

# 14<sup>th</sup> December, 2025

## 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:**

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 heaven 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 Savior 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 Martin Beckwith**

### **Read James 5.7-10 and Matthew 11.2-11 – The King is Coming**

John the Baptist was confused. He'd spent his life talking about Jesus but nothing had happened. Are you the Christ or are you not ? What's happening ? We too might be confused - we're about to celebrate Jesus' coming to earth, and James is talking about him coming back! How does it fit together ?

We know a lot about Jesus' life. In scripture there are 5 biographies of Christ; 4 contemporary and the 5<sup>th</sup> by the Old Testament writers, who recorded, clearly and accurately many centuries before Jesus' life, the main events and places of it, and their consequences. Not vague predictions or aspirations but hard facts. Actually Jesus is the only person ever in history about whom a biography was written before he was born.

So we know his mother was Mary, and that Jesus was her 1<sup>st</sup> child. Mary was "espoused" to Joseph who worked as a carpenter in Nazareth where they both lived. Nazareth was – still is - a town in the Galilee region of northern Israel. It's about 90 miles by road north of Jerusalem the capital city. Bethlehem, the other place in the Christmas story, is another 7 miles beyond that. Nazareth was an insignificant place, "Can anything good come out of Nazareth?" someone once asked.

This wouldn't have bothered Joseph and Mary. Although Joseph would have known that he'd come down in the world. Ancestry was important. His ancestors were from Bethlehem and he was from "the line of David" Israel's greatest earthly king.

But it only became important when the census summons arrived instructing him to get himself down to Bethlehem to be assessed for tax. And Mary, 9 months pregnant, went with him. And so Jesus was born in Bethlehem, rather than Nazareth as would have been expected. It's why we sing lines like "Once in royal David's city".

But it got worse for the young family. Thanks to the wise men King Herod instituted a regime of ethnic cleansing to eliminate what he thought was a potential rival. Fortunately God warned Joseph to get Mary and Jesus out of danger, so instead of going back to Nazareth they hurried south west, to Egypt, for 3 years or so.

After Herod died Joseph and Mary returned to Nazareth. Eventually they had 4 sons and at least 2 daughters. But the bible is adamant that Joseph was not Jesus' father. We're clear on this from accounts by the contemporary biographers, including several barbed comments about Jesus' parentage. So, if not Joseph then who? Dr. Luke, with a professional interest, recorded that Mary had been told, "you're going to have a baby." Mary was not completely naïve, "how ? I'm a virgin?" The reply is important, *"The Holy Spirit will come on you and the power of the most high will overshadow you so the holy one to be born will be called the son of God."* It's saying God himself was Jesus' father just as Mary was his mother. That's why we sing lines like, "he came down to earth from heaven"; "he abhors not the virgin's womb", " Veiled in flesh the Godhead see," "pleased as man, with man, to dwell", "he lays his glory by", "Our God contracted to a span incomprehensibly made man".

But so what ? What was Jesus' greatest achievement? Joseph was told it most succinctly - just a short line, "he shall save his people from their sins.

Sin matters. It's responsible for all the selfishness and imperfection in the world. It separates and divides people from each other and, crucially, from God, during and after life. It was never intended to be. It happened because people chose, and still choose, to do their own thing irrespective of God's guidance. And God can have nothing to do with it. Sin makes him angry. Sin repeats itself every generation. It's in our nature. That's why we needed a Virgin Birth. God had to break the pattern of sin by bringing his own, sinless, character to our world. Paul describes Jesus as "being in very nature God", "the image of God." Another NT writer talks about Jesus as, "the radiance of God's glory and the exact representation of his being". And with these characteristics, and after living a sinless life –Jesus dealt with sin, defeated it, broke its power and enabled the personal relation between God and people to be restored. "God and sinners reconciled".

Leave the last word to John. In his gospel he wrote "to those who received him (Jesus) who believed in his name he gave the right to become children of God. It's the only human right which cannot be denied. Let's enjoy it ourselves.

**3rd Sunday of Advent:** *O Lord Jesus Christ, who at your first coming sent your messenger to prepare your way before you: grant that the ministers and stewards of your mysteries may likewise so prepare and make ready your way by turning the hearts of the disobedient to the wisdom of the just, that at your second coming to judge the world we may be found an acceptable people in your sight; for you are alive and reign with the Father in the unity of the Holy Spirit, one God, now and for ever.*

**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: December 17<sup>th</sup> and January 21<sup>st</sup> at 2pm in Church Hall & Church.
- Coffee and Questions: November 26<sup>th</sup> and January 28<sup>th</sup> at 10.30am in Church Hall.
- Christmas Tea and Praise: December 21<sup>st</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>