

Malachi is not a name, but a word meaning “my messenger” ... an “angel voice.” Its message is one of judgment for ignoring God's plan. At the same time it raises hope for a day when the darkness would end and God's light would change the world.

Like so many messages we encounter it is bad news / good news! Malachi said, “We live in a broken world, but a change is coming.” This reading came to be associated with “judgment day” or the end of the world, and eventually the idea of a Messiah who would come to restore the fortunes of God's people in the Promised Land.

As pilgrims approached the Jerusalem temple, it was after a long climb to high ground. From far away the temple was visible and its white marble walls would gleam from the sunlight. Imagine the joy when, like sunrise, they first saw the light that reflected of their most important building in the world! So imagine their reactions when (as recorded in Luke 21) Jesus rode into the city on Palm Sunday and soon after remarked, “The day is coming when not one stone will be left upon another;” and then followed that with words about war and disaster that were looming in the future.

What a terrible darkness that would be, and how hard to imagine. On the other hand, creatures that live without light, fear the light. For instance, species such as blind cavefish have no eyesight. And, instinctively they swim away from any light, preferring darkness and shadow in which they have lived for thousands of generations. Too often we live in a world where darkness seems to have more power than light! And too many have become too comfortable living in the darkness of sin.

But in the midst of Jesus' warning, there also came a promise. *Not a hair of your head will perish. By your endurance you will gain your souls.*” And so, even in the midst of darkness, with faith, there is always hope. It is always about darkness and light!

I have always been fascinated with Japan. It is a connected group of volcanic islands in isolated at the western edge of the Pacific. Ancient Japanese knew about China and Korea, but they did not know of any land east of their islands. They believed theirs was the first land on earth, awakened each morning by the rising sun. The Japanese call their land “Nippon,” meaning “Land of the Rising Sun.” That is why their flag, and symbols on ships and planes all have a sun with rays expanding outward ...

Like many aboriginal peoples, they worshipped the sun. Can you imagine how they panicked during a solar eclipse? Or how joyful when the light chased the

darkness away? The believed they alone lived in the land of the rising sun. However, I want to talk about a different land with a different rising "Son."

The reason we worship on Sunday is because of Easter. For Christians, it is Sunday (the "son's" day), not Monday that is the first day of the week. This is the day when the Son's rising was unlike anything the world had ever seen. And in rising like the son, Jesus has changed the darkness for all time.

Because of the darkness of sin and death, Jesus came to bring light to the shadows and life to the dying. His sacrifice and burial were loving actions so that he might rise with healing in his wings (as Malachi had promised.)

And so the Son of God rises with the Easter sun -- the new dawn of a new kingdom is full of warmth, and healing, and hope. As we remember the image of the land of the rising sun, we might do well to see the kingdom of Christ as the land of a Son of God. Malachi promised that the sun would rise with healing in its wings ... and after the angelic good news of Easter, each sunrise is colored by the rising Son of God!

Psalm 98 lifts up not only that future change, but calls for a response: "*Sing a new song to the Lord.*" In other words, with the sunrise of Easter comes the call for a new way of living – chasing the darkness away and leading darkness dwellers back to the Light!

And this happens as we open our eyes to the Light which Christ brings, and realize that there is only darkness for those who flee from the Light. And so, if the darkness of sin and death has been chased away, why would we not sing a new song?

One of the sights it was important for me to photograph when I visited Ireland was the incredible variety of Celtic Crosses. They are crosses with a circle around the arms of the cross and popular items of jewelry even though few are aware of their origin. Like the ancient inhabitants of Japan, the residents of Ireland worshipped the sun. Legend has it that when Saint Patrick returned to Ireland as a missionary to proclaim the Gospel, he knew the difficulty it would be for them to give up ancient practices. So he placed a circle to represent the sun on the middle of the cross and used that to teach how the Son of God was lifted high in the sky to lovingly save an entire world.

Just as Paul went to the altar to an unknown God and told the Athenians who that God really was, Patrick He used a familiar image to introduce an unfamiliar concept and revealed Jesus was God in the flesh, lifted high in the sky for the entire world to know how loved they really were.

As we wander through the darkness of earthly brokenness and a reminder of the end of all time, God's entrance into time and space gives us a choice – hide in

the darkness or anticipate the light. Curse the shadows or celebrate the warmth of God's love.

I begin my morning walks in the darkness (it is easier that way, to get moving before I am fully awake.) But the greatest joy of each walk is waiting for the rising sun and seeing how God's paint brush changes each morning, as clouds become orange and yellow ... or the fog gets a glow that is incredible to describe. What a reminder of the beauty and power of the land of a rising son.

And yet just as sunrise warms a cold earth and chases shadows away, even more so does the risen Christ bring healing and hope, joy and peace to lives that have been darkened by sin's power.

Consider this: We are moving into a season of darkness, but the southern hemisphere is moving into the light of summer. In other words, life on this earth is always about perspective – for there is always somewhere that the nights are short and the days are long; and someplace where nights are long and days are short.

Always someplace in darkness and someplace in the light. And isn't that what faith does as well? No matter what else we hear or see or feel, we do in the context of a Savior who came to bring light to the darkness and on Easter morning, brought to us a Son Rise like the world had never seen before. And no matter how deep the shadows or how long the night, that is what life is REALLY like in the Land of our Risen SON!