

When the Old Testament prophet Malachi died, the Word of the Lord fell silent. No longer was the prophetic word of the Lord to be heard spoken through a living prophet. There was no one on whom the Spirit of the LORD had come to rest. The tongues of the prophets were stilled, and the Word of the Lord was silent for **four hundred years**. (*Pause here for a moment of silence—long enough for people to begin to feel uncomfortable.*)

The silence makes us uncomfortable, doesn't it? Silence makes us feel awkward and uneasy, especially in the middle of a church service. Maybe you were wondering, "What's going on?" The pastor's not talking; the organ's not playing—maybe somebody forgot their music, or the pastor lost his place. And it probably made you uncomfortable. It made me uncomfortable, and *I* knew it was coming! The point is, we don't like silence when we expect to hear someone speaking.

Imagine, then, how the people of God must have felt. This was no ordinary silence. The voice of God speaking through the prophets was silent for four hundred years. For a time much longer than the United States has been a country, the prophets of God were not speaking.

There have been times when all of us have been alone with our thoughts. Sometimes it can be soothing, especially if you're a parent or a teacher. But if silence goes on too long, after a while it can be devastating to the mind and the heart. Lack of communication destroys marriages, ruins friendships, and can end careers very quickly. It must have been terrible for the people of God. Where was the living voice of God? Where are His prophets? What's become of God and His promises? If God is now silent, then what hope do *I* have? Are His promises still good? Has God abandoned us? It was a terrible, godly silence.

Then at just the right time, the voice was back. The silence of the prophets was shattered. From the wilderness and barren regions, the voice of one came just as Isaiah had foretold. "In the wilderness prepare the way of the Lord; make straight in the desert a highway for our God. Every valley shall be lifted up, and every mountain and hill be made low; the uneven ground shall become level, and the rough places a plain" (Is 40:3-4). It's the preaching of John that prepares the way. He draws people to his message that a greater One is coming to gather the wheat and burn the chaff. 'The Messiah is coming, and is even here,' John said. 'Everything Moses and the prophets said is to come, is coming to pass right now. Don't miss this! Get ready!'

With fire and the power of the Holy Spirit, the Messiah comes, but instead of being a terrible judge, awesome to behold, He's a lamb. "Behold, the Lamb of

God, who takes away the sin of the world!” John says (Jn 1:29). The Messiah, with gentleness, heals and teaches. In lowliness, the Messiah calls disciples and raises the dead to life. Gentiles will follow Him; sinners adore him; little children call him “Son of David.” The Messiah of God loves the lame, the mute, the deaf, and the blind. In humility, this Messiah touches lepers and washes feet. To be the Lamb of God means to be lowly and gentle and humble to the point of death, even death on a cross.

We **need** that Lamb. In this world where there is often sadness and death, we sinners long for that gentle Lamb, who is also our Good Shepherd, because the enemy stalks us with cold efficiency. From the moment we’re baptized, the enemy is doing his evil best to turn us into a spiritual corpse. Satan’s purpose is to fill your soul and mine with darkness and make sin seem like the good, right, and noble thing to do. When this happens, we ignore the importance of God’s Word for our faith. We ignore our neighbors, turn **against** them, **whisper** against them, and generally treat one another as if they were **not** someone for whom Christ died. When I sin and when you sin in this and every other way we can **possibly** dream up, we offend God and His holiness. Yes, our sins are no small thing; they’re a personal offense against God! There’s no nice way to say it: Sin is a **God**-sized problem, and you and I are nowhere near big enough to solve it. If we understand **anything** at all, we cover our mouths in silence.

After **all** those centuries of silence, after our own **penitential** silence, we now hear the new voice of the Prophet, of **the** Prophet, the voice of God. Jesus of Nazareth. John had pointed to Him, told us to listen to Him, and now Jesus’ own voice shatters the silence.

After all those centuries of silence, some knew they needed to hear Him. He invited Andrew to come and see, and Andrew did—came and saw and heard and stayed . . . and brought his brother Simon. Simon heard Jesus call him by a new name, Peter, the Rock, and Peter followed. Then Jesus called to Philip, “Follow me!” (v 43)—and Philip did.

Philip heard, and Philip understood. “We have found him of whom Moses in the Law and also the prophets wrote” (v 45) he told his friend Nathanael. The long-promised Messiah has come to the world and shattered the silence of the prophets. This is the one of whom Moses said, “Listen to him” in Deuteronomy 18. In Jesus, the new covenant promised in Jer. 31:31 will come to pass on the night of His betrayal. Isaiah foretells His suffering, and Nathan tells David that His kingdom will be forever.

“Repent, for the kingdom of heaven is at hand” (Mt 3:2). This is the prophetic proclamation of the Son of God. With the incarnation of God and the

revealing Epiphany light, the Messiah, Christ Jesus, invades the world, and the kingdom of the enemy has no chance. This invasion of God is one where the only cry is that of a baby being born. He doesn't come with huge machines of war, but rather tiny hands that grasp the hands of His Mother and Father's. He doesn't come decked out in the armor of a soldier, but with strips of common cloth to swaddle a newborn.

The silence of heaven is broken with Jesus' infant cries, and John's recognizing Him as the Lamb that will be slain. Christ will save those who trust in Him, just as Moses and the prophets said. He will save them by dying for them. We can't fully comprehend the wonder and majesty of the baby in the manger unless we embrace the truth that He is revealed to be the man on the cross for us sinners. On that hill called Calvary, it looked as if Satan had won the battle. The Messiah was wounded and dying. The Son of Mary looked to the sky and shouted for His Father, but heaven was silent.

Then on the third day, the silence of heaven was **shattered**. It was broken by the sound of an earthquake. The silence was broken with the announcement of an angel, "He is not here, for he has risen" (Mt 28:6). Death and grave were no match for this Lamb, this Savior, this Christ. He is ours, and He is **for** us forever.

After all the centuries of silence, some eagerly hear. "We have found him of whom Moses in the Law and also the prophets wrote, Jesus of Nazareth, the son of Joseph." But others answer like Nathanael: "Can anything good come out of Nazareth?" (v 46). With our God-sized problem, will **we** try to hold out for a voice more to our liking?

St. Paul reminds us in Colossians 1:17, "He is before all things, and in him all things hold together." And Jesus' own voice promised Nathanael, "Truly, truly, I say to you, you will see heaven opened, and the angels of God ascending and descending on the Son of Man" (v 51). What Moses preached and what the prophets declared is the final, ultimate, and eternal **yes** to all of God's promises. All history of heaven and earth comes to its apex, its high point, in Jesus Christ who redeems you and me. And soon enough, Nathanael believed it too: "Rabbi, you are the Son of God! You are the King of Israel!" (v 49), he said. **You also** trust Him, and He will save you by grace alone through faith.

Get ready! Repent and believe the Good News! The silence of heaven is shattered! Jesus is coming! Amen.