

Christmas 2010

“Creche-ing Savior, Hidden Dragon”

Revelation 12:1-17

Revelation 12:1 Now a great sign appeared in heaven: a woman clothed with the sun, with the moon under her feet, and on her head a garland of twelve stars.

Revelation 12:2 Then being with child, she cried out in labor and in pain to give birth.

Revelation 12:3 And another sign appeared in heaven: behold, a great, fiery red dragon having seven heads and ten horns, and seven diadems on his heads.

Revelation 12:4 His tail drew a third of the stars of heaven and threw them to the earth. And the dragon stood before the woman who was ready to give birth, to devour her Child as soon as it was born.

Revelation 12:5 She bore a male Child who was to rule all nations with a rod of iron. And her Child was caught up to God and His throne.

The first Living Nativity was in 1223AD. Francis of Assisi, Italy, instructed Giovanni Vellita to build, just outside Assisi in the cave at Greccio, a simple little stable. He furnished it with life-sized Nativity figures. As midnight approached that Christmas Eve a great procession wound its way out of Assisi and up the hill to Greccio. The rich, the poor, the old, the young, men and women and children, came candles in hand and journeyed up the hill to this new ‘Bethlehem’ that had been built. Surrounded by an ox and a donkey and by the people of Assisi playing the parts of the shepherds, Francis presented the Christmas story.

According to the writings of Bonaventure the townsfolk attending the event fell prostrate with tears of wonderment before this representation of Jesus Christ’s birth. It became an annual tradition.

The custom spread throughout Italy. It crossed the Alps to neighboring Bavaria and Austria, and to America with the Moravians, a German-born religious communal society. In Bethlehem and Lititz, Pennsylvania, these religious pilgrims built such elaborate Nativities that farm families traveled miles from home just to see these outdoor works of art.

Somewhere along the line miniature representations of the Nativity developed. They go by the name of *creche*, the French word for *crib*. Whether life-sized or miniature, they include the infant Jesus, Joseph and Mary, the shepherds, and miscellaneous barn animals. Most living nativities or creches also depict the visit of the wise men from the east.

As wonderful and powerful as those figures are, there is another way to represent the Nativity. In the verses I read from The Revelation of Jesus Christ we encountered a Nativity with some strange figures: a woman clothed with the sun, a fiery red dragon, and a Child with a rod of iron in His hand!

(Because there is a creche and a dragon, if I were giving this message a title it would be "Creche-ing Savior, Hidden Dragon").

These are the symbols of the Nativity of Jesus Christ seen from the perspective of Heaven through history. When Heaven looks down, the whole of human history can be understood in these few symbols.

We have just such a fiery red dragon hovering over our Nativity at home. It was made for us by one of the young men in our church when he was just a child. *I love it!* I'd market it but I doubt it would catch on!

The symbols seem weird but they are not mysterious. The Bible tells you exactly what they represent:

- The "woman" is the nation of Israel, the physical people through whom Jesus Christ would be born into human history.
- The "fiery red dragon" is the devil, Satan, in his violent opposition to the coming and the Second Coming of Jesus Christ into human history.
- The "Child" is Jesus, in both His first coming as your Savior, and His Second Coming as your Sovereign.

These symbols summarize human history by telling you two things: #1 Jesus Came As Your Savior Despite Satan's Continual Interference, and #2 Jesus Is Coming As Your Sovereign Despite Satan's Continuing Interference.

#1 Jesus Came As Your Savior Despite
Satan's Continual Interference
(v1-5)

The traditional Nativity scene that represents the birth of Jesus doesn't go back far enough. God was at work well before the arrival of Joseph and Mary at Bethlehem. He was at work in **eternity** and in **Eden**:

- In eternity past God already knew that mankind would need a Savior. Before the foundation of the earth was laid, it had already been determined in Heaven that God would Himself enter the world as its Savior.
- In Eden the reason for God's plan to send a Savior became clear: Adam and Eve, representing the whole human race that would spring from them, sinned. Since then, all human beings inherit a sin nature, and all human beings commit individual acts of sin.

