

Revelation 12:1-6 A great and wondrous 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. ² She was pregnant and cried out in pain as she was about to give birth. ³ Then another sign appeared in heaven: an enormous red dragon with seven heads and ten horns and seven crowns on his heads. ⁴ His 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 he might devour her child the moment it was born. ⁵ 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. ⁶ The woman fled into the desert to a place prepared for her by God, where she might be taken care of for 1,260 days.

See this wondrous sign!

1. The child is born

2. The devil cannot devour him

3. The woman is spared, protected, and nourished by God.

It's not exactly the kind of picture that you see on a Christmas card is it? I have yet to see a pregnant woman and a fiery red dragon on the front of card with Christmas greetings on the inside. Yet in its own way this image from Revelation 12 is just like the image of the Christ-child placed in a manger. It holds the same type of significance as the picture of heaven's angels announcing to the shepherds that the Savior is born. Just like the familiar pictures painted, sketched, and drawn of Mary and Joseph and the shepherds adoring the Christ-child this striking and powerful depiction in the book of Revelation is a picture of God's promises being fulfilled.

He promised to send a child for his believers. He promised to send the offspring of the woman that would crush the serpent's head. And even though the devil would try to destroy this promise God would prevail. To his beloved church, to his beloved world, God would send a child who would bring salvation, who would rule all nations.

Perhaps these images from our lesson today may not exactly be what we have come to expect from Christmas cards, but the vision here presented before us, and that God allowed John to see, depicts the eternal significance of Christmas. And so in this season of gentle pictures of the Christ-child lying in a manger, we

see a glimpse of the battle that this child would wage and the victory that our Savior Jesus would win for us.

See this great and wondrous sign! The child is born. The devil cannot devour him. The woman is spared, protected, and nourished by God.

Of course to better appreciate this picture we have to understand it a bit more. We have to understand the significance. And so we look to God's word to find Christmas joy and victory in this great and wondrous sign. Who exactly is this child? Who is this enormous red dragon? Who is the woman? What does this all mean?

This child born to the woman was the promised Messiah. It is Jesus. And we know this because the bible clearly tells us that Jesus is the Savior and the King of all nations. Jesus would be born into this sinful world, as a child. He would be born as our brother. He would have to go through everything that we go through. He would grow up and He would live a perfect life for us, die, rise again, and be taken back up into heaven to rule over all things for the good of his church. This is the child born of the woman.

That brings us to the woman in this vision. One might immediately associate this woman in our text with the mother of our Lord, Mary. After all, this woman gives birth to this child, a son. But this woman does not just represent Mary, but it is symbolic of the Church, the true Israel of God, all the faithful believers who wait for the coming Messiah. The description that John gives us of this woman makes this clear. She is clothed with the sun and the moon is under her feet. Both of these traits remind us of the blessings that believers share with Christ. Just like the face of Christ shone forth like the sun on his transfiguration day through faith we share in his glory, he has removed our sin, we too shine like the sun. As members of his kingdom, believers on this earth, we also reign with Christ and this, therefore, explains the moon under the woman's feet, which is a symbol of strength and power. The woman also wears a victor's crown of twelve stars on her head. The number 12 is significant in Scripture, especially in the book of Revelation. It is the number associated with the Church - the twelve tribes of Israel, the twelve apostles. And the promised Savior was promised to come to and through those faithful believers. God promised Eve that through her seed He would bring one who would crush and defeat that deceitful serpent, the devil.

John's vision gives us an overview of how Christ Jesus would bring about that victory. In John's vision the dragon stands ready to rob the woman of her joy, to devour her child. The dragon here is Satan. His appearance is menacing. He has seven heads depicting his deceitfulness. The devil tries to convince that he is equal to God - The number 7 is God's covenant number. He has ten horns on his head, a symbol of power. He also has seven crowns on his heads. The crowns,

however, are not the crown of victory that the woman wears, his are diadem, a kind of crown that ancient earthly rulers would wear and falsely proclaim themselves to be gods. The dragon is enormous. Satan appears to have the upper hand. At first glance evil seems to have the advantage. It doesn't even seem to be a contest, an enormous fiery red dragon versus a pregnant woman and a newborn child. The woman is suffering, she is in pain; she is vulnerable. The evil dragon proudly stands ready to pounce. But Satan is all show and he has no real power over the child, or over the woman. The child is not devoured, but rather he is delivered. The dragon fails. Evil does not prevail.

