

11th 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:

Come, ye sinners, poor and wretched,
Weak and wounded, sick and sore;
Jesus ready waits to save you,
Full of pity, love and pow'r:
He is able, He is able,
He is willing, doubt no more.

Come, ye needy, come and welcome;
God's free bounty glorify;
True belief and true repentance,
Every grace that brings us nigh,
Without money, without money,
Come to Jesus Christ and buy.

Let not conscience make you linger,
Nor of fitness fondly dream;
All the fitness He requireth
Is to feel your need of Him:
This He gives you, this He gives you,
'Tis the Spirit's rising beam.

Come, ye weary, heavy laden,
Lost and ruined by the fall;
If you tarry till you're better,
You will never come at all:
Not the righteous, not the righteous,
Sinners Jesus came to call.

Agonizing in the garden,
Your Redeemer prostrate lies;
On the bloody tree behold Him!
Hear Him cry, before He dies,
"It is finished!" "It is finished!"
Sinner, will not this suffice?

Lo! th' incarnate God, ascended,
Pleads the merit of His blood;
Venture on Him, venture wholly;
Let no other trust intrude:
None but Jesus, none but Jesus,
Can do helpless sinners good.

The Sermon by Timothy James

Read Revelation 5:1-14 and John 3:14-18 – The King and Saviour

In the previous chapter we were shown vision of God sitting on his throne. Now we see some potentially mysterious symbols.

1. A scroll with seven seals

A written document contains information. You seal a document either to show that you accept responsibility for its contents (like a signature), or to keep it closed (like an envelope). This one seems to be particularly important, as it has seven seals.

The document is going to be opened and what is in it is going to be revealed, giving insight into God's purposes (his blueprint or battle plan). But there is a problem: nobody can find out what is in this document unless the seals are broken; but not just anybody is allowed to do that – you have to have the necessary clearance, to be worthy. The information in this scroll is something that nobody is worthy to look into and therefore the secret will remain secret.

God's plan has always been to put right the problems of the world through obedient humanity. And this took the form of choosing a people, Israel, to be obedient. But Israel was disobedient, and it became clear that God would send one person from Israel, his Messiah, who would be perfectly obedient and fulfil his plan of salvation.

2. A lamb (also called a lion) with horns and eyes

So there is somebody who can open the scroll: the “lion of the tribe of Judah”, the “root of David”; titles used in the Hebrew scriptures to describe the Messiah, God's coming king. So now here is another vision of Jesus.

John's already had an image of Jesus, as the Son of Man (Rev. 1:12-16). Here a different image is used, “a lamb looking as if it had been slain” (v.6).

The person with any familiarity with the Hebrew Bible will know that the killing of a lamb is the crucial step in the celebration of the Passover. A lamb that has been slain clearly puts into the mind of any Jewish reader the blood that protected people from God's wrath and liberated them into his planned freedom and covenant.

The horn is a sign throughout the Bible of power. Eyes obviously have to do with perception: here said to be “the seven spirits of God sent out into all the earth”, so God's complete and perfect knowledge of everything that is going on in the universe. The Lamb has complete and perfect power and perception.

The Lamb is given the scroll. And... we have to wait until next week to see what happens when he starts opening the seals, because now there is an enormous, a cataclysmic, a cosmic outbreak of worship in response.

3. An absolute sea of worshippers.

First the entire heavenly host (vv.8, 11) and eventually every created thing (v.13) cries out in acclamation of the Lamb. I hear the music from Handel's *Messiah*, and I want to join in. That's the right instinct: we are meant to join the chorus.

There is one principle and crucial aspect of the Lamb to which the worshippers return repeatedly, his **death**, because of the effect of his death.

"because you were slain, and with your blood you purchased for God persons from every tribe and language and people and nation.

You have made them to be a Kingdom and priests to serve our God, and they will reign on the earth." (vv. 9, 10)

As Richard Balcombe puts it,

Fundamental to Revelation's whole understanding of the way in which Christ establishes God's kingdom on earth is the conviction that in his death and resurrection, Christ has already won his decisive victory over evil.

The sealed scroll contains God's secret purpose for establishing his kingdom. We won't actually hear, until later on in the book, what the content of that revelation to John is, but

The scroll is to reveal the way in which, according to God's hitherto secret purpose, the Lamb's victory is to become effective in establishing God's rule over the world.

... Because the Lamb has conquered, he is the one who can reveal how his followers are also to conquer.

It's not just our personal salvation which was achieved by the blood which purchased us and made us a kingdom of priests to reign on earth (v.10). Because of his victory on the cross, the Lamb is worthy to open the scroll, and to become the agent of God's plan to complete and finalise the salvation of everything. D-Day has succeeded, and now the irresistible advance to final destruction of evil can proceed.

What must we do?

First, clarify our vision of who Jesus is and what that means. The multitude ascribe exactly the same glory to Jesus as to the Creator on the throne. It's not enough to say "Jesus is God", as if we knew what that meant: what God is, is what Jesus is. Jesus is the one whose paradoxical victory changes everything, even if we have not yet been shown the whole plan. And it was by dying that he gained for us the victory.

Second, recognise we are part of that plan. Our role is to "serve our God and ... reign on the earth" (v.10). So no big one, then.

Finally, worship!

Epiphany Sunday: *O God, who by the leading of a star manifested your only Son to the peoples of the earth: mercifully grant that we, who know you now by faith, may at last behold your glory face to face; 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: 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.pariahofmedsteadandfourmarks.co.uk>