

**Sunday, December 24, 2023 – Easter Hill United Methodist Church**  
**Bible Study**  
**Fourth Sunday of Advent/Christmas Eve**  
**“Love that Transforms Us/Our Wonderful Light”**  
**2 Samuel 7:1-11, 16 and Luke 1:26-38 and Luke 1:46b-55**

Open with a word of prayer

**Gathering Time** (5-10 minutes). In pairs or groups of three, have participants consider: “Advent is a time of waiting and preparation. What have you been waiting for? Preparing for? How much of this time has been spent in seasonal stuff and how much in focusing on Christ as the reason for the season?”

**2 Samuel 7:1-11, 16. Context.** This week’s reading is arguably the high point of the story of David. He had bested King Saul, who was eventually killed in battle. He had made his peace with the other tribal elders who subsequently acclaimed him king. He had established his capital in a “neutral” city, Jerusalem, that had not been under the control of any of the Israelite tribes up to that point. He had built himself a royal palace. He had brought the ark of the covenant, that had accompanied the people throughout their journeys, to Jerusalem. But there was one more thing on the checklist of things kings do: build a temple (house) for his god. It seemed like a good idea; but the narrative makes it clear that instead God has chosen to build a house (family) for David, which would be the symbol and the agent of God’s covenant of grace and justice with the people of Israel throughout the ages.

**Luke 1:26-38. Context.** Luke’s Gospel opens with the annunciation in Jerusalem by the angel Gabriel to the old priest Zechariah that his elderly wife Elizabeth, who had never borne children, would bear a son, John, who would set the stage for the Lord’s coming. Six months into her pregnancy, Gabriel appears again, this time to a young woman in Nazareth, engaged but not yet married, to announce to her that she had been chosen to give birth to the Son of God. What Gabriel proclaims will be fulfilled in Jesus echoes the promise of God to David in 2 Samuel 7, but in a way that David could not have imagined. When Mary questions Gabriel, the angel points to the example of Elizabeth, making the case that “nothing is impossible with God.”

**Luke 1:46b-55. Context.** This week’s psalm from Luke is Mary’s song praising God as she begins to understand the significance of what is happening to her (see the gospel reading below). The angel Gabriel had announced to her the amazing news that she would conceive even while still a virgin, even as he told her about the amazing thing that had already happened to her kinswoman Elizabeth who had conceived a child in her old age – proof that “nothing is impossible with God.” Mary’s words are modeled after the song of Hannah who rejoiced at the birth of her son Samuel (1 Samuel 2), anticipating the

upside-down, transformed world of the kingdom of God. These verses are often called the “Magnificat” after the first word of the Latin translation.

**Read 2 Samuel 7:1-11, 16 and Luke 1:26-38 and Luke 1:46b-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 text?

**Read 2 Samuel 7:1-11, 16 and Luke 1:26-38 and Luke 1:46b-55 again -**

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

- After years of turmoil, when David was “settled in his house” and “at rest from all his enemies around him” (2 Samuel 7:1), he and Nathan decided to give God a permanent home, too, but God objected rather pointedly. The traveling, portable tabernacle was good enough for now; thank you, very much. How do you envision the sort of “home” God has within your life? Is it a place essentially outside yourself where the “God stuff” resides? A portable place in your mind where God is tucked when convenient and pulled out when needed? A firm, unmovable spot in your heart and mind where you are constantly mindful of that presence? Something else? How do you move with God, and God with you?
- In this 2 Samuel passage, God reiterates the covenant promises to David and his people: a permanent land, peace, longevity, and steadfast Godly love. Peace in the Middle East has not been stable or permanent for a very long time. How do you interpret God's promises and rely on the word of God when you see that they seem not to be fulfilled? What do you think is God's response when we fail to keep our promises to God?
- Gabriel said many marvelous things to Mary. He started with “Greetings favored one! The Lord is with you.” He ended with “For nothing will be impossible with God.” (Luke 1:28, 37). Our understanding of grace declares that God says this to all of us if we could just hear it. In what ways do you see with assurance that God holds you in favor? That God is with you? That God interacts with you? (If this seems difficult or impossible to conceive, perhaps a prayer partner might work with you to build up such assurance.) Have you seen evidence that “nothing is impossible with God”? How do you see yourself as God's partner to make good and faithful things happen?
- When Mary, barely more than a child, was visited by Gabriel, she was initially perplexed by what he said (and no wonder!). He told her what must have seemed utterly fantastic: a birth (though she's a virgin) of a son of God Most High, who would have a throne like unto David and an eternal kingdom. But almost immediately (assuming the conversation was as brief as reported), Mary said, “OK. As you wish” (Luke 1:26-38). Imagine yourself in that setting. Could you come to a point of obedience with a fantastic work of God so quickly (or at all)? Do you see yourself questioning? Arguing? Debating? Refusing?
- Mary obviously caught on quickly, especially with reinforcement from Elizabeth (1:39-45). She sings what we call the Magnificat (1:47-55). Play a musical version of this song (such as this one

from St. Luke's Central Music: [My Soul Magnifies the Lord - YouTube](#)). List all the elements of acclamation. Then, in groups of two or three, write your own psalm of praise, based on what you see here, but also from your own experience of God.

### **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). Share prayer requests and respond appropriately.

**Sending Forth** (2 minutes). After all, have shared, end by praying the following or a similar prayer:

Covenantal God of our foremothers and forefathers: we regret that we often fail to keep our promises or accept your guidance. We are grateful that you are faithful to your promises. Renew a spirit within us that we may carry you and your will at all times and all places. Bring us— at this celebration of birth—to a newborn dedication to discipleship. We ask this in the name of our Messiah, Lord Jesus Christ. **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.