

Pastor Kenneth Mars

Christ the King & Immanuel Lutheran Churches – Cody & Powell, WY

Fourth Sunday in Advent (Rorate Coeli)

December 24, 2023

Text: John 1:19–28

Grace be to you and peace from God our Father and from our Lord and Savior Jesus Christ.

John the Baptist was that monumental prophet called by God to prepare the way for the coming of the Lord Jesus Christ. It is good and providential that we hear John's voice once again, even on this Christmas Eve Sunday. John's preaching will prepare us so that our Christmas celebrations will be all the more glorious. Later tonight and tomorrow morning, we will gather in Christ's name to celebrate His birth in Bethlehem. John got people ready for Jesus by teaching them what it means to confess that Jesus is Christ, the Lord. Christmas is the season that we especially confess in word, song, and ritual that Jesus is God's eternal Son now born in human flesh and blood to be our Savior from sin and death. Every "Merry Christmas" and every true Christmas song or carol makes that great confession, Jesus is Lord. John leads us and prepares into this joyous confession unto glory and eternal life.

According to John 1, the gospel text appointed for this morning, priests and Levites from Jerusalem went to John to hear and see what he was doing. They asked John, "Who are you?" (vs. 19). To each and every question, John gave a "negative" confession. I am not (that's what I mean by negative) the prophet Elijah; I am not the Prophet promised in Deuteronomy 18; I am not the Christ (vs. 20-21). You can well imagine those Jerusalem Jews were a bit frustrated. Tell us who you are then!! Not just who you are not.

Even here, John will only give a Biblical confession of who he is in relationship to the Lord. This is his "positive" confession, "I am the voice of one crying out in the wilderness, 'Make straight the way of the Lord'" (vs. 23). John's preaching and baptizing were the divinely ordained means of preparing for the coming of the Christ, the Son of God. John rightly

understood that he was not the Christ; that's not his role. He is a servant of the Lord. You cannot know John without reference to Jesus. And this is where John teaches us to understand who we are and to confess that truth rightly. We are Christians, believers in the Lord Jesus Christ. We publicly confess that Jesus is our Savior. And that is what defines our entire lives now and into eternity.

So, when someone asks who you are, you can describe yourself more fully and completely by giving more than your name, age, occupation, and other important facts. More fundamentally, you can confess that you are a man or woman created by God in His image. You are His redeemed son or daughter, chosen for eternal life in and through the birth, life, death, and resurrection of the Lord Jesus Christ. In other words, you can make that great confession that believers have made for thousands of years, "I am a Christian."

Notice, this self-understanding is inseparably connected to the person and work of Jesus. You can forthrightly confess to the world that you were 1) created by God 2) in His image 3) male or female. And because of your baptism into Christ, you can add 4) that you are a son of God born again unto eternal life. Romans 6 declares that we were buried *with Christ* through baptism into death in order that, *through Him*, we might walk in newness of life. Every moment of your life is lived in, with, and through Christ Jesus. Such is your Christian confession.

This is how the Bible teaches us to think and speak about ourselves. Consider St. Paul in Galatians 2:20:

<sup>20</sup>I have been crucified with Christ. It is no longer I who live, but Christ who lives in me. And the life I now live in the flesh I live by faith in the Son of God, who loved me and gave himself for me.

Listen to what he taught the Corinthian congregation in I Corinthians 6:19–20:

<sup>19</sup>Or do you not know that your body is a temple of the Holy Spirit within you, whom you have from God? You are not your own, <sup>20</sup>for you were bought with a price. So glorify God in your body.

At the moment of your conception, God the Father created you in His image and thus makes a special and unique claim upon you as Creator. But now, He claims you as a temple of His Spirit. By the grace of that Spirit given to us through Christ, we seek to bring every thought, word, and deed into conformity with this truth. You live in, with, and through Jesus.

In everything, we belong to Jesus. Or to put it more simply. You are Christians: baptized men and women inseparably connected to Christ Jesus in every thought, word, and deed. John the Baptist has taught us rightly to confess that we are sinners. But through repentance – turning away from sin, and faith we are prepared for Christ Jesus. He defines who we are. That, is why we make that simple but life-changing confession, “I am a Christian.” May your Christmas celebrations be filled with joy and transcendent peace as we confess together, “Christ the Lord is born.”

✠ In the name of the Father and of the Son and of the Holy Spirit. ✠ Amen.

Now the peace of God which surpasses all understanding, keep your hearts and minds in Christ Jesus unto life everlasting. Amen.