

Westminster Abbey



A National Scout Service of Celebration and Thanksgiving



Friday 20th February 2026

Noon

HISTORICAL NOTE

Following the death of The Chief Scout of the World, The Lord Baden-Powell OM GCMG GCVO KCB DL, in 1941, a memorial stone was unveiled in Westminster Abbey on 23rd April 1947. From then until 1955, Scouting Headquarters staff and some members held an annual wreath laying and a small service in the Abbey. In 1957, the centenary of Baden-Powell's birth, the service was attended by members of the Royal Family. In years thereafter it was referred to as a Service of Thanksgiving and became a much bigger celebration.

From 1959 onwards, the service was held on the nearest Saturday to 22nd February and from 1976, this annual service changed in style and name to a joint celebration of Thinking Day and Founder's Day Service. In 1981, a memorial was dedicated to Lord and Lady Baden-Powell in Westminster Abbey. In 2011, the arrangements for the service were reviewed and changed in the light of increasing local opportunities to celebrate these special occasions. The current arrangement nevertheless maintains the tradition of the annual service at Westminster Abbey, now known as the National Scout Service of Celebration and Thanksgiving and focuses on thanking adult volunteers for their service and dedication.



WESTMINSTER ABBEY

We cannot say with certainty when Westminster Abbey was founded, but we know that around the year 960, Benedictine monks settled on the marshy north bank of the Thames, in a place called Thorney Island. In the mid-11th century, the Anglo-Saxon King Edward established his palace there and became an enthusiastic patron of the monks. He built an entirely new church for them, which was consecrated on 28th December 1065, and then became the King's own burial place in January 1066. Later that year, William the Conqueror defeated King Harold at the Battle of Hastings and made his way to London. He was crowned in Westminster Abbey on Christmas Day and a further 39 coronations have taken place within the Abbey's walls in the subsequent centuries.

After the canonisation of King Edward as St Edward the Confessor in 1161, the Abbey became a place of pilgrimage. With a royal residence and the principal seat of government alongside it, the monastery developed into one of the most important and influential religious houses in medieval England. In 1245, King Henry III resolved to rebuild the Abbey church in the Gothic style and to provide a magnificent new shrine for the Confessor's remains. After 15 years, the eastern portion of the church, its side chapels, and the two transepts, were complete. Numerous craftsmen worked to decorate the interior with stained glass, paintings, and sculpture of the finest quality. On 13th October 1269 the church was consecrated, and St Edward's remains were transferred to their new shrine, east of the high altar, where they remain to this day.

After his death in 1272, Henry III's own tomb was placed near to the shrine and was joined in due course by the tombs of several of his successors. Among them was Richard II, under whom construction of the Gothic Abbey resumed in the latter part of the 14th century. Owing to a decision to continue the work in the original architectural style, the whole building has a remarkable unity of design, even though the very west end of the nave was not finally vaulted until the early 1500s. The western towers intended by the medieval masons remained unfinished, barely rising above the level of the vault of the nave, and were only finally completed (to a design of Nicholas Hawksmoor) in 1745.

The early 16th century also saw the construction of the new Lady Chapel of King Henry VII at the Abbey's east end. It was consecrated in 1516, and the fan-vaulted interior is one of the architectural glories of the Abbey. Within its walls are the tombs of Henry VII himself and of Queen Elizabeth I, Mary Queen of Scots, and many other members of the Tudor, Stuart, and Hanoverian royal houses.

The Benedictine monastery was dissolved in 1540. A period of change and uncertainty followed, but in May 1560, Queen Elizabeth I established the Abbey by royal charter as 'the Collegiate Church of St Peter'. The new foundation consisted of a dean and twelve prebendaries (canons), minor canons, and additional lay officers. It was charged with two main duties: to continue the tradition of daily worship (for which a musical foundation of organist, choristers, and singing men was provided) and to maintain a school for the education of forty 'Queen's Scholars'. Abbey and School flourished as a single institution until the Public Schools Act of 1868 made the School independent of the Dean and Chapter (though a close association between the two remains).

