

Looking for Light – Daily Inspirations

Looking for Light – We're pleased to introduce a new series of reflections for the Season of Epiphany. With short days and long nights, darkness can seem to catch up with us. So as we turn the corner into 2021, we'll reflect on the Light which has come into the world by looking at key references to light in the bible. And may that light shine in our hearts in this season.

Day 1 – Genesis 1:3,14-19 'He also made the stars'

A few weeks ago, our young people's group looked at space. As part of our session, we watched a fairly mind-blowing short video, which showed just how vast it is (if you want to watch it, this is the link: <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=FkQWpQd9Zdo>). We learned, for example, that the sun is a million times bigger than earth, but that the largest star – VY Canis Majoris (which roughly translates as 'Very Big Dog') – has a diameter 2,000 times larger than the sun!

But nothing compares to the size of a galaxy. If our solar system is a 20p piece, than the Milky Way is roughly the size of the USA. Seriously. That is *big*.

So big, in fact, we can't comprehend it. It's better to keep these thoughts as numbers and images, because no-one can really fathom this kind of scale in any meaningful way. Except God.

'He also made the stars.' (v17) This short phrase, offered almost as a throwaway, has to be one of the most incredible verses of all scripture. It barely merits a mention, and yet represents *a feat of creation far beyond anything we can imagine*. Carl Sagan once mused that the total number of stars in the universe would likely be as many as the grains of sand on the whole face of the earth. Next time you're at the beach, scoop up a handful of sand and contemplate that.

What does this really mean? Simply this: *our God is a great big God*. Plenty big enough for our doubts and fears, plenty big enough for our problems – and the world's. And if that is true, then he is well able to hold us in his hand, even in these dark and confusing times.

It has never been more important to seize this glorious truth: our God is a great big God. Let's place ourselves in *this* God's hands today, and comfort ourselves in the vastness of his presence. Let's pray big prayers to a big God. He also made the stars!

As we begin this series today, let me finish with the words of a famous hymn, and may it also be your prayer, as it is mine:

Thou whose Almighty word chaos and darkness heard – and took their flight.
Hear us we humbly pray, and where the gospel day sheds not its glorious ray:
Let there be light! Amen.

Looking for Light – Daily Inspirations

Day 2 – Numbers 6:22-27 ‘The light of God’s face’

When someone sneezes in your presence, I wonder what your first reaction is? In this day and age, possibly to get as far away from them as possible. But in more normal times, I imagine for many of us, the response would be an automatic: ‘Bless you!’

But what does it mean? The word ‘bless’ is one of those words which lots of us use, but we’re not sure why. Sometimes it can be patronising – ‘awwww, bless’ – much of the time it’s a comforting soundbite in response to a human nose repulsing germs, which dates back to the days of plague.

Which is all very well – but when it comes to blessing, I fear familiarity has bred contempt. So today, let’s recover its true power – it’s worth it!

The practice of blessing has a long and noble tradition. Indeed it goes back to the very first chapter of Genesis, where God blesses. Interestingly, even before he blesses human beings, God blesses fish and birds first. God then blesses Noah (ch9) and Abraham (ch12). Each time, the blessing gets bigger, and better. And this all reinforces the basic truth: *our God is a God who blesses*.

Which is really the heart of it, when it comes to what it means for us humans to practise blessing too. At its heart, *to bless is to bestow God’s goodness on something or someone*. We usually do that in one of two ways: sometimes when we bless we offer a concrete sign of that goodness – we do something practical to help them. At other times, when we bless it’s more of a prayer, naming things we’d like someone to experience, perhaps more in hope than expectation.

In today’s passage, Aaron, inspired by God, declares the most iconic blessing of all. The God would keep us, be gracious to us and grant us peace. And at its heart is this beautiful phrase: that *God’s face would shine upon us*. Or to use the adaptation quoted in Psalm 4, that God would ‘lift up the light of his countenance upon us.’ (Psalm 4:6)

God is light. And light always shines. It can’t help it. So this blessing is a prayer that God’s light would be directed towards us, for our wellbeing. It’s not just a prayer for us, but also for others. It’s a great prayer to pray over those we love, those in need of comfort and support.

May God’s glorious light shine on us today. And may it shine too on those we bless, in his name.

