

**Lessons for The Fourth Sunday in Advent**

**December 23, 2018**

Psalm 80:1-7 ~ *A prayer for God's restoration of His people.*

Micah 5:2-5a ~ *The birth of Israel's ruler in Bethlehem was to signal the gathering of God's flock.*

Hebrews 10:5-10 ~ *God took our flesh in Christ and offered His body to make us holy by His sacrifice.*

Luke 1:39-45 (46-56) ~ *Elizabeth and Mary greeted each other, praising God for His mercy incarnate.*

**GATHERING THE TEXTS:** God is Coming in Person!

God's love is revealed specifically and personally: our Ruler, born in Bethlehem; the Messiah willingly sacrificing His own body for us; Mary nourishing the unborn Savior and rejoicing in God's mercy shown to her, and through her to God's people. God Himself came to us in the person of Jesus of Nazareth, born in Bethlehem in the region of Ephrathah, to carry out His Father's will in rescuing us from the power of sin and death: God in the flesh – God in person!

**PRAYER BEFORE THE SERVICE:** Dear Father in heaven, with love You sent Your Son to give His life for me. May every gift I give this Christmas time may be tinged with love as unselfish as Your love for me, that I may give the greater gift as well by sharing the meaning of the Christ Child with my family and friends. Amen.

**STEWARDSHIP THOUGHT:** God works His universal love through the particularity of His presence in the person of Jesus, born in Bethlehem. God uses particular offerings from our individual lives to bring His message of grace to all people. In the gifts we give and the words we speak, God's love is expressed for all to see and hear.

**OFFERING PRAYER:** Now bless these gifts, O Lord, we pray, which from our lives we bring  
That they may work a mighty deed and glory to your name,  
As with the angel hosts of old we lift our voice to sing,  
And marvel at Your holy birth in little Bethlehem.

**CONVICTION AND COMFORT:** We cannot imagine why the Mighty God would come to us in the person of Jesus, born in little Bethlehem. We turn God's love around and look for things about ourselves that make us 'lovable' to Him. We think it must be something we said, or something we did, or just something about us, but in God's choice of Mary to be the mother of our Savior, we see that His choice is pure grace on His part. "The Mighty One has done great things for us" – "we have been made holy through the sacrifice of the body of Jesus Christ once for all."