

Advent IV

Disclaimer: this is an automatically generated machine transcription - there may be small errors or mistranscriptions. Please refer to the original audio if you are in any doubt.

Date: 18 December 2022

Preacher: Seminarian Ian Jarrells

[0 : 0 0] May the words of my mouth and the meditation of our hearts be always acceptable in thy sight, O Lord, our Rock and Redeemer, in the name of the Father, and of the Son, and of the Holy Ghost. Amen.

Please be seated. Where do we find our identity in this world? Where do we find meaning for ourselves?

How should we understand ourselves in the hustle and bustle of everyday life? At some point in our life, we ask these questions. Some of us have put those questions away long ago, concluding that we don't really matter.

Some of us are in the midst of asking these questions as we speak, trying to determine if their life is worth living. And some of us may not have thought much about it, but will ask these questions at some point in the future.

And there may even be some, although I would wager to say that this is not many of us, who don't struggle at all with who we are. Even if some of us have reached that stage, there is something for us to be reminded of in today's Gospel text.

[1 : 0 8] In the Gospel text, St. John the Baptist appears on the scene before Jesus does to make people aware of the coming Messiah. He has a specific role, and it's a mission that he's taken seriously.

Everything that he does and everything that he says is for the purpose of making Christ known, and for preparing people to meet him when he comes. This is why he baptizes people, to show them the way of repentance in preparation for the Lord's coming.

Because of this, some of the higher-ups in Jerusalem wanted to check him out. They thought that maybe he could be the Messiah. So, they send some messengers in their place to test him, and to inquire about who he is.

When the messengers get there, they ask him if he is the Messiah, to which he emphatically says, I am not. Then they ask him if he is Elijah, the one that they believe will come back to prepare Israel for the coming of Christ.

John also responds with a no. They then ask if he is the prophet that Moses spoke of back in Deuteronomy, the one who will be greater than Moses. He responds the same way he had previously.

[2 : 1 8] I am not. A bit confused, they continue their questions. Who are you that we may give an answer to those who sent us? What do you say about yourself? John responds by telling them that he is the voice of one crying in the wilderness.

Make straight the way of the Lord, as the prophet Isaiah has said. They proceed to ask him why he baptizes, if he is not any of those three. Well, surely you must be somebody, because you are baptizing people.

Otherwise, how do you have authority to do such a great thing as baptism for repentance? In asking about how John has the authority to baptize, they are really asking this.

How can someone as insignificant as you be authorized to do such a great thing, such as baptism? How can there be any meaning in what you do?

If we stop and think about the gospel text for a moment, we can place ourselves in the shoes of St. John the Baptist. Similar to how the Jews come to John to ask him why his actions have significance, we have voices coming to us to ask if our actions and our lives are meaningful, whether these voices come from others or they come from ourselves.

[3 : 35] Why is it that we do what we do? Why does it matter if I exist? For John, it would have been impossible for him to not feel meaningful, because he was tasked by God specifically to bear witness to Christ, while I, on the other hand, have not been given such a task as this.

Or at least that's how we might think. But we are wrong if we think such a thing. John's answer to the Jews' question about baptism is the same answer that we should give to ourselves and to others when they ask us if our words, our lives, and our actions have meaning.

John says this, I baptize with water, but there stands one among you who you do not know. It is he who, coming after me, is preferred before me, whose sandal strap I am not worthy to loose.

St. John the Baptist recognized that his identity and his meaningful existence did not come from himself. His identity and meaningful existence came from Jesus Christ.

All of John's actions were done before Christ entered the scene in Jerusalem. John is a witness to the coming of Christ. But Christ, who comes before John, provides true meaning to everything that John does.

[4 : 55] To everything that John does, whether it's extravagant or seemingly mundane. The same goes for us. Our meaning, our identity, is not supposed to be found in what we think of ourselves.

But it is to be found in the task that has been given to all of us. To make Christ known to a world that does not know him. To make the one who is among them already known.

Known. We may be tempted to believe that our lives are insignificant and empty and lack any kind of meaning. But Christ, the one who is coming and the one who will come again, has always been before us, sees our lives and gives us the task of making him known.

There could not be anything more meaningful in this life than to be a witness to our coming Savior. Whether it's in the preaching of the gospel, taking care of the poor, changing diapers, or living quiet lives of holiness that almost no one sees, we are like John the Baptist, being a witness of the one who is to come.

Friends, let us not try to figure out how our lives are meaningful, but rather think about how that meaning has already been given to us, and it will never go away. Let us live in such a truth as that.

[6 : 17] In the name of the Father, and of the Son, and of the Holy Ghost. Amen.