

to the devil's child. In *Darkness Into Light* (dir. David Fairman, 2016, UK), an archaeologist is mysteriously transported to 1st-century CE Palestine where he encounters Jesus, the disciples, and Roman soldiers.

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See also → Conversion; → Cosmos and Cosmology; → Creation and Cosmogony; → Ethics; → Evil; → Good; → Tabor Light

Light of the World

- I. New Testament
- II. Christianity
- III. Islam
- IV. Literature
- V. Visual Arts
- VI. Music
- VII. Film

I. New Testament

The expression "light of the world" (φῶς τοῦ κόσμου) appears three times in the NT: Matt 5:14, John 8:12, and John 9:5. In Matthew, it occurs within Jesus' so-called "Sermon on the Mount" (Matt 5–7) to describe his disciples: "you are the light of the world." A series of related images follow (city on a hill, lamp on a stand) that illustrate Jesus' exhortation in v. 16: "let your light shine before others, so that they may see your good works and give glory to your Father in heaven."

In John, the phrase refers solely to Jesus, who alone can say, "I am the light of the world." Jesus first identifies himself as such in 8:12 while teaching in the temple, probably on the last day of the festival of Booths (cf. 7:2, 37; 8:20), within a context punctuated with controversy about Jesus' identity. Some associate the image with the tradition of candle-lighting at this festival (*mSuk* 5:2–3). References to following and walking in 8:12b connote discipleship and suggest a possible analogy to the pillar of fire that led the Israelites in the wilderness (Exod 13:21; cf. John 12:35; 1 John 2:11). In John 9:5, Jesus authenticates his identity as the "light of the world" by healing a man born blind (9:1–12), whose newfound sight becomes a metaphor for faith and a foil for spiritual blindness (9:35–40). John's pervasive use of light/darkness imagery (cf. 1:4–5, 7–9; 3:19–21; 5:35; 11:9–10; 12:35–36, 46) and repeated "I am" statements (cf. 6:35, 51; 8:58; 10:7, 9, 14; 11:25; 14:6; 15:1, 5) surely heighten the significance of the expression.

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II. Christianity

That God is light is a frequent trope in the HB/OT (e.g., Pss 27:1; 36:9) as well as in the NT. The Jesus of the Fourth Evangelist thus draws on centuries of association when making a strong "I am" statement in John 8:12 in which he identifies himself as the light of the world.

Early Christian interpretations of Jesus in relation to light took shape in the polemical/apologetical context against gnostics, whose dualism drew on light vs. darkness motifs (Nagel). John 8:12 figured prominently in Justin Martyr's articulation of Jesus being "light from light" which eventually became codified in Nicene Christianity (*Dial.* 65). Its greatest exponent, Athanasius of Alexandria, considered salvation to be a form of illumination. His *Vita Antonii* frequently depicts the desert monk assailed by the powers of darkness but clinging to the "power of divine light" (*Vit. Ant.* 1.35, PG 26:860). Upon being made bishop Athanasius wrote, "Salvation proceeds from the savior just as illumination proceeds from the light." (*Exp. fid.* 3.12). He also uses the combination of John 1:9 and John 8:12 to argue for a theology of deification, that the children of the light become light. "We, too, have become the temple of God and are made the sons of God ... It was we who were improved by him [the *Logos* of God] for he is the true light that enlightens every man." (*C. A.* 1.69, PG 26:100).

Thomas Aquinas relates the meaning of the saying to the preceding scene in John 8:1–11, the woman caught in adultery. Jesus forgives her sins, and thus Thomas argues, "So our Lord shows them that he is in the universal light of the entire world, saying, I am the light of the world, not just of Galilee, or of Palestine, or of Judea." (*Comm. Jo.* 6.1104). He also frequently uses the passage to reject Manichaean interpretations of evil as darkness as well as Nestorian Christologies. His near contemporary Gregory Palamas introduced a novel dimension in the reception history of the passage by identifying Christ's statement as a prefiguration of the uncreated "Tabor" light of his transfiguration (*Hom.* 3.1).

Martin Luther in his Reformation preaching is among the first to note the "historical" context of the saying, noting that it was precisely against the Pharisees that the claim was directed. Their typification of a "works righteousness" religion necessi-

tated first-person speech from Christ in which he announced and embodied the gospel (WA 33:517). His colleague Philipp Melancthon contrasts Jesus saying “I am the light of the world” with the prologue’s declaration that John the Baptist in 1:8, “He himself was not the light,” and Jesus’ teaching in Matt 5:14 that “You are the light of the world.” This is done to “teach that Jesus Christ, as the substantial and life-giving light, is the one who justifies. The other prophets and John are witnesses to that light.” (MO 14:1056).

