

## **The Fourth Sunday of Advent Sunday, December 23, 2018**

**The Collect:** Purify our conscience, Almighty God, by your daily visitation, that your Son Jesus Christ, at his coming, may find in us a mansion prepared for himself; who lives and reigns with you, in the unity of the Holy Spirit, one God, now and for ever. **Amen.**

### **Old Testament: Micah 5:2-5a read from the God's Word Bible**

You, Bethlehem Ephrathah, are too small to be included among Judah's cities. Yet, from you Israel's future ruler will come for me. His origins go back to the distant past, to days long ago. That is why the Lord will abandon Israel until the time a mother has a child. Then the rest of the Lord's people will return to the people of Israel. The child will become the shepherd of his flock. He will lead them with the strength of the Lord, with the majestic name of the Lord his God. They will live in safety because his greatness will reach the ends of the earth. This man will be their peace.

### **The Word of the Lord**

### **Psalm: Canticle 15 -- The Song of Mary read from The Episcopal Church Book of Common Prayer**

My soul proclaims the greatness of the Lord, my spirit rejoices in God my Savior; \* for he has looked with favor on his lowly servant.

From this day all generations will call me blessed: \* the Almighty has done great things for me, and holy is his Name.

He has mercy on those who fear him \* in every generation.

He has shown the strength of his arm, \* he has scattered the proud in their conceit.

He has cast down the mighty from their thrones, \* and has lifted up the lowly.

He has filled the hungry with good things, \* and the rich he has sent away empty.

He has come to the help of his servant Israel, \* for he has remembered his promise of mercy,

The promise he made to our fathers, \* to Abraham and his children for ever.

### **Alternate Psalm 80:1-7 read from The Episcopal Church Book of Common Prayer**

1 Hear, O Shepherd of Israel, leading Joseph like a flock; \* shine forth, you that are enthroned upon the cherubim.

2 In the presence of Ephraim, Benjamin, and Manasseh, \* stir up your strength and come to help us.

3 Restore us, O God of hosts; \* show the light of your countenance, and we shall be saved.

4 O Lord God of hosts, \* how long will you be angered despite the prayers of your people?

5 You have fed them with the bread of tears; \* you have given them bowls of tears to drink.

6 You have made us the derision of our neighbors, \* and our enemies laugh us to scorn.

7 Restore us, O God of hosts; \* show the light of your countenance, and we shall be saved.

### **Epistle: Hebrews 10:5-10 read from the Holman Christian Bible**

Therefore, as He was coming into the world, He said:

You did not want sacrifice and offering, but You prepared a body for Me. You did not delight in whole burnt offerings and sin offerings.

Then I said, "See—it is written about Me in the volume of the scroll—I have come to do Your will, God!"

After He says above, You did not want or delight in sacrifices and offerings, whole burnt offerings and sin offerings (which are offered according to the law),

He then says, See, I have come to do Your will.

He takes away the first to establish the second.

By this will of God, we have been sanctified through the offering of the body of Jesus Christ once and for all.

### **The Word of the Lord**

### **Gospel: Luke 1:39-45, (46-55) read from the International Children's Bible**

Mary got up and went quickly to a town in the mountains of Judea. She went to Zechariah's house and greeted Elizabeth. When Elizabeth heard Mary's greeting, the unborn baby inside

Elizabeth jumped. Then Elizabeth was filled with the Holy Spirit. She cried out in a loud voice, “God has blessed you more than any other woman. And God has blessed the baby which you will give birth to. You are the mother of my Lord, and you have come to me! Why has something so good happened to me? When I heard your voice, the baby inside me jumped with joy. You are blessed because you believed what the Lord said to you would really happen.”

Then Mary said, “My soul praises the Lord; my heart is happy because God is my Savior. I am not important, but God has shown his care for me, his servant girl. From now on, all people will say that I am blessed, because the Powerful One has done great things for me. His name is holy. God will always give mercy to those who worship him. God’s arm is strong. He scatters the people who are proud and think great things about themselves. God brings down rulers from their thrones, and he raises up the humble. God fills the hungry with good things, but he sends the rich away with nothing. God has helped his people Israel who serve him. He gave them his mercy. God has done what he promised to our ancestors, to Abraham and to his children forever.”

### **The Gospel of the Lord**

**Closing Prayer: On December 29 we celebrate the life of Thomas Becket, Archbishop of Canterbury. Read from *A Great Cloud of Witnesses*.**

Thomas Becket was born in London in 1118, of a wealthy Norman family, and educated in England and in France. He then became an administrator for Theobald, Archbishop of Canterbury. Later, he was sent to study law in Italy and France and, after being ordained deacon, he was appointed Archdeacon of Canterbury. His administrative skills eventually brought him to the notice of King Henry II, who, to Thomas's surprise, appointed him Chancellor of England. He and the King became intimate friends. And because of Becket's unquestioning loyalty and support of the King's interests in both Church and State, Henry secured Thomas's election as Archbishop of Canterbury in 1162. Becket, foreseeing a break with his Royal Master, was reluctant to accept. As Archbishop he changed, as he tells us, “from a patron of play actors and a follower of hounds, to being a shepherd of souls.” He also defended the interests of the Church against those of his former friend and patron, the King.

The struggle between the two became so bitter that Thomas sought exile at an abbey in France.

When he returned to England six years later, the fragile reconciliation between Henry and the Archbishop broke down. In a fit of rage the king is alleged to have asked his courtiers, "Who will rid me of this turbulent priest?" Four barons, taking Henry's words as an order, made their way to Canterbury, and, upon finding the Archbishop in the cathedral on December 29th, 1170, struck him down with their swords. Later, when the monks of Canterbury undressed Thomas's body to wash it and prepare it for burial, they discovered that under his episcopal robes their worldly and determined Archbishop was wearing a hair shirt. (A hair shirt is a garment of coarse haircloth, worn next to the skin as a penance by a person who dedicates his or her life to a pursuit of contemplative ideals.) While such a garment hardly proves that a person is a saint, it clearly indicates that Thomas was motivated in the exercise of his office by far more than political considerations. His final words to the four barons before receiving the fatal blow were, "Willingly I die for the name of Jesus and in the defense of the church."

**Let us pray:** O God, our strength and our salvation, you called your servant Thomas Becket to be a shepherd of your people and a defender of your Church: Keep your household from all evil and raise up among us faithful pastors and leaders who are wise in the ways of the gospel; through Jesus Christ, the shepherd of our souls, who lives and reigns with you and the Holy Spirit, one God, for ever and ever. **Amen.**