

## Revelation - the end...or the beginning... Rev 12 - Apocalyptic Christmas

So this is a big weekend-yesterday was Halloween so maybe you're eating some good candy today-the Reese's pumpkins are hard to beat! It was also the time change-so we gained an hour of sleep and are all really well rested-which obviously means I can preach a longer sermon today as I see how awake everyone is! And of course it's the weekend before the election-so lots of prayers for that on Tuesday. The only bummer to the weekend is that it gets dark by 5pm so let's not think about that! Instead let's be reminded of how it's Nov 1-and if you were here last week or watched online we were talking about Thanksgiving. And that was promoted by our early Thanksgiving visitor-we didn't have any pilgrims show up-but we did have a turkey who was wandering around the church last week. Now I haven't seen the turkey this week so if someone snagged him or boasts about eating wild turkey for Thanksgiving we'll know it wasn't a coincidence! But once Halloween is over and November starts it seems like it's all systems go for Christmas-that out goes the Halloween candy and decorations and in comes the Christmas candy and decorations! I was at a store this past week and already heard Christmas music playing! So here's my question-who's started listening to Christmas music already? Who's an early bird for Christmas preparations-you're ready to go now? You need your Winter Wonderland fix? Who's like me saying it has to at least be the day after Thanksgiving before you can start get into the festive mood and start playing Christmas music? The reason I bring this up is because oddly enough we're talking about Christmas today! And that doesn't mean we're discussing shepherds and wise men and overcrowded inns-and we'll close by singing Silent Night. Rather this is a version of the Christmas story you might not have heard before. What we'll be talking about is a version of the Christmas story that looks at things from heaven's viewpoint, from a spiritual and cosmic perspective that the angels see. It's certainly the nativity story-there's a mother and a baby being born like we're familiar with-but there's also a fiery red dragon with a long tail and 10 horns-not 3 wise men on camels or 12 reindeer like we'd expect. So if you've ever wondered why there aren't more dragons in the Christmas story-as I think we've all wondered-our passage today will help answer that. As one writer titled it-An Apocalyptic Christmas-and that's a great way to say it. Christmas as told from the book of Revelation!

So you can open up your Bibles to Rev 12-or we'll have it on the screen-Rev 12:1. And right away we can see how this is apocalyptic, symbolic language. John didn't look up to the heavens and see a woman in the sky wrapped up in a dress from the sun and standing on the moon with a twinkling crown of stars. This wasn't an actual person or even some new constellation. Instead this points us all the way back to the book of Genesis. And we've seen lots of connections from Revelation to Genesis in this series-reminding us how the Bible is one big story of redemption from cover to cover. And in this case, the connection is one of Joseph's dreams. If you can remember to pre-Covid life (seems like a distant memory) we did a series on Joseph and encountered this passage-Gen 37:9-10. And it's easy to see the identification of Joseph's family-the sun represents Jacob his dad, the moon is his mom Rachel, and the 11 stars are his brothers.

And in the book of Genesis they're all bowing to Joseph because one day they literally would when we was second in command in Egypt and they came to get food during the famine. But this represents Jacob's family-and of course Jacob was renamed Israel-and the 11 brothers plus Joseph equals the 12 tribes of Israel. It's that same identification back in Rev 12:1. This is the nation of Israel as seen by the sun, moon and 12 stars-the 12 tribes-but it's not just the nation in a political or geographical sense-but in a spiritual sense. This is the righteous remnant of God's people; those who know Him and walk with Him. In Romans 9 it says not all Israel is Israel-meaning ethnic Israel is different from spiritual Israel which is composed of those who live by faith in God. We see that remnant of faithful Israel in our Bibles throughout the OT and we saw it in Rev 7 with the 144,000 Israelites saved and sealed by God. So they're His chosen people. And it's easy to see this in the next verse-because who descended from the nation of Israel-Rev 12:2. And immediately this brings us to Christmas and the nativity story. Look at Isa 7:14. There's the prophecy of the woman about to give birth. Or even more classically Christmas-Luke 1:30-36. So from this woman who represents God's people Israel comes a specific woman Mary who is about to give birth to a child who's really important-conceived by the Holy Spirit, born of the Virgin Mary-the Son of God Most High-and we know that's referring to Jesus. But the Most High doesn't just mean high or higher than most-it means the Son of the Most Highest, Greatest Being in all existence-no one or nothing can ever be higher! This is an important child. We need to know that-it's why we celebrate Christmas because His arrival means some really important things for our lives-but someone else knows that too.

