookies, wrapping presents, sending cards. Then there are Christmas programs and services to attend, and even Advent Choral concerts (!). For some people, Christmas celebrations just aren't what they used to be, either, with loved ones who are absent or passed away. It's no wonder that many suffer what's called the "holiday blues" with feelings of sadness, anxiousness, hopelessness, guilt, or just plain emptiness.

Yes, as beautiful and wondrous as Christmas is, it's easy for hearts to become weighed down for lots of different reasons. That's a big reason why Advent, the days leading up to Christmas, can be such a blessing for us! It helps us to focus on the true joy that is found in Christ alone! During

the Advent season especially, we could all use some good news to stir up our hearts and keep them filled with joy and peace no matter who we are and no matter what the circumstance. There *is* a place we can go to have that happen. In this place, there is Someone Who loves to stir up our hearts and He never gets tired of doing it.

The place is right here- God's house. This past Sunday we prayed together in the Collect, "Stir up our hearts, O Lord." It's easy to overlook that little part of the Liturgy we have each Sunday, and yet praying the Collect of the Day can be very meaningful. Each Sunday, and for that whole week in fact, the Collect is a prayer that collects the congregation's petitions into one plea. Like a laser beam it focuses on one request. This prayer becomes your prayer, by the way, by your giving your "Amen" to it! The Collect for the 2nd Sunday in Advent is especially meaningful: "Stir up our hearts, O Lord, to make ready the way of Your only-begotten Son, that by His coming we may be enabled to serve You with pure minds."

Stir up our hearts, O Lord! Wake them up! It's so easy for our hearts to become weighed down with worry and sadness. Yes, our hearts are

easily troubled when we lose focus on what Christmas is really *supposed* to be about- the Savior born for us. We definitely need our Lord to stir up our hearts to live on the foundation He has built for us—on the truth of His saving work. His kingdom will not end. His promises will never fail. This is the message we need to hear as we draw near to Christmas!

Stir up our hearts O Lord, by Christ's coming! As Malachi says in our text, in verse 2: "But for you who revere my name, the sun of righteousness will rise with healing in its rays" (Malachi 4:2a). The Lord makes a clear distinction. He threatens the unrepentant evildoers in verse 1 of our text. They will be stubble. But to those who revere Him, He gives great promises. So revere His name. Know that He has the right to destroy you because of your sinfulness. Repent, and cling to Him as your only hope. And "for you who revere my name, the sun of righteousness will rise with healing in its wings."

The Sun of Righteousness is Jesus Christ—God of God, Light of light. He shines with full, perfect righteousness, goodness. He shines not only righteousness as eternal God but also His complete righteousness as the

only good, fully loving Man ever to walk this earth. He shines with perfect light, not to blind those who revere Him, but to heal them. The wings of the sun are its rays. The wings of the Sun of Righteousness— Jesus, the Baby of Bethlehem, the bearer of our sin on Calvary's tree—are His mercies coming to you to heal you which He does through Word and Sacrament and we in turn, give Him our thanks and praise.

On that Last Day those rays will shine such healing on you who trust in Him that every physical pain and weakness will be banished. Your soul and mind will never desire sin or chase after the hollow holiday cheer that this world offers as a pale substitute for real joy. Your desire will be the Lord, and He will fill the desires of your heart.

Our loving Lord ***stirs up*** our hearts by the healing rays of Christ, the Sun of Righteousness. He ***rises*** with healing in His wings of mercy. He is coming again one day soon to finally set us free forever!