John Oecolampadius, reformer of Basel, compared Jesus’ saying in 8:12 with the angel of Exod 13:21 and 14:24 who appeared as a pillar of fire leading Israel at night. “Thus, Christ is an angel for us whom we should follow and who will lead us into eternal life” (*Annot. Euang. Io.* 168). He thus speaks for many exhortatory interpreters of the passage who aim to connect human efforts with divine example in bringing light to dark places. John Calvin falls into this group; his interpretation of the passage focuses on its second half, “whoever follows me will never walk in darkness.” (*Comm. John* 1:213).

Friedrich Schleiermacher cites John 8:12 as an example of Christ’s coyness in spelling out details of his person and work (2016: § 85), and Albrecht Ritschl concurs, noting that followers of Christ in fact walk in darkness nearly all the time (1882: 2:248). The young Karl Barth follows in their footsteps when he insists that confessing Christ as the light of the world does not and must not mean explaining away or giving excuses for the darkness that always threatens the light.

Because of its highly adaptable resonance, “Light of the World” has given its name to churches, statues, and movements. The front cover of the *Oxford Handbook of the Reception of the Bible* (2011) shows a Las Vegas-style neon sign with a shooting star and the phrase “Jesus is the light of the world.” It has been especially popular as a namesake in the global south. Many South African Roman Catholic churches, for instance, are called *Lux Mundi* and it has even given the name of a restorationist/primitivist denomination in Mexico called “La Luz del Mundo.”

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III. Islam

The Islamic tradition has similar, although not identical images to those found in the NT concerning both Jesus as the Light of the World (John 8:12) and the faithful who are called to be a light in the world (Matt 5:14–16). The most famous example in the Qur’an is the Light Verse (S 24:35): “... God guides whoever He will to his Light; God draws such comparisons for people; God has full knowledge of everything – shining out in houses of worship” (S 24: 35–36). Al-Ghazālī (d. 1111 CE), states in his *Mishkāt al-Anwār*, the “Niche of Lights,” that everyone who truly desires to understand the relationship between God and the world must recognize God’s transcendence; the Qur’anic symbolism should be understood not only literally, but also through the use of metaphors and similes such as this use of light shining in houses. In addition, Islamic mystics in the 12th century debated the “light of Muḥammad” (*al-Nūr al-Muḥammadi*), which in a cosmological-metaphysical understanding refers to the pre-cosmic soul of the Prophet who represents the first creation of God, the self-appearance of divine consciousness. Thus Light the World is used of Jesus in the NT and of Muḥammad in Islamic tradition in a similar way.

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IV. Literature

The term “Light of the World” applied by Jesus to himself in John 8:12 and 9:5 and to the disciples in Matt 5:14 has had an intermittent literary reception, given strong guidance in the 19th century by the influence of the eponymous painting of Holman Hunt. A highpoint in the early period is the ninth cent. Germanic text the *Heliand* which makes the theme of Jesus Christ as the light of the world central to its presentation of the gospel story. In this “Saxon Gospel,” as G. Ronald Murphy terms it, the journey is from the light introduced by the Savior’s birth through the fulcrum of the Transfiguration and on to the luminous glory of the Resurrection. Typical of this work, during the episode of the healing of the blind men outside Jericho, it is “light” which is given even more emphasis than “sight.”

Dante in *Paradiso* 33 has the pilgrim go through an epiphanic experience of the divine light which was communicated through Christ. Albert Cirillo draws attention to the strong influence of John 8:12 on bk. 3 of John Milton’s *Paradise Lost*, where the distinction between two sorts of light, *lux* (created light) and *lumen* (God’s eternal light) depends upon

the hinterland of the Vulgate version. Among the juvenilia of the poet James Thomson is “A Pastoral Betwixt David, Thirsis and the Angel Gabriel” (from around 1714) which seems to look forward to his masterpiece *The Seasons* by imagining that the light brought by Emmanuel abolishing Winter. Holman Hunt’s painting *The Light of the World*, depicting Jesus knocking at a door while holding a lantern, first appeared in 1854 and was widely disseminated. Julie Melnyk links it with the feminization of Christ in the writings of a range of women poets including Elizabeth Barrett Browning and Christina Rossetti.

