

Sun 21st March: "Let There Be Light"

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Introduction:

Today we are going to explore a thought experiment. The Bible describes Jesus in terms of light. The biggest lightbulb I know of is the sun in the sky for everyone to feel and see.

So, if Jesus is the light of the world, why is it that many have trouble seeing him?



Call to Worship:

We look up at the night sky
Under the starry canopy we can find
ourselves
Feeling small and insignificant
But as we rise to face a new day,
So we gather ourselves together before
you, Lord Jesus Christ
Ready for worship and service.
As members of your body,
Let us come together as one
To worship our Lord.
Amen.

Hymn: Awake, My Soul, and with the sun / thy daily stage of duty run

Awake, my soul, and with the sun
Thy daily stage of duty run;
Shake off dull sloth, and joyful rise

To pay thy morning sacrifice.

By influence of the light divine,
Let thy own light to others shine,
Reflect all heaven's propitious rays,
In ardent love, and cheerful praise.

Wake, and lift up thyself, my heart,
And with the angels bear thy part,
Who all night long unwearied sing
High praise to the eternal King.

Lord, I my vows to Thee renew,
Disperse my sins as Morning dew,
Guard my first springs of Thought and
Will,
And with Thy self my spirit fill.

Direct, control, suggest, this day,
All I design, or do, or say,
That all my Powers with all their might,
In Thy sole Glory may unite.

Praise God, from whom all blessings flow,
Praise Him all Creatures here below,
Praise Him above ye Heavenly Host,
Praise Father, Son, and Holy Ghost.

Thomas Ken (1633-1711)

Prayer of Approach

Light shines from the darkness
Its rays fall on the landscape
Lighting up fields, trees, buildings and
towns
The light falls on our loved ones
Highlighting their faces and warm smiles.

Light shines from the darkness
Imprinting on our souls the beauty of the
world around.
It is enough to bring a smile to our face
And make us thankful to God.

But sometimes we find ourselves residing
in dark places
Places where the sunshine doesn't seem
to quite reach.
We can lose hope of seeing the good in
life
And forgetful that the sun will rise to start a
new day.
Will we appreciate the warmth of its rays?

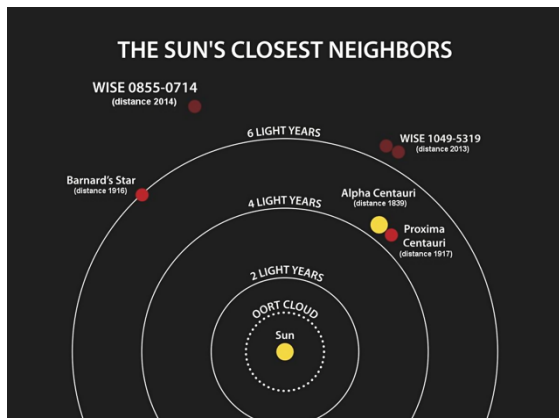
Will we again rejoice in the multi-coloured tapestry of the countryside?

So we come to the Lord
The Lord of Light who created the stars
Confessing that, in our imaginations,
We sometimes only see the world in grey.
Creator God, we ask for your inspiration.
We need the joy of the Lord.

Thank you, Lord
That you freely put your light in the lives of
our families,
Our communities, and ourselves.
Amen.

Reflection #1:

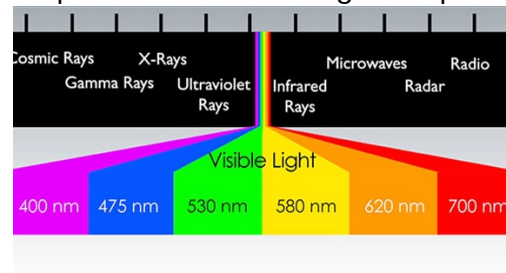
Let's talk about light. Our world is illuminated by our nearest star, the Sun. The next nearest star is the red dwarf star called Proxima Centauri, which is part of the Alpha Centauri system of three stars. Beyond that is another red dwarf - Barnard's Star - and two brown dwarfs called WISE 1049 and WISE 0855.



Brown dwarfs are “failed” stars therefore not luminous enough to be detected by telescopes that view in natural light. They are typically larger than the gas giants, but smaller than stars and lack the fuel to reach nuclear fusion – the essential nuclear furnace of all stars.

Both brown dwarfs weren't hot enough or bright enough to be detected by normal telescopes. Instead, they discovered by telescopes that view stars in the infra-red.

