

*Christ Church New
Southgate & Friern Barnet*

21 November 2021

Welcome

Reading: Revelation 1.4b-8 NIV

4 John, To the seven churches in the province of Asia:

Grace and peace to you from him who is, and who was, and who is to come, and from the seven spirits before his throne, **5** and from Jesus Christ, who is the faithful witness, the firstborn from the dead, and the ruler of the kings of the earth.

To him who loves us and has freed us from our sins by his blood, **6** and has made us to be a kingdom and priests to serve his God and Father—to him be glory and power for ever and ever! Amen.

7 “Look, he is coming with the clouds,” and “every eye will see him, even those who pierced him”; and all peoples on earth “will mourn because of him.” So shall it be! Amen.

8 “I am the Alpha and the Omega,” says the Lord God, “who is, and who was, and who is to come, the Almighty.”

*Song: Holy, holy, holy is the Lord God almighty,
Holy, holy, holy is the Lord God almighty,
Who was, and is, and is to come,
Who was, and is, and is to come,*

Lift up His name with the sound of singing,

Lift up His name in all the earth.
Lift up your voice and give Him glory,
For He is worthy to be praised

*Song: In the darkness we were waiting
Without hope, without light
'Til from Heaven You came running
There was mercy in Your eyes
To fulfill the law and prophets
To a virgin came the word
From a throne of endless glory
To a cradle in the dirt*

*Praise the Father, praise the Son
Praise the Spirit, three in one
God of glory, Majesty
Praise forever to the King of Kings*

To reveal the kingdom coming
And to reconcile the lost
To redeem the whole creation
You did not despise the cross
For even in your suffering
You saw to the other side
Knowing this was our salvation
Jesus for our sake you died

And the morning that You rose
All of Heaven held its breath
'Til that stone was moved for good
For the Lamb had conquered death
And the dead rose from their tombs
And the angels stood in awe
For the souls of all who'd come
To the Father are restored

And the church of Christ was born
Then the Spirit lit the flame
Now this gospel truth of old
Shall not kneel, shall not faint
By His blood and in His name
In His freedom I am free
For the love of Jesus Christ
Who has resurrected me

All age activity: AtoZ names of God
Can you think of a name of God from AtoZ? Which name speaks to you today?

Lord's Prayer Active

Song: 1. O worship the King, all glorious above
O gratefully sing His wonderful love
Our Shield and Defender, the Ancient of Days
Pavilioned in splendour, and girded with praise

2. O tell of His might, O sing of His grace
Whose robe is the light and canopy space
His chariots of wrath the deep thunderclouds form
And dark is His path on the wings of the storm

3. O measureless might, ineffable love
While angels delight to worship above
Thy mercies how tender, how firm to the end
Our Maker, Defender, Redeemer, and Friend

You alone are the matchless King
To You alone be all majesty
Your glories and wonders, what tongue can recite?
You breathe in the air, You shine in the light

Sermon



IMAGE: Dettoni della Grazia, Guido. Maria, from **Art in the Christian Tradition**, a project of the Vanderbilt Divinity Library, Nashville, TN. <https://diglib.library.vanderbilt.edu/act-imagelink.pl?RC=57840> [retrieved November 19, 2021].
Original source:
[https://commons.wikimedia.org/wiki/File:Mary_\(Alpha_%26_Omega\)_913.jpg](https://commons.wikimedia.org/wiki/File:Mary_(Alpha_%26_Omega)_913.jpg).

Take a look at this sculpture called Maria by Guido Dettoni della Grazia in Italy. Here a metal frame of the letter a is suspended above the letter o for omega. The Greek alphabet begins with a for alpha and ends with o for omega. These are the Greek letters. The O is a trough of soil and inbetween are glass cylinders planted in the soil. Each tube contains a wooden sculpture that is lit from above. The letter o in Greek has a gap where I imagine if you or I visited we could walk. I wonder what it would feel like to be in this sculpture?

The book of Revelation is not an easy read, it contains apocalyptic visions of the future and has a highly poetic and prophetic tone. It is drenched with biblical symbolism. John is the author of Revelation and it is a series of letters written to various churches that he has connections to. In this first chapter of Revelation he is writing to the 7 churches in modern day Turkey. Today's reading is what he says to them first. He begins his whole book with this song of praise to the God who is and was and is to come. He writes in this way for then as is now, we live in the inbetween. We were not present at the creation of the world, but God was. We were not present when Jesus was alive, but God was. And none of us, absolutely none of us know when the end of the world will be, apart from God.

I wonder which name of God did you connect with the most in our AtoZ activity? John writes the Lord is the Alpha and Omega, the Lord is A to Z in the English alphabet, the beginning and the end. What does this mean? It reminds us that God is the creator of the world, and will be there at its end too.

