



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:

By grace alone somehow I stand
Where even angels fear to tread
Invited by redeeming love
Before the throne of God above
He pulls me close with nail-scarred
hands
Into His everlasting arms

When condemnation grips my heart
And Satan tempts me to despair
I hear the voice that scatters fear
The Great I Am the Lord is here
Oh praise the One who fights for me
And shields my soul eternally

Boldly I approach Your throne
Blameless now I'm running home
By Your blood I come
Welcomed as Your own
Into the arms of majesty

Behold the bright and risen Son

More beauty than this world has
known
I'm face to face with Love Himself
His perfect spotless righteousness
A thousand years, a thousand tongues
Are not enough to sing His praise

Boldly I approach Your throne
Blameless now I'm running home
By Your blood I come
Welcomed as Your own
Into the arms of majesty

This is the art of celebration
Knowing we're free from
condemnation
Oh praise the One, praise the One
Who made an end to all my sin

Boldly I approach Your throne
Blameless now I'm running home
By Your blood I come
Welcomed as Your own
Into the arms of majesty.

The Sermon by Rev Howard Wright

Read Revelation 8:1-9:12 John 5:19-23 – The King's Warning

And also read right up to Revelation 11:18.

In our series so far, we have established that Jesus is supreme (chapter 1), that he knows about us, he encourages us to persevere/overcome: suffering, persecution and false teaching, and that glory awaits us (Chapters 2 & 3). In chapter 4 & 5 we're invited into the throne room of God and see the full reality. God is on the throne, in utter control, and our access is made possible by the Lion of Judah, the Lamb is God, who dies for us to win the victory. And it is this Lamb, that can open the scroll, that 'reveals' the truth of history, that is, that God wins and we triumph with him.

Chapters 6-7 tell this story of history. Whilst creation groans for God to fix his work and bring redemption (See Romans 8:19-20 and the 'Come' of the living creatures) we see the impact of sin in conquest, wars, scarcity, and death. Noticing that the church is not immune, but has a different destiny, called by name and marked as it is.

Chapters 8-11 today's passages are the next scene, but simply repeat the history story but with a different emphasis. (As we've noted, Revelation is not chronological, but theological). So we get seven trumpets and a similar pattern of suffering from previous opening of the seals. There is volcanic eruptions, violent seas, spoilt, scarce fresh water sources, unnatural darkness, sickness and plague, and war and conflict. And again we see that God is limiting the suffering, notice that it's only (not that this isn't enough) one third that is destroyed. Suffering is allowed, but it's limited, God is gracious to us.

Then there's a parenthesis. Firstly, it's made clear that this suffering is tragic and awful but also an opportunity to respond, see Revelation 9:20-21. As CS Lewis wrote: '*God whispers in our pleasures, speaks in our conscience and shouts in our pain, it is his megaphone to rouse a sleeping world.*' And, secondly, the role of the people of God become clear.

See Revelation 11:3. Two witness, the Old and New Testament people of God are appointed to testify to Jesus and enable others to find their way to God. God is calling all of creation back to himself (See 2 Peter 3:8-9) and as members of his family, we join in this family business and call to others to come with us. See Matthew 28:18-20 and Acts 1:7-8. In the past, we were required to reason with people about the Gospel, and this is still required in part, but our society has shifted and today most people are seeking an encounter with God – an experience. So today, for the most part, we are able to share our own experience and receive a listening.

This may well come with suffering and we do well to remember those churches and individuals, of which there are many that are suffering around the globe for their commitment to Jesus. Pope Francis said accurately in 2023 “As I have said so many times, martyrs are more numerous in our time now than in the first centuries.”

[Do note again that the times mentioned are not actual, and, for example, notice how that the 3½ days(11:11) is half what might have been expect, that is, 7, the complete number. In other words God is limiting the suffering once again.]

But once again the people of God face a different destiny to those who put their trust in themselves or any other idol, and the seventh trumpet emphasises this. Because, as with the previous vision this scene concludes with God’s kingdom coming in power and judgement – the end of this temporary earth and suffering, and the beginning of the rest of our lives. Read Revelation 11:15-18.

3rd Sunday of Epiphany: Almighty God, whose Son revealed in signs and miracles the wonder of your saving presence: renew your people with your heavenly grace, and in all our weakness sustain us by your mighty power; 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: February 18th at 2pm in Church Hall & Church.
- Coffee and Questions: January 28th and February 25th 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>