

Dorset South & West. Written Service.
Sunday July 6th 2025: Bible Month
Week One: Embracing God & All Reality.
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Call to Worship.

The Word became flesh and made his dwelling among us. We have seen his glory, the glory of the one and only Son, who came from the Father, full of grace and truth.

STF 106

God, 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!

Christ, you have come to bring
on your redeeming wing
healing and sight,
health to the sick in mind,
sight to the inly blind,
o to all humankind
let there be light!

Spirit of truth and love,
life-giving, holy Dove,
speed forth your flight;
move on the waters' face,
bearing the lamp of grace,
and in earth's darkest place
let there be light!

Blessèd and holy Three,
glorious Trinity,
Wisdom, Love, Might,
boundless as ocean's tide
rolling in fullest pride,
through the world far and wide
let there be light!

Prayers of adoration and confession

Heavenly Father, we thank You for sending Your only begotten Son into our world. We know that He perfectly understands us and our needs. As we seek to worship you today let His light shine forth through us. We thank You that together as Father and Son that You created a good world, a very good world, for us to live in and enjoy. Though our world is no longer as You made it for us, because sin entered the world and because we have sinned, we know that Jesus Christ came into the world to save us from sin and remake us as children of God. As we study Your Word through John's Gospel in this Bible month, help us to learn more about the Word that became flesh and Your Word written, the scriptures. We praise You and honour You, because You have given us the understanding that no matter what happens in this life, the darkness can never overcome You or Your light, Jesus Christ, the light who lives within us. We praise you for the words of light and life that illuminates our way as we walk with you. **Amen**

Bible reading John 1:1-14

In the beginning was the Word, and the Word was with God, and the Word was God. He was with God in the beginning. Through him all things were made; without him nothing was made that has been made. In him was life, and that life was the light of all people. The light shines in the darkness, and the darkness has not overcome it.

There was a man sent from God whose name was John. He came as a witness to testify concerning that light, so that through him all might believe. He himself was not the light; he came only as a witness to the light.

The true light that gives light to everyone was coming into the world. He was in the world, and though the world was made through him, the world did not recognise him. He came to that which was his own, but his own did not receive him. Yet to all who did receive him, to those who believed in his name, he gave the right to become children of God— children born not of natural descent, nor of human decision or a husband's will, but born of God.

The Word became flesh and made his dwelling among us. We have seen his glory, the glory of the one and only Son, who came from the Father, full of grace and truth.

Reflection

The Gospel of John was the last of the four Gospels to be written in about 85 AD. The stories of the life of Christ had been recorded by Matthew, Mark and Luke. These first three Gospels are called the Synoptic Gospels. The word "synoptic" means "to see together." This means that the first three Gospels contain many of the same stories and teachings, but told from a different angle. So what is John going to add to these already established gospels? John's Gospel is certainly very different. John tells us about the ministry of Christ in a manner that the other Gospel writers do not touch on. John was part of that inner circle of

disciples and known as 'the beloved disciple'. 'The great challenge of John's Gospel' as our study guide for this Bible month says, 'is to welcome being loved like this by accepting the gift of eternal life.'

In this opening chapter, John paints a picture of Jesus: The Word Of God, and in that image I want to touch on just three of the many truths about the Word of God, that are revealed in these verses and the rest of this first chapter in John's Gospel.

God, the Creator:

I do enjoy reading a good book but quite often I find I have to go back to the first few pages and revisit how the book begins. I forget the opening facts and how things began which is integral to understanding how the story unfolds. In this our first week of Bible Month, where we are reading through The gospel of John we are revisiting not a work of fiction but a foundation document about the love of God for us. Those wonderful words that trip off the tongue too easily, "in the beginning...." words that repeat the words of Genesis 1:1 So often we need to go back to the beginning to understand what the way forward is. There's a story about a very special pipe organ in a church in a remote Swiss village. People would come from far and wide just to hear the lovely tunes of this organ. One day something went wrong with the pipe organ. Musicians and experts from around the world tried to repair it. No one could find the fault. It was made unique, customised and no one really knew how to fix it and restore it to play wonderful harmonies and not discordant sounds. After some time, one old man visited and asked "Why wasn't the pipe organ being used?" "It's not playing right," answered the church staff. "Let me try." Since it has been lying there, the staff reluctantly agreed to let the old man try his hand at it. For two days the old man worked in almost total silence. Then on the third day - at noon - suddenly the music came. The pipe organ played the best music ever after so many years. The people in the village heard the beautiful music. They came to the church to see. The old man was playing at the organ. After he finished, one man asked, "How did you fix it? How did you manage to restore this magnificent instrument when even the world's experts could not?"

The old man said, "It was I who built this organ fifty years ago. I created it, and now I have restored it." I don't know if that story is true or has been embellished over time with gospel overlays. However it does reflect the essence of the first few words of our Gospel of John. In Genesis chapter one God made us and our world, in the beginning was God. He created us. Then as we read on we see how disharmony enters into the world. John chapter one reminds us of our beginnings and that in the beginning was God, the word of life. Our world is broken, living in disharmony and disarray and John reminds us that the one constant that has never changed and is still present is God. We came into being through Him. Almost in a child like pure innocence we know "Daddy can fix it and will". If we turn to God and embrace him, he will restore us.