Both brown dwarfs were discovered by telescopes that view stars in the infra-red. Infra-red is part of the vast range frequencies of electromagnetic spectrum



beyond human vision. Your transistor radio and microwave oven are on this spectrum (above). Natural light is a small slither of this spectrum. Without detectors, most of this “light” would remain unseen.

My opening question was: “If Jesus is the light of the world, why is it that many have trouble seeing him?” What has all of this got to do with my opening question? More of all this shortly.

Hymn: O Timeless and Untrammelled Word

Sung to the tune of “Greensleeves”.
Written by John Cambell
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O timeless and untrammelled Word,
God's joy, God's very essence
First, by your plan, all things began -
You spoke and broke the silence.
Yet, now, you've entered time,
Constrained, like us, within its rhyme,
Embraced its sweat and grime,
The Word made flesh among us!

O holy and most heavenly Word,
With God's own glory shining,
Your truth and grace unveil the face
Of God's own inmost being.
Yet, frail like us you came
And lived and died in human frame;
Shared pain with sick and lame -
The Word made flesh amongst us!

O living and empowered Word,
God's light, beyond all other,
Exposing wrong throughout time's song,

God's sun ablaze forever.
Yet, you our dark embraced,
Eclipsed by sin, our failure faced,
Dying, death's darkness chased,
The Word made flesh amongst us!

Scripture Reading: John 1.1-5 and 9-14.

In the beginning was the Word, and the Word was with God, and the Word was God. 2 He was in the beginning with God. 3 All things came into being through him, and without him not one thing came into being. What has come into being 4 in him was life, and the life was the light of all people. 5 The light shines in the darkness, and the darkness did not overcome it.

9 The true light, which enlightens everyone, was coming into the world. 10 He was in the world, and the world came into being through him; yet the world did not know him. 11 He came to what was his own, and his own people did not accept him. 12 But to all who received him, who believed in his name, he gave power to become children of God, 13 who were born, not of blood or of the will of the flesh or of the will of man, but of God.

14 And the Word became flesh and lived among us, and we have seen his glory, the glory as of a father's only son, full of grace and truth.

Reflection #2

A short devotional video accompanies this reflection which features in the online version of this service.

I started by asking the question "If Jesus is the light of the world, why is it that many have trouble seeing him? Let's start with a thought experiment.

A number of years ago I took a motorcycle ride to visit Quarr Abbey. Quarr Abbey is a monastery housing a small group of Benedictine monks on the Isle of Wight. The abbey was designed by

French architect Paul Bellot and is constructed of this wonderful red brick.

I visited the Abbey (below) to do some filming hoping to capture the glory of this brickwork on film.

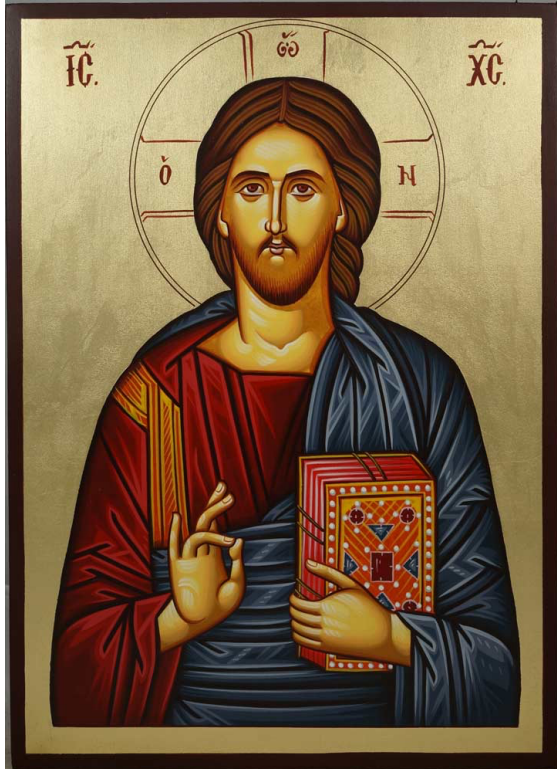


On the way down I rode through the newly opened Hindhead Tunnel on the A3 (below). I enjoyed the way that, with both tunnel and monastery, the light reflected and danced on the different surfaces. Hindhead Tunnel opened in 2011 taking the A3 safely below the Devils' Punchbowl, a 280- hectare site of scientific special interest in Surrey.



You may think that tunnel and monastery are a bit of an odd combination. I spent some days agonising exactly how to bring the two together. I found that the first chapter of John's Gospel, with its theme of light, brought the two together. However, when put the video on YouTube, I received a few complaints that there was too much filming in the tunnel. Less tunnel, more Abbey please!