Safe and victorious the child is snatched up safely to God and to his throne. This child will rule with lasting power and with care, his scepter is iron, and yet he will be a caring shepherd to the nations. The woman; she is delivered as well, preserved by God in a place of refuge that the Lord has prepared for her. There she is nurtured and nourished, she is kept safe for 1,260 days or roughly 3 ½ years. Three and half years is a symbolic period of time used to describe the New Testament era. It is a definite time, a relatively short time amount of time in God's way of seeing things, during which God has promised to take care of his Church until her king comes to take her to himself in glory.

What a powerful vision. In a flash in a blink of an eye, John gets to see the fulfillment of God's plan of salvation. In this vision filled with symbolism John takes in the fulfillment of some of God's most precious promises: the birth of Christ, his ascension, his gracious rule. Dear friends, see this great and wondrous sign and be comforted by the joy, peace, and victory our Savior brings.

At first glance evil seems to have the upper hand this Christmas season. The usual preparation, the light and the joy of the Christmas season has been dimmed by the evil of this world perhaps more than most years. As we look back at a year that is quickly passing on to the next. We recall a year of violence. A year marked with evil, with senseless shootings and horrific crimes. Evil has always been prevalent in this world, from Cain murdering his brother to the senseless violence of today. But in today's world of all access media evil often grabs headlines and stands center stage. And the devil, that sinister dragon, stands proudly with his chest puffed out, wanting us to believe that evil will win the day; for he has a great desire to rob the Church of her joy. He seeks to deceive us, to throw us into dungeons of gloom and despair. He seeks to lead us to question God, to doubt his goodness, and abandon our belief in the Almighty. He seeks to deceive us, but in the end he has no real power over us. He has been defeated. And Christmas reminds us of that victory God has won over Satan for us.

For Satan once proudly stood waiting for the promised Savior to come so that he could devour the Messiah and foil God's plan to save mankind. But that great

dragon was left empty handed. He was defeated by one who came as a child. Satan flailed away in the hopes that he could stop God's plan. He enlisted the murderous pride of King Herod to kill all the little boys of Bethlehem in an effort to destroy the child that God had sent. Satan sent his demons to possess many when Christ walked the earth. He tempted Jesus in the desert. He stood watching and waiting for Jesus to slip up, but the son of God who was also the son of Mary never did.

Jesus was perfect in our place. Jesus was the substitute that we needed. He was the Savior that we needed. True God and true man, God became our brother to save us from the power of Satan. Jesus cast out demons. He preached the gospel that would set free those held captive by sin, death, and the devil's power. He came to destroy the devil's work for he was the promised seed from the woman who would crush the serpent's head. The promise given already to Adam and Eve was fulfilled. God said to the ancient serpent in the Garden of Eden, "He will crush your head and you will strike his heel".

The Christ would suffer, he would die, but even in death the Lord Jesus was victorious. Satan and evil men twisted justice and arrested the son of God, killed this innocent man, but unwittingly brought God's plan of salvation to completion. Jesus had died, but on the third day the Son of God would rise again. And forty days later, after appearing to his disciples, and helping them to understand what this all meant, he was taken up into heaven to rule with an everlasting kingdom.

The child is victorious. The dragon is defeated. And the church is protected. Evil did not prevail, and it will not prevail; not around Christmas time, not ever. In the end the Christ-child is our joy. He is our victory. The members of His Church may suffer in this world of sin and trouble, but we know that Christ has given us victory over sin, death, and the temptations and accusations of the devil.

The imagery from Revelation 12 may not appear on Christmas cards, but you could argue that this vision is what Christmas is all about. God delivered on his promise. God the Father sent his son. The Lord of Lords was born a child. Jesus died as our Savior, and now rules as our compassionate King. He will keep us safe. Even in this wretched wilderness of sin we will find refuge; for the Church finds rest, peace and victory in his word, in his house, and in the precious means of grace until our Savior comes again on the day that he has appointed.

As so we cry out with eager anticipation. *Come, O Come Emmanuel. You came as a child. You come and give us peace through your word and your sacraments. We know that you keep your promises. We know you will come as promised. We have seen the signs. We know that evil will increase, but you have overcome it all, and we know that you will come and give us the joys of everlasting life with you. Preserve us until that day that you have set for your return. Amen.*