The life was the light of all people.

God is the light that gives us life. 'In him was life, and that life was the light of all people'. Lighthouses are among the most fascinating of man-made structures. Their unique and essential purpose makes each one a thing of exquisite beauty and purpose. Seafarers seeking safety on a stormy night find a beam from the shore as precious as life itself. Philip Bliss wrote numerous hymns and worked with Ira Sankey on the hymn book, 'Sacred songs and solos'. We have only one of his hymns included in our current hymn book STF 361 'Man of sorrows what a name.' One of the many hymns he wrote was about a lighthouse:

Brightly beams our Father's mercy
from his lighthouse evermore,
But to us he gives the keeping
of the lights along the shore.

The story behind this hymn is that during a stormy night on Lake Erie, a ship struggled to enter Cleveland harbour. The captain could see the lighthouse but the "lower lights" along the shore, which guided ships through the channel, were extinguished. The ship missed the channel and was wrecked, with many lives lost. Dwight L. Moody used this tragic event in a sermon to emphasise that while God provides the overarching guidance (the "great light-house"), individuals are responsible for being the "lower lights," shining their influence to help others navigate life's challenges and find safety. Philip Bliss, who was leading music at Moody's revival meeting, was deeply moved by the story. He wrote the hymn "Let the Lower Lights be Burning," which later became known as "Brightly Beams Our Father's Mercy," to capture the message of our individual responsibility and service. The hymn's message is a call to action, encouraging individuals to be a source of guidance and support for others, especially those struggling or facing difficult times. It highlights the idea that even small acts of kindness and service can have a significant impact on someone's life. In the small section of John chapter one that we are considering today, we read about another John, John the Baptist. We can call him a Beacon of light. He dedicated his life to challenging people to live lives that reflected the light of God. To repent of all the darkness in their hearts and minds and to live as children of God. John, the gospel writer says of him, 'He himself was not the light; he came only as a witness to the light.' So he was not a great light but as in Bliss's analogy, a lower light.

This idea of lower and higher lights should be something that we are familiar with. Especially if we visit Portland. We know that there are three lighthouses on Portland and the ones perhaps more commonly known are of course the lower and higher lighthouses. I wonder which one you are drawn to most? From Roman times beacons were lit on Branscombe Hill and on Verne hill. That is when there was plenty of fuel. However in hard times of shortage the lights were not lit. In 1716 two coal fired lighthouses were built. Again with

limitations owing to the lack of fuel. So in 1788 Trinity House commissioned the installation of Argand lamps at the Old Higher Lighthouse. It was the first lighthouse in Britain to be fitted with these lamps, which consisted of a wick enclosed in a glass tube which gave a clean, intense light roughly ten times brighter than before.

At the same time, Weymouth builder William Johns was commissioned to build a new tower at the Lower Lighthouse. He produced an elegant 63-foot-high tower with Gothic-style doors and windows and, inside, a spiral Portland stone staircase which led up to the lantern house, where a system of special lens lights was developed by Thomas Rogers to concentrate the light from six Argand lamps into a series of intense fixed beams which reached up to 18 miles out to sea on a clear night. That must have been an awesome time in history. Light extended and lives directed to safety and safe havens. Both Lighthouses were rebuilt in 1869 but replaced by the Portland Bill lighthouse in 1906 and subsequently remotely operated. However enough of local history, what of our present day stories? Could we be described as witnesses to The Light? How are we operating as God's lower lights? Do people see us as beacons of God's light, dispelling the darkness by the way we use the faith we have in Christ to fuel our inner light?

The Darkness cannot overcome it.

