

# 24<sup>th</sup> November, 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:**

Joyful, joyful, we adore You,  
God of glory, Lord of love;  
Hearts unfold like flowers before  
You,  
Opening to the sun above.  
Melt the clouds of sin and sadness;  
Drive the dark of doubt away;  
Giver of immortal gladness,  
Fill us with the light of day!

Always giving and forgiving,  
Ever blessing, ever blest,  
Well-spring of the joy of living,  
Ocean-depth of happy rest!  
Loving Father, Christ our Brother,  
Let Your light upon us shine;  
Teach us how to love each other,  
Lift us to the joy divine.

All Your works with joy surround  
You,  
Earth and heaven reflect Your rays,  
Stars and angels sing around You,  
Center of unbroken praise;  
Field and forest, vale and mountain,  
Flowery meadow, flashing sea,  
Chanting bird and flowing fountain  
Praising You eternally!

Mortals, join the mighty chorus,  
Which the morning stars began;  
God's own love is reigning o'er us,  
Joining people hand in hand.  
Ever singing, march we onward,  
Victors in the midst of strife;  
Joyful music leads us onward.

## The Sermon by Rev Howard Wright

### Read Hebrews 1:1-7 and Mark 8:22-33 – Being Messiah

Welcome to the central verses of the whole Gospel. ‘Who do you say I am?’ To reframe this question in the context of our whole text, the question for today is ‘What do you see?’

In the first story the man born blind is asked what he can see. From seeing nothing, he is touched by Jesus and says that he can see people looking like trees. But after the second touch he sees completely – reality is revealed to him.

And now Mark, the brilliant story teller, moves to Jesus’ question: what do others, and what do you, see?

**Firstly**, what do others see? Or, ‘Who do people, say I am?’ The disciples answer, John the Baptist, as Herod had thought (Mark 6:16), or Elijah, as Malachi had prophesied (Malachi 3:1 & 17:13), or one of the prophets, all of who were forerunners of the Messiah.

Mark has also already recorded that the Pharisees thought he was demon possessed (Mark 3:22) and that his mother and siblings thought out of his mind (Mark 3:21). It was only the demons knew him! (See Mark 1:24, 3:11 and 5:7).

Today people might, if they believe he existed at all, see Jesus as a good man, a good teacher, but ultimately most people today see Jesus as irrelevant to them. Conversely, there is still a strong belief in something after death, and that it’ll be good for us all – except of course for those we think shouldn’t qualify. But people today have little evidence to back up what is essentially a folk religion. Many may say, ‘I am a spiritual person’, and of course Christians believe that’s how we were made. Worryingly, the demons may have been spiritual beings but their destiny is very far from good. We’ll come back to how we might help others find truth and the way to eternal life, not death.

**Secondly**, Jesus asks: ‘Who do you say I am?’, what do you see? And Peter replies, ‘You are the Messiah.’ (Matthew 16:16 adds, ‘the son of the living God.’). Fantastic, gold star, top of the class, the right answer but... what does Peter really see?

Having heard the answer, Jesus now tells them, what type of Messiah he is, that he will suffer, die, and rise again! And Peter rebukes him. Peter knows what the Messiah should be – or at least he thinks he knows what the Messiah should be. And it’s not this Messiah, not this Jesus, with these absurd ideas.

And Jesus in turn rebukes Peter and the others. Challenging them to have in mind the concerns of God not those of man! This is about the Kingdom of God, not human concerns. Peter and all the disciples need a second touch, and the rest of the Gospel reveals the nature of Jesus' Messiahship. And, in fact, Jesus will twice more before the end of the Gospel repeat the prediction of his death.

The blind man did not see straight away and neither did the disciples and neither might we. So, what do we see? Do we see *the* Messiah, *the* Saviour, *the* King, *the* Lord, or do we see a Messiah made to suit us. In other words, do we know Jesus? Peter thought he did, but he was wrong! What's our understanding -- is our image of him correct? Jesus will not be contained by us, he won't be contained by any limited view we hold.

Eventually, our understanding of Jesus, the type of God we believe in, is seen in the person we're becoming and when difficulties/storms come along. In Matthew 7 we read of the false prophets and others claiming they're followers, but who are ultimately recognised by the fruit of their lives – in most simple terms, love! Additionally Jesus challenges us about our understanding with the story of the wise and foolish builders.

We can improve our understanding. By reading the Bible – daily as best we can. By catching up with our sermons – and with those from other churches. By reading Christian books – see our excellent bookstall. And join a small group.

The blind man did not see straight away and neither did the disciples, neither might we, and neither might others. 'Don't tell others' was Jesus' immediate response to Peter's declaration about Jesus as Messiah, and the church has been hiding this ever since! But Jesus' command was upgraded following the resurrection to, go and make disciples of all nations (Matthew 28:19-20) and the subsequent outpouring of the Spirit, was an equipping for this mission of declaration (Acts 1:8).

We may need to be persistent with others, in prayer, in love, in invitations and in words – telling our story, sharing what we know. We may need to ask our own questions, 'Who do you say?', 'Why do you say/think?', 'Why do you believe this? There may need to be many 'touches.'

*Pray now for ourselves and our own understanding, and for those you know who need to 'know' Jesus.*

**1st Sunday before Advent:** Eternal Father, whose Son Jesus Christ ascended to the throne of heaven that he might rule over all things as Lord and King: keep the Church in the unity of the Spirit and in the bond of peace, and bring the whole created order to worship at his feet; 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 18<sup>th</sup>, 2pm to 5pm.
- Tea and Praise for Christmas: December 22<sup>nd</sup> at 3pm in Church.
- 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>