God promised Adam and Eve that He would send a Savior into the world to deal with sin. The Savior would be God Incarnate, God in human flesh, fully God and fully human. The Savior would be born of a woman.

Not just any woman. As Bible history unfolds, God established a nation through Abraham to which the Savior would be born. The nation was Israel. The Savior of the world would be born to a Jewish woman.

The first two verses of Revelation Twelve describe the "woman" who would give birth to the Savior as,

Revelation 12:1 ...a woman clothed with the sun, with the moon under her feet, and on her head a garland of twelve stars.

Revelation 12:2 Then being with child, she cried out in labor and in pain to give birth.

People often accuse the Bible, and the Revelation in particular, of being impossible to understand because of its weird symbols that are open to multitudes of interpretations. *Nothing could be further from the truth!*

- First of all, signs and symbols are intended to clarify, not to confuse. Traffic signs are largely symbols. Is it to confuse you? No, it is to clarify and communicate.
- Second of all, the Bible defines its own symbols. This "woman" in Revelation Twelve is defined for you all the way back in the book of Genesis. In chapter thirty-seven Joseph had a dream. In his dream the sun, moon, and stars symbolized the nation of Israel.

The "woman" of Revelation Twelve is the nation of Israel, with her twelve tribes, through whom God would send the Savior, Jesus Christ, into the world.

The nation of Israel is at the very heart of God's dealings with human history. It is miraculous that the Jews even exist as an identifiable people among the nations of the world. The descendants of Abraham, Isaac, and Jacob have been scattered throughout the world since the time of Babylon - for over 2500 years. For the past 1900 years they have had no temple to worship in; still their language, literature, and lifestyle has been preserved.

It defies any possible rational or natural explanation that the Jews would return to their own land at the end of centuries of global exile to be reestablished once again as a nation! Nevertheless, in our own modern era, on May 14, 1948, Israel was again a nation in her promised land.

The only explanation that anyone can give for Israel's existence throughout human history as a nation is a supernatural explanation. God has a plan for Israel.

Our verses also indicate supernatural interference with God's plan to bring a Savior into the world through the nation of Israel:

Revelation 12:3 And another sign appeared in heaven: behold, a great, fiery red dragon having seven heads and ten horns, and seven diadems on his heads.

Revelation 12:4 His tail drew a third of the stars of heaven and threw them to the earth. And the dragon stood before the woman who was ready to give birth, to devour her Child as soon as it was born.

The identity of the fiery red dragon is not in dispute. You are told later in this same chapter, in verse nine, that,

Revelation 12:9 "...that serpent of old, [is] the Devil and Satan, who deceives the whole world..."

Do you see that the Bible defines it's own signs? Either from the Old Testament or right in the text itself you can ascertain exactly what these symbols mean.

The grotesque imagery of the devil standing before the woman seeking to devour her Child is a symbolic summary of Satan's continual interference with the birth of the promised Savior. Satan knew that the Savior would be born of a woman, and so he has tried throughout history to thwart that birth.

His interference began with Cain killing Abel. It's possible that Adam and Eve thought Abel might be the promised Savior; Satan may have thought so, too. At any rate you're told that the Devil was involved in Abel's death. First John 3:12 says "Cain... was of that wicked one, and slew his brother." When Cain killed Abel, Satan was attempting to cut-off the line through which the Savior would be born.

Later, in the days of Noah, Satan tried to pollute the whole human race and its offspring. In Genesis 6:4 you read,

Genesis 6:4 "...the sons of God came in to the daughters of men and they bore children to them..."

While scholars disagree about the exact details, this was an attempt by Satan to thwart God's plan to bring your Savior into the world.

