When you think about it, the Hanukkah story is, in a funny way, about a miraculous increase in energy efficiency. An energy resource (olive oil) that was supposed to supply only enough energy for one night's worth of light was able to supply light for eight nights. That's an eightfold improvement in energy efficiency, akin to driving 2000 miles on one tank of gas. No wonder it was thought to represent divine intervention.

Almost by definition, a miracle isn't something we can expect in ordinary life. Even in its wildest dreams, EPA isn't going to be able give us gas-burning cars that get 250 miles per gallon or more on the highway. Actually, however, there's one area where we've come close to that kind of increase in efficiency, which turns out to involve lighting. An LED can deliver over seven times as much light for the same amount of power as an old-fashioned light bulb. Obviously, however, that would not have been an option for the Maccabees in 200 B.C.

This may just seem like a professor going off on a tangent — what else is new? — but after writing this post I discovered that a rabbi had also remarked on the holiday's connection to energy conservation. Connecting the holiday with something as mundane as energy efficiency may seem a bit whimsical. It may seem less so when we remember how seriously climate change threatens the world and how much we need to decrease energy use.

Whimsical or not, this side of the Hanukkah story is something that might be worth a moment of thought as the children are opening their presents.And to help protect the futures of those children, you might consider replacing your old bulbs and compact fluorescents with new LEDs.

It's called the "Festival of Lights," after all.