Day 3 – Psalm 97 ‘Light is sown on the righteous’

2020 was a bumper year for acorns. I can verify that this is true, walking past the Holm Oak at the front of Wavendon churchyard numerous times in October and November. It was fascinating to watch Autumnwatch on TV around the same time and discover the reason why.

Apparently every 4-7 years there is a bumper – or ‘mast’ – year. The reason why oak trees drop their seeds later than most other trees is that it coincides with the time of year when animals like squirrels and jays are storing food for winter. The more acorns, the more seeds to bury. Jays in particular like to bury acorns some distance from the original tree, about 1.5cm deep into the soil – perfect sowing conditions for a new oak, which can germinate safely over the winter whenever a jay forgets where all its acorns have been buried. So a mast year means lots of potential new oak trees and a boost to the wildlife population. All from one oak tree.

It’s amazing, isn’t it? The more we learn about nature, the more we discover how interconnected the balance of our ecosystem is. In this case squirrels and jays act as woodland farmers, sowing seeds for the next generation.

In our Psalm today we see another type of divine sowing. Psalm 97 is a great Psalm, which speaks beautifully of the majesty of God. But towards the end, we see this extraordinary phrase – ‘Light is sown on the righteous’ (v11). Modern translations will usually paraphrase it as ‘Light shines...’ But the original text is almost certainly the agricultural image – applied to light! What does it mean?

It’s actually the last of several ‘light’ images in this psalm, all related to God. First there is fire (v3, the main source of human light after sunset) – symbolising God’s purity and judgement. Then there is lightning (v4), which speaks of his power and majesty in creation. But then comes this last and most intimate image. Fire and lightning are awesome – scary, even. Is this how humans can only relate to God?

Not at all. For the righteous, God sows light upon them. This light brings joy (v11) and praise (v12). What a beautiful image! To sow is to plant things which bear fruit and feed us. So *God’s desire is to plant light into our lives*. Yes, God is majestic and awesome – but he is also the tender gardener, sowing good things into the lives of his children.

I’m not much good at gardening – but thankfully the divine gardener is not like me. As we dedicate ourselves to him, God sows light upon us. Where is God sowing light for you today? Pray that this light grows! And if light is hard to find, claim this verse as a promise, that we might again find joy in our hearts.

Looking for Light – Daily Inspirations

Day 4 – Psalm 119:105-112 ‘A lamp to my feet’

As the nights draw in, we’re in that time of year when light is at a premium. Nowadays this affects us much less than it would have done in ancient societies, lacking access to artificial light. Then, a full (or nearly full) moon and a clear sky made a huge difference. Otherwise, fire was pretty much the only source of light on a dark evening.

We sometimes experience the effects of true darkness. Last year there was a power-cut in Wavendon one evening, and for the first time in years we were in a dark house, at the end of a dark drive. We found our torches and realised that only one had batteries which actually worked! Eventually we found some matches and a bag of tea lights and lit as many as we could find. The whole process took so long it was probably only about 5 minutes later that the power came on again!

Navigating a dark house, trying not to trip on furniture, was a useful lesson in what walking in the dark really looks and feels like. It’s a healthy reminder that *light is precious*. Therefore, reliable sources of light are of immense value.

Today’s passage begins with this famous image about God’s word being a light to our path (v105), but truthfully I suspect most of us in the West don’t really connect with it to the same degree that our ancestors would have done. It’s easy for us to take light for granted. Similarly, our ease of access to Scripture is likewise a privilege that many Christians around the world are denied.

How we need both! Scripture and light. And here we see the two combined. God’s word lights our way. It is our reliable guide for life.

Light is often connected with truth and wisdom. The writer of this psalm goes on to outline some of the practical reasons why this wisdom is so valuable – for example, it preserves our life (v107) and acts as our inheritance (v111). Elsewhere in the psalm we read that it gives us hope, sustains us daily, rescues us from oppression and besetting addictions, and brings us delight. No wonder the writer concludes: ‘To all perfection I see a limit, but your commands are boundless.’ (v96)

Today, let’s pray to recapture a sense of wonder at God’s word, the true and enduring source of light. And let’s also pray for that light to shine on any particular needs and challenges we have. May that word be a lamp to our feet and a light to our path today.

