

1st December, 2024

The paper-version Service



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:

I cannot tell why he, whom angels
worship,
should set his love upon the sons of men,
or why, as Shepherd, he should seek the
wanderers,
to bring them back, they know not how
or when.
But this I know, that he was born of Mary
when Beth'lem's manger was his only
home,
and that he lived at Nazareth and
laboured,
and so the Saviour, Saviour of the world,
is come.

I cannot tell how silently he suffered,
as with his peace he graced this place of
tears,
or how his heart upon the cross was
broken,
the crown of pain to three and thirty
years.
But this I know, he heals the broken-
hearted
and stays our sin and calms our lurking
fear
and lifts the burden from the heavy
laden; for still the Saviour, Saviour of the
world is here.

I cannot tell how he will win the nations,
how he will claim his earthly heritage,
how satisfy the needs and aspirations
of east and west, of sinner and of sage.
But this I know, all flesh shall see his
glory,
and he shall reap the harvest he has
sown,
and some glad day his sun will shine in
splendour
when he the Saviour, Saviour of the
world, is known.

I cannot tell how all the lands shall
worship,
when at his bidding every storm is stilled,
or who can say how great the jubilation
when every heart with love and joy is
filled.
But this I know, the skies will thrill with
rapture,
and myriad myriad human voices sing,
and earth to heav'n, and heav'n to earth,
will answer,
'at last the Saviour, Saviour of the world,
is King!'

The Sermon by Rev Howard Wright

Read 1 Thessalonians 3.9-13 and Luke 21.25-36 – Being watchful

The whole Bible story, starting from Genesis, is of: Creation, The Fall, that is, sin's destructive consequences, Redemption, that is, the saving of us, and Recreation. Luke's Gospel introduces Jesus, whom Luke presents as the Saviour of the world, or in other words the bringer of 'Redemption.' And in this passage – which really starts at verse 5 – Jesus is talking about, living between Redemption and the full Recreation brought by the 2nd coming, the return of Christ.

Today is 'Advent' Sunday, from Latin word 'advenio' meaning 'coming'. Christmas is coming, it is relentlessly approaching – with no regard of all we have to fit in before then. For our society – Christmas is celebrated in the build-up, now is the season for parties, presents, for enjoying the good things of life. For pursuing happiness, the happiness of those close to us, and our own.

But it is not just Christmas that's coming. Jesus is coming, relentlessly approaching, - with no regard for all we have to fit in before then. Back in 1980 Punch published a cartoon of a furious department store owner standing on the roof of his shop shouting at Jesus and his accompanying angels, "Must you come back NOW? - you're disrupting the Christmas shopping!"

For our society the question is 'am I ready?' And by this we mean are the decorations, the food, the presents, ready?

The Christian's question is the same, 'am I ready?' And by this we mean, as Christ challenges us, are we, 'able to stand before the son of Man?' (Read Luke 21:36)

When juggling, if your focus in on any one object, you'll likely drop the others. To juggle you have to focus on what's called the 'peak', the place at the top of the arc the objects are following. In life we need a focus a reference point which makes sense of all the rest. Read Hebrews 12:1-3. If we make other things the focus, we are in danger of dropping the ball!

Bishop Tom Wright writes: *There are times when our eyes will be shutting with tiredness spiritual, mental, emotional, and physical. The life of faith at times is not an exciting battle with adrenaline flowing and banners flying but the steady tread of prayer, hope, scripture, sacrament, and witness, day by day and week by week.*

Today for much of society the question is about 'now', it's about our enjoyment now. How do we pay for this and regain financial stability is for January! Along with how do I get back my fitness, ... For much of society it is have now, pay later. And that's where Christ challenges us – read Luke 21:34-35. Jesus talked as much about judgement and hell, as much as any other subject, and he talked about it in detail, warning about consequences today and for eternity.

Christmas is a serious business. Jesus' arrival marks the amazing possibility of receiving the love of God, having peace with God, and living in the joy of God. These three things, love, joy, and peace are the things we all hope for at Christmas. But these are only truly available in living a life with Jesus – the daily pursuit of a relationship with God in prayer, scripture, sacrament, and witness. They are not found in the frippery and tinsel, the present and pies – it's not in pursuing happiness or even in indulging in the much touted 'spirit of Christmas'. David Smith, an Australian priest quotes from a presenter on a Christmas TV show: *“Good people, if we can just hold hands with one another and live the spirit of Christmas year round and just try a little bit harder next year, we can bring peace on earth.”* He then writes, *‘I used to wonder whether those shows were broadcast over at Long Bay gaol, where prisoners would think ‘if only we all held hands’ and ... I wonder if they ever screened that stuff over in Jerusalem, so that Jews and Muslims might listen together and think ‘If only we tried just a little bit harder...’*

Only Jesus can provide the love, joy, and peace we pursue – fix your eyes on him. Jesus was not against parties or fun – quite the opposite, the kill-joy Pharisees accused of Jesus of being a party animal. Jesus was into the superabundance of joy – he changed many gallons of water to quality wine!

If we're daily saying 'yes' to Jesus, then we too can *stand up and lift up (our) heads, because (our) redemption is drawing near.* Luke 21:28

Closing Prayer: *May the Lord make our love increase and overflow for each other and for everyone else. May he strengthen our hearts so that we will be blameless and holy in the presence of our God and Father when our Lord Jesus comes with all his holy ones.* (Adapted from 1 Thess 3:12-13)

Advent Sunday: Almighty God, give us grace to cast away the works of darkness and to put on the armour of light, now in the time of this mortal life, in which your Son Jesus Christ came to us in great humility; that on the last day, when he shall come again in his glorious majesty to judge the living and the dead, we may rise to the life immortal; through him 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

- December's Tea and Chat, Tea and Bowls and Coffee and Questions will join for a Christmas get-together on December 18th, 2pm to 5pm.
- Tea and Praise for Christmas: December 22nd at 3pm in Church.
- January's Tea and Chat: January 15th at 2pm in the Church Hall.
- January's Tea and Bowls: January 15th at 2pm in the Church.
- January's Coffee and Questions: January 22nd at 10.30am in the 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>