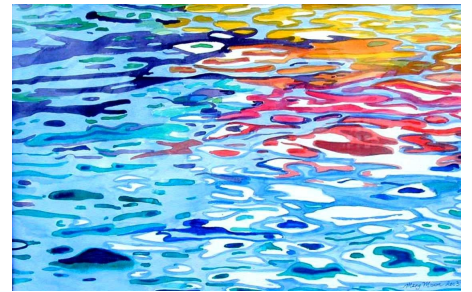




# Galaxies Evening Service 18 November 2007

Service by Pete Cowley



## Welcome:

Tonight we are looking at Hanukkah and what it means to the Jewish people.

## Gathering together:

**Leader:** Come step in the light of  
everyday.

Enter this place

as space with grace.

Open our hearts our ears and eyes  
with all who share some

Jesus faith

**ALL:** Let us worship God

## Introduction:

**Leader:**

**On the road to Jericho!**

It was no five minute miracle.

These things take time, You said, and You sat beside me, at the edge of the road,  
your hands on my eyes, slowly and gently removing my judgemental attitudes.

I admit I felt vulnerable. There's comfort in shadows. The world of light was so vast that if  
You hadn't been there, I might have changed my mind, but your touch spoke to my eyes and  
there was no going back.

As you healed my blindness, You asked me what I could see but I didn't have the words to  
describe the loveliness emerging from the light or what that loveliness was doing to my heart.

It was beauty, You said. Without the blindness of judgement, the eyes only see beauty, the  
heart knows only love. The heart that knows only love, You said, is in the presence of God.

I told You I couldn't see all that well as that,  
and You reminded me again  
that miracles took time.



Several [Hanukkiyot](#) on the eighth night of the festival.

### Affirmation of faith (said all together):

The bounty of God the Creator surrounds us with grace,  
spread in generous measures of loving creativity,  
poured forth for generation after generation in hopeful abundance,  
in an endless invitation to hospitality.

The feasting Christ walks in our scarce life  
as though all of us might be part of the celebration,  
as though each of us might be a guest at the banquet,  
as though we might all be together at the table,  
holding each other as precious,  
dying before we will give up love  
or life which is lived to the full.

The laughing Spirit moves in endless freedom  
stirring, surprising, bestowing gifts as she moves  
as though wisdom is foolishly faithful to hope,  
eternal living for truth and will not settle for less,  
as though we are worth the struggle  
and we could really be the emerging children of God

This we believe. This is the wonder of our God.

### Passing the Peace:

**Leader:** Now that we are reminded that God the free Spirit shares itself with us, we can share our peace and love with one another.

Let us feel the power of the earth that holds us together.

Let us celebrate our gifts in song and dance.

Let us all rejoice in our power and our beauty.

**All:** We open our hearts to the miracle of birth and the mystery of God's love in all Creation. We carry in us the divine light, which shone so brightly the night of Christ's birth. The gift of love, which we share tonight, deepens us as people, deepens us as sisters and brothers.



Each person shares hugs or whatever those around them.



### Notices:

If you have any notices to bring to our attention please speak up.

## Contemporary reflections:

### **Hanukkah - The festival of the lights!**

*Hanukkah*, from the Hebrew word for "dedication" or "consecration", marks the re-dedication of the Temple after its desecration by [Antiochus IV](#) and commemorates the "miracle of the container of oil." According to the [Talmud](#), at the re-dedication of the [Temple in Jerusalem](#) following the victory of the [Maccabees](#) over the [Seleucid Empire](#), there was only enough consecrated [olive oil](#) to fuel the eternal flame in the Temple for one day. Miraculously, the oil burned for eight days - which was the length of time it took to press, prepare and consecrate new oil.

#### The story goes like this:

Around 200 BC Jews lived as an autonomous people in the [land of Israel](#), also referred to as [Judea](#), which at that time was controlled by the [Seleucid king of Syria](#). The Jewish people paid taxes to Syria and accepted its legal authority, and by and large were free to follow their own faith, maintain their own jobs, and engage in trade.

