

4th January, 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:

O Jesus, I have promised
to serve Thee to the end;
be Thou forever near me,
my Master and my Friend;
I shall not fear the battle
if Thou art by my side,
nor wander from the pathway
if Thou wilt be my Guide.

O let me feel Thee near me,
the world is ever near;
I see the sights that dazzle,
the tempting sounds I hear;
my foes are ever near me,
around me and within;
but, Jesus, draw Thou nearer,
and shield my soul from sin.

let me hear Thee speaking
in accents clear and still,
above the storms of passion,
the murmurs of self-will;
O speak to reassure me,
to hasten or control!
O speak, and make me listen,
Thou Guardian of my soul!

O Jesus, Thou hast promised
to all who follow Thee
that where Thou art in glory
there shall Thy servant be;
and, Jesus, I have promised
to serve Thee to the end;
O give me grace to follow,
my Master and my Friend!

The Sermon by Rev Howard Wright

Read Revelation 4:1-11 and John 4:21-24. The King of Kings.

Last term, having been once again, in the context of the whole Bible, been introduced to the majesty of God as revealed in Jesus in Chapter 1, we looked at the seven letters to the churches. These gave a coherent message to the church then, which is as vital and relevant today. We learnt that the world, the flesh, and the devil, will seek to divert us from faithfulness to Jesus, with temptations, persecution, and lies about God. But, that those who overcome these challenges will inherit the extraordinary glory of eternal life in the presence of the God who gives us meaning and importance.

This term we look at remaining message of Revelation. We will read of the visions of John which are rich in symbolic imagery. But note that, as commentators have noted, the visions are not presented chronologically but more theologically. They were written to teach and encourage the Christians of the day facing a turbulent world order and again, therefore remain important to us today.

Today we consider the first part of a wider vision as we are reminded of the majesty of God. This chapter carries the central pillar of Revelation, that is, God is on the throne! This means less to us today, but in ancient times, the throne was a symbol of absolute power and authority before which all must bow.

A king didn't sit on the throne for comfort, they sat on it to demonstrate their authority and proclaim their judgement. God here is not marshalling troops for the battle against evil, the battle against evil is already won. God sits secure, in complete control, and victorious upon his throne ready to deliver justice – it's a terrifying image.

Yet, in today's chapter, here are crowds of adoring creatures, and later, as we'll see in chapter 7, that includes all who have remained faithful to God, and in chapter 21, that it's from this throne that the great river of life flows to all creation.

If we remember nothing else, remember this – our God is majestic, mighty, and good beyond our comprehension, so, whatever happens, trust in him! This is point of Revelation.

Humanity in general, and, probably everyone much of the time, believes that the world revolves around them, and that somehow God is for our benefit, to make us happy. But God is so much bigger than this, and bigger

than us. God's ways, says Isaiah, are not our ways – he is not human (see Isaiah 55:8-9 & Numbers 23:19).

Like a parent challenged to explain the logic and sense of their decision to a three year old, so much greater is the gulf in understanding between us, with our finite minds standing before an infinite God. The majestic nature of God causes all to humbly trust and worship.

Both the living creatures, representative of all creation, and the 24 elders, representative of the whole people of God, before and since Christ. Worship, read again vs. 8 & 11. These two doxologies – short exclamations or hymns of praise – point to both, the Holy God who stands against evil because it destroys all that is good, especially, love, joy, and peace, and the all-powerful God who will and does triumph over all evil and bring about a future of complete and utter love, joy, and peace.

So our response?

Firstly, worship. Notice the glory, majesty, and power, and, along with all creation, the whole church of God, and all heavenly powers, respond with praise and thanksgiving. The colours, the precious stones, and even the thunder and lightning all point to the most extraordinary and awesome power and beauty – this is our God! We don't want to be blind like the Laodiceans who couldn't see the glory... (Revelation 3:17-18).

'Come up here...' says God to us. Come into my presence and worship. Who can we spend more time with God this year, glimpsing and basking in his glory?

We are invited to 'Come up' and join the worship of Heaven. We can use hymns and songs – see Ephesians 5:18-20 and Psalm 29. Worship him in Spirit and truth (John 4:24). Surrender to God, give him the glory – your best – and with the whole people of God, surrender your crown before him.

Secondly, trust. Trust in and receive God's mercy. Notice the rainbow which encircles the throne – which speaks of God's promise of mercy – and the sea, which has multiple meanings, and speaks of the cleansing of sin for the priests as they entered the temple sanctuary. This sea is clear like crystal – pure and unspoilt by the sin it washes from us. And in contrast to the earthly sea from which fear and evil emerge in later chapters, this sea like crystal is completely still, there's no storm or evil in heaven.

God is in on the throne, and God has all the time in creation – trust him in your situation and circumstance of life – gain a throne room perspective

– see Romans 8:28. He loves you and is big enough to carry you through to glory.

Thirdly, hope. This glimpse of the glory of God gives us hope – as captured by Peter, see 1 Peter 1:3-6.

What perspective will you start this year with – include God and his throne!

2nd Sunday of Christmas: Almighty God, in the birth of your Son you have poured on us the new light of your incarnate Word, and shown us the fullness of your love: help us to walk in his light and dwell in his love that we may know the fullness of his joy; 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: January 21st at 2pm in Church Hall & Church.
- Coffee and Questions: January 28th 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>