

18th 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:

Love divine, all loves excelling,
joy of heaven to earth come down,
fix in us Thy humble dwelling;
all Thy faithful mercies crown!
Jesus, Thou art all compassion,
pure, unbounded love Thou art;
visit us with Thy salvation;
enter every trembling heart.

Come, Almighty to deliver;
let us all Thy life receive;
suddenly return and never,
nevermore Thy temples leave.
Thee we would be always blessing,
serve Thee as Thy hosts above;
pray, and praise Thee without
ceasing,
glory in Thy perfect love.

Breathe, O breathe Thy loving Spirit
into every troubled breast!
Let us all in Thee inherit,
let us find the promised rest.
Take away our love of sinning;
Alpha and Omega be;
end of faith, as its beginning,
set our hearts at liberty.

Finish then, Thy new creation;
pure and spotless let us be;
let us see Thy great salvation
perfectly restored in Thee.
Changed from glory into glory,
till in heaven we take our place,
till we cast our crowns before Thee,
lost in wonder, love, and praise.

The Sermon by Rev Howard Wright

Read Revelation 6:1-17 and John 16:1-11 – The King's Scroll

And all of Revelation chapters 6 and 7.

So far we have seen that: Jesus is supreme (Chapter 1); that Jesus knows about us and that he encourages us to persevere, to overcome, in the face of suffering, persecution and false teaching, and glory awaits us (chapters 2 & 3). Read Romans 8:18. In chapters 4 & 5, we saw the full reality. God is on the throne, and utterly in control, the Lion of Judah, the Lamb is God – the God who dies for us to win the victory.

Now in chapters 6 & 7, the scroll revealed in chapter 5 is opened one seal at a time. A refrain of Revelation is that our God is the God who was, who is, who is to come. This scroll reveals part of the story of what was, what is, and, what is to come. But, remember, God knows, cares, and wins. Read again John 16:33.

The awful imagery of the suffering upon the earth revealed in our reading bluntly tells the story of sinful humanity. None of this is a surprise, it is in the story of the Bible, and is the story of our own history. Jesus talked openly about it, read Matthew 24:4-8 & 30-31.

The first horse and rider represent 'Conquest'. The greed of humanity wanting what others want. Read James 4:1-2. The second rider and horse represent 'war' and murder. Starting with Cain killing his brother Abel, to toddlers who want the same toy, screaming at, and striking each other, and on to, Russia wanting the Ukraine, and so on. The rider and horse tells of the scarcity which results from this conflict. But notice the limitation. God might allow suffering but he limits it, restraining the depths to which evil could descend, (see also Job, 2:6). This limit is even clearer after the opening of the 4th seal which presents us with death – all will die, but, and still awfully, just ¼ are lost in violence.

There is a change at the fifth seal. The church which has suffered along with the rest of the world, as a sacrifice poured out around the altar, cries out, *'How long, Sovereign Lord, holy and true, until you judge the inhabitants of the earth and avenge our blood?'*

At the opening of each seal so far the four Living Creatures had in turn cried, 'Come!' This is not a calling forth of the evil and suffering on the earth, which has been going on since the beginning of humanity, but a call

to God. See Revelation 22:20 and 1 Corinthians 16:22, and notice the Lord's Prayer, 'Your Kingdom come, your will be done.'

The sixth seal brings all this to an end. The end comes, and woe to all who have rejected Christ. C.S. Lewis writes in the problem of pain, "*We can ignore even pleasure. But pain insists upon being attended to. God whispers to us in our pleasures, speaks in our conscience, but shouts in our pains: it is his megaphone to rouse a deaf world.*" Our suffering is self-inflicted but God can and does transform all things – the crucifixion and resurrection being the ultimate example – and he can use even suffering to call to us all to return to him.

Chapter six shows that the church is not immune to the realities of evil but that it has a different destiny. Do remember the image of throne room (chapters 4 and 5), and notice that all is calm and reassuring, with celebration at the victory which has been won.

God, creator and sustainer of all creation, ruler of the universe, is actively involved in calling the whole of creation back to himself, and he has redeemed His creation by his blood shed upon the cross. He is our God and Saviour. So, though there is a wait, victory is assured.

During the misery of the 12 century civil war of the reign of King Stephen, people said '*God and his angels sleep*' – chapters 4-5 show otherwise, even in the face of the suffering and misery of chapter 6 and chapter 7 now reinforces that our eternal destiny is assured.

The symbolic four horsemen, shift to the four angels at the four corners of the earth. God's people are sealed before the horsemen ride forth/angels release the 'winds'. Read Ephesians 1:4 & 13-14. As in Ezekiel 9. 'A man clothed in linen', told to put a mark on the forehead of the faithful, before the executioners come.

Like Jesus' parable of wheat and tares, both the people of God and the those without God, grow together for a while! But they are different and face a different outcome.

144,000 are listed – but this is a strange list of the tribes – Dan is missing and Joseph is added but the half tribe of Manasseh, Joseph's son is already there, though his brother Ephriam is not – so what's going on? God's full number will be present, and this is emphasized in the next verses: '*... a great multitude that no one could count, from every nation, tribe, people and language ...*' But it may not be exactly as we expect, read Matthew

7:21-23.

Those here are all those who have ‘... *washed their robes and made them white in the blood of the Lamb.*’ (Revelation 7:14) And all these, as in chapter’s 4 and 5 respond in worship to the God who has won our salvation. This is us, both now and forever. Read Revelation 7:15-17 and again John 16:33.

2nd Sunday of Epiphany: *Almighty God, in Christ you make all things new: transform the poverty of our nature by the riches of your grace, and in the renewal of our lives make known your heavenly glory; 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 and February 18th 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>