

St. Peter Lutheran Church  
Dec. 21, 2025  
Advent 4  
John 1:19-28

**The Jews sent priests and Levites from Jerusalem** to interrogate John the Baptist. They were sent to ask John who he was. John was causing quite a religious stir, with his preaching that the kingdom of heaven was at hand and his call for repentance. And his baptism was a spectacle, with the crowds coming to him. The religious authorities wonder, who is this man that he is doing such things? His preaching that the kingdom of heaven was at hand was eschatological—so what expected end-times figure is he?

And they ask John, **“Who are you?”** From John’s response, we see that what they and many were wondering about was the coming Messiah. Does John claim to be the Christ? And **John confessed, and did not deny, but confessed, “I am not the Christ.”** John knows this with all certainty because he now knows who the Christ is—for the Christ has been revealed through his own baptizing. John hadn’t know who He was, but by his baptizing, He was revealed—both to John and to Israel. John saw the Spirit descend on Jesus when He baptized him, the sign from God that He is the Messiah. John therefore proclaimed to Israel that Jesus is the Christ. So when John is asked, “who are you?” he confidently confesses the truth that he is not the Christ, for the expected Christ is now revealed as Jesus of Nazareth.

The delegation from Jerusalem then tries another figure expected in the end times. **They asked him, “What then? Are you Elijah?”** For the LORD had said through Malachi, **“Behold, I will send you Elijah the prophet before the coming of the great and dreadful day of the LORD.”** Did John, who said the kingdom was at hand, claim to be this figure? John answered, **“I am not.”** But wasn’t he? Jesus said he was. Jesus said about John the Baptist, **“I say to you that Elijah has come already, and they did not know him but did to him whatever they wished.”** But even this role of Elijah, which John had in fact fulfilled, he now denies. For that work is now accomplished. Christ has been revealed. The people needed no longer to listen to John but to listen to Christ. John denies any significance at this point, for Christ is come! John must decrease and He must increase.

So they try one more figure promised to come—they say, **“Are you the prophet?”** This is not just any prophet, but THE prophet, the one Moses promised, when he said, **“The LORD your God will raise up from you a Prophet like me from your mist, from your brethren.”** The people had been terrified of the voice of the LORD speaking at Mt. Sinai, and they had asked that God no longer speak to them, lest they die. And the Lord said to Moses: **“What they have spoken is good. I will raise up from them a Prophet like you from among their brethren, and will put My words in His mouth, and He shall speak to them all that I command Him.”** To that promised Prophet the people were to listen. This expected figure promised by Moses was a prophecy of the Christ himself. The majesty of God is a consuming fire—His voice, and the breath of His mouth, destroys his enemies. But in Christ comes in in the likeness of men, able to

be approached, able to be heard. And His words are the words of God. John, who very clearly had stated he was not the Christ, would not identify himself as the prophet Moses spoke of either, and so **he answered, “No.”**

What then? Who is John? **They said to him, “Who are you, that we may give an answer to those who sent us? What do you say about yourself?”** And then John does identify himself. He is not the Christ, he is not Elijah, and he is not the Prophet. **He said, “I am ‘The voice of one crying in the wilderness: “Make straight the way of the LORD,”’ as the prophet Isaiah said.”** John is a voice—he came for a witness—he was not the Light (as he made clear to the delegation from Jerusalem), but he bore witness of the Light—he pointed to Jesus and said, “Behold, the Lamb of God who takes away the sin of the world.” John is the voice spoken of by Isaiah who cries, “Make straight the way of the LORD.” Jesus is the Way. He leads to the Father. The way to the Father is the way of Jesus’ obedience even to the cross. There, the glory of the LORD has been revealed, and all flesh has seen the salvation of God. There at the cross, Israel’s warfare was ended—her iniquity pardoned, as the sacrificial Lamb of God, upon whom the LORD laid our sins, was put to death.

Since John denied any eschatological relevance to himself now, the interrogators from Jerusalem now demand to know why he is baptizing. It’s relevant that some of those sent to question John were of the Pharisees. **The Pharisees and lawyers rejected the will of God for themselves, not having been baptized by [John].** So they asked him, saying, **“Why then do you baptize if you are not the Christ, nor Elijah, nor the Prophet?”** John answered them, saying, **“I baptize with water, but there stand One among you whom you do not know. It is He who, coming after me, is preferred before me, whose sandal I am not worthy to loose.”** John was preparatory. He prepared the way of the Lord. Jesus is the Way. John is not worthy to be even a slave to Jesus who comes after him. John is earthly, Jesus comes from heaven and is above all. He is the Son of God. He who believes in Him has everlasting life; and he who does not believe the Son shall not see life, but the wrath of God abides on him. For as the LORD said through Moses, **“It shall be that whoever will not hear My words, which He speaks in My name, I will require it of him.”**

We have heard his voice—we have heard the words of God—we have received Him. God has called us by name and joined us to Jesus, the Way to the Father. We are the people of God who walk in the way, who walk in the Light of whom John bore witness. We have been baptized into Jesus’ death and so walk the way of his Sonship. We live His life, Christ lives in us. God has called us sons, and so we are.