Day 5 – Proverbs 13:1-10 ‘A light which shines brightly’

I wonder if you remember those pictures a few years ago which had other images embedded in them? If you looked closely and let your eyes glaze a little, suddenly a new, ‘hidden’ image would miraculously appear. Apparently 92% of the population could do them – I was one of the 8% who couldn’t. Make of that what you will!

The book of Proverbs sometimes seems to me a bit like those pictures. The sequence of proverbs seems random: they flit from subject to subject – always incisive, always arresting, but hard to collate into a coherent whole, hard to find the hidden pattern.

And yet, look a little more closely and there are patterns. Much of the teaching coalesces around two simple contrasts: the foolish and the wise, and the unrighteous and the righteous. The two are largely synonymous – the righteous are wise and vice versa. Ultimately *living in God’s light leads to both wisdom and righteousness*: life works, essentially. Doing the alternative fails the ultimate test.

There are also certain verses which seem to guide the teaching around it. Take today’s passage for example: verse 9 tells us that ‘the light of righteous shines brightly’, which is a lovely image in itself, and one picked up by Jesus a thousand years later in his famous teaching. However, it also functions as a helpful summary of much of what comes around it. *What does bright living look like?* It looks like: the capacity to take advice and instruction (v1, v10); careful attention to our words (v2,v3); the ability to moderate our appetites (v4); to love truth (v5). Ultimately this kind of wise or righteous living guards us in the situations we face (v6).

So often we can feel pushed down by negative stereotypes attached to faith or church – so, today, let’s soak in this lovely image of the light shining brightly. A life which takes advice, blesses with our lips, enjoys good things in moderation and loves truth and goodness is a beautiful thing, and one which also shines to those around us.

Where would you like your light to shine today? Which of today’s proverbs touches your heart? May God grant us grace to heed this timeless wisdom, and so to shine the light of his glorious love and truth into our lives, and out from our lives to those around us.

Day 6 – Isaiah 42:1-9 ‘The light which frees’

It’s amazing how scary a bedroom looks in the darkness. As a child I would often wake and look around the room in the middle of the night, sure that the various shapes were moving, and/or represented something malevolent or dangerous. Then, as the first rays of light broke through the cracks in my curtains, suddenly those terrifying shapes turned out to be a chest of drawers or a pile of clothes on the floor!

It’s not only children who feel like this, of course – who knows how many of you resonate with what I’ve just described! But this scene, which must be repeated in millions of bedrooms around the world every night, illustrates how perfectly darkness can feel like a form of imprisonment. We cower under the covers, trying to get back to sleep again. But, ultimately, *it is the light that frees us.*

Today’s passage is one of the great prophecies of God’s rescue for a broken nation. A new servant would come, filled with Spirit of God (v1), who would re-establish justice (v4), rescue God’s people, renew the covenant, but more than that, who would also reach out to the world (v6). The way this last promise is described is significant: this rescuer would be a ‘a light for the Gentiles’ (i.e. non-Jews) too.

What does that light look like? Verse 7 paints a beautiful picture: ‘to open eyes that are blind, to free captives from prison and to release from the dungeon those who sit in darkness.’

This darkness was more than just the temporary terror of night: it was the settled gloom of a world that is not as it should be: lacking hope, joy or peace.

And into this situation, God promises: light is coming! And this light will bring freedom.

Our current situation may not feel so far from the scene described in Isaiah 42. So these words are a particular comfort today. *We worship a God who comes to bring the light*, and all that that means – hope, joy, peace, purpose. The darkness does not win in the end, there is release for those who dwell in the light.

Today, pray for God’s light to fill you again, and to shine into your situation. Pray to feel a deeper freedom which is not bound by the current restrictions. And know that God is gentle – he does not break our bruised reeds (v3). May we put our hope in this God again today.

Day 7 – Isaiah 49:1-7 ‘To the ends of the earth’

Recently I heard the story of the Norwegian village that didn't receive a single scrap of sunlight for 6 whole months. Their solution was to install three mirrors which move and rotate on a specific axis, to capture the sunlight. Its tracking system enables them to track the sun, and reflect sunlight downwards to the main square.

It's a wonderful reminder of the power of light. And also that there are some parts of the world which miss out on light for long periods of the year. That said, it is also true that, at whatever point you're reading this today, much of our world is bathed in light. The way that our earth rotates means that sunlight extends to the ends of the earth.

