

ADVENT IN THE MINOR PROPHETS

The Prophetic Witness of the Twelve on the Threshold of the Incarnation

Class Three — The Silence Before the Dawn

Haggai, Zechariah, and Malachi

Session Three of Four

PRIMARY TEXTS

Prophets: Haggai 1—2; Zechariah 3, 6, 9, 12; Malachi 1—4

Advent Fulfillment: Luke 1:5—17; John 1:14; John 2:19—21

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Opening Prayer

Almighty God, You filled the tabernacle with Your glory and then withdrew it from a defiled house, and Your people waited four hundred years in silence for its return. Grant that we may not mistake Your patience for absence or Your silence for indifference. Refine us as silver is refined, and set our eyes on the Lord who came suddenly to His temple in flesh. Fill this house with Your glory and give us Your peace. Through Jesus Christ, Your Son, our Lord, who lives and reigns with You and the Holy Spirit, one God, now and forever. Amen.

I. Opening and Framing

Where Did the Glory Go?

Class Two ended with Jerusalem in ruins and the people marched east. This session picks them up on the way back. The exiles return, the temple is rebuilt, and the building is finished — and nothing happens. No cloud fills it. No fire falls. The old men who remember Solomon's house weep when they see the foundation of the new one. Three prophets speak into that

disappointment, and then Scripture goes quiet for four centuries. This is the session about waiting in a building where God has not shown up, which is a situation the Church knows something about. One Hebrew word runs underneath the whole hour: kavod (כְּבוֹד), “glory,” from a root meaning weight. The question of the session is where the weight went, and whether it is coming back.

Discussion Question

God’s glory filled the tabernacle and Solomon’s temple so thickly that the priests could not stand to minister. Ezekiel then watched that glory leave the temple in stages and stop on the Mount of Olives. When the second temple was finished, no cloud came. For four hundred years God’s people worshiped in a building He had not visibly entered. What does it do to a people’s faith to keep the appointment when the other party has not arrived — and how would you know the difference between God’s absence and God’s silence?

1. Ezekiel saw the glory of God leave the temple in three reluctant stages: to the threshold, then to the east gate, then out to the mountain east of the city, where it stopped and stayed. Before we begin: when you have felt God to be far off, was it more like an absence, a departure, or a silence? Hold your answer. The distinction is going to matter.

Watch for one pattern all session. Every time God threatens to withdraw or delay, He does something first that guarantees His return — a promise, a sign, a name, a garment. The silence of the four hundred years is not empty. It is loaded.

Key Vocabulary

Kavod (כְּבוֹד): “Glory,” from a root meaning weight or heaviness. Not brightness but substance — the felt weight of God’s presence. The verb form asks Malachi’s question: “Where is my honor?” (1:6).

Hekal (הֵיכָל): “Temple, palace.” The same word covers a king’s throne room and God’s house. The temple was never merely a religious building; it was a royal residence.

Shekinah: A later rabbinic term from the verb shakan, “to dwell, to pitch a tent.” It names the localized, visible presence that filled the tabernacle and Solomon’s temple — and did not fill the second.

Chemdah (חֶמְדָּה): “Desire, treasure, that which is longed for.” Haggai 2:7. Luther translated it “the Consolation of all heathen.”

Tsemach (צֶמַח): “Branch, sprout.” Zechariah’s messianic title. The image is not a limb on a tree but something coming up out of the ground.

II. The Original Gift — The Glory That Filled the House

Before we can feel the silence, we have to have heard the noise.

Read Exodus 40:34–38 and 1 Kings 8:10–13 aloud.

Exodus 40:34–35 (ESV)

“Then the cloud covered the tent of meeting, and the glory of the LORD filled the tabernacle. And Moses was not able to enter the tent of meeting because the cloud settled on it, and the glory of the LORD filled the tabernacle.”

Ezekiel 11:22–23 (ESV)

“Then the cherubim lifted up their wings, with the wheels beside them, and the glory of the God of Israel was over them. And the glory of the LORD went up from the midst of the city and stood on the mountain that is on the east side of the city.”

Key Hebrew Terms:

Kavod (כָּבוֹד): “glory,” from kaved, “to be heavy.” The weight of God’s presence. Its opposite is not dimness but lightness — treating God as though He weighed nothing.

Shakan (שָׁכַן): “to dwell, to pitch a tent.” The verb behind both mishkan (tabernacle) and the later term Shekinah. John 1:14 translates it into Greek.

