

**“One Little Candle”
January 4, 2009**

The magi from the east followed a star that finally rested above the light of the world.

Isaiah tells us that “The people who walked in darkness have seen a great light.”

The Gospel of John tells us that

We celebrate Christmas as a festival of light, in the church and in and on our homes.

The winter solstice has always brought on a celebration of light.

What can it mean for Jesus to say, “I am the light of the world”?

What were the magi really seeking? What are you really seeking?

Stephen Hawking, the Newton chair at Cambridge, will tell you that light is the ultimate constant in the universe, that it always travels at 186,000 miles per second, that light transmits energy, radiation, and information. Or ask a third-grader to put a sunbeam through a prism and you will see the spectrum of a rainbow. Physics can tell us a great deal about light. But there’s one thing physics has never explained, namely, what exactly do we mean by that word “light”? What is it? We know it when we see it, but we can’t really explain what it is. Unlike space or time, light cannot be defined over against anything else. Light simply exists.

Quantum Theory—the photon—unit of action that cannot be subdivided

Light comes in whole units—quanta—universal in function

Creation of particles themselves—a photon creates a particle

Spiritual—has no properties that matter possesses—mass, charge, position, time

Only one person sees each photon

Unpredictable, immaterial

Biophotonics—inner light, life force, light exchange, all beings are intricately related

Bioluminescence

We are all one, we are all part of one source, we are part of each other.

What does it mean for Jesus to say, “I am the light of the world”? In the Gospel of Matthew: “You are the light of the world. Do not hide your light under a bushel basket.”

St. Serpahim Seraphim of Sarov (1759-1833), Saint of the Russian Orthodox Church: His favorite sayings were, “The aim of the Christian life is the acquisition of the Holy Spirit” and “Acquire the Spirit of Peace and a thousand souls will be converted around you!”

“Come, son, why do you not look me in the eyes? Just look and fear not! The Lord is with us!”

After these words I looked in his face and there came over me an even greater reverential awe. Imagine in the center of the sun, in the dazzling brilliance of his midday rays, the face of the man who talks with you. You see the movement of his lips and the changing expression of his eyes, you hear his voice, you feel someone grasp your shoulders; yet you do not see the hands, you do not even see yourself or his figure, but only a blinding light spreading several yards around and throwing a sparkling radiance across the snow blanket on the glade and into the snowflakes which besprinkled the great elder and me. Can one imagine the state in which I then found myself?”

Seraphim “was himself a living prayer.” He was buoyantly happy, simultaneously spending his time in the company of his “heavenly visitors” and the “poor in spirit” who came to seek his guidance. Even the animals of the forest came to know the friendship of the gentle Seraphim, and he would on frequent occasions seek out the solitude of the wilderness. He addressed every visitor as “my joy” and greeted them by falling down on his knees.

A Russian pilgrim tells of seeking this holy man. When he saw a bright glowing off in the forest, he approached cautiously. When he was close enough to the light to see what caused it, he saw that it was Seraphim on his knees in prayer, glowing brightly from within.

He taught that “God is fire, warming and igniting the heart and inward parts. So, if we feel coldness in our hearts, which is from the devil (for the devil is cold), then let us call the Lord: He, in coming, will warm our heart with perfect love, not only towards Himself, but to our neighbors as well. And the coldness of the despiser of good will run from the face of His warmth.”

One day, while chopping wood, he was attacked by a gang of thieves who beat him mercilessly until they thought he was dead. Seraphim never resisted and was beaten with the handle of his own axe. The thieves were looking for money, but all they found in his hut was an [icon](#) of the [Theotokos](#) (Virgin Mary). The incident left Seraphim with a hunched back for the rest of his life. However, at the thieves’ trial he pleaded to the judge for mercy on their behalf.

After this incident Seraphim spent a thousand successive nights on a rock in continuous prayer with his arms raised to the sky, an almost super-human feat of [asceticism](#), especially considering the pain he was already in from his injuries.

In 1991, St. Seraphim’s relics were rediscovered after being hidden in a Soviet anti-religious museum for seventy years.

Widely esteemed in his lifetime, St. Seraphim is one of the most beloved saints of the Orthodox Church.

An old Jewish story tells of a rabbi who asked his disciples, “How do you know when the night is giving way and the morning is coming?”

One of the disciples stood and said, “Teacher, won’t you know that night is fading when, through the dim light, you can see an animal and recognize whether it is a sheep or a dog?”

The rabbi answered, “No.”

”Rabbi,” asked another. “Won’t you know that the dawn is coming when you can see clearly enough to distinguish whether a tree is a fig or an olive?”

”No,” responded the teacher. “You’ll know that the night has passed when you can look at any man and any woman and discern that you are looking at a brother or a sister. Until you can see with that clarity, the night will always be with us.”

Do we need a bigger telescope or wider reflective lens in order to capture more light?

Do our artificial lights drown out natural light?

“Tom tells about a night when he was a teenager. He and his friends were walking around the neighborhood. It was a warm night and very dark. Suddenly one of them saw a police car and shouted. They hadn’t done anything wrong, but they didn’t want to be seen, either. So they began to run. The police car saw them and watched them turn down an alley. Tom tripped and knocked over some trashcans. The police officers got out the car and began to go after them.

One of the officers turned on a searchlight. Tom looked around for his friends, but didn't see them. All he saw was that burning, searing searchlight, looking for him.

"Tom jumped behind those trashcans, only to find his friends huddled there. With frantic energy they tried to hide, pulling trash over their heads and hoping to blend in. The spotlight fell on Tom. "Come out where we can see you," said the voice behind the light. Tom stood up where he was, covered in garbage.

"What are you doing?" said the voice.

Tom stammered, "Nothing."

The voice said, "I can't hear you. What are you doing?"

Tom said, "Officer, I wasn't doing anything wrong; I saw the light, I ran, I knocked over these garbage cans. I'm sorry about the disturbance." The searchlight was beaming into his eyes, blinding him. He stood there in the light with nowhere to hide.

Then the voice said, "I think I recognize you. Don't you live around the corner?"

"Yes," he stammered. His heart was racing, and he thought to himself, "My life is ruined. If I don't get arrested for disturbing the peace, something worse will happen: this officer is going to tell my parents."

But then the voice behind the light said something unexpected. "Son, I'm not here to punish you; I'm here to protect you." As he stood before that searchlight, Tom says he caught a glimpse of what it means to stand before Jesus, who is the Light of the World. There he was, fully exposed yet completely protected. He was fully revealed, yet free from unnecessary punishment. He stood hip-deep in garbage, yet cleaner than he had ever felt, somehow cleansed by a light that cast no shadow. In that moment, he saw something of what it means to stand in the presence of Jesus Christ, who is full of truth and full of grace.

"I am the light of the world," says Jesus. "Whoever follows me will never walk in darkness but will have the light of life" (8:12). And the church affirms, "The light shines in the darkness, and no darkness shall overcome it" (1:5).

Melanie: **we were so close there was no room
we bled inside each others wounds
we all had caught the same disease
and we all sang the songs of peace
some came to sing, some came to pray
some came to keep the dark away
so raise the candles high
cause if you don't we could stay
black against the sky
oh oh raise them higher again
and if you do we could stay dry against the rain**

"One Little Candle" (by George Mysel and Joseph Maloy Roach)

*It is better to light just one little candle
Than to stumble in the dark.
Better far that you light just one little candle,
All you need is a tiny spark.
If we'd all say a prayer that the world would be free,
A wonderful dawn of a new day we'd see...
And if everyone lit just one little candle,
What a bright world this would be.*

What a bright world this would be.