

The Other Nativity scene, And How We Got into Holy War  
Revelation 12

Turn to Rev 12 please. At Christmas time we set up Nativity scenes in our home. We have two. One is Joseph and Mary and baby Jesus in a shed, Mary's on her knees facing the baby, there are some sheep resting there. Baby Jesus has a halo.

The other scene has Mary and Joseph and three wise men and one shepherd, all on their knees, worshipping the baby. A sheep and a goat are lying down and resting. In Revelation, there are just two in the nativity scene, and it has a different feel to it. Let's read Revelation 12.

*A great sign appeared in heaven: a woman clothed with the sun, with the moon under her feet and a crown of twelve stars on her head. She was pregnant and cried out in pain as she was about to give birth. Then another sign appeared in heaven: an enormous red dragon with seven heads and ten horns and seven crowns on its heads. Its tail swept a third of the stars out of the sky and flung them to the earth. The dragon stood in front of the woman who was about to give birth, so that it might devour her child the moment he was born. She gave birth to a son, a male child, who "will rule all the nations with an iron scepter." And her child was snatched up to God and to his throne. The woman fled into the wilderness to a place prepared for her by God, where she might be taken care of for 1,260 days.*

*Then war broke out in heaven. Michael and his angels fought against the dragon, and the dragon and his angels fought back. But he was not strong enough, and they lost their place in heaven. The great dragon was hurled down—that ancient serpent called the devil, or Satan, who leads the whole world astray. He was hurled to the earth, and his angels with him.*

*Then I heard a loud voice in heaven say: "Now have come the salvation and the power and the kingdom of our God, and the authority of his Messiah. For the accuser of our brothers and sisters, who accuses them before our God day and night, has been hurled down. They triumphed over him by the blood of the Lamb and by the word of their testimony; they did not love their lives so much as to shrink from death. Therefore rejoice, you heavens and you who dwell in them! But woe to the earth and the sea, because the devil has gone down to you! He is filled with fury, because he knows that his time is short."*

*When the dragon saw that he had been hurled to the earth, he pursued the woman who had given birth to the male child. The woman was given the two wings of the great eagle, so that she might fly to the place prepared for her in the wilderness, where she would be taken care of for a time, times and half a time, out of the serpent's reach. Then from his mouth the serpent spewed water like a river, to overtake the woman and sweep her away with the torrent. But the earth helped the woman by opening its mouth and swallowing the river that the dragon had spewed out of his*

*mouth. Then the dragon was enraged at the woman and went off to wage war against the rest of her offspring—those who keep God’s commands and hold fast their testimony about Jesus.*

The Queen of Heaven - Rev 12:1 *A great sign appeared in heaven: a woman clothed with the sun, with the moon under her feet and a crown of twelve stars on her head.*

This is an astonishing and magnificent heavenly woman. The sun is her robe, a remarkable picture. The moon is her footstool. And she has a crown of twelve stars. Clothed with God’s Creation! She is a sign, a symbol, which means this is not an actual woman, the woman is not Mary. It’s us, the church, the bride of Christ.

A Jewish believer in one of John’s churches in Asia would immediately assume the woman was Israel, and that believer would be right. The OT prophets often spoke of Israel as God’s wife. The twelve stars in her crown would be the twelve tribes of Israel.

But at the end of Revelation 12, we read that the woman has other children, and those other children are those who obey God and who hold on to their testimony about Jesus. That’s us, this includes Gentile believers. So the woman is the bride of Christ, the woman is God’s faithful people through all of human history, faithful Israel and Gentile believers. Each one of us individually are her children.

This heavenly woman was having particularly difficult birth pains. Some childbirths are longer and more difficult than others, and this woman’s labour seems to be one of those long, hard ones. The NIV softens this. She was crying out in the agony of birth. God’s people had a long and difficult time before the child was actually born.

The Ruling Dragon 12:3

*Then another sign appeared in heaven: an enormous red dragon with seven heads and ten horns and seven crowns on its heads. Seven heads with seven crowns mean the dragon is also a royal character of some kind, a princely being. The dragon is a ruler. Ten horns means great strength.*

The Dragon Destroys 12:4a

*Its tail swept a third of the stars out of the sky and flung them to the earth.* The dragon is a symbol for Satan, for the devil; we learn that in 12:9. Some think these stars refer to fallen angels, to spiritual beings that God created to serve him but who turned away to serve Satan. That may or may not be true. Either way, the dragon sweeps down a third of the stars.

