

Light (KS2 and KS3)

My Irish mother used to urge us to hurry by saying we should 'run like a linty'. What? Well, a linty was a nickname for someone who lit the streetlamps in the days of gas lighting, and the lamps on their posts would often need the mantle changing, made of lint. As the linty had to hurry, and in changing mantles often got covered in lint fibres as he ran through the town from lamp to lamp, so he became a byword for someone in a great hurry. In this resource I want to slow him or her down and say we should all be thoughtful linties.

One of the great symbols of Christianity is light. 'Lighten our darkness' is the start of a familiar closing prayer in many Anglican services, the whole of creation began, we are told with the majestic 'Let there be light', and Jesus sensationally said: "I am the Light of the World" (John 8.12).

In the world up until the 19th Century, and in many parts still today, light means fire: candles, pitch, hearth fires, oil lamps, charcoal, anything that burns gives light. So, light meant heat, light could easily be extinguished, and kindling a fire/light was an arduous process, so don't let the fire go out! All of these thoughts are involved in Christian thinking about light at this time of increasingly short days and long nights. But it is not the physical facts of light that matter, it is the spiritual significance which you can find in everything from infant baptism (christening) through to praying for the souls of the dead, from referring to conversion as 'enlightenment' to prayer for guidance ('lighten our darkness') or to making use of external light to illuminate stained glass windows.

Let's concentrate on candles. At infant baptism in the major denominations a special candle is given and lit by the priest as a sign of that new life, a symbol of the one baptised, a picture of the light of Christ conquering the darkness of evil. Everyone who is baptised "walks in that light" for the rest of their lives, baptism being the start of that journey into faith and obedience. I quote the Anglican liturgy here:

Priest: God has delivered us from the dominion of darkness and has given us a place with the saints in light. You have received the light of Christ; walk in this light all the days of your life.

All Shine as a light in the world to the glory of God the Father.

This is how symbolism works here: Baptism does not of itself make you a believing Christian, which is why many Protestants delay it until a person can decide for themselves. However, baptising an infant, to cut a long story short, is seen as entering the family of faith prior to playing your part in later life. The light of the candle therefore serves:

- a. As a reminder of the truths of walking in the light of Christ in your life;
- b. As a reminder of Christ as the Light of the World;
- c. As a fire, not an electric bulb, which burns away deadwood, heats, and purifies precious things: it symbolises therefore the indwelling Holy Spirit who works in us to the glory of God.

To take one more instance, All Saints (or Hallows/Souls) Day. In the last 25 years we have been overtaken by the

commercialising of the evening before All Hallows Day reviving what are presumed to be ancient practices (a rather dubious claim) and encouraging people to dress up as the Dark Side. OK, for many this is a bit of fun. But if we instead remember the next day all the good and the great, the pioneers, saints and martyrs, heroes, both sung and unsung, it is a fantastic festival of lights, and we should be lighting candles and other illuminations to celebrate these – there is quite enough gloom around, so let's have some good news!

So, as the scripture says, 'God is Light, and in Him there is no darkness at all' (1 John 1.5). Further, we are also told God is the 'Father of lights' (James 1.17): we can translate 'lights' here as 'enlighteners' – God is the Father of all those who seek to bring light to shine in the world around. This we remember in the baptismal candle, and then promise to do as we live our lives as lints.

This resource was written by Richard Coupe, one of RE:ONLINE's Email a Believer team. If your class would like to ask a Christian representative any questions about their beliefs, or to see answers to previously asked questions please visit <http://pof.reonline.org.uk/people-of-faith/christianity/>