



FIRST UNITED METHODIST CHURCH
214 East Jefferson Street, Iowa City 52240. (At the corner of Dubuque & Jefferson Streets)
Phone 319.337.2857. *Lead Pastor, Rev. Dr. Barrie M. Tritle*

Many Gifts, One Spirit

Sunday morning worship services at 8, 9:15, and 10:30 / Sunday School at 9:15

Preparing the Way by Pastor Jonathan Fell

Scripture for the Week of December 5, 2010

Matthew 3:1-12

The Proclamation of John the Baptist

In those days John the Baptist appeared in the wilderness of Judea, proclaiming, "Repent, for the kingdom of heaven has come near." This is the one of whom the prophet Isaiah spoke when he said, "The voice of one crying out in the wilderness: 'Prepare the way of the Lord, make his paths straight.'" Now John wore clothing of camel's hair with a leather belt around his waist, and his food was locusts and wild honey. Then the people of Jerusalem and all Judea were going out to him, and all the region along the Jordan, and they were baptized by him in the river Jordan, confessing their sins.

But when he saw many Pharisees and Sadducees coming for baptism, he said to them, "You brood of vipers! Who warned you to flee from the wrath to come? Bear fruit worthy of repentance. Do not presume to say to yourselves, 'We have Abraham as our ancestor'; for I tell you, God is able from these stones to raise up children to Abraham. Even now the axe is lying at the root of the trees; every tree therefore that does not bear good fruit is cut down and thrown into the fire. I baptize you with water for repentance, but one who is more powerful than I is coming after me; I am not worthy to carry his sandals. He will baptize you with the Holy Spirit and fire. His winnowing fork is in his hand, and he will clear his threshing floor and will gather his wheat into the granary; but

the chaff he will burn with unquenchable fire.”

Reflections: Preparing the Way

Advent is a time of active waiting, and of preparation as we prepare ourselves for the coming Christ child. During this next week, I invite you to reflect upon the devotions written by members of our First UMC family.

December 4, 2010 – Matthew 3:1-10 - Charles Thiede

“As I prepare my heart and mind for Advent, I find it imperative to keep my focus on what is really important. Sometimes the trappings of the season: the decorations, gifts, and expectations; can overwhelm and lead me away from the reason that there is Advent. This passage about John the Baptist sends the message loud and clear that I am to change my heart and ways, to make ready the way of the Lord, and to make His paths straight, for the Kingdom of Heaven is at hand. Like the Pharisees and Sadducees, I can't merely rest on my identity as a Christian or my past deeds for grace. I am called to “bring forth fruit in keeping with repentance.” In doing so, I will be making space in my life for the coming Christ child's birth.”

December 5, 2010 – Matthew 3:11-12 - Steve Ballard

Matthew 3: 11, 12 reminds me of the tremendous power and mystery of Christmas - that the birth of a child in very modest conditions caused people of significant stature and importance in their societies to drop what they were doing and make a dangerous journey of faith. We are reminded daily of the vastness of God's love, and his desire for us, as disciples, to share it with a world in need. We usually aren't even required to travel a perilous path to do God's will. But we are required to take risk - risk that we'll have to confront our lives of comfort and ease to reach out to those in need, risk that we'll have to reveal the private nature of our faith to help someone else in the name of Jesus. What sort of event heralded by what sort of angels would prompt me to risk my life to obey God? What measure of Christmas is necessary for my faith to transcend presents and carols and move me to action in the name of Christ?

December 6, 2010 – Isaiah 35:1-7 - Patte Henderson

The prophet Isaiah wrote the words of this text to the Israelites exiled in Babylon and throughout Asia Minor. God had fulfilled the promise that the people would be punished for their lack of faith and inability to worship God as God had commanded them. Now, through Isaiah, God wants his people to know that this is NOT the end of the road for them. Indeed, there will be a new beginning; a time is coming when

*The wilderness and the dry land shall be glad,
the desert shall rejoice and blossom...*

In other words, a completely radical change will come to the land; yet not just the land, but to all of creation. Hands will be strengthened, feeble knees will be made firm, the eyes of the blind will see again and deaf ears will hear.

This must be a prophesy of the Messiah, "the anointed one," the promised deliverer of Israel who will establish God's rule. Who else could Isaiah be talking about? Who else would have the power to accomplish the above tasks? And these tasks are not just meant to soothe the weary hearts, minds and bodies of our ancient ancestors, but to also bring healing and comfort to us, US, even today.

We 21st century folk still deal with challenges to the heart, mind and soul; some afflictions that may only be eased by our own recognition of "...the glory of the Lord, the majesty of our God." In this season, may we rejoice with joy and singing as we accept the Messiah once again to a place deep within.