By 175 BC [Antiochus IV Epiphanes](#) ascended to the Seleucid throne. At first little changed, but under his reign, the Temple in [Jerusalem](#) was looted, Jews were massacred, and [Judaism](#) was effectively outlawed. In 167 BC Antiochus ordered an altar to [Zeus](#) erected in the Temple.

Many modern scholars argue that the king may have been intervening in an internal civil war between the traditionalist Jews in the country and the Hellenized elite Jews in Jerusalem. These competed violently over who would be the High Priest, with traditionalists with Hebrew/Aramaic like [Onias](#) overthrown by Hellenizers with Greek names like Jason and Menelaus. As the conflict escalated, Antiochus took the side of the Hellenizers by prohibiting the religious practices the traditionalists had rallied around. This may explain why the king, in a total departure from Seleucid practice in all other places and times, banned the traditional religion of a whole people.[9]

In any case, Antiochus' actions proved to be a major miscalculation as they provoked a large-scale revolt. [Mattathias](#), a [Jewish priest](#), and his five sons Jochanan, [Simeon](#), [Eleazar](#), [Jonathan](#), and [Judah](#) led a rebellion against Antiochus. Judah became known as Judah Maccabee ("Judah the Hammer"). By 166 BC Mattathias had died, and Judah took his place as leader. By 165 BC the Jewish revolt against the Seleucid monarchy was successful. The Temple was liberated and rededicated. The festival of Hanukkah was instituted by [Judah Maccabee](#) and his brothers to celebrate this event.[10] After recovering [Jerusalem](#) and the Temple, Judah ordered the Temple to be cleansed, a new altar to be built in place of the polluted one and new holy vessels to be made. According to the [Talmud](#), oil was needed for the menorah in the Temple, which was supposed to burn throughout the night every night. But there was only enough oil to burn for one day, yet miraculously, it burned for eight days, the time



*Illustration 1: Hanukkah lamp unearthed near Jerusalem c.1900*

needed to prepare a fresh supply of oil for the menorah. An eight-day festival was declared to commemorate this miracle.

The version of the story in 1 Maccabees, on the other hand, states that an eight day celebration of songs and sacrifices was proclaimed upon rededication of the altar, and makes no mention of the miracle of the oil.<sup>[11]</sup> A number of historians believe that the reason for the eight-day celebration was that the first Hanukkah was in effect a belated celebration of the festivals of [Sukkot](#) and [Shemini Atzeret](#).<sup>[12]</sup> During the war the Jews were not able to celebrate Sukkot/Shemini Atzeret properly; the combined festivals also last eight days, and the Sukkot festivities featured the lighting of lamps in the Temple (Suk.v. 2-4). The historian [Josephus](#)<sup>[13]</sup> mentions the eight-day festival and its customs, but does not tell us the origin of the eight day lighting custom. Given that his audience was Hellenized Romans, perhaps his silence on the origin of the eight-day custom is due to its miraculous nature. In any event, he does report that lights were kindled in the household and the popular name of the festival was, therefore the "Festival of Lights" ("And from that time to this we celebrate this festival, and call it Lights").

It has been noted that Jewish festivals are connected to the harvesting of the Biblical seven fruits which Israel was famed for. [Pesach](#) is a celebration of the barley harvest, [Shavuot](#) of the wheat, [Sukkot](#) of the figs, dates, pomegranates and grapes, and Hanukkah of the [olives](#). The olive harvest is in November and [olive oil](#) would be ready in time for Hanukkah in December.

It has also been noted that the number eight has special significance in Jewish theology, as representing transcendence and the Jewish People's special role in human history. Seven is the number of days of creation, that is, of completion of the material cosmos, and also of the [classical planets](#). Eight, being one step beyond seven, represents the Infinite. Hence, the Eighth Day of the Assembly festival, mentioned above, is according to Jewish Law a festival for Jews only (unlike Sukkoth, when all peoples were welcome in Jerusalem). Similarly, the rite of circumcision, which brings a Jewish male into God's Covenant, is performed on the eighth day. Hence, Hanukkah's eight days (in celebration of monotheistic morality's victory over Hellenistic humanism) have great symbolic importance for practicing Jews.