When God began to reveal His plan to establish a new nation through Abraham through whom your Savior would be born, Satan's efforts became focused on destroying the Jews. Biblical history is full with his efforts to destroy Israel:

- At the birth of Moses, Pharaoh ordered the death of all male children born to Jewish women.
- During the days of David, King Saul and others repeatedly attempted to kill David, from whose lineage the Savior would be born.
- At one point, in Second Kings Eleven, only one little boy was left through whom Jesus could be born.

- The Book of Esther records the attempts of a man named Haman to exterminate the Jewish race.
- Around the time Jesus was born, King Herod issued a decree to slaughter the Jewish infants under two years of age.

Satan is not alone in his long war against God:

Revelation 12:4 His tail drew a third of the stars of heaven and threw them to the earth. And the dragon stood before the woman who was ready to give birth, to devour her Child as soon as it was born.

"A third of the stars of heaven" refers to Satan leading one-third of the angels in a rebellion against God. Satan, an angel himself, is the leader of the fallen angels that we call demons. When the Bible says that Satan "threw them to the earth" it means that the earth is their place of service to the devil.

Despite all Satan's diabolical designs to "devour" Jesus, your Savior **was** born through the nation of Israel:

Revelation 12:5 She bore a male Child who was to rule all nations with a rod of iron. And her Child was caught up to God and His throne.

The baby Jesus was born to eventually "rule all nations with a rod of iron." To that end, these verses summarize the life, death, and resurrection of Jesus by speaking of His ascension into Heaven to sit at the right hand of God's throne.

Jesus came the first time to save sinners. Who are the "sinners" Jesus was sent to save? **They are every descendant of Adam and Eve.** All human beings fall short of the righteousness of God.

Let me ask you a question: Are you less perfect than God? If you honestly answer "Yes!," then you are the sinner who Jesus came to save.

Jesus came into the world to save sinners – and He has. He is the Savior of all men – especially those who believe.

#2 Jesus Is Coming As Your Sovereign Despite Satan's Continuing Interference (v6-17)

Satan didn't stop the first coming of Jesus; perhaps he can interfere with the Second Coming of Jesus.

Modern history is full of attempts to exterminate the Jews. A careful study of Hitler and Himmler reveals occult, supernatural activity – *satanic activity* – that accounts for the incredible hostility of the Holocaust.

But the worst persecution against Jews is still in the future:

Revelation 12:6 Then the woman fled into the wilderness, where she has a place prepared by God, that they should feed her there one thousand two hundred and sixty days.

Bible teachers and students of prophecy immediately understand the reference in verse six to "one thousand two hundred and sixty days." These days add up to three and one half years. They are also sometimes referred to as "a time, times, and half a time." Those are all prophetic descriptions of a three and one half year period of time that immediately precedes the Second Coming of Jesus to the earth. They are the last half of the seven year Great Tribulation spoken of in Scripture.

In the very near future the earth will be plunged into the Great Tribulation. Sound fantastic? Sensational? It is nevertheless true. Let me point out just one thing that verifies our claim that we are near the end.

Two thousand years ago the Bible predicted that, in the Last Days before Jesus returned to earth, everyone would "...receive a mark on their right hand or in their foreheads, and that no one may buy or sell except one who has the mark..." For centuries people ridiculed this as Bible fiction. Yet you know that the technology now exists to unite the world into one economic system, and to put a microchip or an invisible electronic tattoo in or on your hand or forehead that could be scanned by the devices currently in use all over the world.

More and more we are opting for cashless commerce. Efforts are underway in many nations to issue remotely-readable national id cards. Security issues, whether national or personal, are overshadowing privacy concerns.

By itself this technology is *not* “the mark of the beast.” But you can see how easy it would be to implement such a system. **We need to realize that all this is a very recent phenomena but one we knew would develop in the last days!**

Verses seven through seventeen of Revelation twelve are a summary of Satan's future efforts to interfere with the coming of Jesus to rule the world:

Revelation 12:7 And war broke out in heaven: Michael and his angels fought with the dragon; and the dragon and his angels fought,
Revelation 12:8 but they did not prevail, nor was a place found for them in heaven any longer.

