

does not tell us who that One is! We are so close to celebrating the birth of Jesus, yet it's not quite here. Likewise, as Advent teaches us, we are so close to celebrating the return of Jesus, but it's not quite here yet either. We have to wait a little longer.

So how do we wait? We wait just like John did. The Jews had **“sent priests and Levites from Jerusalem to ask him, ‘Who are you?’ (Jn 1:19).** John the evangelist recorded the action of John the Baptist saying, **“He confessed, and did not deny, but confessed, ‘I am not the Christ’ (Jn 1:20).** This confession teaches us a lot about what it means to confess things. So often we think of a confession of faith only in positive terms of what we do believe. But with a true and clear confession of faith also comes a negative statement of what it is that we oppose or don't believe. When you read your Book of Concord at home during personal study, you will notice that our biblical articles of faith include not only what we believe, teach, and confess from Scripture alone, but also what we reject as false teaching. John confessed who he was by confessing who he was not. This is precisely what we do in Advent and how we wait for Jesus. We confess that we are not the Christ. By doing so, we confess, then, that we need Jesus. We are those who wait and hope for Christ to come. It is hard to wait for things and not get discouraged, especially since in this case Christians have been waiting for almost 2,000 years for Christ return! I'm sure most of our parents here have had their patience tested with kids asking, “How many more sleeps til Christmas?!” **Psalm 27:14, “Wait for the Lord; be strong, and let your heart take courage; wait for the Lord!”** In the meantime while we wait for His final return, we come to His house to receive Him in Word and Sacrament for the forgiveness of sins.

Now, regarding one of the Sacraments, those who had been sent by the Pharisees asked John, **“Why are you baptizing, if you are neither the Christ, nor Elijah, nor the Prophet?” John answered them, “I baptize with water, but among you stands one you do not know” (Jn 1:25-26).**

John's point is simply that he is the forerunner of the Christ, merely the **“voice of one crying out in the wilderness” to “make straight the way of the Lord” as the prophet Isaiah said” (Jn 1:23).** John was just the one pouring the water in Baptism, just like pastors today are just pouring the water. In both cases, it is God who does the baptizing through the power of His Word. John the Baptist and pastors today are simply the human vessels through whom God does His work. John's job was to point people to Christ; same with pastors and same with you. There are a lot of people that do not know Jesus, despite the fact that He stands among us today in Word and Sacrament. It is our Christian duty to live in a way each according to our vocations that points to Jesus' real presence in these means.

The fourth Sunday in Advent is a strange Sunday. It's not the theme we'd expect. That's sort of how Christmas usually goes, though, isn't it? It always seems like something doesn't go to plan. We have this expectation that our Christmases will be perfect in the way we envision. Mary, though, certainly wasn't expecting to give birth in a stable. Those workers in Mayfield, Kentucky certainly weren't expecting a tornado to destroy their livelihoods and for many of them their lives.

The world is full of uncertainty, and the holiday doesn't deliver us from that. But Christ does. He gives us certainty; He delivers us. Here today stands among us One we do know. And He comes in His Word and in His body and blood under the bread and wine. He gives us joy and hope and peace, not as the world gives, but as only He can give, when we believe His Word. He is the **“prophet like me from among you” (Deut 18:15)** whom Moses spoke of in the Old Testament reading. He is the One to **“whom we shall listen”**, for His words have eternal life.

Several months ago I made a visit to one of our beloved shut-ins. They were having a really bad day. There was an issue with filling a necessary prescription, and they were struggling to resolve it on the phone. When I got there, I immediately sensed the tension. Perhaps in my younger days as a pastor, I would have just waved and said, “I'll come back another time.” This is good for you to hear, Vicar. But, instead, I just waited outside. You know, we do not have enough practice waiting patiently for things these days, do we? It's a good exercise, though. I mean, the point of today's sermon is that we are waiting for Jesus to come back, right? Learning to do that with faithful and patient hopefulness is the point of Advent! Anyways, after about twenty minutes or so, I knocked on their door again. Our shut-in opened the door and said, “Sorry, pastor. I'm waiting for the doctor to call back, but I think you're the doctor I need.”

They knew I was there to give them the medicine of immortality in the Eucharist. For in Jesus we have everything we need for the good of both body and soul. He does not stand among us as one we do not know. He has made Himself known in His Word, and He has revealed where to find Him until He comes again – here. Listen to Him, and receive Him today, this Friday, this Saturday, and next Sunday for the forgiveness of sins, strengthening you until life everlasting. Wait for the Lord! Be strong and let your heart take courage; wait for the Lord! He is coming! In Jesus' name, Amen.