In today's reading, we see a similar promise of global spiritual light. In the second of the great servant songs of Isaiah, God promises *a new light for the whole world*. The blessings enjoyed by Israel would soon be available to all (v6): which had always been the plan, but had not quite come to fruition before now. As people gazed on the ruins of Jerusalem, and wondered if life would ever recover, a new hope was springing up: one that was too big to be held within one people, but would stretch across the globe. This light would bring God's salvation 'to the ends of the earth.'

It's easy to take this glorious truth for granted. We're so used to the idea of universal access to God, we forget how rare it is. Virtually all other worldviews place some sort of limit on who's 'in', but not the God of the bible. The grace of the one true God is available for all.

As humans we are made in the image of God, who is light. It follows that *we were made to live in light* – not just the light of the sun, but the light of the Son, too. When we pray, there will be thousands of people, maybe millions too, praying at that exact moment. Likewise when we sing. A global chorus of unceasing prayer and praise, as day follows night, and night follows day. It echoes the unending glory of heaven, where God is eternally praised.

So today, and every day, our small voice joins with millions of others across the world and throughout eternity, all worshipping the true light, the true servant who sets us free. May that thought lift our hearts today. And may it also cause us to offer prayers of thanks and support for all who will pray and praise in Jesus' name across the world today.

Looking for Light – Daily Inspirations

Day 8 – Isaiah 59:15b-60:3 ‘Rise and shine!’

‘Wakey, wakey – rise and shine!’ That phrase certainly takes me back to my childhood – maybe it does yours too. Or maybe you’ve used it yourself to try and rouse sleepy children or grandchildren. But have you ever wondered where that phrase comes from?

Well, wonder no more – in all likelihood you’ve just read the original version of it in Isaiah chapter 60 and verse 1: ‘Arise, shine...’ Long before we rose and shone – or more likely, flickered reluctantly – God was declaring it over his chosen people 2,500 years ago. They too were living in a time of darkness (v2) – only not the darkness of an early morning, but of a situation of defeat and judgement. And into this situation God speaks a succession of great promises: of hope, of renewal, and also of light. We’ve looked at a couple of these promises in the last two days, and here is one more to lift our spirits.

Let’s notice first that *God doesn’t ask us to do anything he hasn’t done first*. It is God who rises and shines on us (v2). We rise and shine with his reflected light. A light which reaches to the nations, and to those who rule them (v3). A light which declares the glory of God into our situations (v1). To a world that is looking for light, God declares: ‘Your light has come!’

To a defeated people, this felt like the brightness of a new dawn (v3). And this global work of God would usher in an age when people would revere him across the world (59:19).

God gave this to his people 2,500 years ago as a solemn promise – a covenant (59:21). A covenant which remains in force now. We too have this light in our hearts. We too have this word on our lips and God’s Spirit upon us.

In this season which feels dark to many, let’s recover the power of an old saying which speaks not just of a new day, but of the ancient and enduring promise of God. *Rise and shine!* The glory of God rises on you. Even here, even today.

*** Day 9 – John 1:1-9 ‘A light in the darkness’**

‘The true light that gives light to everyone was coming into the world.’ (v9) But why did the light come? To answer that, I’m going to take you back about 10 years to a time when my children were small and we were in a supermarket. Isaac at the time was obsessed with torches. It seemed like every time we entered a shop which sold any sort of hardware, we would come out with another type of torch. And so one summer’s day, in the middle of the day, when it’s about as bright as it can possibly be, there we were, standing at the tills about to buy another torch with whatever was left of Isaac’s pocket money. Which we did.

And as we left the shop Isaac grabbed my arm and shouted: ‘Make it dark, Daddy, make it dark!’

It’s great isn’t it, when your kids are young and they think you can do *everything*. You not only look after them and play games and make their food and make them feel safe, but you can make it *dark*, you probably built the house they live in and made the car you drive. Electricity comes out of your fingertips and the planets move at your command. They don’t know that your knees are shot and you can put your back out just bending down to tie your shoelaces and you can barely rewire a plug, let alone build a house. You’re daddy, you can do *everything*: ‘Make it dark, Daddy, make it dark!’

