

Who Do You Say I Am?
Matthew 11:2-15
December 11, 2016

When John heard in prison what Christ was doing, he sent his disciples to ask him, "Are you the one who was to come, or should we expect someone else?" Jesus replied, "Go back and report to John what you hear and see: The blind receive sight, the lame walk, those who have leprosy are cured, the deaf hear, the dead are raised, and the good news is preached to the poor. Blessed is the man who does not fall away on account of me." As John's disciples were leaving, Jesus began to speak to the crowd about John: "What did you go out into the desert to see? A reed swayed by the wind? If not, what did you go out to see? A man dressed in fine clothes? No, those who wear fine clothes are in kings' palaces. Then what did you go out to see? A prophet? Yes, I tell you, and more than a prophet. This is the one about whom it is written: 'I will send my messenger ahead of you, who will prepare your way before you.' I tell you the truth: Among those born of women there has not risen anyone greater than John the Baptist; yet he who is least in the kingdom of heaven is greater than he. From the days of John the Baptist until now, the kingdom of heaven has been forcefully advancing, and forceful men lay hold of it. For all the Prophets and the Law prophesied until John. And if you are willing to accept it, he is the Elijah who was to come. He who has ears, let him hear."

In today's Gospel reading, we have something that many people find troubling. Here we read that John the Baptist has sent his disciples to Jesus to find out exactly who he was. This is the same John the Baptist who announced that the Messiah was coming. This is the same John the Baptist who baptized Jesus in the Jordan River. This is the same John the Baptist who said to the crowd, "Behold, the Lamb of God who takes away the sin of the world."

So what happened? Why was John the Baptist asking such a question? What makes this incident so important that God included it in the writing of Scripture? The answers to these questions and the question posed in the sermon title is what we want to explore today. We are going to look at John the Baptist, at the world around us, and at ourselves in reference to these questions.

First, why would John the Baptist be so seemingly confused? To answer that question we have to know a little bit about John the Baptist. John was born to very old parents. From that we can easily surmise that John was orphaned at an early age.

The Bible tells us that John grew up in the desert. That couldn't have been an easy life. John's ministry wasn't in the Temple or the beautiful synagogues. He taught in the same desert he lived in. And to top it off, John was now in prison for telling King Herod that he was wrongfully married to his brother's wife.

Now, put yourself in John the Baptist's place. You have led a difficult life. You understand that your mission in life is very important, but people aren't as accepting as you think they should be. No sooner than do you make the most important introduction of your life – introducing the world to Jesus – you wind up in a dungeon waiting to die.

Any takers on whether or not John the Baptist was just a little depressed? Any wonder why John might have been both hoping and doubting at the same time?

While in prison, John hears about this person who's doing all manner of miraculous things. He hopes this is the promised Christ, but he can't be sure. He wants to believe the Lord's promised Savior has come, but he must be sure. So John does the logical thing. He sends some of his disciples to ask Jesus: *Are you the one who was to come, or should we expect someone else?* (Mt 11:3).

The answer Jesus gives isn't a simple yes. Instead of an answer that could be challenged, Jesus gives proof of whom he is. Jesus tells John's disciples: *Go back and report to John what you hear and see: The blind receive sight, the lame walk, those who have leprosy are cured, the deaf hear, the dead are raised, and the good news is preached to the poor* (Mt 11:4-5).

Notice what Jesus' answer to John the Baptist does. It puts John in the position of either acknowledging or denying that Jesus is the Messiah, the Savior, the Son of God. The answer Jesus sends back puts John in a position where he must answer the question in our sermon title. Whom do **you** say I am?

We're not told what John's answer was to that question. But it's safe to assume John put together what he knew from Scripture and what Jesus was doing and came up with the right answer. The answer that Peter gave when Christ asked his disciples whom they believed him to be. Peter said: *You are the Christ, the Son of the living God* (Mt 16:16).

That explains John the Baptist's part in the reading, but what does today's Gospel have to do with the world around us? Just as John had to answer the question of whom Jesus was, so the world needs to answer Jesus' question, "Who do **you** say I am?" And don't think for one minute the world hasn't tried to answer that question. People have been trying to answer that question right from the moment of Jesus' birth.

The Muslim world answers this question, not by looking at the truth about the life of Christ, but by believing the reasoning of Mohammad. Mohammad wanted to portray himself as God's greatest prophet. He knew enough not to deny or ignore Christ's existence, so he labeled Christ as a very great prophet, but certainly not God.

The Mormon church and Jehovah Witnesses of today will freely admit that Jesus was a great man – but still just a man. They will tell you to follow his teachings. They will hold Christ up as someone with a special relationship with God. Our Mormon friends will even go so far as to say that Jesus was so good he worked his way up to being a god. But neither of them will say that Jesus is the true and only Son of God, the second person of the Trinity.

Many of the Eastern religions look to Christ as a superior wise man. Their followers will read the Bible to see what lessons can be learned from Jesus that will help them better live out their faith. They will advise you that you, too, should read and follow Christ's

example. But when it comes to giving Jesus the title of Almighty and Sovereign Lord, they draw the line.

However, all of these answers are wrong answers. Anytime you try to answer the question of whom Jesus truly is, you are faced with the dilemma raised by C. S. Lewis. You see, Jesus must be one of three things. Jesus must be a liar, a lunatic, or the Lord. Jesus said, more than once, that he was God. When he made that claim, Jesus was lying, or he was suffering from delusions of grandeur, or he was and is the Lord.

That being the case, how can anyone say that Jesus was a great prophet, a good and wise man, if he was lying or insane. And if you maintain Jesus was neither a liar nor a lunatic, then you are left with having to admit that he is Lord. Because of this, most of the world chooses not to answer the question at all and simply ignore Jesus. But the question cannot be ignored. It must be answered.

That brings us to you, and it's a very personal you. Each of us must answer on our own. No one else can answer for me, no one else can answer for you. "Whom do **you** say I am?" The question is simple. But this is also the most important question in the world. The answer is important, because this is the only question you ever have to get right. All of eternity hangs on your answer to this question.

I'm sure that some of you are asking yourselves why is the pastor making such a big deal out of something so simple. Of course, Jesus is the Son of God. Of course, Jesus is the Savior of the world and the only way to salvation. And in one way you're right. This is pretty simple stuff – for us. But I want you to think about something.

Have you ever considered that you can only get the answer right if you have faith. Only with faith can you answer, with Peter, that Jesus is the Christ, the Son of the living God. Only with faith can you say that Jesus is neither liar nor lunatic but he's Lord. Only with faith can you look at Holy Scripture and see that Jesus is Lord. Only with faith can you look at all of Creation and see that Jesus is Lord.

So here's why I'm making such a big deal out of this. In just 14 days much of the world will stop to celebrate Christmas. But will the world be getting it right? People will be giving presents and having parties. Families will be gathering together. Songs will be sung. Christmas love and good cheer will be shared. But will the world get the right answer?

What will the world see when it looks into the manger? Will the world see a cute little baby on a bed of straw? Will the world see a "hallmark moment" – something that gives a warm, fuzzy feeling inside and is forgotten about on December 26. Or will the world see the King of kings and the Lord of lords.

This Christmas how about giving someone an absolutely priceless gift. This Christmas, take some time to consider exactly who was lying in that manger. Join with John the Baptist in looking at all the facts and becoming firmly convinced whom Jesus truly is. Then take that priceless gift of faith that God has given you and share it with someone

else.