The novelist George Eliot rejected the imagery as “too medieval and pietistic” (Witemeyer: 153). Yet, its broad influence is demonstrated by the fact that the Irish playwright Lady Gregory saw her play of 1911, *The Deliverer*, as the “theatrical counterpart of Holman Hunt’s *The Light of the World*” (Rempport: 44). Two important modern novels which use the Johannine theme of the Light of the World as the foil for their depiction of human wickedness are Joseph Conrad’s *The Secret Agent* (1907) and William Faulkner’s *Light in August* (1932). In the former the constant antithesis between light and dark informs the central conceit of Verloc as a man bridging two worlds, that of the anarchists and the London police. The critic Elliott Gose connects the imagery with Conrad’s view of the city as “a cruel devourer of the world’s light” (Gose: 44). In Faulkner’s novel the character Lena Grove radiates the light which the lynching of Joe Christmas threatens to extinguish. The Nicaraguan poet Ernesto Cardenal’s *Cántico Cósmico* (1993; ET: *Cosmic Canticle* 2002), associates the light brought by Christ with the sun worship found in ancient Egyptian and Polynesian religion.

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V. Visual Arts

Light of the World (1851–52) was the first exhibited painting of Jesus Christ by William Holman Hunt (1827–1910). It depicts Christ knocking at an overgrown, closed door, his other hand holding a lan-

tern which illuminates the scene. The production and reception of the painting was closely bound up with biblical and religious contexts. Hunt stated that the subject matter was based on his own experience of religious conversion (Bronkhurst: 151). He claimed to have been inspired entirely by scripture, noting in 1865 that he drew on Rev 3:20, Rom 13:12, and Ps 119:105 – although contemporaries identified numerous other extra biblical sources too (Bronkhurst: 152). Revelation 3:20 (“Behold, I stand at the door and knock: if any man hear my voice, and open the door, I will come in to him, and will sup with him, and he with me”), literally encases the painting; it is inscribed on the frame of the first and third versions, and was printed in the catalogue when the painting was initially displayed at the Royal Academy in 1854. Hunt painted three versions; the second, smaller iteration (1853–57) is now housed at Manchester Art Gallery. The popularity of the painting, reproduced across the globe in engravings, combined with the relative inaccessibility of the first version (housed since 1873 in Keble College Chapel, Oxford), contributed to Hunt’s decision to paint a third version (1900–1904) (Bronkhurst: 289). This toured British settler colonies, visiting Canada, Australasia (where some four million people viewed it), and South Africa before being presented by its owner to St Paul’s Cathedral in 1908 (Maas: 122–203).

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VI. Music

The phrase “Light of the World” has inspired a wealth of compositions in music for the liturgical seasons of Advent, Christmas, and Easter, as well as large scale classical works based on John 8:12, including various settings in popular music for performances in other nonreligious settings.

Since the Middle Ages, Easter Vigil ceremonies in many Western Christian denominations have referenced Christ as the Light. This was, for instance, proclaimed in the medieval Latin Ceremony of Light through the versicle *Lumen Christi* (Light of Christ) during the solemn entrance procession of the Paschal Candle. Here, a deacon, or a priest in the absence of a deacon, heads the procession with the Paschal Candle lit from the Easter fire. Making its way up the central aisle, the procession stops on three separate occasions, to enable the deacon to raise the Paschal Candle aloft, and to intone the versicle, *Lumen Christi*, to which the congregation/choir respond, *Deo Gratias*. After the versicle’s third itera-

tion, the candles of the congregation are lit from the single flame of the Paschal candle, which symbolizes Christ's glorious presence in the world brought about by the splendor of his resurrection from the dead. The candles of the congregation remain lit for the recitation of the Easter Proclamation i.e., the *Exultet (Praeconium Paschale)*; see "Exultet") – a hymn of praise intoned *a cappella* by a deacon, priest, or cantor:

Exsult, let them exsult, the hosts of heaven,
 Exsult, let angel ministers of God exsult.
 Let the trumpet of salvation sound aloud
 Our mighty King's triumph!
 Be glad, let earth rejoice, glory floods her,
 Ablaze with light from her eternal King,
 Let all corners of the earth be glad,
 Knowing an end to gloom and darkness.
 ...