Ezekiel watched the glory leave in three stages, and the slowness is the point. First it rose from above the mercy seat to the threshold of the temple (9:3; 10:4), so that the Holy of Holies stood empty and the building became ordinary. Then it moved to the east gate (10:18–19). Then it crossed the Kidron and stopped on the Mount of Olives (11:23) — and stayed there, in view of the city. Note the direction. East is the road to Babylon. God did not withdraw to heaven; He placed Himself on the road His people were being marched down. And just before He went, He promised them a *miqdash me’at*, “a sanctuary for a little while,” in the lands where they were going (11:16). The temple emptied, and the sanctuary became portable.

2. The glory was so heavy that Moses could not enter the tent and the priests could not stand to minister (Exodus 40:35; 1 Kings 8:11). The presence of God was, quite literally, in the way. What does it say about our expectations of worship that we would find such a service a failure rather than a success?

3. Ezekiel’s glory does not vanish; it leaves slowly, stops on a hill overlooking the city, and does not go home. What is the difference between a God who has abandoned His people and a God who has gone into exile with them — and which one is Ezekiel describing?

4. Before the glory departs, God promises the exiles that He will be “a sanctuary for a little while” in the lands where they are going (Ezekiel 11:16). The building is emptied and the sanctuary becomes a Person. Where, in your own life, have you needed God to be a sanctuary rather than a place?

III. What Israel Lost — The Return, the Rebuilding, and the Contempt

They came home, finished the building, and then despised it.

Read Ezra 3:10–13; Haggai 1:2–9; and Malachi 1:6–14 aloud.

Ezra 3:12–13 (ESV)

“But many of the priests and Levites and heads of fathers’ houses, old men who had seen the first house, wept with a loud voice when they saw the foundation of this house being laid, though many shouted aloud for joy ... and the people could not distinguish the sound of the joyful shout from the sound of the people’s weeping.”

Malachi 1:6–8 (ESV)

“A son honors his father, and a servant his master. If then I am a father, where is my honor? ... By offering polluted food upon my altar ... When you offer blind animals in sacrifice, is that not evil? And when you offer those that are lame or sick, is that not evil? Present that to your governor; will he accept you or show you favor?”

Historical Context

The chronology, following the commentaries used throughout this series: Cyrus issues the decree of return in 538 BC; the first exiles arrive in 533; the foundation of the temple is laid in the month Ziv, 532; opposition halts the work in 531. For roughly eleven years nothing happens. Then on the twenty-fourth of Elul, 520, the work resumes under Haggai and Zechariah’s preaching, and the house is finished on the third of Adar, 515. Malachi comes later still, perhaps a century after the return, when the disappointment has had time to harden into contempt. Then Scripture goes silent for about four hundred years.

Note what Haggai and Malachi share. In Haggai 1:9 God says of the people’s offerings that He blew them away — the verb is *naphach*, to huff or puff. In Malachi 1:13 the priests *naphach* at God’s table, snorting in contempt. The same verb, aimed in both directions. The people breathed at God, and God breathed back.

5. In Ezra 3 the shouting and the weeping were so mixed that no one could tell them apart. The young rejoiced at what was being built; the old wept at what it was not. Both responses were honest. When a congregation contains both, which one is right — and what does it cost a church to have only one of them?

6. Haggai 1:4 asks, “Is it a time for you yourselves to dwell in your paneled houses, while this house lies in ruins?” The people were not irreligious; they were simply busy, and the temple slipped down the list. How does a good thing get postponed into a dead thing? Where does that happen among us?

7. Malachi’s priests brought blind, lame, and sick animals to the altar, and God’s answer is devastatingly practical: “Present that to your governor; will he accept you?” They were giving God what they would have been embarrassed to give a civil servant. What does that reveal about what they actually thought of Him — and what would the same test reveal about us?

8. The Hebrew of Malachi 1:6 is literally, “Where is my weight?” Kavod means heaviness; the opposite of glorifying God is not insulting Him but treating Him as though He weighed nothing. What does contempt for God look like when it takes the form of indifference rather than hostility?

IV. The Prophetic Word — Three Voices in the Long Silence

Haggai promises glory. Zechariah shows the Branch. Malachi threatens fire and calls it grace.

Read Haggai 2:1–9; Zechariah 3:1–10, 6:12–13, 9:9, and 12:10; Malachi 3:1–5 and 4:1–6 aloud.

Haggai 2:7–9 (ESV)

“And I will shake all nations, so that the treasures of all nations shall come in, and I will fill this house with glory, says the LORD of hosts ... The latter glory of this house shall be greater than the former, says the LORD of hosts. And in this place I will give peace.”

