

The Rev. Dr. Carolyn Jones '77/'89
Director of Field Education, PTS

Thursday, December 16, 2010

Morning Psalms 18:1-20; 147:12-20

First Reading Isaiah 9:18-10:4

Second Reading 2 Peter 2:10b-16

Gospel Matthew 3:1-12

Evening Psalms 126; 62

3 In those days John the Baptist appeared in the wilderness of Judea, proclaiming, 2 'Repent, for the kingdom of heaven has come near.' 3 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."' 4 Now John wore clothing of camel's hair with a leather belt around his waist, and his food was locusts and wild honey. 5 Then the people of Jerusalem and all Judea were going out to him, and all the region along the Jordan, 6 and they were baptized by him in the river Jordan, confessing their sins. 7 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? 8 Bear fruit worthy of repentance. 9 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. 10 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. 11 '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. 12 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.'

When surrounded by desert, we tend to focus almost exclusively on looking for a way out of the wilderness. We listen for voices which assure us that we are not alone in our grief, our discouragement, or our failing health. We look for signs which point to life beyond our economic distress, our political polarization, our ecclesiastical wrangling. And then John the Baptist helps us remember that, for the people of God, the wilderness has always been a time and place of preparation and formation, for God is with us in the wilderness.

The Gospel lesson for today reminds us of the two-fold message of Advent. As we await again the birth of love in the form of a baby who will rule as King, we dare not let the wonder of his humble birth allow us to forget Advent's focus on the second coming of Christ as judge of those who would resist love's demands. As someone has noted, it is only God's coming to us that makes it possible for us to come to God—and repentance clears the way.

Prayer: Eternal God, as we wait for love to be born among us once again, show us how we may help to “prepare the way of the Lord” in the wildernesses of our world – today – for Christ’s sake. Amen.