



The Apostle

St. Aidan's Orthodox Church
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Reflections on the Scriptures LIGHT



For this talk I chose to reflect on verses 7-12 in Psalm 36 and verses 6-8 in Psalm 4.

Verse 9: "For with You is the fountain of life; in Your light we can see light."

This you will recognise as the words in the Great Doxology sung at the close of Matins on Sundays. In fact the idea of light is woven like a silver thread throughout the scriptures and indeed through worship itself. From Genesis through to Revelation we hear about light in its various forms. We are illumined by the Word which gives us the Divine Light of grace and wisdom, but it is only through faith and mercy that we can continue to absorb the Light and benefit from it.

We are illumined first in baptism and continue to be illumined in prayer and worship if we listen to the words of wisdom in the liturgies and pray for enlightenment in our hearts. Soon, in the Lenten Liturgies of the Pre-sanctified Gifts, we will be blessed by the Priest with the words: "The Light of Christ illumines all." and at the end of Great Lent we will partake of the light of the Paschal candle on Easter morning.

Another very profound manifestation of the uncreated light is that of the Transfiguration when we sing: "The true Light has appeared and grants enlightenment to all." These are manifestations of the

presence of God which can be an inner light seen by the noetic eye. Sometimes a joyful experience but at other times a light which awakens us to the inner self by revealing to heart and mind the dark corners of the inner self showing up our sins and transgression, calling us to repentance and to a closer relationship with God.

I am reminded here of the words of Blessed Augustine – "Yesterday you understood a little; today you understand better; tomorrow you will understand better still; the Light of God is growing in you."

But the light can also be a natural, physical light – Genesis – "Let there be light."

We have the beautiful light of dawn, for instance when the sun rises on the frosty earth, but I especially love the light of the sky reflected on water particularly over the sea which is why, when I am in need of immersion in prayer, I take myself off to Rhos-on-Sea for a few days. If I am awake at dawn I go to the open window and watch the sun rise over the sea; a picture which changes every second. Then, after breakfast, I arm myself with t-light and matches and walk a short distance along the coast to the cell of St. Trillo where there is a stone altar with a spring of fresh water underneath. I light the candle and meditate with St. Trillo, St. Winifred and St. Dwynwen, contemporary hermits of the late 5th century living about 30 miles apart from one another. The beauty of candlelight, the sound of the sea and the peace of that place are certainly most conducive to prayer.

Returning to the Psalm 4:6 "There are many who say: 'Who will show us any good? Lord, lift up the light of Your countenance upon us.'"

This awakens my conscience to my neglect in praying for the suffering people in the dark corners of our world. I do always try to be aware of the needs of the people around me and especially those who have asked for my prayers but I know I am negligent in praying for those I can't see and don't know and yet they are even more needful of prayer. We see such darkness in the world. We witness the atrocities on TV. They invade our comfortable space in our homes but do I pray often enough for the light of Christ to shine into these dark places and to give these suffering people a glimmer of hope? I remind myself to make a renewed, concentrated effort to remember them in prayer. We do, of course, always pray for the church and for the world every Sunday in the Divine Liturgy, in the litanies and in the intercessions, but daily, concentrated private prayer is also very important. At this time our prayer is essential to the suffering people in Gaza who need to be able to say: "I will both lie down in peace, and sleep; for You alone, O Lord, make me dwell in safety." Ps. 4:8.

Returning to the words of Psalm 36 – "For with You is the fountain of life...."

Augustine says of this verse: "That which is light is also a spring because it satisfies the thirsty and enlightens the blind," so I pray that the blind may see that bloodshed is not the answer to conflict but words of wisdom can, and will, shed light on those dark placed if we ask for it in prayer.

St. Simeon's prayer about light:

"Light, simple and to be adored,
Light which at times hides itself, at times unites itself

Wholly, as it seems to me, to us, your servants.

Light, spiritually contemplated from afar.

Light, suddenly revealed within us.

Light sometimes like to a fire which kindles,

Sometimes to running water....

My humble, tormented soul is on fire, it is on fire and flames."