Here's when the Christmas story becomes rather apocalyptic! Look at Rev 12:3. What a description! I remember reading this a kid and immediately thinking that it sounded like something Godzilla would have fought. Here's Godzilla from 1964 battling Ghidorah the 3-headed dragon! They used to air these movies on tv when I was kid-the effects were terrible even by 80's standards but there was still something intimidating about these creatures-pic. Here's this massive, 3 headed dragon with giant wings and long tail. Of course he's golden in color-and really nothing compared to what's being described-Rev 12:3. So instead of being golden he's fiery red in color highlighting bloodshed and death. And his 7 heads point to the world empires he's dominated in past-including Babylon, Medo-Persia, Greece and Rome and the 10 horns point to 10 future world kingdoms he will dominate and rule as the diadems suggest. A creature like this was described in Daniel's OT prophecy but here in Rev 12 his identity is clearly revealed as Satan. And I'm not so sure that this is what Satan actually looks like-a red 7 headed dragon. Rather this is symbolic language describing his dominion and devastation. Listen to how it continues-Rev 12:4a. And this refers to way back in heaven when Satan rebelled against God and a 1/3 of the angels followed him and fell from heaven. His dragon's tail knocked them out! And we saw the reference to that moment a few weeks ago-and look at how Satan is described-not very dragon like-Isa 14:12-15. So notice the contrast-Satan wanted to ascend his throne and be like the Most High-but who's the child that's about to be born? The Son of the Most High God. This was never a role for Satan-God had originally given him a high position-Day Star, son of the Dawn. That sounds like a good job title-but Son of the Most High was always and only

meant for Jesus. So back to Jesus' birth-Luke 2:4-7. And when you read that aren't you ready for some candles and Silent Night? This is classic Christmas. Mary and Joseph in the stable, Baby Jesus is away in the manger, the shepherds are on their way. *All is calm, all is bright...sleep in heavenly peace*. And we picture that still, starry night in Bethlehem and feel the Christmas glow in our hearts. But behind the scenes-it is apocalyptic Christmas-Rev 12:4b. Now what Christmas carol contains that part? Anybody have a Nativity set that has a 7-headed dragon next to the stable with it's mouth wide open? Do they sell that? Somebody find out. It would be far more accurate and biblical! Because that's what's going on behind the scenes. That's what's taking place in the spiritual realm. We can't see it with our physical eyes-but it's very real and very important! The battle of the ages-but instead of the 3-headed dragon against Godzilla-this is Satan the 7-headed dragon against the Son of God. And the battle has been raging for awhile as Satan has tried relentlessly to kill this child from the nation of Israel. Just think back through the Bible-he got Cain to kill Abel right at the start (but then Seth was born). He got Pharaoh to kill all the Hebrew baby boys in Egypt (but Moses was spared in the basket). He tried really hard to have Saul kill David (but David survived). He tried to have Haman exterminate all the Jews but Esther and Mordecai prevailed. And then we come to the NT-Matt 2:13,16. Here's Satan-the red-headed dragon-literally using King Herod to try and kill Jesus-the fury of Herod is like the roar of the dragon heads! But of course God intervened, He directed Mary and Joseph and kept His Son safe. Back to Rev 12:5. The timeline moves quickly in this verse. Not only did God protect His Son by having Jesus go to Egypt-but then the verse summarizes the rest of His life-including His resurrection and ascension into heaven at the right hand of God's throne-where He's at now.