Let's be honest - the A3 and Quarr Abbey make strange bedfellows. The plain and ordinary seems to grind against the beauty and, dare I say, spirituality expressed in the architecture of the Benedictine Monastery.



At one point in the film, I tried to focus on an icon of Jesus Christ. The picture was blurred - going in and out of focus. And this is the point. Here is Jesus, both human and divine, existing between the two realities of earth and heaven. The down-to-earth of mundane, run-of-the-mill, everyday human existence juxtaposed against the grandeur of heaven. The two do not naturally mix. This dual-existing life seems blurred to us. For example, can you comfortably imagine a picture of Jesus Christ sitting in a transport cafe on the A3?

Sometimes we only focus on the divine aspect of Christ. Others struggle to see this side, and only see him in human terms. They can't see his divine light. Why is this?

Please return with me to our earlier point of infra-red light. Infra-red is one example

of light that we cannot see with the human eye. That's why we have infra-red, Xray and radio astronomy opening up the heavens in ways that the human eye could never see. Most forms of light are beyond the range of human vision.

This is the twist: God's light is beyond human perception. If it exists, as the Bible and Christian tradition witnesses, it seems to be beyond our detection. As John 1.5 says, in a more correct translation: "The light shines in the dark, and the darkness has not *understood* it." We are surrounded by a form of light that we are unable to see, yet alone comprehend. We are in the dark.

However, there is a key verse in the Bible which helps us to unlock this further. In the Letter to the Ephesians, St Paul famously prayed:

*"I pray that the God of our Lord Jesus Christ, the Father of glory, may give you a spirit of wisdom and revelation as you come to know him, so that, **with the eyes of your heart enlightened**, you may know what is the hope to which he has called you ..."* (Eph 1.16-18).

It is interesting that this verse mentions "eyes of the heart" rather than just "eyes". Our eyes can see objects. It is in our hearts where we can truly know the love of someone and return that love in relationship. God opens our hearts so that we can know his love, and to return that love in worship.

Our hearts (and minds), which normally are "blind" towards God, and have to go through a process of readjustment to perceive God's light. This "recalibrating" is a thing of mystery, but something that is a ministry of the Holy Spirit. But may we welcome this transformation in our lives.

May God open the eyes of our hearts all the more.

May we see his love and ministry among our communities all the more.

May he open the eyes of many people for the first time. Amen



Prayers of Intercession:

Please respond where indicated with:
Help us to carry your light.

Open the eyes of our hearts, Lord
Help us to see your light and to carry it out
into our communities.

Help us to carry your light.

Nurture and protect the ember of our faith,
kept alive by the breath of the Holy Spirit
Help us to carry your light.

May we carry the light of Jesus to our
family, friends and community around us.
Help us to carry your light.

May we be able to carry your light to dark
places
Bringing hope and and renewal
Help us to carry your light.

We pray for our national government and
all political parties.
Help them to find a way forward which
brings justice to all.
Help us to carry your light.

We pray for those who are in vulnerable
housing or are homeless.
We pray that they may find shelter and
support among the agencies that come
alongside them.
Help us to carry your light.

We pray for national and local leadership,
agencies and staff
Battling the pandemic, caring for the sick,
and rolling out the vaccine in our
communities.

Help us to carry your light.

May we all know of the light of Jesus
Christ
Burning in the darkness.
Often misunderstood
Bringing comfort, hope and light.
Amen.

Hymn 117: How Great Thou Art

O Lord my God, When I in awesome
wonder,
Consider all the worlds Thy Hands have
made;
I see the stars, I hear mighty thunder,
Thy power throughout the universe
displayed.

*Then sings my soul, My Saviour God, to
Thee,
How great Thou art, How great Thou art.
Then sings my soul, My Saviour God, to
Thee,
How great Thou art, How great Thou art!*

When through the woods, and forest
glades I wander,
And hear the birds sing sweetly in the
trees.
When I look down, from lofty mountain
grandeur
And see the brook, and feel the gentle
breeze.

Then sings my soul ...

But when I think, that God, His Son not
sparing;
Sent Him to die, I scarce can take it in;
That on the Cross, my burden gladly
bearing,
He bled and died to take away my sin.

Then sings my soul ...

When Christ shall come, with shout of
acclamation,
And take me home, what joy shall fill my
heart.

Then I shall bow, in humble adoration,
And then proclaim: "My God, how great
Thou art!"

Then sings my soul ...

*Russian hymn
Translated by Stuart K Hine
(1899-1989)*

The Aaronic Blessing:

May the LORD bless you and keep you;
May the LORD make his face to shine
upon you and be gracious to you;
May the LORD lift up his countenance
upon you and give you peace.
Amen.