A Christmas call to revolutionary patience

“The people who walked in darkness have seen a great light” (Isaiah 9.2a)

Isaiah was speaking in his own day about the darkness of a foreign occupying military power that was oppressive and cruel. But a child was born who might one day become king. The birth of that child gave new hope to the nation.

The darkness persisted. The military power still occupied the land. The people were still treated harshly. But now there was something more. A light had dawned and there was something other than darkness, something that resisted darkness, something that refused to be shut out by darkness, something that gave people hope.

In our day we do not have to look far to find darkness. It does not take the same shape as in Isaiah’s day, but darkness is here nonetheless.

The darkness of drought is threatening lives and livelihoods and causing great suffering for families on the land. We are shocked that financial institutions we trusted have failed millions of times and exposed children to abuse. Aged care places fail and harm our frail elderly people. Corruption seems to resist all attempts to root it out. Domestic violence makes the lives of many women and children unbearable. Darkness in all its shapes and forms and guises – personal, institutional, cosmic – threatens to overwhelm and devour us.

But the people who walk in darkness have seen a great light. The birth of Jesus Christ 2000 years ago points us to a new and different kind of future. That future is not fully and completely here yet. The darkness has not been totally banished. That day is still to come. But for those with the eyes to see the future, it has dawned. It has begun. It is here. We have seen the breaking dawn of a new future, in the birth of a child, and the full light of day will follow.

This dawn gives rise to hope and joy, which in turn generate a special kind of patience. It is not passivity. It is a more active anticipation. Things might be dark and difficult at the moment, but something better is coming and we can be active in welcoming it, pointing to it, working for it.

The South African poet Breyten Breytenbach wrote about what he called ‘revolutionary patience’. He said:

It is not enough to rail against the descending darkness of barbarity.

... One can refuse to play the game. A holding action can be fought. Alternatives must be kept alive. While learning the slow art of revolutionary patience.
‘Revolutionary patience’ is born of a deep joy that itself stems from a profound hope for a better future. That is why we refuse to play the game as it is now. Something better can be. A brighter future is coming.

“Wishful thinking” you might say. But this possibility is closer than you might think. This holding action is at your fingertips. The alternative is as close as your breathing. We can see the beginnings taking shape already.

Wherever we see love, joy, peace, patience, kindness, generosity, faithfulness, gentleness and self-control, we see the dawn which came in the birth of Jesus Christ slowly becoming the full light of day.

I hope that each time we see these signs of the Spirit of Christ we might feel a little stirring of revolutionary patience; might feel the thrill of deep joy and hope, even in the midst of darkness; that we might take up God's invitation to live generously, gently, peacefully, and so make our contribution to the coming reign of Christ.

**Sunday Devotions • Monday 16 December 2019 • By The Rev'd Jazz Dow**

**Sunday Devotion: 22 December 2019, Fourth Sunday of Advent**

Fear not, God is with us

**Main readings:** Isaiah 7.10-16; Psalm 80.1-7, 17-19; Romans 1.1-7; Matthew 1.18-25

**Supplementary readings:** Psalm 72.1-14; 2 Corinthians 12.21-13.7; Ruth 4.9-21; Psalm 80.7-19; Matthew 1.1-6 (7-16) 17

“But just when he had resolved to do this, an angel of the Lord appeared to him in a dream and said, ‘Joseph, son of David, do not be afraid to take Mary as your wife, for the child conceived in her is from the Holy Spirit.’” ([Matthew 1.20](#))

In the 2006 dystopian motion picture action thriller, *Children of Men*, the world is depicted devoid of children, laughter, joy and play, instead dominated by relentless war and humanity's impending extinction. Just as the viewer is exhausted by the violence and hopelessness, a child is born into the chaos. Gunfire stops. Silence. The audience takes a breath. A child is carried into their midst.

When Joseph realises Mary is pregnant and the baby is not his, he plans to dismiss her according to social custom, albeit quietly. But, in a dream an angel appears to Joseph and says, “do not be afraid to take Mary as your wife”. The passage goes on to speak of the fulfilling of the prophecy we read in today's Isaiah reading, “Look, the young woman is with child and shall bear a son, and shall name him Immanuel” ([Isaiah 7.14](#)). Today’s readings proclaim that in the birth of Christ, God is with us (‘Immanuel’).

We are bombarded daily with messages of hopelessness through stories of violence in the digital and print media we consume. However, when the child is born into relentless bleakness in *Children of Men*, I am reminded of our Advent hope — the birth of the Christ child. In just a few days we will rejoice as Mary gives birth to Jesus, God with us, the Prince of Peace.

In the Christmas story we are invited as disciples of Christ to bear Christ, working constructively to bring hope and peace into a broken world.