The arrival of Arthur Penrhyn Stanley as Dean in 1864 brought new vigour to the Abbey's life. He wrote extensively about its history, gave permission for the burial of national figures such as Dickens and Livingstone, and did much to establish the idea of the Abbey as a place in which every citizen of the nation and Empire had a share. In particular, Stanley saw the nation's history reflected in the Abbey's monuments and memorials. In monastic times, burials in the church were limited to royalty and to a few highly favoured nobles and churchmen. After the Reformation, the side chapels, transepts, and nave began to be filled with tombs and memorials. Today, there are over 600 monuments and memorials, which seem to fill almost every available space. They add to the rich historical and artistic interest of the Abbey, visited by more than one million people each year.

In the aftermath of the First World War, and particularly with the burial of the Unknown Warrior in November 1920, the Abbey acquired a wider role as the setting for occasions of national celebration or sorrow. Not least among these were coronations with their pomp and pageantry; the weddings of the late Queen Elizabeth The Queen Mother, the late Queen and the late Duke of Edinburgh, and The Prince and Princess of Wales; a developing tradition of special services, some of which, such as the Commonwealth Service of Celebration and the Battle of Britain Service, are now a regular part of the Abbey's calendar.

This rich and varied mission, firmly rooted in the Abbey's long history but always responding to changing and current needs, continues to place Westminster Abbey at the very centre of the nation's life.

Members of the congregation are requested kindly to refrain from using private cameras, video, or sound recording equipment. Please ensure that mobile telephones and other electronic devices are switched off.

The church is served by a hearing loop. Users should turn their hearing aid to the setting marked T.

The service is conducted by The Very Reverend Dr David Hoyle KCVO MBE, Dean of Westminster.

The service is sung by the Westminster Abbey Special Service Choir, conducted by Matthew Jorysz, Sub-Organist.

The organ is played by François Cloete, Organ Scholar.

Before the service James Gough, Assistant Organist, Southwark Cathedral, plays

Hymn Prelude *Ralph Vaughan Williams (1872–1958)*
on Rhosymedre

Prelude and Fugue *Johann Sebastian Bach (1685–1750)*
in G BWV 541

Adagio in E *Frank Bridge (1879–1971)*

Allegretto *Felix Mendelssohn (1809–47)*
from Sonata No 4 in B flat Op 65

The Right Worshipful the Lord Mayor of Westminster, Councillor Paul Dimoldenberg, is received by the Dean & Chapter. Presentations are made and he is conducted to his seat. All stand and then sit.

ORDER OF SERVICE

All stand. The choir sings the Introit

O PRAISE the Lord, all ye heathen :
praise him all ye nations.

For his merciful kindness is ever more and more towards us :
and the truth of the Lord endureth for ever. Amen.

Adrian Batten (c 1591–c 1637)

Psalm 117

*All sing the Hymn, during which the choir and clergy move to their places
in Quire and the Sacrarium. Flags are presented at the High Altar*



PRAISE to the Lord, the Almighty, the King of creation;
O my soul, praise him, for he is thy health and salvation:
come ye who hear,
brothers and sisters draw near,
praise him in glad adoration.

Praise to the Lord, who o'er all things so wondrously reigneth,
shelters thee under his wings, yea, so gently sustaineth:
hast thou not seen
all that is needful hath been
granted in what he ordaineth?

Praise to the Lord, who doth prosper thy work, and defend thee;
surely his goodness and mercy here daily attend thee;
ponder anew
all the Almighty can do,
he who with love doth befriend thee.

Praise to the Lord! O let all that is in me adore him!
All that hath life and breath come now with praises before him!
Let the Amen
sound from his people again:
gladly for ay we adore him.

