

## Silence is Broken

(for sermon on 27<sup>th</sup> Nov 2022)

**Before we begin, think about what Christmas means to you and your family; and how do you get ready for Christmas?**

*Christmas means thanking God for the gift of his precious Son Jesus [our Lord and Saviour] and ensuring that we don't lose focus on keeping Jesus the Christ in Christ-mas, by remembering and celebrating His birth. Without Jesus' birth, there is no death on the cross for the forgiveness of sins and there is no resurrection for eternal life.*

*It's a time for our family to celebrate God's gift of love by showing love to one another.*

*Preparation: Reading the nativity passages in the Bible and attending various Christmas services and Christmas Carol services and decorating our home in preparation for family gatherings.*

### Read Malachi 4: 1-6

1. What is the day that is coming? What picture is conjured up?

*The day that is coming is a day of fiery judgment.*

*The picture is of the wicked evildoer being like stubble (chaff) – the combustible dry straw that remains after the grain has been harvested (see Psalm 1). When such material is put into a furnace it would inevitably be set ablaze and utterly consumed from the bottommost 'root' to the topmost 'branch' (v1). It is a picture of total destruction with no hope of survival nor restoration. God's judgment will deal finally and decisively with His enemies; no more chances!*

2. What two types of people are compared in verses 1, 2 & 3? What will be the destiny for each of the types?

*Evildoers (v1 &3) and those who revere the Lord's name (v2 & 3)*

*For the evildoers it will be a dark and gloomy day but for those who revere the Lord's name it will be like the sun's light shining in darkness and like the healing warmth of the sun's rays.*

*Those who revere the Lord's name will be like well-fed calves released from their pens all excited and trampling on the wicked. So those who revere the Lord's name will be spared but the evildoers will be done for.*

3. Who is the "sun of righteousness"? (cf. Psalm 118:27; Isaiah 9:2; 45:8; Luke 1:78 and Eph 5:14)

*Psalm 118:27 - The Lord is God, and he has made his light shine on us. With boughs in hand, join in the festal procession up to the horns of the altar.*

*Isaiah 9:2 - The people walking in darkness have seen a great light; on those living in the land of deep darkness a light has dawned.*

*Isaiah 45:8 - "You heavens above, rain down my righteousness; let the clouds shower it down. Let the earth open wide, let salvation spring up, let righteousness flourish with it; I, the Lord, have created it."*

*Luke 1:78 - because of the tender mercy of our God, by which the rising sun will come to us from heaven*

*Ephesians 5:14 - This is why it is said: "Wake up, sleeper, rise from the dead, and Christ will shine on you."*

*From the time of early Christians like Justin Martyr to today, Christians have regarded the Sun of Righteousness as a reference to Jesus.*

*In many passages God is related to a planet or star (Psalm 84:11, Isaiah 60:19, Revelation 22:16, Numbers 24:17). Here in Malachi 4:2, the Messiah is not only a Sun, but also the Sun of Righteousness who brings healing.*

*With Jesus as the Light of the World as the "Sun of Righteousness", we need no other light or warmth. Imagine trying to light a candle on a sunny day to help out the sun! That makes as much sense as trying to "improve" the work of Jesus for us with our own righteousness.*

4. What's the role of the Law of Moses in verse 4?

*Malachi tells the people to remember God's Law given through Moses. It's God's law that distinguishing between good and evil. God's law is God's standards by which He judges everyone. Obedience or disobedience! The fact that we are sinners and fall short of God's perfect standards and cannot fully keep the law shows why we need Jesus (the Sun of Righteousness!)*

*God reminds Israel to not forget His law because He is about to be silent for 400 years.*

5. How can we make sense of Elijah being promised in verse 5, when Malachi writes after Elijah? (cf. 1 Kings 17:1; Matt 11:14; 16:14; 17:1-4; Luke 1:17 and Rev 11:1-3)

*God through Malachi is promising someone to come who has a similar strong and powerful ministry as Elijah. This person will go out "in the spirit of Elijah"*

*Elijah was a prophet of prayer – He prayed at it stopped raining (1 Kings 17:1) and he prayed and the drought was broken (1 Kings 18:1).*

*In Matthew 11:14, Jesus describes John the Baptist as the Elijah that Malachi promised.*

*In Matthew 16:14, Peter told Jesus that some people thought Jesus was the Elijah that Malachi promised.*

*In Matthew 17:1-4, Elijah appeared on the mountain with Moses when Jesus was transfigured.*

*Luke 1:17 – The angel tells Zechariah that his son, John the Baptist, is the fulfilment of Malachi's promise. Zechariah's son, John, will go before the Lord in the "spirit and power of Elijah".*

*Revelation 11:1-3 – When Jesus returns again – there will be two witnesses – often considered to be Moses and Elijah (or someone in the "spirit of Elijah).*