The purpose of light is darkness. No point in light otherwise. That was true in the beginning: ‘The earth was formless and empty, and God said “Let there be light.”’ And it’s true now – as St John says: ‘The light shines in the darkness, and the darkness has not overcome it.’ (v5)

Looking around our world, there’s enough darkness, isn’t there? And if we’re honest, we know the darkness is not just out there, it’s *in here* – in our hearts. Greed, compassion fatigue, anger, pride... whatever it is, it’s a darkness that needs the light.

This is why the light came: to bring us life, to put an end to our darkness – ‘that life was the light of all humankind.’ (v4) And that light still shines in the darkness. It shines today, it shines in the hearts of millions around the world – and the darkness does *not* overcome it. Never has, never will.

Today, let’s give thanks for that light, a light which never fades or blows out, which brings us warmth and peace, guidance and security – as light always does. And perhaps take a few moments too, to pray that this beautiful light draws others to Jesus, people that you love.

**** Day 10 – John 3:16-21 ‘Come into the light’**

A few years ago, some friends and I were out walking in the woods and got lost. It was approaching winter and by 4.30pm it was dark. All of our phones had run out of charge, apart from mine, which had a pathetic tiny little torchlight, only offering a few feet of watery beam. For an hour or so, we picked our way slowly through the undergrowth, frequently stepping into muddy puddles and hoping that we were vaguely heading towards our accommodation.

Eventually we came to a road, which we thought it best to follow, even though we had no idea what road it was. And finally, twenty or so minutes later we rounded a bend and the drive to the house hove into view. We opened the front door, dirty and weary, but immensely happy to find ourselves bathed in light. It was only a bulb in the hallway, but after two hours of almost total darkness, it might have been the glory of heaven.

There’s nothing like coming into the light, is there? After hours of darkness every night, the approaching dawn causes the birds to burst into song every day – first the robin, then the blackbird. We can’t translate birdsong – I wish we could – but I like to imagine that what they’re all singing is: ‘The light is coming! The light is coming!’

And Jesus describes the experience of meeting God in the exact same way – it’s like *coming into the light* (v21). Jesus himself is that light – as he declares in v19 – and coming to Jesus is like being bathed in his light.

It’s not an entirely comfortable image, as Jesus also admits that not everyone wants to be bathed in this light (v20). Just as light attracts moths but repels cockroaches, so Jesus’ light draws some, while others choose to hide from it. The reason is that such people prefer to retain the choice to keep doing evil things, even though in Christ such things can be forgiven and left in the past. But for those who want to live in the light of God’s love, healing and blessing, the response can only be one of joyful and thankful coming into that light.

Take a moment to give thanks today that God’s light has found you. Choose again to be bathed in that light. Declare that light over all parts of your life. And if there is any darkness ‘attached’ to you at present – ask for God’s light to shine there too. All things can be healed in the precious name of Christ. Thanks be to God!

Day 11 – John 7:50-8:12 ‘The light of the world’

You knew we’d get here eventually. Any series looking at the idea of light in the bible at some point has to cover these iconic words of Jesus in John chapter 8. All those glorious Old Testament promises of light that we’ve been soaking up over the last few days, those great prophecies about the coming hope, the coming Saviour.... and here is the fulfilment! Or as John puts it at the start of his gospel: ‘The true light that gives light to everyone was coming into the world.’ (1:9)

There’s not much I could say today which would add to the volumes written and spoken about this great declaration of Jesus. But I would just encourage us to think about the context in which Jesus spoke it. John begins v12 as follows: ‘When Jesus spoke again to the people...’ which implies that what Jesus says next in some way connects to what has happened before. He has something to share which throws light (pardon the pun) on recent events.

And what has just happened? Well, that is a matter of intense debate. It all depends on whether that famous story of the woman caught in adultery (vv1-11) is part of the original text or not. Let’s imagine for a moment that it isn’t: in which case the context is the debate that erupted between Jesus and the Pharisees at the end of chapter 7 after Jesus had declared that thirsty people should come to ‘drink’ the water of life from him. So it’s possible that this subsequent teaching that he is the light of life is a corollary to his also being the water of life.

My personal view, though, is that the story of the woman is original to the text, but has been largely excluded by the manuscript writers because it was too controversial. It’s more credible that something controversial was left out than inserted later. If that is true, then suddenly those famous words of Jesus in John 8:12 have a fascinating context. He declares that he is the light of the world immediately after this extraordinary encounter with the Pharisees and the woman.