The dragon has enormous destructive power. The woman was clothed with God’s heavenly creation, but the dragon attacked and destroyed it. That’s the real point.

*The dragon stood in front of the woman who was about to give birth, so that it might devour her child the moment he was born. Now we have John's nativity scene. The heavenly woman was pregnant and was crying out in birth pangs, in the agony of giving birth. The dragon stood in front of the woman who was about to give birth, so that it might devour her child the moment he was born.*

### The Ruling Son 12:5a

*She gave birth to a son, a male child, who "will rule all the nations with an iron scepter." This line, "will rule all the nations with an iron scepter," quotes Psalm 2, which is a psalm predicting the Messiah, the descendant of David.*

So we know who the child is, it's the coming Christ that Ps 2 described, who is also Jesus of Nazareth. Which we all knew anyway. But we can see now why the dragon wants to devour the child. The dragon has heads and crowns, that is, *the dragon* plans to rule the nations with an iron scepter. But this child is destined to rule the nations with an iron scepter.

Therefore, the dragon MUST, absolutely must, destroy that child. Who will rule the nations? It will be one of those two, either that child or that dragon. The dragon will rule ONLY if he destroys that child.

The woman, the people of God, is in terrible labour pains, trying to produce her child that will rule the nations. The dragon, the enemy of God, is waiting for the birth, because he plans to rule the nations and he must at all costs destroy that child.

For the woman, that child must succeed. If the Dragon destroys the Child, the people of God are lost. The people of God versus the enemy of God, only one will survive in the end, their conflict centered on this child: the woman in great pain, trying desperately to produce the child, the dragon close by and alert, needing desperately to destroy the child = John's nativity scene.

*And her child was snatched up to God and to his throne.* Jesus was born in Bethlehem, and 30 some years later he ascended to God and to his throne. John packs those 35 years into a moment. He was born, and grabbed to God. In this picture, the whole time of Jesus' life on earth was a time of great danger and vulnerability.

That whole time the dragon does his best to devour the child. "Snatched up to God." I get the feeling that God was SO MUCH relieved to get this important child out of harm's way, into a place of safety. Great relief in heaven.

The dragon is not just Herod trying to kill baby Jesus. The dragon is doing all he can through the whole life of Jesus to destroy Jesus or get him off track. At the end, Satan fills Judas's heart to betray Jesus. Satan was sure he'd finally succeeded. But Satan was destroyed by the humble obedience of Jesus to death. Satan did not see that coming.

### The Protected Woman 12:6

*The woman fled into the wilderness to a place prepared for her by God, where she might be taken care of.*

In Exodus, God led Israel out of Egypt into the desert, in the desert Israel was safe from Egypt. That's the picture here. The woman, and we the church are the woman, flees into the wilderness just as Israel fled Egypt, and as God cared for Israel in the wilderness, so God cares for the woman, his people, his bride, his church.

### The Battle in Heaven 12:7-10

Until the child was taken into heaven, until God seated the risen Jesus on his right hand, Satan and his angels had some kind position or access to the dwelling of God. But after the child was taken up to the Throne of God, there was a battle, Michael and his angels against the dragon and his angels, and the dragon and his angels lost. They were thrown down to earth in defeat.

When Jesus rose from the dead and ascended to heaven and was invited to sit at God's right hand, there was a huge shift of power in the realm of spiritual beings, good and bad, angels and evil spirits and principalities and powers and authorities. The dark side suffered a great defeat, one from which it will never recover. That happened with the child was taken up.

### The Victory on Earth – 12:11

Verse 11 tells us how we ourselves overcome the dragon, the accuser. This line tells us how to win the holy war we are in. Three things: *They triumphed over him (1) by the blood of the Lamb and (2) by the word of their testimony; (3) they did not love their lives so much as to shrink from death.*

We conquer because Jesus died for us. And we conquer by the word of our testimony: "Jesus is Lord of heaven and earth, and he has full rights to my life." That's our testimony, and we won't let go. Three, we will stick with these even in the face of death.

