

**Sunday, December 19, 2021 – Easter Hill United Methodist Church
Fourth Sunday of Advent**

**Bible Study – Micah 5:2-5a & Luke 1:39-45 (46-55)
“The Joy of Home”**

Open with a word of prayer

Gathering Time (5-10 minutes) In pairs or groups of three, have participants share what has been a blessing to them and/or how they have been a blessing to others.

Micah 5:2-5a. Context. Micah (whose name means “Who is like Yahweh?”) was active in the second half of the 8th century BCE. Daniel Simundson writes in *The New Interpreters Bible* (7.534) that “The situation of ordinary citizens was of great concern to Micah. He felt compassion for the poor and dispossessed, and held the leaders responsible for their suffering. We can learn something about the people’s social and economic situation from Micah’s condemnation of their rulers, merchants, and prophets. Similar words from Micah’s contemporary, Isaiah, add to our picture of a society where the rich and powerful used their influence to exploit the vulnerable and to create even greater inequalities of wealth and influence.... The economic situation of the poor was further aggravated by programs of armament and fortification in efforts to hold off the threat from foreign empires”. (Compare the original Build Back Better Act at \$6 trillion (now less than \$2 trillion) over 10 years versus a defense budget of \$1 trillion *annually*.) As in this week's reading, Micah envisioned a time when the old order of things would be swept away and from among the least of the tribes of Israel, the Ephrathites who lived in the small village of Bethlehem, would arise again one who would rule “for God” and not for the status quo – just as David had done centuries before.

Luke 1:39-45. Context. As we come to the last Sunday before the Feast of the Nativity (known as Christmas in English-speaking countries, coined from the phrase “Mass of Christ”), the Gospel reading from Luke is taken from the last episode before the births of John the Baptist and Jesus. The angel Gabriel had announced to Mary the amazing thing that was about to happen to her - that she would conceive even while still a virgin - and had told her about the amazing thing that had already happened to her kinswoman Elizabeth (who had conceived a child in her old age) as proof that “nothing is impossible with God.” This week’s reading immediately precedes Mary’s *Magnificat*, above.

Read Micah 5:2-5a & Luke 1:39-45 (46-55)

What touches your heart, what do you hear in the scripture, what questions do you have, or what doesn’t make sense to you in the story?

Write down your thoughts or share your thoughts with the person or group you are with.

Read Micah 5:2-5a & Luke 1:39-45 (46-55) again.

Some reflection questions – Write down your thoughts or share your thoughts with the person or group you are with.

- Verses 47 to 55 is known as Mary's Magnificat. Name all the actions Mary ascribes to God. [Looked with favor, v. 48; scattered the proud, v. 51; brought down powerful, v. 52, etc.]
- What emotions surface as you read the Magnificat (vv. 47-55)?
 - Awe
 - Hope
 - Joy
 - Confusion
 - Energy
 - Other
- Name all the reversals in the Magnificat. [brought down the powerful, lifted up the lowly, etc.] How might this poem's focus on reversals and Micah's declaration of Bethlehem of Ephrathah's status reversal be indicative of God's character?
- How do these reversals speak to what God might do in and through each of us?
- How would the news from the Angel Gabriel to Mary (1:26-31) have been unwelcomed news for Mary? How would Elizabeth's response to Mary have been welcomed?
- How have Advent practices such as prayer, waiting, and repentance contributed to a meaningful Advent season?
- How do Elizabeth and Mary embody faithful discipleship?
- How is God calling you to be like Elizabeth or Mary this week?

Closing Reflection Question

How is this scripture calling you to change, to see, to be or what might it be calling you to do?

Prayer (10 minutes). Each person prays sharing their answer the following statements:

I ask God for....

I thank God for.....

Sending Forth (2 minutes). After all, have shared, pray the closing prayer. Ask for a volunteer to lead the group or read the following prayer in unison:

Creator God, by now most have done at least some of the preparation work to share blessings with family, friends, and colleagues. Presents have been bought and wrapped; decorations are on display; and children are anticipating gifts. Help us also to do the preparation work to celebrate rightly and experience peace, hope, and joy this Christmas. **Amen.**

And now we pray The Lord's Prayer....

Our Father who art in Heaven
hallowed be thy name.

Thy kingdom come, thy will be done,
on earth as it is in Heaven.

Give us this day our daily bread and forgive us our trespasses,
as we forgive those who trespass against us.

Lead us not into temptation
but deliver us from evil.

For thine is the kingdom, the power
and the glory, for ever and ever. Amen.