*It is significant that in these closing words of the Old Testament, God makes reference to both Moses and Elijah. They both met God at Mount Sinai (Exodus 3:1; 1 Kings 19:8-18). They also both met Jesus at the Mount of Transfiguration (Matthew 17:1-5). They are probably the two witnesses of Revelation 11. And they represent the Law and the Prophets – which Jesus completely represents and fulfils!*

6. What will this "Elijah" do in verse 6? (cf. Luke 1:17) and what will God do otherwise? (cf. Rev 19:15)

*Elijah will turn the hearts of the fathers to the children: This promise speaks of more than the reconciliation of families. When God turns the hearts of the children to their fathers, it also has in mind turning to the God of their fathers, to the faith of the patriarchs.*

*As Luke 1:17 says - turn the hearts of the parents to their children and the disobedient to the wisdom of the righteous—to make ready a people prepared for the Lord.*

*What this promised Elijah (John the Baptist) will do is tell people to turn their hearts back to God and repent – and come and meet the One (Jesus) who can take away the sin of the world.*

*If people do not return to the Lord and have faith like the patriarchs (Abraham, Isaac and Jacob) then the Lord will strike the land with total destruction.*

*Note: Malachi means "My messenger" – and God's messenger promises that He will send another messenger John (Elijah) who turn prepares people to meet the ultimate 'messenger from God'*

#### **Read Luke 1:1-4**

7. What's the time lapse between Malachi's prophecy and the events of Luke 1? Why the delay?

*The time lapse is 400 years.*

*Why the delay? God had completed His revelation through His prophets. He has promised to send His Messiah and His "Elijah" to prepare the way before the Messiah. So, the next thing to happen is the coming of the Promised Messiah, in God's own perfect timing, which happens to be 400 years.*

*As Hebrews 1:1-2 says: In the past God spoke to our ancestors through the prophets at many times and in various ways, but in these last days he has spoken to us by his Son, whom he appointed heir of all things, and through whom also he made the universe.*

8. What's Luke's purpose in writing his Gospel?

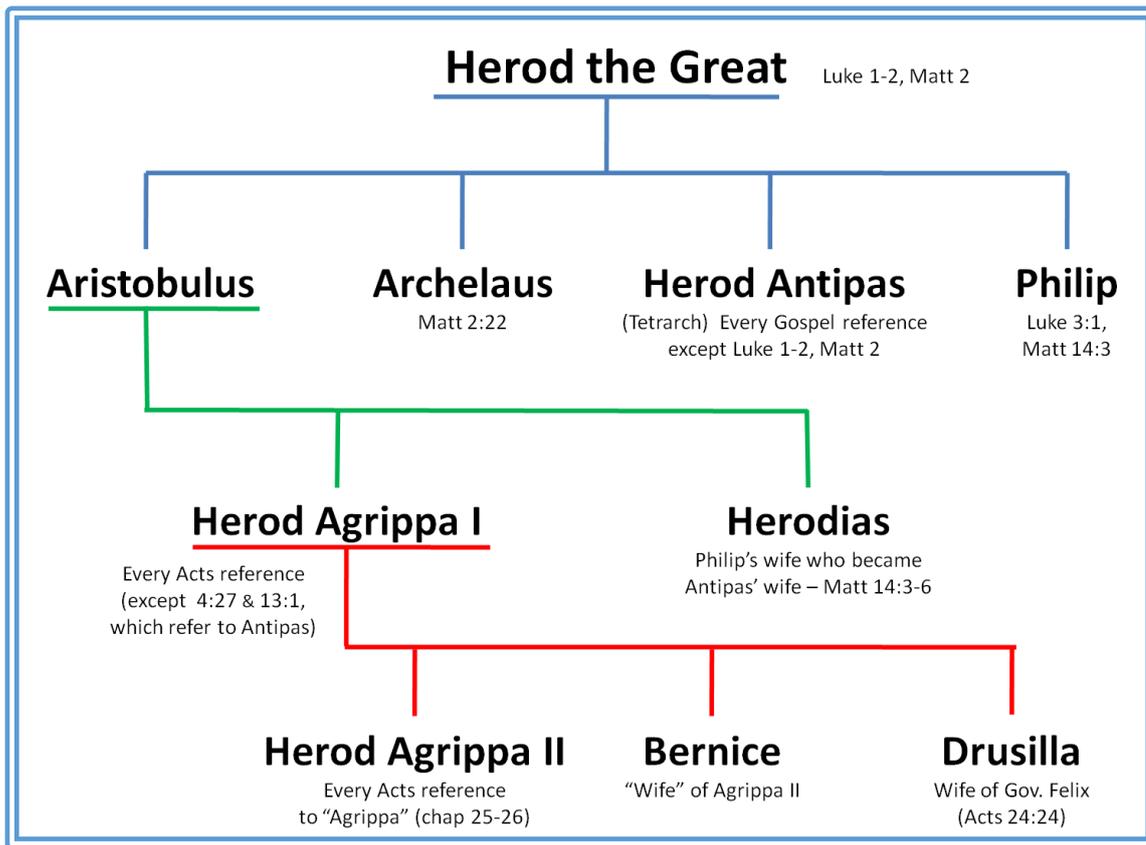
So that Luke’s friend, Theophilus, might “know the certainty of the things he has been taught”