There are many advent hymns and anthems that tell of the coming of Christ the light of the world, among them "Christ Be Our Light" by Bernadette Farrell, "I am the Light of the World" by Jim Strathdee and Howard Thurman, "Christ is the World's True Light" to a melody by J. S. Bach and words by G. W. Briggs, and John Rutter's sublime setting of "A Gaelic Blessing" for chorus, organ, and harp. The latter features an ascending melody that climaxes on "light" to express the radiant effect of Christ's healing presence in the world ("Deep peace of Christ the light of the world to you"). There are many references to Christ as the Light of the World in Christmas carols, among them "O Come All Ye Faithful," "Angels from the Realms of Glory," "O Little Town of Bethlehem," "Silent Night," and "Hark the Herald Angel Sings." Popular worship songs based on this theme include the song "Light of the World" by Lauren Daigle on the Christmas album *Behold* (2016).

Simeon's words to Mary and Joseph upon seeing the baby Jesus at the Temple of Jerusalem for the ceremony of consecration of the firstborn son are known as the canticle, the *Nunc Dimittis* (Luke 2:28–35). It features in the evening liturgy of many Eastern and Western Christian traditions. Here Simeon prophesies that Jesus will be "a light to lighten the gentiles." It has been set to music by well known and lesser-known composers down through the history of music (see "Nunc dimittis").

On the theme of the light born of light, the anonymous 10th-century hymn text *O Nata Lux de lumine* (O Light Born of Light) is an ancient, seven-verse text, which formed part of the Morning Office at Lauds for the Feast of the Transfiguration. Its best-known settings, of two of the seven verses, are by Thomas Tallis (published in *Cantiones sacrae* 1575), and more recently by the American composer Morten Lauridsen in the third movement (*O Nata Lux*) of his Requiem entitled *Lux Aeterna*. The latter, composed in the year of his mother's death (1997), is unified by a reference to the light in all five move-

ments. It opens and closes with settings of two texts from the Requiem Mass (*Introitus: Requiem aeterna* and *Agnus Dei – Lux aeterna*). The movements in-between comprise the *Te Deum (In Te, Domine, Speravi)*, *O Nata Lux*, in which Jesus is named as the source of the light, and *Veni Sancte Spiritus*, which describes the Holy Spirit as the ray of light from heaven and as a light most blessed (*O lux beatissima*). The final movement, which opens with the *Agnus Dei*, reprises the opening section of the *Introitus* and concludes with a joyful Alleluia and final Amen.

There are many worship songs about walking with Christ the Light of Life, among them "O Light of Life" by Mack Wilberg and "Teach Me to Walk in the Light" by Clara McMaster. Popular children's worship songs include "The Light of the World" by the Hillsong Kids on the album *Tell the World* (2010), *Light of the World/Lumina Lumii* by the African Children's Choir (*Light of the World/Lumina Lumii*), and "He is the Light" and "Light of the World" by Cave Quest VBS whose catchy songs feature on You Tube. The theme also featured prominently in the Official World Youth Day theme song, entitled "Light of the World" by Richard Lebel, when it was performed in Toronto at an evening Vigil with Pope John Paul II on July 27th 2002.

Within Western classical music, Sir Arthur Sullivan composed the oratorio *The Light of the World* (1873) inspired by Holman Hunt's painting by the same name (1853–54) and other events in the life of Christ. Edward Elgar also composed a monumental oratorio by the same name, which focuses on the story of Christ restoring sight to the blind man from John's Gospel (John 9). It also includes other references to Christ the Good Shepherd and Christ the Light of the World (John 8:12). Works by Handel, the *Messiah* and the *Birthday Ode for Queen Anne*, also describe the presence of Christ's light with ascending melodies that soar to a climax on the reference to light. In more recent times, Czech composer and conductor Jaroslav Krček composed an oratorio *Stones to Bread* (2012), which contains a movement entitled "Light of the World" to a libretto inspired by Rudolph Steiner's Fifth Gospel as well as excerpts from John's Gospel. The words of the well-known African-American spiritual "This Little Light of Mine" by Harry Dixon Loes inspired by Matt 5:14–16, "let it shine, let it shine, let it shine" is a response to Christ's words in Matt 5:16 for people to live their lives inspired by Christ's words and actions.

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VII. Film

The biblical phrase "Light of the World" is featured in several movies. First, *The Light of the World* is the

title of a 2003 slideshow video by cartoonist Jack T. Chick (US). The video features more than 360 oil paintings strung together into a biblical narrative that begins with the creation of the world and ends with Jesus' ascension into the heavens. The movie preaches Jesus as the savior of the world and portrays all non-Christian religions (as well as Roman Catholicism) as the work of Satan.

