

# 21<sup>st</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:**

Angels from the realms of glory,  
wing your flight o'er all the earth;  
ye who sang creation's story  
now proclaim Messiah's birth:

Come and worship, come and  
worship,  
worship Christ, the newborn king.

Shepherds, in the field abiding,  
watching o'er your flocks by night,  
God with us is now residing;  
yonder shines the infant light:

Come and worship, come and  
worship,  
worship Christ, the newborn king.

Sages, leave your contemplations,  
brighter visions beam afar;  
seek the great Desire of nations;  
ye have seen his natal star:

Come and worship, come and  
worship,  
worship Christ, the newborn king.

Saints before the altar bending,  
watching long in hope and fear  
suddenly the Lord descending  
in His temple shall appear.

Come and worship, come and  
worship,  
worship Christ, the newborn king.

## **The Sermon by Val Lucas**

### **Read Romans 1.1-17 and Matthew 1.18-25 – The King Announced**

Paul, is well known for writing letters to churches he had founded or visited, giving them lengthy written advice and solutions to problems. His letters were full always full of boasts, not about himself but always about Jesus. Many of his letters were full of critical advice and warnings, women often getting a bad deal. You wouldn't want a round robin in your Christmas card from Paul.

Paul's letter to the Romans was different. He wrote to introduce himself, to clarify the gospel message and hopefully gain support for his planned mission to the West. He hoped Rome would be a staging post for his mission to Spain where he would find prayer and financial support. For us today it is a letter that encourages us to share the Gospel and encourages our faith in Jesus.

Rome at the time of his letter could be described as a popular holiday destination, known as the eternal city, it was wealthy, had luxury and lively entertainment. It was a busy city of around 1 million people and traded in silks, spices, wine and olive oil. In Paul's time it had impressive buildings such as the Pantheon, Forum and Circus Maximus. The Colosseum had not yet been built but occasionally Christians were martyred in the Circus maximus alongside others who would not submit to the Roman power.

Therefore, the Church in Rome met in secret, usually in small groups, in people's homes. The groups were diverse and inclusive, Greeks, Jews, the wealthy, poor, men, women and slaves all meeting united by the good news of Jesus. They had probably heard the gospel from passing merchants or from Peter. Paul sent his letter to Rome with Phoebe a trusted Christian woman, a benefactor to Paul who used her own wealth and resources to travel. In those days a person taking a letter was tasked with reading and explaining the correspondence on behalf of the sender. Phoebe did that to all the small groups. We are encouraged to be like Phoebe today in explaining what Paul was passionate about.... the gospel.

Paul writes that he is not ashamed of the gospel, the good news of Christ. Paul knew what it was like to encounter Jesus and he wanted the Christians in Rome to share the good news of how they met Christ with others.

Paul said he was set apart to preach the gospel. In Corinthians 9.16 he states "For necessity is laid upon me. Woe to me if I do not preach the gospel. He wanted the Romans to hear the gospel and share the passion. We are all Christians because someone explained the gospel to us. Many of us went on Alpha courses, were taken to church or Christian festivals and events.

Are we compelled to share the Gospel with others? We do not live in a persecuted land, our meetings are open, advertised and the good news is shared

by social media. Our small groups do not meet underground and our bibles are not hidden.

Paul's letter encourages us to share the good news and not be ashamed to do so. There is no better time than Christmas to do this, to explain the birth of our Saviour and to give the real reason for the Christmas season. Let us protest to our friends the use of words such as Winter holidays, Winterval or Yuletide. Ollerton writes "I wonder whether our political and timid form of Christianity betrays an inner loss of confidence"

Have we lost our confidence? Paul in this letter reminds us of what we should be confident about. It is Jesus, the Power of the Gospel. Paul uses the word gospel extensively in his letter. In Greek the Gospel means the announcement of Good News. The Romans would have known Emperor Augustus as the gospel as he was the one who brought victory and established peace in the area by bringing order and prosperity. Paul was writing to the Romans and reminding them of the greater victory of Jesus. The ultimate triumph the only Gospel. Jesus, by the power of the Holy spirit, rose from the dead and defeated sin, evil and death. In Jesus we have new life and eternal hope. There is no other man capable of achieving this. Jesus is our confidence.

Our confidence is amplified because we know that by living for Jesus and in Jesus we are being changed. We are becoming righteous and growing a stronger faith. The gospel continues to challenge and change us, it is powerful, enabling us to become more Christlike and strengthening our relationship with Jesus.

The Romans lived in a society where slavery was accepted. Paul was aware that 30% of the Roman population were the property of wealthy masters and their aim was to be free men. Paul writes that he is a slave. A slave to Christ. This statement would get the attention of the Romans. Paul's entire life and purpose was determined by Jesus. Unlike the Roman slaves he did not have to pay or work harder for his freedom, Jesus did that for him by dying on the Cross. Jesus is the master who brings perfect freedom as you're only truly free when you die to yourself and live totally for Jesus.

As our master, and the one we truly believe and live for, Paul in his letter explains how we have a right relationship with Jesus. God makes us right in his sight through faith. Not by our human effort or by keeping laws but solely through faith in Jesus. It is through faith that a righteous person has life. The life of faith is a spiritual one, we live a life of holiness and peace through trusting in God, praying and listening to him. It is from faith that we grow the fruits of the spirit and live a good righteous life. Habakkuk 2.4 NLT

Look at the proud they trust in themselves and their lives are crooked, but the righteous will live by their faithfulness to God.

No better example of a righteous man is the reading today of Joseph and his journey of faith when he heard the news of Mary's pregnancy. He demonstrated his obedience and faith to God in many ways

Firstly he was going to obey the law by divorcing Mary. This as we know could result in stoning and rejection by society. The child clearly wasn't his and he was confused and bewildered by the events and what Mary had told him. But Joseph had a good balance of holiness, godly standards, love and sensitivity. He planned to send her away quietly and not publicly disgrace her. However once the angel visited him in a dream, he trusted God and he did what the Lord commanded. He did not argue or procrastinate. He took Mary as his wife despite facing social scorn. Joseph was not ashamed and he trusted and obeyed God completely.

And we all know that in all things, God works for the good of those who love him.

We give thanks that Paul was a good letter writer and that we still have his letters today. The letters have stood the test of time and will continue to encourage Christians to share the gospel and to give an account of their faith with boldness and confidence. May it inspire us to write letters to our family and friends to explain the gospel or issue an invitation to the Alpha course in the New year. I am sure the invitation via social media will also be acceptable. Or we can be like Phoebe and explain the gospel and an invitation to Alpha to those around us.

***4th Sunday of Advent:*** *God our redeemer, who prepared the Blessed Virgin Mary to be the mother of your Son: grant that, as she looked for his coming as our saviour, so we may be ready to greet him when he comes again as our judge; who is alive and reigns with you, 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.*

### **For Further information:**

This paper and all parish details are on the website at  
<https://www.parishofmedsteadandfourmarks.co.uk>