

1st February, 2026

The paper-version Service



St Andrew's
Church



The Good
Shepherd
Four Marks
Responding to God's Love



To Begin: Find a Bible and a comfortable place. If safe, light a candle and read prayerfully through the service. If you have access to worship music, choose a song and listen to it as you begin or read, or even sing, the song from this Sunday's Service.

Opening Prayer: Almighty God, to whom all hearts are open, all desires known, and from whom no secrets are hidden: cleanse the thoughts of our hearts by the inspiration of your Holy Spirit, that we may perfectly love you, and worthily magnify your holy name; through Christ our Lord. **Amen.**

Hymn:

Not to us be glory given
but to him who reigns above:
Glory to the God of heaven
for his faithfulness and love!
What though unbelieving voices
hear no word and see no sign,
still in God my heart rejoices,
working out his will divine.

Not what human fingers fashion,
gold and silver, deaf and blind,
dead to knowledge and
compassion,
having neither heart nor mind,
lifeless gods, yet some adore them,
nerveless hands and feet of clay;
all become, who bow before them,
lost indeed, and dead as they.

Not in them is hope of blessing,
hope is in the living Lord:
high and low, his name confessing,
find in him their shield and sword.
Hope of all whose hearts revere
him,
God of Israel, still the same!
God of Aaron! Those who fear him,
he remembers them by name.

Not the dead, but we the living
praise the Lord with all our powers;
of his goodness freely giving,
his is heaven; earth is ours.
Not to us be glory given
but to him who reigns above:
Glory to the God of heaven,
for his faithfulness and love!.

The Sermon by Martin Beckwith

Read Revelation 11:19-12:12 and John 5:24-30 – The King's Story

During the North African campaign in 1942 General Montgomery famously kept a framed photograph of Rommel on the wall of his caravan. He wanted to know his enemy. How he thinks and acts, so to anticipate his next move. Chapters 12 and 13 of Revelation do just that for us with the Christian's enemy, Satan himself.

Revelation describes the conflict between God and Satan and the Church and the world. It's not science fiction. It's not secular history like we were taught at school. It's world history from God's viewpoint, as described by John as he was shown it; summaries/visions of events and their outcome for the encouragement of Christians through the ages. But it can be tough reading.

Chap 12 is essentially 3 separate but interrelated visions; indications of events about to happen. 1 & 3 have the characters of the dragon, child and woman, and the middle one (v7-12) is Christ's victory and Satan's expulsion from heaven. Let's start with that.

Satan rebelled against God. The rebellion was defeated and Satan and his associates thrown out of heaven to earth. This (v12) is good news for heaven but bad news for us, because defeat infuriates him to (v9) "*lead the whole world astray*" and to "accuse our brothers and sisters" (v10) and to sow depression, defeat, disharmony. And it will get worse as time goes on because, (v12) "*he knows his time is short,*" although he's already defeated "*by the blood of the lamb*" (v11.) He knows he won't last once Christ returns. And we're getting closer to that event every week.

The other visions involve the same dragon – Satan – a newborn Child – Christ – and a woman. In each case Satan threatens to destroy the child and the woman but they are miraculously saved. In the 1st case (v1-6) the woman represents Israel, the nation with whom God covenanted his plan of salvation and from which Jesus descended to fulfil that covenant. You remember how Satan tried to have Jesus killed at birth? Then tried to tempt away from his purpose and interfere with his ministry? But he failed. The Jewish people remain particularly precious to God and protected from Satan's hatred and fury for the duration of human history despite continued persecution to the present day.

In the 3rd vision (v13-17) the woman is the Church – us - "*those who keep God's commands and hold fast their testimony about Jesus*". The same thing happens. Satan pursues and seeks to destroy the woman – the Church - but she is again protected from annihilation. So he "*wages war*" on the church, actively persecutes it throughout history. It is happening today. Peter, John's fisherman friend, described it as "*your adversary the devil*

prowls around like a roaring lion seeking someone to devour. (1 Pet 5:8). It's one of our greatest blessings and a matter of great thankfulness that we are living our lives mostly free from active persecution. And one of the greatest subjects of prayer to intercede for those who don't.