Lobe den Herren 440 NEH
Praxis pietatis melica 1668

Lobe den Herren, den mächtigen König der Ehren
Joachim Neander (1650–80)
translated by Catherine Winkworth (1827–78)

*All remain standing. The Very Reverend Dr David Hoyle KCVO MBE,
Dean of Westminster, gives the Bidding*

WE gather where nation and Commonwealth meet to give thanks for our common life. In this house where oaths are taken and promises made, this house of memory and meaning, we celebrate the life and work of all who are involved with Scouting. We give thanks for the tireless enthusiasm and dedication of volunteers, and for the joy and hope we see in young people. We have all been entrusted with great gifts. We pray now that Scouts may have the grace to use those gifts in the service of our common life. May God encourage and sustain all those involved in Scouting, and may they so flourish that they are an encouragement to all around them.

All sit. Ayesha Karim, UK Youth Lead, gives a Testimony

The choir sings the Anthem

BEATI quorum via integra est,
qui ambulant in lege Domini.

*Blessed are they whose way is pure,
who walk in the law of the Lord.*

Charles Villiers Stanford (1852–1924)

Psalms 119: 1

Charlie Cunnane, County Youth Lead, reads Just imagine a different world, anonymous, from Enviroteach 1, 1992, reproduced in The Global Scout

All stand to sing the Hymn



BE thou my vision, O Lord of my heart,
be all else but naught to me, save that thou art,
be thou my best thought in the day and the night,
both waking and sleeping, thy presence my light.

Be thou my wisdom, be thou my true word,
be thou ever with me, and I with thee, Lord;
be thou my great Father, and I thy true son,
be thou in me dwelling, and I with thee one.

Be thou my breastplate, my sword for the fight,
be thou my whole armour, be thou my true might,
be thou my soul's shelter, be thou my strong tower,
O raise thou me heavenward, great Power of my power.

Riches I heed not, nor man's empty praise,
be thou my inheritance now and always,
be thou and thou only the first in my heart,
O Sovereign of heaven, my treasure thou art.

High King of heaven, thou heaven's bright Sun,
O grant me its joys after vict'ry is won,
great Heart of my own heart, whatever befall,
still be thou my vision, O Ruler of all.

*Slane 339 NEH
traditional Irish melody*

*Irish, c 8th century, translated by Mary Byrne (1880–1931)
and versified by Eleanor Hull (1860–1935)*

All sit. Molly Reed, Scout Network Member, reads the Reading

WHEN Jesus saw the crowds, he went up the mountain; and after he sat down, his disciples came to him. Then he began to speak, and taught them, saying:
'Blessed are the poor in spirit, for theirs is the kingdom of heaven.
'Blessed are those who mourn, for they will be comforted.
'Blessed are the meek, for they will inherit the earth.
'Blessed are those who hunger and thirst for righteousness, for they will be filled.
'Blessed are the merciful, for they will receive mercy.
'Blessed are the pure in heart, for they will see God.
'Blessed are the peacemakers, for they will be called children of God.
'You are the light of the world. A city built on a hill cannot be hidden. No one after lighting a lamp puts it under the bushel basket, but on the lampstand, and it gives light to all in the house. In the same way, let your light shine before others, so that they may see your good works and give glory to your Father in heaven.
'Do not think that I have come to abolish the law or the prophets; I have come not to abolish but to fulfil.

Matthew 5: 1–9, 14–17

Thanks be to God.

The Right Reverend Stephen Lake, Bishop of Salisbury, Vice President of Dorset Scouts, gives the Address

The choir sings the Anthem

FOR the beauty of the earth,
For the beauty of the skies,
For the love which from our birth
Over and around us lies,
*Lord of all, to thee we raise
This our joyful hymn of praise.*

For the beauty of each hour For the joy of human love,
Of the day and of the night, Brother, sister, parent, child,
Hill and vale and tree and flower, Friends on earth and friends above,
Sun and moon and stars of light, For all gentle thoughts and mild,

For each perfect gift of thine,
To our race so freely given,
Graces human and divine,
Flowers of earth and buds of heaven,

John Rutter (b 1945)

Folliott Pierpoint (1835–1917)

The Reverend Tessa Bosworth, Minor Canon and Succentor, introduces the Prayers

In the power of the Spirit, and in union with Christ, let us pray to the Father.