Suddenly the follow-up sentence: ‘Whoever follows me will never walk in darkness but will have the light of life,’ has a direct application. In both cases the Pharisees and the woman were invited to confront their own darkness by Jesus and to choose light and life. For the woman, that meant a new start, and a new lifestyle. For the Pharisees that meant a new mindset, a new humility when confronting issues of sin and forgiveness in themselves and others. In both cases, it was *an invitation to turn their backs on darkness and to embrace the light.*

We too face that choice every day. We face personal darkness, the darkness of situations, as well as the physical darkness of this time of year. And into each, *Jesus invites us to receive the light of life.* The light of forgiveness and strength to face temptations and dark thoughts. The light of hope to shine into difficult situations. The light of Jesus’ own abiding presence to lift our spirits on cold winter evenings.

Let’s claim that light today. Jesus is not just the light of the world in general – he is *our* light. May we know the light of true and abundant life today.

Day 12 – Matthew 5:13-16 ‘We are the light, too’

The Roman writer Pliny talked about the two essentials of life as ‘sale et sole’ – salt and sun i.e. salt and light. And here in Matthew chapter 5, Jesus picks up on those same two images as metaphors for how we are to live as his followers. I love the combination of the two, as it characterises different facets of how we interact with the world around us: one subtle, the other obvious; one preventing decay, the other promoting goodness; but both powerful and influential, often from relatively small amounts/sources.

The focus today, naturally, is on the latter. And the key phrase here is towards the end, just four simple words: ‘let your light shine.’ Not *make* it shine – just.... *let* it shine.

The point here is that *light inevitably shines*. That’s what light does. It can’t do anything else. And if Jesus is the light, and his light dwells in us, then as those in whom Christ dwells, Jesus’ light will shine, in us and through us. Like a town on a hill, it’s hard to hide it.

That doesn’t stop many of us from trying, though! We’ve all had days, or weeks, or seasons when we’d prefer to lie low, when we felt the demands of ‘shining’ were too great to carry. Perhaps through a sense of unworthiness, or weariness, or doubt – but the effect was that we got that big bowl out of the cupboard, dusted it down and stuck it over our light.

I’m sure many of us can relate to that. But the problem is what then happens to the light. In Jesus’ day, all human-created light was essentially fire. Starve a fire of oxygen by concealing it and it eventually goes out. Jesus knew this, so his encouragement to avoid going down that road is *not just for his sake, but also for ours. We need the light*. We need its warmth and power inside us – to help us to live and to love, to care and to pray, to know peace, joy and purpose. Jesus our light is all of those things to us. In return, all he asks is that we let that light shine.

What a relief to know that we don’t have to make it shine! We just have to let it. May God grant us grace to do just that today. Perhaps we need to repent of trying to cover it up. Perhaps we need to pray for more courage, for a new determination to keep shining. Take heart – God is much more willing to forgive and to bless than we are. He loves that kind of prayer! So let’s seize our courage in both hands, and throw off that bowl. *Let the light shine*, and who knows how God will bless that today?

Day 13 – Matthew 6:19-25 ‘The lamp of the body’

Just once in my life I was able to have a drink with a friend at a grand old London club. It was the Carlton Club on Pall Mall, and one of my good friends was a member there – long story. I was duly warned the day before to make sure I was wearing a tie – no admittance without one! As it happens, despite the warning, as I seem to remember my friend actually turned up tie-less. There was a brief delay as the genteel doorman quietly produced a rack of ties from his cupboard, one of which my friend chose. Then it was up the stairs to lounge for a couple of hours on enormous Chesterfields. I could get used to it, I must confess.

Entry points matter. They certainly matter in elite establishments, who usually have all kinds of rules to make sure only the right sort are let in. Truthfully, I’m not sure if wearing a tie is necessarily a foolproof method of ensuring this – answers on a postcard, please – but there is a principle here which today’s passage addresses directly.

Let’s move location from a posh club to our souls and bodies. And what Jesus tells us today is that *what we let in is profoundly important*. Or to put it another way, we need ways of screening out ‘undesirables’. In this case, it’s definitely not people, all of whom are equally loved by God and made in his image. It’s the stuff of life: it’s attitudes and motivations, desire and direction.