So chapter 12 sets out Satan's principal priorities on earth; Real. Active. Violent. And doomed to failure. But it gets worse. Satan is a master of infiltration, deception and duplicity. Why do all the work yourself when you can get others to do it for you? Chapter 13 describes how he does that by introducing the "Beasts". (Remember they're not animals, they're concepts. They represent Satan's strategy- how he works - throughout history, geography, economics and theology.)

The 1st beast has all the trappings of raw power. Horns, heads, crowns. It seems invincible. Satan gives it great authority. It blasphemes and slanders God and his people (v6). And, worse, (v7) makes war on them. It is Satan's influence through history behind countless dictators and tyrants. And we know from Jesus and Paul that, as Satan's time gets shorter, so his persecution gets stronger. Good government, in Christ's name and manner, is God given. But abuse of power at any level in any. The beast is incredibly powerful. Everyone, (v8) except the Church, will succumb to it and follow in its way. You have to: the only alternative is to follow Jesus. And that will be costly. (v10). Some Christians will lose their lives and others their freedom. It is blunt. But its power is limited to what God allows. It will never succeed.

The 2nd beast looks like Jesus but talks like Satan. It is false religion. The apostate church. It can do miraculous things to deceive mankind. It generates fear. Its focal point is not the cross of Christ, but the image of the 1st beast. It is controlling and manipulative and opposed to the Gospel. We see across the world wherever religion opposes/dilutes the gospel or promotes other gods. We see it a church which has lost its cutting edge. Wherever people, of whatever background, are herded and squeezed into Satan's mould they come out like a cast in his image, shape and mindset - which is not that of the Holy Spirit. And life can become very difficult, possibly impossible, for those who don't fall in line with it. We'll see later that Satan and his agents will be judged most severely after Christ's return.

So there it is. Know your enemy. Montgomery did defeat Rommel at El Alamein. Christ did defeat Satan at Calvary. We remember the cost of victory in the eucharist. Christ will come again. But, in the meantime, Satan is no laughing matter. He loves it when he's portrayed as such. It allows him to operate with impunity in plain sight. His hostility is real. He is powerful, deceitful and full of fury against the Church. He knows his time is getting ever shorter, but he has not given up or conceded defeat.

Persecution will continue, especially where the Church and its members are effective for the Gospel. But Christ has overcome the devil. The Church and the eternal lives of individual Christians are protected by God and won't ever be lost though all eternity.

3rd Sunday before Lent (Septuagesima): *Almighty God, who alone can bring order to the unruly wills and passions of sinful humanity: give your people grace so to love what you command and to desire what you promise, that, among the many changes of this world, our hearts may surely there be fixed where true joys are to be found; through Jesus Christ your Son our Lord, who is alive and reigns with you, in the unity of the Holy Spirit, one God, now and for ever. Amen*

The Lord's Prayer: *Our Father in heaven, hallowed be your name, your kingdom come, your will be done, on earth as in heaven. Give us today our daily bread. Forgive us our sins as we forgive those who sin against us. Lead us not into temptation but deliver us from evil. For the kingdom, the power, and the glory are yours now and forever. Amen.*

Blessing to be declared over yourselves, St Andrews and The Good Shepherd, the communities around us and our whole nation. 'The Lord bless you and keep you; the Lord make his face shine on you and be gracious to you; the Lord turn his face towards you and give you peace.' (Numbers 6:24-26 NIV).

At the Church of the Good Shepherd:

- Tea and Chat and Bowls: February 18th at 2pm in Church Hall & Church.
- Coffee and Questions: February 25th at 10.30am in Church Hall.
- The Community Cupboard, 2:45pm every Thursday in Church.

For Further information:

This paper and all parish details are on the website at <https://www.parishofmedsteadandfourmarks.co.uk>