### The Chase – 12:13-16

The dragon tried to destroy the child, but failed. The dragon tried to keep his place in God's dwelling, and that failed too. He was thrown down. So he pursues the woman who bore the child. We were told earlier that the woman fled into the wilderness to a place prepared by God, so she would be safe. Now that gets repeated in different words.

God gave the woman the wings of the eagle, so she could escape by flying into the wilderness and be safe from the dragon. This is God's basic covenant offer to Israel in Exodus 19.

Back then, God said to Israel, “You’ve seen how I carried you on eagle’s wings, and brought you to myself.” The was given the wings of the God-eagle. In Greek it’s not “a great eagle” it’s “the great eagle, that great God-eagle in Exodus.” (*Lord of the Rings* likes to use this.)

The dragon produces a river out of his mouth to drown the woman. What kind of river would come out of the dragon’s mouth? We just read, “the accuser of our brothers and sisters, who accuses them before God day and night.” He can no longer accuse before God in the same way, but he still accuses slanders us. He tells us lies about ourselves, and he tells the world lies about us. That’s the river. We read early that he leads the whole world astray. He deceives people. But it won’t destroy the woman.

The earth swallows the river. The earth itself is on our side. In Numbers 16, some Israelites falsely accused Moses and rebelled against him. The next day the earth opened, swallowed those people, then closed up. Gone. The lies and false accusations won’t work. Jesus said in Matthew that the armies of hell would not overcome his church. God will see to it that the church survives.

### The Woman’s Children

*The dragon was enraged at the woman and went off to wage war against the rest of her offspring—those who keep God’s commands and hold fast their testimony about Jesus.*

The dragon, the ancient serpent, known as Satan or the devil, is at war with you and me, because he’s enraged. His rage comes from four great losses he has suffered.

One, he tried to destroy this child, but he failed. The child who will rule earth is safe with God.

Two, he tried in battle to keep his place in heaven, but he failed and was thrown down.

Three, he has tried to destroy the woman but he cannot, she is safe and he cannot destroy her.

Four, his time is short. He is doomed and he knows it, and his time is short.

All he has left is a brief frantic furious time of going after her children. That’s us, and that’s how this Christmas child got us into holy war. There is a huge amount of protection going on, we’re being shielded, but I expect this affects our lives every day.

Jesus told Peter, “Satan asked to test you, but I prayed that your faith would not fail. When you turn around, strengthen your brothers.” Paul writes to the Thessalonians that he tried again and again to come visit them, but Satan blocked his way, so he wrote that letter and he sent Timothy to visit them. Satan does *not* just persecute us, he does all kinds of things.

Paul tells the Corinthians that his thorn in the flesh, some kind of painful trial that tormented him, was a messenger of Satan. He asked the Lord to remove it, but the Lord said it was better for his power and work to leave Paul with it.

None of this alarms Paul, it's just the way it is, the Lord is in charge and does what he wants. There is no prayer trick or claiming the victory that will stop this. Because if there was, Paul would know it. But make no mistake, the dragon is at war with us, and this shapes our world and our lives.

It's good to know. It's not just persecution, it is all kinds of frustration and trouble, as well as temptation. Peter says Satan always prowling around like a roaring lion, looking for someone to devour. "Resist him," says Peter, "and stand firm in the faith." James says, "Submit to God, resist the devil and he will flee from you, come near to God and he will come near to you."

The woman's child got us into all this, he's guarding us and praying for us, and he will get us out. Amen.

Prayer: Eternal God, we remember the birth of Jesus, the child that you promised would rule the nations, the child that you promised would rule your people and your kingdom forever. Thank you that he is safe, that his time of danger is over. Thank you that as you cared for Israel in the wilderness, and carried them on eagle's wings, so also you care for your people now, we who are your bride, we have those same wings. O Lord Jesus, come quickly. Amen.

Benediction: The God of peace will soon crush Satan under your feet. The grace of our Lord Jesus be with you. Amen. Go in God's peace to love and serve the Lord.