So Pt1:Jesus' birth: forever confirmed Satan's doom and the end of his reign over us. All of his efforts and energy and focus were on destroying, literally devouring Jesus. And yet he couldn't accomplish it. He couldn't devour him at his birth-Apocalyptic Christmas truly is joy to the world because the dragon's mouth-his 7 mouthes-came up empty! Our Savior wasn't stopped by Satan-instead Satan is stopped by the Savior. To think of another Christmas carol-*God rest ye merry gentlemen, let nothing you dismay, remember Christ our Savior was born on Christmas Day, to save us all from Satan's power when we had gone astray, O tidings of comfort and joy!* This child was born to save us from Satan's power. Here we were caught up in the cosmic battle of the heavens-having fallen victim to Satan's lies and temptations, being dead in our sins just like Adam and Eve and everyone else who's ever lived-and yet this child was born to reverse that. He's come to bring us new life and set us free-and you can add this to Pt1-even when we didn't know we needed to be set free. That's the subtlety of Satan's power.

He didn't come to Eve looking like a fiery red 7-headed dragon ready to devour her for lunch. He slithered up and from his mouth came a reasonable set of smooth-sounding lies. Lies that were actually attractive and interesting to Eve. Satan never tells us that his outcome is misery and death. If he did we would never to fall victim to his lies in the first place. Instead he tries to present what leads to misery and death as the very things we most want-the things that will bring us the happiness and satisfaction we think we need and deserve. For Eve it was this fruit-this

delicious looking fruit that for whatever reason God was wrongly withholding-that God was keeping her from happiness and holding back her potential-Eve thought the fruit would make her wise-and Satan flat out lied and said you surely won't die. So she-along with Adam-fell headlong for those lies, took a big juicy bite, and plunged the human race into sin and under the reign of Satan's power. For you and me it's probably not fruit-maybe, I like a good pear-but there's all sorts of things Satan presents to us that subtly seek to devour and destroy our hearts-whether addiction, immorality, bitterness, pride, or an unforgiving, unloving heart. Look at the result-[Eph 2:1-3](#). And the prince of the power of the air is another reference to Satan. We were all dead in our sins, under his reign, living in the passions of our flesh, and blinded to the reality of it all. In His classic book *The Screwtape Letters* CS Lewis says one of the main errors we fall into is to disbelieve in the devil's existence. That's one of his main strategies. God's Word says he comes masquerading himself as an angel of light-again offering us what we want that looks so good-usually in ways that don't require any effort or patience on our part-and so we fall for it. Look at what it says later on in [Eph 6:10-12](#). That's another description of that cosmic spiritual battle we're caught up in. This is what Apocalyptic Christmas has done-set us free from under Satan's power and reign so that we can take our stand against his lies and schemes.

So as our passage in Revelation unfolds-we'll see how that happens. Look at [Rev 12:7-8](#). The battle continues to rage across the spiritual realm in heaven. Satan realizes he's lost his chance to devour God's Son-and Michael leads the angelic army to finally and forever boot Satan and his demons out of heaven. Wouldn't you love to see that battle-and watch the armies of heaven emerge victorious as Satan plummets to defeat! Now Bible scholars are divided over the timing of this battle-it may have occurred in connection with Jesus' death and resurrection when Satan knew his doom was sealed as the cross didn't destroy Jesus but became the means of salvation. That was an epic fail from Satan! Or this battle could be waiting to take place during the end times Tribulation due to its placement here in Revelation. Either way we know that while Satan fell from his position in heaven long before creation, in the OT he was still allowed an audience with God where he tried to tempt and accuse people. Job is a clear example of that-where Satan and God have this conversation about him. But once this battle takes place-whether it's at the cross or in the end times-[Rev 12:8-9](#). They're out for good! Their doom is sealed! And that means Satan no longer has an audience with God to accuse believers. He's not slithering back up to heaven to have a conversation with God to try and condemn us. Look at this amazing verse-[Rev 12:10](#). The accuser of God's people is gone. Your accuser is gone. Think about it this way. Anybody ever been accused of eating the last piece of pie or the last cookie or the last slice of pizza? *Who ate the last slice? It was you! I was saving that for me!* Your whole family might accuse you-and there might not be much you can do about it-as you're wiping the pizza sauce or cookie crumbs from your mouth! But you can always order another pizza or bake some more cookies. Satan wants to impact your destiny-and look at how often he tries to accuse believers? This isn't occasionally or periodically-but day and night! Constantly, continuously Satan is trying to accuse believers before God. *Well God-did you see what Jim did this morning-that wasn't too good? And if you missed that let me mention to you what he did last night-even worse!*