Zechariah 9:9 (ESV)

“Rejoice greatly, O daughter of Zion! Shout aloud, O daughter of Jerusalem! Behold, your king is coming to you; righteous and having salvation is he, humble and mounted on a donkey, on a colt, the foal of a donkey.”

Malachi 3:1–3 (ESV)

“Behold, I send my messenger, and he will prepare the way before me. And the Lord whom you seek will suddenly come to his temple ... But who can endure the day of his coming, and

who can stand when he appears? For he is like a refiner's fire and like fullers' soap ... he will sit as a refiner and purifier of silver."

Key Hebrew Terms:

Chemdah (חֶמְדָּה): "desire, treasure." Haggai 2:7. Read collectively it means the wealth of the nations; read as a singular it is the Desired One. Luther translated it "the Consolation of all heathen."

Ra'ash (רָעַשׂ): "to shake, to quake." Haggai 2:7 is the only place in the Hebrew Bible where God is said to shake people rather than things.

Shalom (שָׁלוֹם): "peace, wholeness, soundness." Haggai 2:9. The verb is imperfect — an ongoing, ever-recurring giving, the same word and construction as the Aaronic Benediction.

Tsemach (צֶמַח): "Branch, sprout." Zechariah 3:8 and 6:12. Something coming up out of the ground.

Daqar (דָּקַר): "to pierce, to run through." Zechariah 12:10. A word for a fatal thrust with a weapon.

Borith (בִּרְיֹת): "fullers' soap," a strong alkaline lye for scrubbing raw wool. One letter from berith (בְּרִית), "covenant."

Three prophets, one problem: the house is built and the glory has not come. Haggai answers that the glory is coming and will be greater, though not in the way they are measuring. Zechariah answers with a series of visions in which a filthy priest is re-clothed and a king arrives on a donkey. Malachi answers that the Lord will come suddenly to His temple, and then asks whether anyone actually wants that.

9. A. HAGGAI. The old men wept because the new temple was nothing beside Solomon's. God's answer is not that it will eventually be as large, but that "the latter glory of this house shall be greater than the former" (2:9). If the former glory was measured in gold and stone, and the latter is not, what is God doing to the definition of glory itself?

10. A. HAGGAI. Haggai 2:7 says God will shake all nations — and it is the only verse in the Hebrew Bible where He is said to shake people rather than things. Hebrews 12:27 explains the purpose: the removal of what can be shaken, so that what cannot be shaken may remain. What in your own life has needed shaking before it could be let go?

11. A. HAGGAI. Haggai 2:7 promises that the chemdah, the desire of all nations, will come. Luther rendered it "the Consolation of all heathen" and read it as Christ Himself. But Isaiah 53:2 says of Him that He had "no form or majesty that we should look at him, and no beauty that we should desire him." The Desired One arrives and is not desirable. What does that do to our assumptions about what we actually want from God?

12. A. HAGGAI. Haggai says “in this place I will give peace,” and the verb is ongoing — I will keep on giving. It is the same word and the same construction as the Aaronic Benediction your pastor speaks over you at the end of every service. What changes about that blessing when you know it was first promised to discouraged people standing in a building that disappointed them?

13. B. ZECHARIAH. In Zechariah 3 the high priest Joshua stands in a heavenly courtroom in filthy garments, with Satan at his right hand to accuse him. Joshua says nothing in his own defense. The Angel of the LORD orders the clothes removed and clean ones put on. What is the difference between being acquitted and being re-clothed — and which one has happened to you?

14. B. ZECHARIAH. Zechariah 6:13 says the Branch “shall be a priest on his throne, and the counsel of peace shall be between them both.” In Israel the offices of king and priest were deliberately kept apart, and King Uzziah was struck with leprosy for crossing the line (2 Chronicles 26). Why does the union of the two offices in one person require somebody greater than either?

15. B. ZECHARIAH. Zechariah 9:9 has the king arriving “humble and mounted on a donkey,” and 12:10 has the people looking on “me whom they have pierced” and mourning as for an only child. Same book, same king. How can the crowd that shouts for Him in chapter 9 be the crowd that pierces Him in chapter 12 — and were they in fact different crowds?

16. C. MALACHI. Malachi 3:1 says the Lord “will suddenly come to his temple,” and then asks, “But who can endure the day of his coming?” The people had been complaining that God was absent. He answers by promising to show up. Why is the granting of that request more frightening than its denial?