And a final prayer from Lev Gillet, the famous "monk of the Eastern Church":

"O Thou Who art the Light of the world

Grant us to advance from illumination to illumination

That Thy will may always be done in us. Amen."

Dwynwen East

Key references to the light in the Scriptures — (Editor)

Genesis 1:3 Then God said, "Let there be **light**"; and there was **light**.

Psalms 27:1 The LORD is my **light** and my salvation; Whom shall I fear? The LORD is the strength of my life; Of whom shall I be afraid?

Psalms 36:9 For with You is the fountain of life; In Your **light** we see **light**.

Isaiah 9:2 The people who walked in darkness Have seen a great **light**; Those who dwelt in the land of the shadow of death, Upon them a **light** has shined.

Isaiah 60:1 Arise, shine; For your **light** has come! And the glory of the LORD is risen upon you.

Matthew 4:16 The people who sat in darkness have seen a great **light**, And upon those who sat in the region and shadow of death Light has dawned."

Matthew 17

1 Now after six days Jesus took Peter, James, and John his brother, led them up on a high mountain by themselves; 2 and He was transfigured before

them. His face shone like the sun, and His clothes became as white as the **light**. 3 And behold, Moses and Elijah appeared to them, talking with Him.

John 1 In Him was life, and the life was the **light** of men. And the **light** shines in the darkness, and the darkness did not comprehend it That was the true **Light** which gives **light** to every man coming into the world.

John 8:12 Then Jesus spoke to them again, saying, "I am the **light** of the world. He who follows Me shall not walk in darkness, but have the **light** of life."

2 Corinthians 4:6 For it is the God who commanded **light** to shine out of darkness, who has shone in our hearts to give the **light** of the knowledge of the glory of God in the face of Jesus Christ.

1 John 1:5 This is the message which we have heard from Him and declare to you, that God is **light** and in Him is no darkness at all.

Revelation 21:23 The city had no need of the sun or of the moon to shine in it, for the glory of God illuminated it. The Lamb is its **light**.

The famous encounter between St. Seraphim of Sarov and Nicholas Motovilov



Father Seraphim replied: "I have already told you, your Godliness, that it is very simple and I have related in detail how people come to be in the Spirit of God and how we can recognize His presence in us. So what do you want, my son?"

"I want to understand it well," I said.

Then Father Seraphim took me very firmly by the shoulders and said: "We are both in the Spirit of God now, my son. Why don't you look at me?"

I replied: "I cannot look, Father, because your eyes are flashing like lightning. Your face has become brighter than the sun, and my eyes ache with pain."

Father Seraphim said: "Don't be alarmed, your Godliness! Now you yourself have become as bright as I am. You are now in the fullness of the Spirit of God yourself; otherwise you would not be able to see me as I am."

Then, bending his head towards me, he whispered softly in my ear: "Thank the Lord God for His unutterable mercy to us! You saw that I did not even cross myself; and only in my heart I prayed mentally to the Lord God and said within myself: 'Lord, grant him to see clearly with his bodily eyes that descent of Thy Spirit which Thou grantest to Thy servants when Thou art pleased to appear in the light of Thy magnificent glory.' And you see, my son, the Lord instantly fulfilled the humble prayer of poor Seraphim. How then shall we not thank Him for this unspeakable gift to us both? Even to the greatest hermits, my son, the Lord God does not always show His mercy in this way. This grace of God, like a loving mother, has been pleased to comfort your contrite heart at the intercession of the Mother of God herself. But why, my son, do you not look me in the eyes? Just look, and don't be afraid! The Lord is with us!"

After these words I glanced at his face and there came over me an even greater reverent awe. Imagine in the centre of the sun, in the dazzling light of its midday rays, the face of a man talking to you. You see the movement of his lips and the changing expression of his eyes, you hear his voice, you feel someone holding your shoulders; yet you do not see his hands, you do not even see yourself or his figure, but only a blinding light spreading far around for several yards and illumining with its glaring sheen both the snow-blanket which covered the forest glade and the snow-flakes which besprinkled me and the great Elder. You can imagine the state I was in!