John's Gospel is full of symbolism and analogies and next week our study guide moves us onto look at what are known as the signs. This week has really been about identity. In the whole of John chapter one there are seven descriptions of who Jesus is and we have just touched on two or three. The Creator and The Life that is The Light. Who is Jesus to you? How would you describe him to someone enquiring about your faith? I guess our description would differ from day to day and our circumstances. So far we have touched on the fact that God is our Creator and that sometimes we need him to come and fix us or the world around us. He guides us through difficult situations and paths and sheds light upon our darkness. As much as we can marvel at the advancement of man made innovations that shed light. We know that things can fail for all sorts of reasons. However He is the light that shines and can never be extinguished. Darkness can not overcome it. What is darkness? We use the word to express a physical absence of light and the terrible events that are so 'dark' in our world. Experience's and horror's that seem to have no light or life in them. Jesus is never absent from us. His light and presence is always with us even in the moments when we can't focus on anything else but what we are facing, He is there, the light is not overcome by the darkness. The message of the cross is just that. The powers of darkness took their most powerful shot and crucified God's Son. However as we recall in the words of the creed, our affirmation of faith. "He descended to the dead. On the third day he rose again;" Even death and all the powers of darkness could not extinguish the light of Christ from our world. I guess there are very few people who relish walking through darkness. The light at the end of the tunnel is a great sight. I remember diving in UK waters and how some would call off doing the dive because it was too dark 'down there'. I loved it! Only because I had a powerful torch, so I took 'the light' with me and I had a Skipper that I knew I could rely on. I used to try to encourage others to come and use their lights and my stock phrase was, "it's like punching holes in the darkness and you never know what delights your going to see." Light of course attracts and all sorts of fantastic marine creatures would swim into your torch, awesome to behold creation so close. How are you punching holes in the darkness? Are you taking the time and the risks to see what wonders God will uncover? There is darkness all around us. Turn on the news or read a newspaper and it's there in your face. Locally and globally. Sadly the media believes bad news sells. We are easy prey to darkness. Can you resist a bit of gossip? And what will the nature of the juicy gossip be? Someone's scandal? I love to watch the good old days television programs where the villain gets caught and there's no violence, unnecessary language or behaviour. Real feel good television shows, but the channels that show them have to find financial support and so you get long commercial breaks that remind you that death and funerals are costly and upsetting. Animals in the UK and elsewhere are suffering from neglect and cruelty. Children all over the world, are abused or are in terrible poverty and suffering. So even in the cosy distraction of watching a lighthearted show we are reminded of the very real darkness in our world. Darkness is a present reality but we have the light of Christ that the darkness cannot overcome. We are called to be the lower lights channeling our light towards, "The true light that gives light to everyone". By the power of Christ, Let's punch some holes in the darkness!

STF 55

Immortal, invisible, God only wise,
in light inaccessible hid from our eyes,
most blessed, most glorious, the Ancient of Days,
almighty, victorious, thy great name we praise.

Unresting, unchanging, and silent as light,
nor wanting, nor wasting, thou rulest in might -
thy justice like mountains high soaring above
thy clouds which are fountains of goodness and
love.

To all life thou givest, to both great and small;
in all life thou livest, the true life of all;

we blossom and flourish as leaves on the tree,
and wither and perish; but naught changeth thee.

Great Father of glory, pure Father of light,
thine angels adore thee, all veiling their sight;
all praise we would render: O help us to see
'tis only the splendour of light hideth thee.

Immortal, invisible, God only wise,
in light inaccessible hid from our eyes,
most blessed, most glorious, the Ancient of Days,
almighty, victorious, thy great name we praise.

Prayers of Intercession.

Let us pray for the many places in our world that are in 'darkness'.

We pray for those who we know that are suffering and are unwell. For those troubled with worries and problems that seem insurmountable. We take a moment to think of those who are on our minds and we bring them before you.

Lord in your mercy hear our prayer and bring your light and life into their lives.

We pray for those who offer themselves as beacons of hope in our world. We pray for all those who work as volunteers amidst the vulnerable, the dispossessed and those in desperate situations. We think of what is happening in our world today. The places where violence, injustice and oppression are prevalent. Where people are afraid for their lives and safety.

We take a moment to think of those who are on our minds and we bring them before you.

Lord in your mercy hear our prayer and bring your light and life into their lives.

The world is a beautiful place full of the wonders of creation. You give to us a special place to live in and enjoy. You even give the gift of co-creation. We delight in the advancement of science and technology. However our greed and shortsightedness destroys our planet. We pray for all who work to keep us mindful of our need to preserve and protect the world. Who remind us to share our resources and be mindful of the needs of others. Help us to 'turn back the tide' and to create sustainable solutions to the many problems in our world.

Lord in your mercy hear our prayer and bring your light and life into the lives of all people. Amen

The Lord's Prayer.

STF 82

O Lord, my God, when I in awesome wonder
consider all the works thy hand hath made,
I see the stars, I hear the mighty thunder,
thy power throughout the universe displayed:

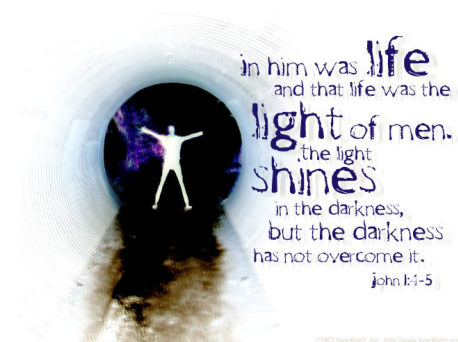
*Then sings my soul, my Saviour God, to thee:
how great thou art, how great thou art!*

*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 hear the brook, and feel the gentle breeze:

And 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:

When Christ shall come with shout of acclamation
and take me home - what joy shall fill my heart;
then shall I bow in humble adoration,
and there proclaim: my God, how great thou art:



The Blessing

May your light O Lord, shine brightly in every dark situation we face,
bringing hope, peace, and joy.

Help us to trust in your power and presence,
knowing that you are always with us
and that your light will never be extinguished. **Amen.**