*Oh and look at this-a new one-no follower of yours Lord would be acting like that. Clearly you made a mistake saving him! That's what Satan used to do. But can he do it anymore? No-not at all!*

I love this statement-Exposition, 214. No one likes a tattletale-especially one that actually tries to tell God all the bad stuff we've done! Because let me ask the more obvious question-would Satan have enough evidence to accuse us day and night before God? Yes! Resoundingly yes! And that's Pt2:Satan's accusations: forever silenced by Jesus' blood and the beginning of His reign over us-even when we know we're guilty. Because we all know we are! None of us can say we aren't. None of us can say-*That wouldn't affect me. I've done good-nothing bad to say. Satan doesn't have any accusations to tell God about me*. He doesn't have any accusations to tell God about you because all those accusations have been forever silenced by the blood of Jesus! Insights, 179. And it always will be! And yet the good news is that God's love for us is also relentless! And look at how far it goes-Rev 12:11. The martyrs in heaven were willing to give up their lives for Christ because of the remarkable truth that by the blood of Christ-by the blood of the Lamb they're saved-and its the same truth for us! We conquer-we're victorious not because we started living better and got rid of all our bad habits and God said-*Wow-impressive. Way to go-you're doing a whole lot better than most people!* No-none of us are doing any better than anybody else. There's only One who did perfectly-and that's Jesus. He lived the perfect life we never could and then gave up His life for us at the cross. His blood was spilled to pay for our sins. His blood was spilled to forgive us of our sins. His blood was spilled so that Satan's accusations wouldn't have any ground to stand on-because we're standing before the cross and it wonderfully proclaims the truth that all of our sins-past, present, future-all of our mistakes, all the things we regret and are ashamed of-are forever covered by the blood of Jesus. We have a Savior greater than all of our sin. He's far greater than Satan, the 7-headed dragon who wants to take you down. Satan can't harm you-now or impact your destiny when you turn to Jesus. Now he'll try all he can to discourage you, to bring despair and hurl all sorts of temptations and false accusations your way. Look at how this passage wraps up-Rev 12:12. Like a losing quarterback in the 4th quarter-he knows the clock is ticking and there isn't enough time to stage a comeback. He's done, game over. But he's not going out silently-he goes out kicking and screaming. But what is silenced? Back to Pt2. Are you still hearing the accusations? God isn't. He hears Jesus saying that you belong to Him. He hears His Son saying your sins are covered-no accusations exist anymore. And yet maybe you're still accusing yourself even after Satan's been silenced. *You know-no one who calls themselves a Christian should struggle the way you do. No one who says they follow Jesus ought to be doing that*. And maybe so-probably so-but the Lord will help you overcome that when you look to the Cross and see Jesus and His blood paying for those very sins you're struggling with. He doesn't say 3 strikes and you're out-Jesus says-*You're mine because I've come to save you from yourself, for my blood to cover all your sins and silence every accusation that could ever be mentioned*. Look at one last verse-Rom 8:1-2. That's what an Apocalyptic Christmas is all about-we can be in Christ Jesus, we can put our faith in Him

because He's come to this earth to save us and forever silence all the condemnation our sin brings. And that's what brings us to communion this morning!