

It's happened many times in our nation's recent history. There is a huge power failure. A whole city is shrouded in darkness. It lasts a number of days. Eventually people start looting; smashing shop windows, walking away with TVs and stereo systems; whatever they can carry.

In the dark, businesses were destroyed, not by hardened criminals, but by neighbors, by ordinary people who lived up the road, by normally law-abiding people. In the dark, something took over.

There is something dangerous about darkness, and everybody knows it; it hardly needs to be explained. Countless stories have been spun off of the theme, “Don't go out there in the dark.” In those stories, the bad guys wear black hats or capes and they're trying to dominate from their dark fortresses. Human nature figures out pretty quickly, that if you don't want to get caught, use the cover of darkness. And darkness can also refer to people whose circumstances in life are anything but bright and optimistic. This kind of darkness differs from one person to the next.

The darkness may be poverty or hunger.

For another person darkness is struggling with an illness, the aches and pains of old age, losing the struggle with failing abilities. For some, darkness is the inevitable day when they lose a loved one through death.

Whatever is your temptation – that is your darkness. Hatred. Greed. Not caring how your actions affect others. All the things that Satan, the prince of darkness, brings into our lives.

Make no mistake there is darkness inside us. It is the darkness of sin.

How does darkness manifest itself in your life?

Sometimes the darkness can become so thick that we have difficulty seeing the mess that sin has made of our lives. The problem with darkness is that it is very easy to get used to.

There is an old story about a desert nomad who woke up in the middle of the night feeling very hungry. He lit a candle and began eating fruit from a bowl beside his bed. He took a bite from one piece and saw a worm in it; so he threw it out of the tent. He bit into the second, found another worm, and threw it away also. Reasoning that he wouldn't have any fruit left to eat if he continued, he blew out the candle and quickly ate the rest.

Sometimes people prefer darkness. They continue in old ways, because they don't like what the light reveals; that their relationship with God is in terrible shape and they are in serious trouble. John's gospel says, "This is how the judgment works: the light has come into the world, but people love the darkness rather than the light, because their deeds are evil." (John 3:19).

The Old Testament lesson today from Isaiah reminds us that light has come from the Lord. It is shining on all people. This new light chases away all shadow.

When the light of the Lord arrives, two major things happen: The closer this light comes, the more it exposes the darkness in your life and the more you will feel its warmth and its life-giving

properties. During this Christmas season I was reminded that my poinsettias needed plenty of direct light in order to thrive and grow, and if they got it, they would. In this regard, we are no different. Without God's light, we wither and die, and it doesn't take long. The benefit of being in God's light is that something new starts growing and its beautiful!

Isaiah is talking about people from all nations being drawn from the darkness to the light. The prophet is setting us up for the visit of the wise men. But that's not all. You and I are part of the 'all nations' Isaiah was talking about. We are direct beneficiaries of this promise. The Light came to a singular place and time, but it has never stopped shining. What exactly does this light consist of? Isaiah told us when he recorded the words: "I, the Lord, will be your eternal light" (Is 60:19).

And about six centuries later, Jesus said, "I am the light of the world. Whoever follows me will have the light of life and will never walk in darkness" (John 8:12). Prophecy: fulfillment.

Jesus is the Light. His presence exposes those dark private corners of our hearts that we prefer to keep hidden. Everything is not as neat and tidy as we pretend. There is a mess that needs to be cleaned up, and even though we have tried to hide the garbage in the darkest and most private nooks and crannies, the light of Jesus has shown us that there is stuff piled up there that needs cleaning out.

Our temptations and secret sins; those faults that we would prefer not to admit to; the poor way we have treated the people we love; the selfish attitude that we have nurtured; the times we have preferred to look the other way than offer a helping hand.

But the Light, Jesus, has come into the world, not to condemn, but to save, not to rub our noses in the dirt of those dark corners, but to sweep them out, to bring healing and reconciliation.

This light is freely yours.

Jesus is the genuine light who changes things, who exposes things, who cleans things, who gives growth and spiritual health.

He is forgiveness. He is hope. He is a word of love. He is strength.

He is the light who guides along life's journey when we have more questions than we have answers.

He is the light that dispels the darkness of guilt with his forgiveness and the darkness of fear when we take our last breath. He is the light of life, eternal life.

Wherever there is darkness in our family, in our friendships, in our community, Christ has come to shed light on all those areas of our lives to restore peace and harmony and joy.

Wherever there is darkness in our nation or in the world at large, Christ enables us to let our light shine before men, to use whatever means we have at our disposal to relieve the suffering of others and drive out the darkness that shrouds the lives of so many. We are to let the light of Christ shine through us so that the darkness of despair and hopelessness might be dispelled.

When the wise men bowed before Jesus they realized that the brilliance of the star they had followed was just foreshadowing. Nothing compares to the light that God sent in his Son Jesus. Every light on every Christmas tree; every candle in every church points to this light of goodness; the light that gives life and strength; the light that reveals the way forward; This light is a person. This light is God. Leave the darkness behind.