Hanukkah is also mentioned in the [deuterocanonical books](#) of [1 Maccabees](#) and [2 Maccabees](#). 1 Maccabees states: "For eight days they celebrated the rededication of the altar. Then Judah and his brothers and the entire congregation of Israel decreed that the days of the rededication...should be observed...every year...for eight days. (1 Mac.4:56-59)" According to 2 Maccabees, "the Jews celebrated joyfully for eight days as on the feast of Booths."

The martyrdom of Hannah and her seven sons has also been linked to Hanukkah. According to the Talmudic story<sup>[1]</sup> and [Book of Maccabees](#), a Jewish woman named Hannah and her seven sons were tortured and executed by [Antiochus](#) for refusing to bow down to a statue and eat pork, in violation of Jewish law.

Historically, Hanukkah commemorates two events:

- The triumph of [Judaism](#)'s spiritual values as embodied in the [Torah](#) (symbolized by the [Menorah](#), since the Torah is compared to light) over [Hellenistic civilization](#) (considered darkness). Under [Antiochus IV](#), Jewish religious practices were outlawed, and Greek religious symbols were forcibly installed in the [Second Temple](#).

- The victory of the Jews over the armies of [Antiochus IV](#). The rebellion, begun by [Mattathias Maccabee](#) and continued by [Judah Maccabee](#) and his brothers, ended in a resounding victory of the "few against the many" and the rededication of the Second Temple.

Because Judaism as a religion shies away from glorifying military victories, because the [Hasmoneans](#) later became corrupt, and because civil war between Jews is viewed as deplorable, Hanukkah does not formally commemorate these historical events. Instead, it focuses on the Miracle of the Oil and the positive spiritual aspects of the Temple's rededication; The oil becomes a metaphor for the miraculous survival of the Jewish people through millennia of trials and tribulations.

From an anthropological perspective, it is hard not to draw parallels between Hanukkah observance and the celebrations of winter solstice one finds in so many other religions. Most significantly, Hanukkah always includes within its nights the darkest night of the year. This night is not winter solstice itself, but rather the new moon of Rosh Chodesh Tevet, the night closest to winter solstice in which there is no moonlight. The tradition of increasing the candle light over the days before and after the darkest night recalls in form more explicitly pagan customs to bring back the light of the sun.

### [Hanukkah ritual](#)

**Leader:** Blessed are You, Lord our God, King of the Universe, Who sanctified us with His commandments and commanded us to kindle the Hanukkah lights.

Blessed are You, Lord our God, King of the universe, Who performed wondrous deeds for our ancestors, in those days, at this moment.

Blessed are You, Lord our God, King of the universe, Who has kept us in life, sustained us, and brought us to this moment.

**Now we make a menorah and light it! Fergus will explain how it will be made. Then we light the candles.**

**Leader:** We light these lights For the miracles and the wonders, for the redemption and the battles that you made for our forefathers, in those days at this season, through your holy priests. During all eight days of Hanukkah these lights are sacred, and we are not permitted to make them serve except for to look at them in order to express thanks and praise to Your great Name for your miracles, Your wonders and Your salvations."

**Leader:** We acknowledge this festival of lights and what it means to the Jewish people past and present. May we too share the beauty of the miracle this represents and also shed our light for others to see. Let us take some time to reflect on these things.



### Great Spirit Prayer: (all together)

"Oh, Great Spirit, whose voice I hear in the wind,

Whose breath gives life to all the world.

Hear me; I need your strength and wisdom.

Let me walk in beauty, and make my eyes ever behold the red and purple sunset.

Make my hands respect the things you have made and my ears sharp to hear your voice

Make me wise so that I may understand the things you have taught my people.

Help me to remain calm and strong in the face of all that comes towards me.

Let me learn the lessons you have hidden in every leaf and rock.

Help me seek pure thoughts and act with the intention of helping others.

Help me find compassion without empathy overwhelming me.

I seek strength, not to be greater than my brother, but to fight my greatest enemy  
Myself.

Make me always ready to come to you with clean hands and straight eyes.

So when life fades, as the fading sunset, my spirit may come to you without shame.

### Departure:

As we depart from this place  
of light,

love,

and warm hearts

may we be a light to others

may we treat all we meet with loving-kindness

may we warm others hearts with our care and commitment  
to compassion, truth and justice

in all our dealings.