It also means that God is present in b, c, d, e, f, g ... and all the other letters of the alphabet. It means that we can play a game trying to think of all the names of God beginning with each letter. But the bigger point is that God is present right across our lives and the world. God made each of us, God made the trees that built the pews at church or chairs at home that we are sitting on. God made the earth that we are living on, the galaxy that we are just a small part of. It is his breath that breathes life into humanity, his word that brings light where there was darkness, that draws water from the land. If God had an alarm clock and an early morning start, that's what he did first. God sets the world in motion.

Gloria Gaynor famously sang: I am what I am'. I think that she was singing about being accepted as a person. John reminds his readers – the churches in Asia, modern day Turkey, that God was the first one so say I AM. As Moses gets near the burning bush in Exodus 3, we hear this name of God: I am. God is present, before, during and after. God is a constant presence in the world. And God is constant from Moses meeting the great I AM, to the early church who John reminds are worshipping the same God who was and is and is to come.

The sculpture is called Maria, or Mary. So I guess that the sculptor was thinking about the mother of God. Next week we enter into Advent when we remember Christ coming to the world. And this piece reminds us of the space into which Jesus comes. The world has already been made, God has already led his people out of slavery in Egypt, already given the people of God King David to lead and guide, already spoken through the prophets. And now in the meantime there is a thirst for a new King. Into this gap in the glass cylinders comes a new kind of King, the king of kings. A king who would be born with animals, to a poor refugee family and grow up

to be a man of great influence and power but not like any other king that we know of.

This king knows God intimately, he calls him Father. This king heals, restores and brings new life. This king follows the call of God to serve his people. This king has a crown of thorns not gold. This king dies on a cross to free us from sin. This king takes away all our pain and emptiness, he fills our aching and longing hearts with love.

This King's name is Jesus Christ.

It is this king who invites us to enter into his AtoZ, to meet with every aspect of his character and to know everyone of his blessings and challenges. He invites us to build his kingdom with him. To build a kingdom that has a different sort of power. Not one that corrupts, that is fraudulent or oppressive but to build a kingdom with grace and peace. Peace that God gives that is total well being – shalom, and grace that God gives that is total healing and salvation. God gives us grace and peace as a blessing and a source of joy for testing and trying times.

God is, God was and God is to come. He is the beginning and the end. Now we are in the middle. Before us is God, with us is God and after us is God. If you imagine time between alpha and omega, God is holding both ends and all the letters inbetween. God is holding this space for us now. This is what it means for God to be King, or to be sovereign. God as King of the world does not control his creation, he gives choice and ability to do good and be peaceful. God offers each of us opportunity to seek him now in the knowledge that God is before, with and ahead of us. It means that he's there to catch us when we fall, to lift us when we are weak and challenge us when we fail.

Take a look at those gaps in the tubes, his presence before, during and after opens up the gap for us to serve him. He opens a way

for us to build his kingdom by serving him. Take heart from the King of Kings who does not use force, punishment or threats but invites us to serve him in the full knowledge that God is, was and is to come. What will we choose to do? Will we focus only on what he has done before, or be so anxious for judgement we will forget his presence now in our everyday lives? May our lives from beginning to end seek to glorify Christ the King.

Song: King of kings, Majesty
God of Heaven living in me
Gentle Saviour, closest friend
Strong Deliverer, beginning and end
All within me falls at Your throne

*Your Majesty, I can but bow
I lay my all before You now
In royal robes I don't deserve
I live to serve Your Majesty*

Earth and Heaven worship You
Love eternal, Faithful and True
Who bought the nations, ransomed souls
Brought this sinner near to Your throne
All within me cries out in praise.

Communion
Share in bread and juice together

Intercession

Prayers for the beginning and ending of every journey this coming week

Prayers for the beginning and ending of each new day this coming week

Prayers for the first and the last in the world's eyes

Most High God, majestic and almighty,
our beginning and our end:

rule in our hearts
and guide us to be faithful in our daily actions,
worshipping the one who comes
as Saviour and Sovereign,
and who lives and reigns with you
in the unity of the Holy Spirit, one God.
Amen.

*Song: Take heart, dear sisters,
fear not, dear brothers,
all you who yearn for the Lord;
the night is long
and the fight is hard,
but know Christ has already won.
And though we see the sun go dark
and the moon give up its light,
we'll know, when all the heavens quake
and stars fall from the sky:*

*He'll come in glory, glory,
riding on the clouds.
The night shall flee,
and every knee
will bow before his majesty and power.*

Take heart through trials,
fear not, though fires may burn,
you shall overcome.
The pain of labour
will soon be over,
our cry will turn to a song.

His word is true, our hope is sure,
and the Spirit holds us fast;
our waiting hearts will find their joy
when Christ returns at last.

Blessing