

Wednesday Reflection: Sun

Over the past three months we have considered God and the spiritual life through the medium of the manse garden. We began with the melodic song of blackbirds, the Dove of St Columba and, over the following weeks, we reflected on bats, fairies, hedgehogs, rabbits, mice, squirrels, apples, tortoises, and others besides. On this my last Wednesday Reflection for now, let us ponder the importance of the sun and its use as a symbol in our faith.

Each year at Christmas time, we sing with great gusto the hymn of Charles Wesley, *Hark! The herald angels sing*. We know the lines so well:

Peace on earth, and mercy mild,
God and sinners reconciled....

Veiled in flesh the Godhead see;
Hail, the Incarnate Deity.....

The final verse opens with these lines:

Hail, the heaven-born Prince of Peace!
Hail, the Sun of Righteousness!
Light and life to all he brings,
risen with healing in his wings.

Wesley used the metaphor of the sun as a reference to Jesus. He did so again in his devotional hymn, *Christ, whose glory fills the skies*. We sing:

Christ, the true, the only Light,
Sun of Righteousness, arise,
triumph o'er the shades of night.

The power of the sun is used dramatically to evoke and inform our sense of the Divine. In one of his hymns, the distinguished Victorian clergyman, John Keble, wrote of the Saviour as 'Sun of my soul'. In his hymn, *I heard the voice of Jesus say*, the Scottish churchman and hymnodist, Horatius Bonar, wrote:

I looked to Jesus, and I found
in him my Star, my Sun,
and in that light of life I'll walk,

till travelling days are done.

Present day hymnwriters also use of the metaphor of light and the shining sun. To the tune, *Christ be our Light*, in her hymn *Longing for light, we wait in darkness*, the Catholic writer Bernadette Farrell penned the chorus:

Christ, be our light!
Shine in our hearts.
Shine through the darkness.

Similarly, in his popular hymn, *Lord, the light of your love is shining*, Graham Kendrick wrote:

Shine, Jesus, shine,
Fill this land with the Father's glory

And, in verse 3:

As we gaze on your kingly brightness,
So our faces display your likeness....
Shine on me.....

In the ancient world, the Greek Titan god, Helios, was god of the sun. The Olympian deity, Apollo, was the god of archery, music, dance, healing, justice and the sun. In Egyptian mythology, the god Ra, the creator and giver of life, the King of gods, was the sun god. In the Bible, in the Book of Deuteronomy, the Israelites were strictly forbidden to worship the sun, moon or stars. Yet, in the prophetic writing of Malachi, on the 'Great Day of the LORD', at the coming of the Messiah, those who revere the name of God will see 'the sun of righteousness rise, with healing in its wings'. I wonder if, in the Aaronic blessing, we have a hint of the sun metaphor:

The Lord bless you and keep you;
the Lord make his face to shine upon you,
and be gracious unto you:
the Lord lift up his countenance upon you
and give you peace.

In the Gospel of John, Jesus is the 'Light of the world'. In Matthew's Gospel, 'the righteous will shine like the sun in the kingdom of their Father'.

Religious ideas evolve across time and through the creative interaction of cultures. It is no surprise that the ancients, biblical writers and the Church have used the symbol of the sun as joyful metaphor of God: the source and giver of life, healer, bearer of equity and justice, and the One who overcomes darkness. When next you see sunlight, think also of the God who gives life, the warmth of God's love, and the resurrection: sunrise always follows the night.