

## Year A Epiphany 3 Isaiah 9:1-4

### It was a dark and stormy night....

When I was at High School the English teacher asked us to write a scary story. She gave us the first line and then we had to do the rest. The first line was, "It was a dark and stormy night". It was quite amazing how 28 very different scary stories were presented using the same opening sentence, "It was a dark and stormy night".

Darkness seems to set the scene for scariness.

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It was one very dark and stormy night when I heard a loud knocking of the door. I went to see who it was, and it was a man – a really, dodgy, looking guy. He seemed drunk. He asked me for a push.

"No way, go away!" I said and quickly shut the door.

Lynette asked, Who was that?

I said, it was Just some drunk asking for a push, I told him "no way, go away". I was thinking I did the right thing.

Lynette said, You should be ashamed! Don't you remember that time when we broke down and those two guys helped us out?

You should go and help him.

Grumbling and muttering, I put on a coat and went out into the dark and stormy night.

I yelled out into the darkness, Hello, are you still there, do you still need a push? Yes, please! came out of the darkness – it came from the back yard somewhere. Where are you, I yelled.

The drunk man yelled back, I'm over here on the swing – give me a push.

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Would you go out in the dark?

Most of us have some kind of fear of the dark.

The scariest parts of a horror movie almost always takes place in the dark.

If you hear a strange noise in the middle of the day you hardly even bother about it.

If you hear a strange noise in the middle of the night, it's a different ball game. Darkness is confusing. Darkness can be terrifying.

When God made the earth, it was "formless and covered in darkness".

Funny, the first thing God created was light – it was good – it separated the light from darkness.

Isaiah tells us that God's people were walking around in darkness – every night was a dark and stormy night – it suggests even the days were dark with fear.

Isaiah gives a message of hope to God's people who are living in fear and darkness.

Hope is like a light shining in the darkness.

Isaiah describes the new light coming into the world like the dawn – don't you love the dawn?

When dawn comes the darkness disappears.

It seems that Isaiah uses the image of darkness to describe a hopeless situation. God's people were in the cross hairs of the Syrians and the Assyrians.

"The wicked" were carrying God's people away as Boney M sings:

*By the rivers of Babylon, there we sat down*

*Yeah, we wept, when we remembered Zion*

*There the wicked*

*Carried us away in captivity*

*Required from us a song*

*Now how shall we sing the Lord's song in a strange land?*

It was a dark time – it seemed completely hopeless.

Talking among friends lately, the question was asked, which is worse, a fire, a flood, or a drought – which of these natural disasters creates the greatest sense of hopelessness?

Naturally, the most hopeless one is the one you are in.

However, in hindsight – my vote went towards a drought. I believe a long drought creates a sense of hopelessness into every aspect of a community.

What do you say?

Helplessness and hopelessness go hand in hand.

When your loved one is suffering or dying - you are helpless – it seems there is no hope.

But you know what, life has shown over and over that we can get through anything if we have hope.

You will know of people who are survivors because of hope.

Corrie Ten Boom comes to mind – she survived the darkest stage in history in a Nazi concentration camp because of her hope in Jesus. She could sing silent praises and pray silent prayers in a horror of darkness we can't even imagine.

Isaiah, in other words God, gives the people walking in a similar darkness a ray of light – a picture of hope.

*The people walking in darkness*

*have seen a great light;*

*on those living in the land of deep darkness*

*a light has dawned.*

What is this hope?

For them it was that the “rod of their oppressors” will be “shattered” and there will be an end to war.

We don't know what it's like to face a Russian missile or tank – even though we see it on TV – imagine their day of peace.

God's people are given hope.

Imagine this – from Isaiah (from God):

*..every garment rolled in blood will be destined for burning, will be fuel for the fire. For to us a child is born, to us a son is given, and the government will be on his shoulders. And he will be called Wonderful Counsellor, Mighty God, Everlasting Father, Prince of Peace.*

Isaiah reveals how all of this will take place. He says, “The zeal of the Lord will do this”.

“Zeal” means he will jealously and passionately protect his people.

But read the whole chapter there is not one mention of God himself zapping the Syrians and the Assyrians.

It says he will use governments, armies, builders, teachers, and a son: *A child is born a son is given.*

This Son, will reign on David's throne.

It seems God doesn't zap much anymore – he rarely intervenes.

This is the privileged of being God's people – he uses us to shape his kingdom.

Some say this is a burden – I say to you this is a privilege.

God uses you and me over and above his perfect power to shape his kingdom – to care for his people.

As a pastor the privilege of being here 2 seconds and people share their darkest secrets and I am invited to give them the light of Christ.

You have the same privilege.

Immanuel, God is with us and will never leave us, and we have privileged work to do.

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You know the joke about the man on the roof and the flood waters are rising – this could be anywhere here, couldn't it?

A lady in a canoe comes to rescue him – and he says no thanks I'm waiting for God to help me.

Then man in boat comes to rescue him - and he says no thanks I'm waiting for God to help me.

Then a soldier in a helicopter comes to rescue him - and he says no thanks I'm waiting for God to help me.

Then the waters get too high, and he is drowned.

He complains bitterly to God.

You know this story don't you? God said I sent a canoe, I sent a boat, I sent a helicopter but you refused them all.

This not as joke it is the truth – God privileges us to work along-side him – to give hope.

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After the 2019/20 bushfires in the Hills our Woodside Lutheran church gave out over 10,000 meals – in fact they only stopped giving the meals last year.

We soon learned that it wasn't about meals – it was about the contact and hope that given.

We know we are ambassadors of God's help and hope.

It's our job to give hope.

If there is anyone who has no hope – they haven't met you.

If you are in a hopeless situation, let me play the role of the prophet Isaiah and assure you that there is hope.

God is with you. For us God is in the words of Jesus and the power of the Holy Spirit – living in us his people.

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You can go out any night in the paddocks behind our place – and there are kangaroos, rabbits, hares, deer, possums, and koalas. They all use the darkness to protect themselves from foxes, and dogs, and hunters.

We use the light. The light makes it hard for foxes, and dogs, and evil to harm us.

Remember what John assures us of: "When Jesus spoke ...to the people, he said, 'I am the light of the world. Whoever follows me will never walk in darkness, but will have the light of life'"(JOHN 8:12).

The Light has dawned in our hearts so that it can shine in our lives and into in this dark world.

Our lives dispel fear and bring hope – are you up to it?

You have the light of life.

At baptism we make a big point of the baptismal candle. We present it and say, "you are the light of the world let your light shine". Amen.

*Lord give us the confidence to be what we are – your ambassadors of light and life. Help us shine light into hopelessness. Help us offer your peace. Amen.*