

**There is light at the end of the tunnel.** Grieving families, hard-pressed NHS staff, the elderly, vulnerable and those suffering in lockdown have indeed been experiencing a long period of darkness. The prospect of receiving a vaccine and suppressing the virus offers longed-for light transforming our lives. **It reminds us that darkness will not ultimately overcome the light.**

In the Bible darkness is generally pictured as negative -but notice, not as evil. It is not a battle between light and darkness. In Genesis it is the formless void or chaos that God's spirit gives order to, separating light from darkness. It is the raw material which needs shaping but is still part of God's creation. God says light is good but there is still darkness, or day and night. Darkness can be **threatening and destructive but it can also carry potential, hidden growth and renewal.** It is the other side of light, the passive and the active, the waiting and the fulfilment, winter and spring.

**When Israel was driven into exile in Babylon it was a time of darkness, of pain and despair, but also a time to reflect on their past and to learn new truths about God.** Isaiah looked forward to a new dawning of light for a people in darkness but that would only happen if they had learnt hard lessons from the darkness about God's demands for faithfulness, justice and mercy.

**Notice how in the gospels the beginning and the end of Jesus' life take place in darkness.** The shepherds hear the good news at night, the Magi follow a star through the darkness and God speaks to Joseph in dreams as he sleeps. We believe a world-changing event happened on that holy night. At the end John says Judas went out to betray him when it was dark, Jesus prayed in Gethsemane at night when the disciples deserted him, Matthew says darkness came over the land at his crucifixion. **We believe in his death Jesus overcame the darkness by entering into it, with the result on Easter morning of a new dawn for the world.**

The truth is that, even though it can be painful, darkness has its place in life as well as light. It is all God's creation and he may be found in both. Psalm 139 says "Surely darkness will cover me and light will become dark? But darkness is not dark to you, it is as light."

**Jesus redeemed the darkness by facing it, in the world around him and in himself .** He brought God's order to the storm on the lake, the sick and suffering and the oppressed and excluded. **But he could only do this because**

**he had faced his own darkness as depicted in the temptations in the wilderness and other challenges in his ministry.** That is why he could be humble, unwilling to condemn, and compassionate towards others. So he was able to face the forces of darkness and absorb them, not avoid, deny or reject them as humankind has typically done down the centuries.

John says that the light has never been overcome by darkness, but the darkness persists. **Some see the light Jesus brings and welcome it but others reject it.** And both groups are the opposite of what you would expect. The shepherds and Magi were the least likely to welcome the Christ whereas the religious leaders in Jerusalem should have been the first to greet his coming. **The paradox is that those who accept the light are those who accept their darkness, while those who reject the light do not accept their darkness.**

That is the truth about us too. **There is darkness within all of us that never goes away – we have to learn to live with it and hopefully not allow it to dominate us.** If we pretend it is not there or try to ignore it, it will find ways to undermine us and eventually break through our defences. And the strange thing is those dark aspects of our personalities are so often just the other side of our virtues. Our weaknesses and strengths are two sides of the same coin. I think of my own insecurities and anxieties that drive me to seek perfection, with all the stress that goes with it, but also result in some achievements.

We are all looking for the light at the end of the tunnel, the light that will overcome the darkness. **The Biblical perspective is that it is too simplistic to think the darkness will be eliminated by a vaccine.** The way the vaccine is being deployed across the world underlines this. Israel is swiftly completing the immunisation of its citizens with no regard for the Palestinians and the World Health Organisation is appealing to the rich nations not to forget refugees. **Until we acknowledge the depth of darkness we are actually in, we will not be able to welcome the true light.** That darkness includes the deep inequalities and injustices that disfigure our society, the lack of honour and accountability, the abuse of power, our measure of everything in terms of money, the narrow nationalism, the refusal to face our past failures, our lack of compassion – all these are aspects of turning our backs on God's ways and erecting false idols. Unless we change we cannot see the light.

God yearns to shed his light on our disordered world, to bring those in darkness into the light. **We who would be the people of light must be willing to call out the darkness in ourselves and the world for the true light to shine.**