

### Advent III A

The people who came from Jerusalem to see John the Baptist had a lot of questions.

The basic one being, *who are you?*

*Are you the messiah?*

*Are you Elijah reincarnate?*

*Are you some other expected prophet?*

*Who are you?*

Perhaps you have seen a similarly mysterious figure around town in recent weeks. Soon he'll be at the foot of Woodcrest hill, across from the old water treatment plant on Grace Street.

He also sits enthroned in the center of the mall, in a shabby, screechy Arctic splendor. He was right out front of the church two weeks ago, at the end of the Christmas parade. (I am never so glad as to see him as then; it means I can go home.)

He used to come to my Rotary club, very tall, rather skinny, reminding me of a man I know named John Welborn.

He was inside the church a couple of weeks ago, but his attire was a little different, a little more Anatolian liturgical and less Victorian North Pole.

Some children were confused about that, as they often are by the ubiquity of Santa this time of year.

Are some of these deputized, assistant Santas? Or is the plural *Santae*?

Or is this magic?

Theories abound.

And so children ask, they ask their parents, they ask the men in red velvet, who are you? Are you real? Are you the one?

John would later send some of his disciples to ask the same of Jesus; who are you? The real thing? The one we have been waiting for?

Let me give that beard a tug. Hmmm. You smell like coffee.

When questioned, our brother John had no need to be elusive.

He knew who he was not. Not messiah, not Elijah, maybe a prophet, but not THE prophet.

And he told them all that quite plainly.

I have in my life wanted to be a veterinarian or a naturalist, when I was young.

And then, in chronological order, when I had a little more sense, a lawyer, a professor, and finally a priest.

Here I still am. I think whatever the bishop and the Holy Spirit did to me has stuck.

Like most of you, there have been times when I wanted to be something, for a while, that I found out I was not.

That's part of growing up, something most of us are still working on,

giving up on the shiny, intriguing things that once partially claimed us  
And being, instead, who we actually are, who a loving God made us to be.  
That is accepting our calling, uncovering our vocation, claiming the identity we have  
been given by our creator.

That can be hard won.

John spent a long time by himself, a season in the wilderness, before his calling  
became clear.

And maybe early in that time in the woods, he thought himself Messiah, or Elijah, or  
The Prophet.

But by the end, he knew he was not, and thus who knew who he was.

That might even be a good working definition of repentance; it is the revelation of  
who you are not and what is not yours, so that you may be yourself and be in God.

As we hear in Thessalonians, we are not to do some things:

Not to despise the prophets, not to do evil, not to quench the Spirit.

And in not doing and not being like that, we are free to rejoice always, to pray without  
ceasing, to give thanks continually, and to hold fast to that which is most good.

To Jesus, similar questions would be put. Who are you?

We know little about his early life, and the Gospels don't reveal much about the  
development of his consciousness.

But surely he too had to accept what he was not.

Not just another carpenter's son, not a Galilean villager whose life would be quiet and  
peaceful.

He would not marry, labor, prosper, have a family, and end his days old and wise and  
in his bed.

He too had to accept that much was not his, in order to receive what was,

That he was uniquely called to reveal the Kingdom, and the will of God, and to give  
his life for the sake of the world.

Lesser things were not his, that greater things, the greatest things, would be.

This time of year invites a certain amount of play-acting.

There is real cheer but also some false cheer.

Deep affection is expressed but also some pretense.

We are buying some presents just because we have to.

And not everybody in red velvet is the man himself.

While we do all that we must, while we meet the many needs of the season, while we  
fill all the roles that modern life demand,

Let us also seek the time, places, and room to discover who we are not and who we  
are, that we might fully know the One who is and who knows us so fully and in such  
great love.