Jesus has just told us that we are the light of the world – filled with God’s presence, reflecting that presence to others. We can’t hide it – we just need to let it shine as best we can. But *light needs fuel* – in ancient societies that would be material to burn; nowadays that might be electricity or battery power. Either way, for light to keep burning brightly, it needs careful attention.

Our eyes are the entry point for our souls (v22). If what we let in is only ‘good fuel’, then the light will burn ever more brightly. However, we can also dim it by letting in darkness (v23).

The context of the passage is that of greed and desire. Jesus has warned his listeners not to set our hearts on wealth, but rather on the things of the kingdom (v19-20). So often, our eyes can feast on material temptation: we can see the trinkets of the wealthy, and allow that into our souls. Or we can allow worry over our material circumstances to dominate our thinking and reduce our trust in God’s provision (v25).

Both such temptations are forms of ‘darkness’, as Jesus describes it – they corrode our souls. Instead we are to watch what we absorb, to keep ‘healthy eyes’, that our souls and bodies may be full of light.

What grabs our attention today? Is it helping your light to burn? May God grant us grace to be renewed through what we see, what we fix our eyes upon – that we may shine brightly, for his glory. Amen!

Day 14 – John 12:30-36 ‘While you have light’

I’m reading a book about mountaineering at the moment. I’m not much of a climber myself, but I find accounts of heroic feats on mountains fascinating. In the particular chapter I’ve just finished, a pair of climbers run out of daylight on a descent. With a sheer drop just five metres to their left, they find themselves stuck on a ledge for several hours through the night, unable to move. At one point, one of them accidentally knocks his helmet off the ledge and hears it clattering on the slopes below. Only when dawn broke were they able – shivering and stiff – to start descending again.

The author notes how the descent was relatively simple in the daylight – they even came across the helmet on the way down! – but the darkness had rendered it utterly impossible. They could only walk *while they had the light*.

Jesus climbed a fair few mountains in his time, though I doubt this was in his mind when he shared the wisdom of today’s passage. The basic principle is the same, though – ‘walk while you have the light, before darkness overtakes you.’ (v35)

In this case, the light is not that of the sun, but of the Son – Jesus has already referred to himself as the light of this world, and it is his light we are to walk in. This light is what illuminates both the depths of our heart, the eyes of our mind, and the paths of our life. *Jesus’ light enables us to be ‘children of light’* (v36). What a beautiful phrase that is!

Light feels in short supply at present. Literally, we are in the darkest two months of the year. But we also carry the challenges of this season – challenges which may make us feel ‘dark’. Today’s encouragement from Jesus is very simple, but very powerful: walk in his light. And if we have the light of Jesus – which we do – we might re-phrase that as: keep walking. Outwalk the darkness – stay ahead of it. Let Jesus’ light lead you: let it fill your heart, inspire your mind and guide your way.

Unlike Jesus’ listeners, we are the other side of Calvary. Jesus is not going away anytime soon. The darkness need not overtake us. His light shines on – permanently, powerfully, eternally. Let’s walk in the light today, and so live as the Father’s precious children of light.

Day 15 – Acts 9:1-18 ‘Seeing the light’

It’s a famous story, possibly the most famous conversion experience of them all. Saul the implacable opponent of Christians, on his way to cause more trouble in Damascus, meets Jesus directly and his life changes forever. Even his name changes!

It’s a timeless story, and many of us will know of similar dramatic conversions happening in people that we know, or that we’ve read about. People who usually went on to become great sharers of God’s good news with others. These stories lift our spirits, and perhaps today is a good time to dig one of those out and spend a few minutes marvelling at God’s love and mercy, and his power to change the human heart.

But let’s also observe very simply today that *Jesus meets Saul in light*. There is a strong connection between light and truth in the bible, so the light is partly about Saul discovering the truth of who Jesus is. There’s also a connection between light and holiness – when Jesus is transfigured on the mountaintop, his three friends saw his clothes become ‘white as a flash of lightning’. St John has a similar experience of Jesus’ face ‘shining like the sun in all its brilliance’ at the start of his Revelation. So when Jesus meets the ruthlessly pure (or so he thought) Saul in a flash of light, suddenly Saul is confronted with the awesome purity, perfection and love of the Almighty.