Revelation 12:9 So the great dragon was cast out, that serpent of old, called the Devil and Satan, who deceives the whole world; he was cast to the earth, and his angels were cast out with him.

Since he failed to keep Jesus from coming as Savior, Satan's only strategy is to seek to prevent Jesus from coming again to be Sovereign. He instigates a war in heaven.

"They did not prevail." This literally means, "they were not strong enough." God wins this heavenly war letting Michael and the other angels have the privilege of carrying out His will. The devil and his demons are finally and utterly cast out of Heaven to the earth.

Revelation 12:10 Then I heard a loud voice saying in heaven, "Now salvation, and strength, and the kingdom of our God, and the power of His Christ have come, for the accuser of our brethren, who accused them before our God day and night, has been cast down.

Revelation 12:11 "And they overcame him by the blood of the Lamb and by the word of their testimony, and they did not love their lives to the death.

Revelation 12:12 "Therefore rejoice, O heavens, and you who dwell in them! Woe to the inhabitants of the earth and the sea! For the devil has come down to you, having great wrath, because he knows that he has a short time."

Revelation 12:13 Now when the dragon saw that he had been cast to the earth, he persecuted the woman who gave birth to the male Child.

Revelation 12:14 But the woman was given two wings of a great eagle, that she might fly into the wilderness to her place, where she is nourished for a time and times and half a time, from the presence of the serpent.

Revelation 12:15 So the serpent spewed water out of his mouth like a flood after the woman, that he might cause her to be carried away by the flood.

Revelation 12:16 But the earth helped the woman, and the earth opened its mouth and swallowed up the flood which the dragon had spewed out of his mouth.

Revelation 12:17 And the dragon was enraged with the woman, and he went to make war with the rest of her offspring, who keep the commandments of God and have the testimony of Jesus Christ.

These verses describe the future activity of Satan on earth in the final days of history before Jesus returns. Chief among his efforts will be an attempt to exterminate all Jews. You see, God has promised the Jews that they would survive to see the return of Jesus. Satan reasons that if he can annihilate the Jews from the earth, then Jesus cannot return in His Second Coming.

God will supernaturally protect a remnant of His people, the Jews. They will remain; Jesus will return.

Conclusion

Whether you do or don't display a Nativity I sincerely hope that you will see that the true Nativity scene includes these symbols: a woman clothed with the sun, a fiery red dragon, and a Child with a rod of iron in His hand. These symbols tell you that Jesus came as your Savior, and that He is coming as your Sovereign.

Salvation is a gift that must be received. Christmas gifts illustrate this. You're given a gift. You must take it, open it, receive it, in order for it to be of any value to you. It's yours even if you do not receive it, but it has no impact on you. It does you know good to simply acknowledge there is a gift. You've got to receive it.

Salvation is a free gift that comes to you when you receive Jesus Christ and believe on Him with all your heart.

Is Jesus your Savior? If He is not, you are not ready for Him to be your Sovereign.

If He is your Savior, are you excited about God's continuing gifts?

- Jesus promised His followers the further gift of the empowering of the Holy Spirit.
- The Bible promises each believer one or more supernatural gifts of the Holy Spirit.
- Jesus told us that He'd be gone for a time occupying Himself with building our heavenly homes which He referred to as mansions.
- The Lord said that at His coming for us He would bring a reward.

May this Christmas be one in which you rededicate yourself to experiencing all the gifts God has promised you - both now and in the future.

Keep yourself ready to see Him. True, the Lord is coming a second time, at the end of the Great Tribulation. But before that - at least seven years before that - He is coming to resurrect and rapture the Church. It is presented as an imminent event; it could happen at any moment.

Remain rapture ready.