17. C. MALACHI. God comes as “a refiner’s fire and like fullers’ soap,” and 3:3 says He will sit as a refiner — the refiner sits, patiently, skimming the dross as it rises, until his own face is reflected in the silver. The priests who defiled the table are not fired; they are cleaned. Why is refining a harder mercy to receive than replacement would be?

18. C. MALACHI. In Malachi 4:1 the day burns like an oven and the arrogant become stubble; in 4:2 the sun of righteousness rises with healing in its wings. Same day, same sun. Where else in this series have we seen one event produce two opposite outcomes — and what determines which one a person receives?

V. History Vindicates the Prophets — Four Hundred Years of Silence

The temple stood, the sacrifices continued, and heaven said nothing.

Read Malachi 4:4–6 aloud, and then sit in the silence for a moment before continuing.

Malachi 4:5–6 (ESV)

“Behold, I will send you Elijah the prophet before the great and awesome day of the LORD comes. And he will turn the hearts of fathers to their children and the hearts of children to their fathers, lest I come and strike the land with a decree of utter destruction.”

Rabbinic tradition (Yoma 21b) held that five things present in Solomon’s temple were missing from the second: the ark with the mercy seat and the cherubim, the fire from heaven, the Shekinah, the Holy Spirit of prophecy, and the Urim and Thummim. The building was magnificent — Herod’s renovation made it one of the wonders of the ancient world — and the Holy of Holies was empty. When Pompey forced his way into it in 63 BC he expected treasure or an idol and found a bare room, and reported his astonishment. Around the same magnificent building the Herodians built the soleg, a low stone wall with inscriptions in Greek and Latin warning Gentiles that to pass it meant death. Haggai had promised that the desire of all nations would come in; the most beautiful version of the building had a wall to keep them out.

19. Malachi ends the Old Testament with the word “destruction,” and then nothing follows for four centuries. What does it do to a people to be given a promise and then silence? Is silence from God the same thing as a refusal?

20. The second temple had everything except the things that mattered: the building without the ark, the liturgy without the fire, the priesthood without the prophecy. Where is the Church most at risk of keeping the furniture and losing the presence?

VI. The Advent Fulfillment — The Glory Comes Back Through the Same Gate

An old priest gets his one hour at the altar, and the silence breaks.

Read Luke 1:5–17; John 1:14; and John 2:19–21 aloud.

Luke 1:8–11 (ESV)

“Now while he was serving as priest before God when his division was on duty, according to the custom of the priesthood, he was chosen by lot to enter the temple of the Lord and burn incense ... And there appeared to him an angel of the Lord standing on the right side of the altar of incense.”

John 1:14 (ESV)

“And the Word became flesh and dwelt among us, and we have seen his glory, glory as of the only Son from the Father, full of grace and truth.”

Because there were perhaps eighteen thousand priests, the incense offering inside the Holy Place fell to a given man only once in his lifetime, assigned by lot. Zechariah is standing in the single

greatest hour of his priestly career, in the building Malachi addressed, at the altar of intercession, when the four-hundred-year silence ends. Malachi's priests had said of this same service, "What a weariness this is" (1:13). Zechariah waited a lifetime for one hour of it.

21. Gabriel says John will go before the Lord "to turn the hearts of the fathers to the children" — quoting Malachi 4:6. The Greek Old Testament had blurred Malachi's Hebrew verb; Luke reaches past the Greek and restores the prophetic word for turning. The last promise of the Old Testament is answered in its original vocabulary. What does that precision suggest about how God keeps His word?

22. John 1:14 says the Word "dwelt among us," and the Greek verb means literally "pitched his tent" — the same image as the tabernacle of Movement II. Then: "we have seen his glory." The glory Ezekiel watched leave has come back, and this time nobody is knocked over by it. Why did the glory have to become approachable before it could save anyone?

23. In John 2:19 Jesus says, "Destroy this temple, and in three days I will raise it up," and John explains that "he was speaking about the temple of his body." If the temple is now a Person, what happens to the question this session began with — where did the glory go? Where do you go to find it now?

24. Zechariah 3 had a filthy priest re-clothed by God's own order. Malachi 3 had a refiner sitting patiently at the silver. Both are pictures of what happens to those who serve at the altar. In Luke 1 an ordinary priest, deep in the four-hundred-year silence, is handed the announcement of the Gospel. What does God do with unworthy ministers, on the evidence of these three texts?

25. The sore wall kept the nations out of the most beautiful temple ever built. Ephesians 2:14 says Christ "has broken down in his flesh the dividing wall of hostility." Haggai promised the desire of all nations would come in. Who finally came in, and how did the wall come down?

