

8th 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:

Once in royal David's city
stood a lowly cattle shed,
where a mother laid her baby
in a manger for His bed:
Mary was that mother mild,
Jesus Christ her little Child.

And our eyes at last shall see Him,
through His own redeeming love;
for that Child so dear and gentle
is our Lord in heav'n above,
and He leads His children on
to the place where He is gone.

He came down to earth from
heaven
who is God and Lord of all,
and His shelter was a stable,
and His cradle was a stall:
with the poor, and meek, and lowly,
lived on earth our Saviour holy.

Not in that poor lowly stable,
with the oxen standing by,
we shall see Him, but in heaven,
set at God's right hand on high;
when like stars His children
crowned
all in white shall wait around.

The Sermon by Timothy James

Read Philippians 1.3-11 Luke 3:1-6 – Being a voice

As Luke declares (vv.4-6), John comes to fulfil Isaiah 40:3. His mission, according to the angel who foretold his birth, is to “make ready a people prepared for the Lord” (1:17).

See the parallel between Luke’s account of John and OT account of **Samuel**: God’s intentions for his people take a new path, and he calls a prophet to announce it. Each story is the prologue to the coming of God’s chosen king.

In Samuel’s day, the time of the judges was over. God called the last judge (Acts 13:20) as the first of a new order of prophets (Acts 3:24). Samuel called God’s people back to him (I Sam. 7:2b-4) and **anointed** for them a king chosen by God (I Sam. 16:13).

This historical event was an imperfect foretaste of the fulfilment which was to come. In John’s day, after centuries of silence, the last of the prophets (according to Jesus – 16: 16) is called to summon God’s people to repentance (v.3). He promises them forgiveness and **baptises** the one who is coming as the king of a new kind of kingdom (vv. 21-22).

Samuel called Israel to obedience (I Sam. 12). He promised them a rescue (I Sam. 7: 4b).

John calls God’s people to repentance and promises forgiveness (release) (v.3).

Both forerunners stand at a hinge of history, inaugurate a new age of God’s grace and pronounce a **judgment**, and make a **call** and a **promise**.

Judgment

- Samuel announced the loss of the Ark and the end of Eli’s family’s priesthood (because of his sons’ wrongdoing) (I Sam. 3:13). He warned Israel that continued disobedience will result in their being swept away (I Sam. 12:25).
- John declares judgment on the Temple hierarchy. He warns the people of the “wrath to come” (v.7) and that the king whose coming he prophesies will gather the grain but burn the chaff (v.17).

Call

- Samuel called Israel to turn back to God and follow him “with all [their] hearts” (I Sam.12:20b).

- John calls God’s people to repentance for release from sins (v.3) and to a first step in baptism.

Promise

- Samuel promised Israel that God would rescue them (I Sam. 7) and that “If you follow the Lord your God, it will be well” (I Sam. 12:14).
- John promised (echoing Isaiah) that “all flesh shall see the salvation of God” (v.6).

As Bishop Tom Wright says, *“Luke is telling the story of Jesus as the fulfilment, the completion, of the story of David and his kingdom”*. So here, in historical events, is the proclamation of the world’s salvation by Israel’s God.

What warning are these prophets giving to us? To what are they calling us? What are they promising us?

- They are warning us of **judgment**,
- calling us to **repentance** and
- promising us **release** from sins.

At Advent (a penitential season) we must reflect on what in our society and our own lives attracts God’s just judgment. That judgment is coming when Jesus returns as King and Judge, an event to which we eagerly look forward – but which will not just be a joyful celebration.

As a result, of what should we be repenting? John and Samuel both called God’s people to a new obedience and closeness of relationship, so what is preventing this in us and needs to be renounced so we can be released?

But, above and beyond this, we are looking forward to the blessings of the new kingdom which Jesus inaugurated (see Mark), which exists now as he reigns at God’s right hand, and which will be fully consummated when he comes again to bring perfect justice and joy.

“Preparing for God’s arrival means rethinking systems and structures that we see as normal but that God condemns as oppressive and crooked. It means letting God humble everything that is proud and self-satisfied in us, and letting God heal and lift up what is broken and beaten down” (Judith Jones).

2nd Sunday of Advent: O Lord, raise up, we pray, your power and come among us, and with great might succour us; that whereas, through our sins and wickedness we are grievously hindered in running the race that is set before us, your bountiful grace and mercy may speedily help and deliver us; through Jesus Christ your Son our Lord, to whom with you and the Holy Spirit, be honour and glory, 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>