

Advent

Reflection 13: Advent 2 - Remembering the Mysteries You Can't See

"I will send my messenger, who will prepare the way before me. Then suddenly the Lord you are seeking will come to his temple; the messenger of the covenant, whom you desire, will come," says the LORD Almighty.

Malachi 3:1

*"A voice of one calling in the wilderness,
'Prepare the way for the Lord,
make straight paths for him.'"*

Matthew 3:3

It's hard when nothing seems to be happening, when it seems activity has stopped and everything has gone silent. It can be frustrating when something has been promised, with assurances of change and everything goes silent.

This year has felt a bit silent, promises of change, promises of a vaccine, with lots of periods of not really knowing about the work going on behind the scenes for these changes.

The verses above look like they could have been written within weeks or even days of each other, the book of Malachi and the book of Matthew both announcing the coming Messiah. However, the period between these books is believed to be around 400-500 years.

The gap between the Old Testament and the New Testament are often called 'the silent' years, and it denotes the time the last of the inspired prophets spoke and when the first of the New Testament writers began to write. It seemed that God was silent, he had promised but nothing was happening – or so it seemed! After Malachi there are no more books of the Bible until the New Testament so it would be easy to write that period off, but when we compare the two we see a major shift in atmosphere.

The late Ray. C Steadman, pastor and author, writes:

At the close of the book of Malachi in the Old Testament, the nation of Israel is back again in the land of Palestine after the Babylonian captivity, but they are under the domination of the great world power of that day, Persia and the Medio-Persian empire. In Jerusalem, the temple had been restored, although it was a much smaller building than the one that Solomon had built and decorated in such marvelous glory... Now when you open the New Testament to the book of Matthew, you discover an entirely different atmosphere -- almost a different world. Rome is now the dominant power of the earth. The Roman legions have spread throughout the length and breadth of the civilized world. The center of power has shifted from the East to the West, to Rome. Palestine is still a puppet state -- the Jews never did regain their own sovereignty -- but now there is a king on the throne... God allowed a period of time for the teachings of the Old Testament to penetrate throughout the world. During this time, he rearranged the scenes of history, much as a stage crew will rearrange the stage sets after the curtain has fallen, and when the curtain rises again there is an entirely new setting.ⁱ

Without the benefit of hindsight, or evening living in a particular era, it seemed everything fell silent, yet God was working, he was preparing the atmosphere for his Son to come. His Son that would shift things in a much more visible way, not just while on earth but for years to come. As Malachi and John the Baptist in Matthew declared, it was about 'preparing the way of the Lord'.

This advent (and this year) it may feel like things are not shifting, maybe life and God seems silent but during this season it's a good time to 'remember the mysteries you can't see' trusting that God is working in every situation, preparing the atmosphere of things to come in your life.

Reflection Questions:

- What feels silent in your life currently?
- Does God feel silent?
- Take time to look back over the year to see how the atmosphere has changed, even when things felt silent
- Spend time asking God to shift the atmosphere in your situation

Prayer

Father, I thank you that you have promised never to leave us and when things feel silent we can be confident you are working behind the scenes shifting the atmosphere. Help me to know you are there even when I don't feel it, and that I can trust you in all situations. Amen

ⁱ <http://www.templemount.org/0240.html>