All kneel or remain seated

Joshua Marshall, Cub Leader, says

WE give thanks to God for our founder Robert Baden-Powell: for his visionary ambition and dedication towards Scouting and Guiding, and his commitment to helping young people develop and grow.

Lord, in your mercy
hear our prayer.

Jayden Stokes, UK Youth Representative, says

WE give thanks to God for all who have inspired and encouraged us within the Scout movement: for those who have been influential in our lives and who have helped us to become the people and leaders we are.

Lord, in your mercy
hear our prayer.

Alexander Gulline, District Youth Lead, says

WE give thanks for Scouting and Guiding around the world:
For the joy of friendship between Guides and Scouts of
different nations; for all that strengthens the bond we share.

Lord, in your mercy

hear our prayer.

Scarlett Bugler, District Youth Lead, says

LET us pray for those parts of the world where it is hard to
belong to the Scouts, where there is persecution, animosity, or
a lack of tolerance: for greater freedom and understanding, and an
awareness and appreciation of the good that can be achieved.

Lord, in your mercy

hear our prayer.

Ed Fearn, Scout Network Member, says

LET us pray for those who are called to leadership within our
movement: for vision, imagination, and inspiration to
continue the work of our founder; that they may encourage those
committed to their care, and raise up leaders for the future.

Lord, in your mercy

hear our prayer.

Dylan Murray, Scout Leader, says

LET us pray that Scouts may continue to be a force for good in
this world: that we may always do our best to serve our
communities, to care for the earth, to foster cohesion where there
is division, to influence change, and build resilience.

Lord, in your mercy

hear our prayer.

The Succentor concludes

All these our prayers and praises let us now present before our heavenly Father, in the words our Saviour Christ has taught us:

OUR Father, who art in heaven, hallowed be thy name; thy kingdom come; thy will be done; on earth as it is in heaven. Give us this day our daily bread. And forgive us our trespasses, as we forgive those who trespass against us. And lead us not into temptation; but deliver us from evil. For thine is the kingdom, the power, and the glory, for ever and ever. Amen.

Dwayne Fields, Chief Scout, thanks adult volunteers for their service in developing young Scouts

All stand to sing the Hymn



IVOW to thee, my country, all earthly things above,
Entire and whole and perfect, the service of my love:
the love that asks no question, the love that stands the test,
that lays upon the altar the dearest and the best;
the love that never falters, the love that pays the price,
the love that makes undaunted the final sacrifice.

And there's another country, I've heard of long ago,
most dear to them that love her, most great to them that know;
we may not count her armies, we may not see her King;
her fortress is a faithful heart, her pride is suffering;
and soul by soul and silently her shining bounds increase,
and her ways are ways of gentleness and all her paths are peace.

Thaxted 295 AMNS
Gustav Holst (1874–1934)

Urbs Dei
Cecil Spring-Rice (1859–1918)

All remain standing. The Scouts, led by Carl Hankinson DL, UK Chief Volunteer, renew their Promise

The Dean pronounces the Blessing

GO forth into the world in peace; be of good courage; hold fast that which is good; render to no-one evil for evil; strengthen the fainthearted; support the weak; help the afflicted; honour all people; love and serve the Lord, rejoicing in the power of the Holy Spirit; and the blessing of God almighty, the Father, the Son, and the Holy Spirit, be among you and remain with you always. **Amen.**

All sing

GOD save our gracious King.
GLong live our noble King.
God save The King.
Send him victorious, happy and glorious,
long to reign over us.
God save The King.

All remain standing as the clergy and choir move to the west end of the church

Music after the service

*Allegro molto e ritmico
from Sonata Britannica*

Charles Villiers Stanford (1852–1924)

Members of the congregation are requested to remain in their places until invited to move by the Stewards

The Abbey bells are rung