

At some point, there'll be a new Earth

'It's the end of the world as we know it. (And I feel fine).'

— Song by R.E.M.

BY THOMAS FROESE

KAMPALA, Uganda ♦ OK, so what if Chicken Little was right?

Chicken Little is that bird who got hit on the head by a falling acorn and then ran around screaming “The sky is falling!” He got all his forest friends in an alarmist tizzy and, on their way to tell the king, they were summarily fooled and eaten by that Foxy Loxy.

Chicken's disciples have carried on through the ages. Even here in Africa, in these hand-wringing days of Copenhagen, the action flick 2012 just appeared to make sure that, as the movie teaser says, “We've been warned.”

Run to the hills, people. And wear your galoshes.

Yawn. Warnings of the end are hardly new. History is littered with the rusted wrecks of false prophets. In our own time, take your pick from the pool of kooks and self-declared agents of God.

Remember Marshall Applewhite, who led Heaven's Gate cult members to suicide so they could rendezvous with a spaceship behind comet Hale-Bopp?

But this feels different. What if the sky is actually falling? Or what if, more technically, the ground is simply rising? Maybe climate change is, in fact, Father Time's way of rolling up his belongings and saying “That's all folks!”

If we're to believe the chorus of experts, what we do know is that climate change will hurt the world's poor first and worst. Headline: Madagascar falls into the sea.

The rest of us, that is the rich, become the voyeurs in front of our supersized widescreens.

My neighbours in Kenya are already starving from drought. And of 28 countries the UN lists as

most vulnerable to extreme weather, 22 are in Africa. This, for a continent of subsistence farmers producing just 4 per cent of Earth's carbon emissions.

Eventually, say enough scientists, we'll all get flattened. As put by James Lovelock, one of

Britain's most respected climatologists, “Prophets have foretold Armageddon for a long time. But this is the real thing.”

Into this comes Advent, these moments before Christmas when millions around the globe wait on the presence of the Christ Child, “Emmanuel,” which literally means “God with Us.”

The gritty account of that first

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SPECIAL TO THE HAMILTON SPECTATOR

California falls into the ocean in a scene from the movie 2012. Advent, Christians believe, is about a different scenario. 'What we do today already impacts the new Earth — whether it comes next week or in 1,000 years.'

Christmas when a young, faithful girl gave birth in a dirty stable reminds us that the Divine's ways are not our ways. That's comforting.

But it also adds to our angst. Because this is also a time to reflect on the so-called Second Adventus or Second Coming, the orthodox Christian view that “Christ has died, Christ has risen, and Christ will come again.” And, false prophecy aside, this forces us to come to grips with a day of reckoning when painful birth pangs lead to a new future.

In the movie 2012, Earth's survivors approach this new day by relying on, of all places, Africa. Thanks to tectonic shifts, the entire continent has risen thousands

of feet. John Cusack and company point their battered arks to the Cape of Good Hope. The Have-Not Brother saves what is left of the human family. It's a nice twist.

Advent tells of a different storyline, another continuum, one that is far more satisfying, where humankind is eventually given a new, reborn Earth: an eternal home that's less “out there” and more “right here.”

This is why Martin Luther once said that if he knew the world would end tomorrow, he'd still plant an apple tree today. He understood that we need to care for our planet not just for the sake of our great-grandchildren, but because, in some mysterious way, what we do today already impacts

the new Earth — whether it comes next week or in 1,000 years.

We've never been very good at waiting. That's human nature. Look at the kids eyeing the stash under the Christmas tree. But this is what these days ask of us: To wait and hope and long for that kind of gift that goes far past our imaginations.

The whole thing may be a little frightening. But this is what makes it all so real.

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