Second, movies about the life and teachings of Jesus frequently include scenes of him using the phrase. For example, *The Visual Bible: The Gospel of John* (dir. Philip Saville, 2003, CA/UK) follows John's gospel closely and thus includes a portrayal of John 8:12 in which Jesus says, "I am the light of the world." In *The Visual Bible*, the audience for these words is a small group of Pharisees who are hostile to Jesus' message. Cecil B. DeMille's 1927 silent *The King of Kings* (US) gives Jesus' words an entirely different setting. In DeMille's version, Jesus is called upon to cure a small girl who is blind: "Lord, I have never seen the flowers nor the light. Wilt Thou open mine eyes?" pleads the child. As a celestial beam illuminates her, Jesus replies, "I am come a light into the world that whosoever believeth in me shall not abide in darkness." The girl's blindness is then cured.

Other films portray Matt 5:14, wherein Jesus tells *others* that *they* are the light of the world. For example, *Il vangelo secondo Matteo* (dir. Pier Paolo Pasolini, 1964, IT/FR, *The Gospel According to St. Matthew*) contains a sequence in which Jesus intones a number of teachings, including "You are the light of the world." The sequence is shot in close-up and focuses solely on Jesus' face, so his intended audience is not clear. In *The Greatest Story Ever Told* (dir. George Stevens, 1965, US), the Sermon on the Mount and Jesus' subsequent observations about salt and light are filmed in an extreme wide shot; what dominates the screen is not Jesus but rather the desert landscape behind him. In *The Visual Bible: Matthew* (dir. Regardt van den Bergh, 1993, ZA, *The Gospel According to Matthew*), Jesus preaches to a crowd on a mountainside about their being the salt of the earth and the light of the world. Rather than intoning the teaching solemnly, Jesus chuckles as he muses about the futility of flavorless salt and of lights that no one can see.

Finally, the 1973 musical *Godspell* (dir. David Greene, US) features a song titled "You Are the Light of the World." The number is performed as Jesus and the disciples frolic on a boat in New York Harbor – glimpses of the Statue of Liberty and of the twin towers of the World Trade Center are visible in the background. Interestingly, it is not Jesus who sings the lyrics but rather the disciples. This leaves the referent of the pronoun "you" ambiguous; it is not clear who, precisely, is the light of the

world. Is it Jesus, or New Yorkers, or the viewers of the film?

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Theresa Sanders

See also → Nunc Dimittis; → Sermon on the Mount; → Transfiguration of Jesus

Light unto the Nations

- I. Hebrew Bible/Old Testament
- II. Judaism

I. Hebrew Bible/Old Testament

1. Ancient Near Eastern Background. Light in the ANE was often associated with a deity (e.g., Egyptian sun-god Re, Mesopotamian sun-god Shamash, etc.). A key term in the Mesopotamian literature is *melammu* (meaning "radiance" or "splendor"), alongside *puluhtu*. During the 2nd millennium BCE, this term had more mythical connotations, denoting "the covering or outer layer of a person, being, or object, or rays emanating from a person or being, which visibly demonstrate the [supreme, irresistible] power of that person, being, or object" (Aster: 38). In the 1st millennium BCE, esp. during the Neo-Assyrian era, its meaning evolved to signify the royal propaganda of imperial military power, associated with radiance and the sun-disk, which the deity bestowed upon the king (Aster: 66–106).

The motif of light was thus commonly employed in royal titles, such as the Neo-Assyrian kings, Tiglath-pileser ("the light of all humankind") and Esarhaddon ("the light of the world"; Paul: 189). The motif of divine election before birth coincides with the special status and task of the appointed king, such as the last Neo-Babylonian king, Nabonidus: "I, Nabonidus, who was raised by [the god] Sin and [the goddess] Ningal, was chosen for this destiny while still in my mother's womb" (Paul: 189; cf. Isa 49:1, 5; Jer 1:5). Similarly, the Old Persian royal inscriptions attest to the creation formula of the deity's charging the chosen one for the commissioned tasks: "A great god is Ahuramazda / Who established this earth / Who established that sky ... Who made Darius king" (DNA 1–8); "Thus says the god YHWH / Who creates the heavens and stretches them out / Spreads out the earth and its offspring ... And I have grasped you by the hand" (Isa 42:5–6; Mitchell: 305–8).

Light, as an inherent symbol of a deity and elected human king, is the opposite of darkness, literally or figuratively. In the Balaam inscription from Deir 'Alla, we learn of this contrasting motif: "There is darkness ... and no light" (Paul: 519; cf. Gen 1:2–3; Isa 59:9). Also, in the Persian era, many Persepolis reliefs depict the Persian god Ahura-