‘Saul, why do you persecute *me*?’ Not my people – ‘me’. Jesus so identifies with his people that an attack on them is an attack on him. We may be fortunate to live in a time and a place when we are free to practise our faith. But it is still no small encouragement to know *how much Jesus is for us*. Our wellbeing, our safety, matters to him. Today may be a moment to claim that promise – perhaps there is something where you need Jesus to defend you at the moment. Ask him boldly – Jesus himself encourages it (Luke 11:5-13).

And Jesus still meets us in light now. The light of His word inspiring our minds; the light of his love warming our hearts. May that light be precious to us – and may it lift our hearts and minds today.

Day 16 – Romans 13:8-14 ‘The armour of light’

A few years ago, while visiting a castle with the family, I tried on a chain mail vest. It was very heavy! Probably at least 20 pounds in weight: whilst it was comforting to feel momentarily invincible (sort of), the thought of staggering round a battlefield wearing not just this, but all kinds of other metal protection was less than appealing. Apparently the typical weight for a full set of armour in the Middle Ages was around 60 lbs. Admittedly this is roughly the same as a combat backpack for a modern soldier, albeit a backpack is designed to keep the movement of legs and arms completely free, a benefit not available to the medieval knight. Either way, I was glad to remove the vest, which I must confess I did with some difficulty, and much to the amusement of my family.

Thankfully, in today’s passage we’re encouraged to wear another type of armour, which doesn’t weigh anything at all: *the armour of light* (v12). St Paul is here addressing candidly the challenges of living as a Christian in the world, and from his own experience he knows we need protection.

But what is this ‘armour of light’? In this passage we see three components: first *the light of truth*. Paul reminds us that our understanding matters (v11) – he points to the reality of the world around us, and also to the great encouragement that we are closer to the fullness of our salvation than we were before. This remains as true now as it did then – we are closer to the finishing line, so let’s keep going!

Secondly, *the light of holiness*. Paul urges us to keep our lifestyles pure (v13), in particular our thought lives – if we don’t gratify those, then we’re less likely to indulge in the things those thoughts lead to. As someone once observed, Jesus encourages us to pray ‘lead us not into temptation’ because once we’re in temptation, it’s hard to get out of it.

So far, so good – and you may have noticed that these ideas of light as reflecting both truth and purity were also those we dwelt on yesterday. But there’s a third one here too – *the light of love*. Ultimately it is love that enables us to dwell in light. Love, as Paul says, is the fulfilment of God’s law (v10). Let us therefore love each other, that we too might be ambassadors of light.

Truth, purity and love – this is the armour of light. May God grant us grace to wear this armour today – and may this defend not just our own hearts, but those of others as well.

Day 17 – 1 John (First letter of John) 1:1-10 – God is light!

‘Now all has been heard, here is the conclusion of the matter.’ So ends the book of Ecclesiastes, as the wise teacher reflects on the mysteries of life and delivers the verdict. In many ways this first chapter of John’s first letter performs a similar role. St. John joins the dots for us and draws a very simple, but profound, conclusion.

There are only three nouns in the bible used to describe God which aren’t names, but rather define the essence of God’s being: God is love, God is Spirit and God is, you guessed it – light.

The clue was there right at the start – in the third verse of the bible, God declares over creation: ‘Let there be light.’ Thousands of years later, St John articulates why: God can call forth light because he possesses light within himself. *God is light*.

It follows, then, that when God comes to earth, the divine son can likewise declare: ‘I am the light of the world.’ And the darkness does not overcome it.

But the good news doesn’t end there. As Jesus’ followers are united with him in his death and resurrection, so we too become the light of the world – shining the good news of God’s love and truth to those around us.

So John’s advice to us is simple: *walk in the light* – the light of God, the light of the Son. As humans, we’ll always be tempted towards the darkness, and John acknowledges this openly. We all sin (v8), in other words we all do things that fall short of God’s glory. But God is faithful and just, and longs to forgive – indeed he *will* forgive (v9), that we might continue to walk in the light, in the path of God’s abundant, eternal life (v2).

And the ultimate purpose of it all? Union with God and with Jesus (v3). The word ‘fellowship’ is a bit weak, the original *koinonia* means ‘oneness’ – a deep sharing together.

So, as we draw this season ‘Looking for light’ to a close, let’s resolve again to walk in the light, to confess the darkness and see it healed, and to find renewed hope and expectation that God’s light continues to shine in our world. Amen, come Lord Jesus.