

There's a sense of dread around, today, that I've never known before. And if you think Brexit is bad and the present series of governments the worst we've ever seen, just listen to this:

It is worse, much worse, than you think. The slowness of climate change is a fairy tale, perhaps as pernicious as the one that says it's not happening at all and comes to us bundled with several others in an anthology of comforting delusions: that global warming is an Arctic saga, unfolding remotely; that it is strictly a matter of sea level and coastlands, not an enveloping crisis sparing no place and leaving no life undeformed...that wealth can be a shield against the ravages of warming; that the burning of fossil fuels is the price of continued economic growth; that growth and the technology it produces, will inevitably engineer a way out of environmental disaster . . .

And there's more, but you get the idea. *None of it is true* – the opening words from a terrifying read entitled *The Uninhabitable Earth* by David Wallace Wells. He does end on a mildly optimistic note but it sounds more a note of desperation than real hope to me. Which begs the question 'What is our hope as Christians?' if this scenario is true? And is it a place we've been before, if not in detail, at least in the sense of an ending? Does the dynamic of God's presence to us in history help? King Ahaz thought not and Isaiah is desperate to reassure him that he must neither fear Assyria nor seek help from Egypt but remain confident in God's presence with his people even if that involves seeming disaster. Three times he uses the phrase *immanu-el* meaning, *God is with us* and this will be made known to Judah in the birth of a child born to a maiden known to them both. But what is the birth of a baby when an army is at the door, when disaster threatens? The irony in the passage is that God will allow Assyria to take Judah in order to cleanse it, to put an end to the corruption of Ahaz's rule in order to preserve a remnant of holy people. What God is teaching Ahaz is that he has a greater enemy and friend to fear in God than in any earthly power. And this is what the Christ-child is here to teach us. Things may look bad but God is with us. Things may look impossible, not least because of our selfish exploitation of one another and the earth's resources; our greed; our hunger for power; but God is with us. Our sinfulness then brings judgement but also God's desire to save us. Whether this desire to save us from our sins will result in a remnant here or in heaven, this time, however, remains an open question. But the greater hope is always in God and the Christ-child.

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