26. THE HINGE. This session began by asking where the glory went. The answer of the Old Testament is that it left over the Mount of Olives, heading east, and did not return in Haggai's lifetime or Malachi's or in the four hundred years after them. The answer of the New Testament is that it returned in a body, was pierced, was raised, and now dwells in His Church through Word and Sacrament. If the glory of God is no longer located in a building you can visit but in a Person who has promised to be present where His Word is preached and His Supper is given, then what is actually happening to you on Sunday morning — and does the disappointment of the returned exiles have any hold on you at all?

Synthesis and Closing

Text	Contribution to Session Theme	Key Term
The Original Gift	The glory fills the tabernacle and Solomon's temple, then departs	Kavod

	eastward in stages (Exodus 40; 1 Kings 8; Ezekiel 8—11)	
What Israel Lost	The house rebuilt and then despised; blind animals on the altar (Ezra 3; Haggai 1; Malachi 1)	Naphach
Haggai	The latter glory redefined, not enlarged; peace given continually in this place (Haggai 2)	Chemdah / Shalom
Zechariah	A filthy priest re-clothed; the humble King; the Pierced One (Zechariah 3; 6; 9; 12)	Tsemach / Daqar
Malachi	The Lord comes suddenly to His temple; the refiner sits down (Malachi 3—4)	Borith / Berith
History Vindicates	Four hundred years of silence; the Holy of Holies empty; the wall against the nations	Shekinah
Advent Fulfillment	The Word pitches His tent; the temple is a body (Luke 1; John 1—2)	Eskēnōsen

27. For four hundred years faithful people kept showing up to a service in a building where nothing visible ever happened, and one of them was standing at the altar on the morning it ended. What does their persistence say to you about the seasons when your own prayers seem to go nowhere?

28. The glory left over the Mount of Olives heading east, and returned from the east. Luke puts the Ascension on that same hill, with two men in white saying He will come back the same way He left. What would change in the way you keep this Advent if you took seriously that the waiting is not for something new, but for the return of Someone who has already come once?

Closing Prayer

Lord Jesus Christ, true Temple and glory of the Father, You emptied Yourself and pitched Your tent among us, and were pierced for our transgressions. Sit as a refiner over Your Church until You see Your own face in us. Give us Your peace in this place, and keep us faithful in every silence, until You come again in glory. To You, with the Father and the Holy Spirit, be all honor and worship, now and forever. Amen.

Soli Deo Gloria

Appendix: Liturgical, Lectionary, and Hymnic Connections

Liturgical Connections

This session explains why the Divine Service ends the way it does. Haggai 2:9 promises “in this place I will give peace,” with an imperfect verb denoting an ongoing, ever-recurring giving — the identical word and construction as the Aaronic Benediction of Numbers 6:24–26, which the pastor speaks over the congregation at the close of every service. The peace first promised to discouraged people standing in a disappointing building is distributed here every Sunday. The *Nunc Dimittis*, sung after the Supper, belongs to the same movement: Simeon held in the temple what Haggai and Malachi were promised.

Lectionary Connections

Malachi 3:1–7b is the Old Testament reading for Advent 2 in the One-Year Lectionary and appears in Series C, placing “the Lord whom you seek will suddenly come to his temple” squarely in the Advent proclamation. Malachi 4:1–6 is read near the end of the Church Year (Proper 28, Series C). Zechariah 9:9–12 is the Old Testament reading for Palm Sunday and for Advent 1, which is why the Palm Sunday cry and the Advent cry are the same cry. Haggai 2:1–9 appears in Series C (Proper 27).

Hymnic Connections

LSB 332: “Savior of the Nations, Come” — Luther’s Advent hymn; the *chemdah* of Haggai 2:7 in his own rendering, the Consolation of all heathen

LSB 357: “O Come, O Come, Emmanuel” — The O Antiphons; the cry of a people in the long silence

LSB 341: “Lo! He Comes with Clouds Descending” — Malachi 3:2 set to music: who can endure the day of His coming?

LSB 395: “O Morning Star, How Fair and Bright” — Malachi 4:2, the sun of righteousness rising with healing in its wings

LSB 349: “Hark the Glad Sound” — The Savior promised long; the answer to four centuries of waiting

A note on dates. This series follows the chronology of the commentaries: the decree of Cyrus in 538 BC, the arrival of the first exiles in 533, the foundation laid in Ziv 532, the work halted in 531, resumed on 24 Elul 520, and the house completed on 3 Adar 515. Some study Bibles print 536 and 516. The 520 date is fixed independently by Haggai’s own dateline, which is why this series follows the commentary chronology throughout.