9. How can we be certain that Luke’s account of what happened when Jesus came to Earth is accurate?  
*We can be certain that Luke’s account is accurate because they were handed down from those who were actually eyewitnesses and servants of God’s word (v2) and because Luke himself has carefully investigated everything [about Jesus] from the beginning (v3)*

10. What does the name *Theophilus* mean?  
*Theophilus means “friend of God”.  
 In a sense we are “friends of God” and so it’s like Luke is writing to each one of us.*

**Read Luke 1:5-25**

11. Who is the King of Judea at the time? (cf. Matt 2:1). Look up his family.  
*King Herod the Great. He was at the end of a long and terrible reign. Ethnically, he was not a descendant of Israel, but of Jacob’s brother Esau — therefore an Edomite, or an Idumean. He was known for his spectacular building programs, but even more so for his paranoid cruelty, which drove him to execute many, including members of his own family.*



12. Who is the priest named, and his wife; and his descendants; and his priestly division? (cf. 1 Chron 24:4-19)  
*The priest was named Zechariah and his wife was Elizabeth. They were descendants of Aaron; and Zechariah is the priestly division of Abijah.  
 1 Chronicles 24 describes how the priestly tribe, Levi, was spilt into 24 divisions for ministering in the Temple. Zechariah was part of the eighth division Abijah.*

13. What was the character of Zechariah and Elizabeth?

*They were righteous in the sight of God, observing all the Lord's commands and decrees blamelessly.*

14. What problem do the couple have in verse 7?

*They were childless and were unable to conceive and were now old.*

15. Why was barrenness seen as a problem in the culture? (cf. v25 and Gen 30:23; Isa 4:1)

*There was a stigma in society that if a woman could not conceive a child; it was a disgrace/shame. Not necessarily a shame/disgrace from God but children were seen as a blessing from God; so, if a couple could not have a child, then society saw it as a curse from God and the woman especially felt shame/disgrace. Hence, Elizabeth says in v25 that God has taken away her disgrace!*

*In Genesis 30:23 – when Rachel conceived and gave birth to Joseph, she said that God had taken away her disgrace.*

*Similarly in Isaiah's day; it was seen as a disgrace to not bear a child (Isaiah 4:1)*

16. What priestly duty was Zechariah carrying out in verses 8 to 10?

*He was in the temple burning incense.*

*According to the Law of Moses, incense was offered to God on the golden altar every morning and every evening (Exodus 30:7-8). By this time, there was an established ritual for the practice.*

17. What does the angel tell Zechariah?

*The angel tells Zechariah that his prayer has been heard, and that his wife, Elizabeth, will bear him a son, called John.*

18. How does Zechariah react to the angel's message? What 'punishment' does Zechariah receive?

*Zechariah doubted the angel's message "how can I be sure of this? I am an old man and my wife is well along in years".*

*The angel told Zechariah he would remain silent until the child is born.*

19. What is significant about the prophesied child's name? How does that relate to Jesus?

*John means "God is a gracious giver".*

*John will introduce people to Jesus – the Grace of God.*

20. Who will this boy be like? And what will be his job for the Lord?

*He will be a joy and delight to Zechariah.*

*Many will rejoice at his birth.*

*He will be great in the sight of the Lord.*

*He will never drink wine. This is probably a reference to the vow of a Nazirite found in Numbers 6. Their son John would be specially consecrated to God all the days of his life, as Samson should have been.*

*He will be filled with the Holy Spirit before he is even born. John would have a unique filling of the Holy Spirit, being filled with the Holy Spirit even while in the womb.*

*Job: He will go before the Lord in the Spirit and power of Elijah – to turn the hearts of the parents to their children and the disobedient to the wisdom of the righteous – to make ready a people prepared for the Lord. In other words, calling people to repentance, in order to meet Jesus, the Saviour. This is a fulfilment of Malachi 4:5-6 [the last words in the Old Testament] – and now God's revelation is resuming where it let off.*

*Like Elijah who called Israel to a radical repentance*

21. How does Elizabeth react to being with child?

*She praised God for taking away her disgrace.*

22. How does Malachi 4:1-5 relate to Luke 1:1-25?

*Luke 1:1-25 and the promise of the birth of John; is a fulfilment of Malachi's prophecy of an Elijah to come. John will usher in Jesus, the Sun of Righteousness, who will come again to implement the day of judgment that Malachi also prophesied.*

23. Luke 1:17 says John will 'make ready a people prepared for the Lord' – how are people today made ready to meet the Lord?

*By hearing the Word of God and applying it to our lives.*

*By admitting sin and repenting.*

*By being born of the Holy Spirit.*

*By evangelizing so others can come to faith in our Lord Jesus.*

**Finish in prayer:** Thanking God for His Word and asking for opportunities for us to make others ready to meet the Lord