

## Bible Challenge - December 14-20, 2015

### INTRODUCTION

*Cradle and cross are inextricably connected on the fourth Sunday of Advent. Between a lovely tribute to the little town of Bethlehem and the blessed virgin Mary's magnificent song of praise, the letter to the Hebrews reminds us in no uncertain terms that Christ's advent is for "the offering of the body of Jesus Christ once for all." It is the kind of tension in which the church always lives as when in the holy communion—with high delight—"we proclaim the Lord's death."*

### FIRST READING: Micah 5:2-5a

*The prophet Micah, having pronounced judgment upon Judah, speaks of a future shepherd-king who, like David, will come from the small town of Bethlehem. (Ephrathah refers to the area around Bethlehem.) This king will restore Israel and bring peace. New Testament writers understood this passage to be referring to Jesus.*

**Adventure Challenge:** Micah 5.

**Explorer Challenge:** *Option A.* Research Ephrathah in at least two or three sources to learn the possible significance of this name. (There are some differing views.)

*Option B.* Research the historical and social background of Micah and his prophecy.

### PSALM: Psalm 80:1-7

*Let your face shine upon us, and we shall be saved. (Ps. 80:7)*

**Adventure Challenge:** Psalm 80.

**Explorer Challenge:** *Option A.* This psalm includes a refrain. Where does it occur and how does the refrain seem to organize this psalm? (How do we use refrains or repeated phrases in our worship services?)

*Option B.* Research the phrase "God of hosts."

### SECOND READING: Hebrews 10:5-10

*The author of Hebrews uses the image of religious sacrifice to convey the significance of Christ's coming. Through obedient acceptance of God's will, Christ allows his own body to become the greatest sacrifice of all, one through which we are made a holy people.*

**Adventure Challenge:** Hebrews 10.

**Explorer Challenge:** *Option A.* Read Leviticus 16 to learn the requirements for the annual Day of Atonement, the cultural and religious context for the proclamation in Hebrews 5.

*Option B.* Read Psalm 40, the source of the quotations in Hebrews 10:5-7.

### GOSPEL: Luke 1:39-56

*We are presented with Elizabeth, John's mother, and Mary, the mother of Jesus, two women filled with the Holy Spirit and with faith. In Elizabeth's inspired greeting and Mary's song of praise we hear of a saving God who remembers, scatters, lifts up, and fulfills all things.*

**Adventure Challenge:** Luke 1:39-80.

**Explorer Challenge:** Compare Mary's song (vv. 46-55) with the song of Hannah over the birth of Samuel in 1 Samuel 2:1-10; or with Psalm 34:1-10.

**PRAYER OF THE DAY**

Stir up your power, Lord Christ, and come. With your abundant grace and might, free us from the sin that binds us, that we may receive you in joy and serve you always, for you live and reign with the Father and the Holy Spirit, one God, now and forever.

**GOSPEL ACCLAMATION**

Here I am, the servant of the Lord; let it be with me according to your word. (*Luke 1:38*)