

Grace, mercy and peace are yours in abundance through faith in our Lord and Savior, Jesus Christ. Amen.

¹ 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. **This is God's Word.**

Dear Friends,

Would you choose to have your appendix removed in a cattle pen in a barn or to have your teeth cleaned in a horse stall while the horse is still there? Would you put your baby down for a nap in the hog barn where 500 hogs are housed? Most of us would say "NO" because we know that any place you house livestock gets to be pretty dirty, the smell can become over whelming and it certainly isn't very sanitary.

What about the manger where Jesus was born? As we view the nativity scene in the front of our church or various nativities around our community or in our homes, we get the idea that the stable was a pretty good place to have a baby. In reality it was probably a lot dirtier than most modern day barns and it wasn't as pristine as we make it out to be. There is more to understand about the birth of our Savior and John, in the portion of scripture before us this morning, helps us to see, **"A Wondrous Sign and How it Shows the Wondrous Love of Our God."**

I. The Book of Revelation is full of word pictures that convey God's truth to us. The different people and objects are symbolic of the reality trying to be conveyed and so we must look at the different pictures and consider their symbolism to understand God's message.

John begins with the 1st picture: **"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."** When we hear the description of this woman, our 1st thought is probably that this is Mary, the mother of Jesus. But the woman is clothed with the sun and has the moon under her feet and 12 stars on her head. These details tell us that this woman has some authority over creation and the number 12 is significant in that it is a combination of the Trinity (3) and the world (4) and 3x4=12 which is a number indicating God's interaction with the world.

So, as we consider this 1st picture, the woman is symbolic of the Christian Church – the body of all believers in this world who are eagerly awaiting the birth of the Savior. The cries of pain are an indication that the Savior is about to be born.

II. John continues by telling us, **“Then another sign appeared in heaven: an enormous red dragon with seven heads and ten horns and seven crowns on his heads.”** The enormous red dragon is identified as Satan in verse 9 of this chapter. A dragon is a ferocious and powerful figure of terror. The 7 heads are an indication that he wants to take God’s place. The 10 horns and 7 crowns are signs of power and a reminder that Satan is powerful. Something that we easily forget. John tells us more about this dragon, **“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.”** A third of the stars swept from the sky represent the evil angels who followed Satan. Not a majority but still a large number of evil demons.

Satan knows why Jesus is coming into the world and so he wants to destroy Jesus right from the beginning. He is poised to strike at the moment of birth. What a gruesome picture of the dragon waiting for the child to be born so he can devour him. This is a grim reminder of Satan using King Herod to kill the babies in Bethlehem shortly after the Magi came to visit. This picture shows us the extremes that Satan will go to in order to destroy God’s plan of salvation.

III. But Satan is defeated. John tells us, **“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.”** From birth to Ascension – John compresses the life of Christ and his victory over Satan because it has happened and is a fact. Christ has defeated the dragon (defeated Satan). His work of redemption is complete and so he returns to heaven. During the next 6 months we will talk about that work beginning with the birth of Christ this week and going through Christ’s journey to the cross to pay for our sins and ending with his resurrection and ascension.

Satan hates this part of the church year because it is all about his defeat and our redemption by our Savior. Christ is now in heaven ruling for our benefit but Satan is still trying to destroy us spiritually.

IV. Now, what happens to the Church? **“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.”** The woman – the Church – exists in the desert (an apt description of the world in which we live) but God has prepared a place for his Church and he takes care of her. The 1260 days represents the NT period – the period we are in right now. Satan is still active – roaming in the world and yet we have God who protects us from Satan through his Word and promises.

This is certainly an interesting picture but how does it help us see and understand God’s love? If you think about it, every parent wants to protect their children at all costs but what does God do? He sends his Son into the worst horror for us and he did this so that he could adopt us as his children. He sacrificed his perfect Son for us, who are anything but perfect. That goes beyond our human understanding and yet it helps us to see exactly what it means when we hear, **“God so loved the world....”**

We don’t always see God’s great love for us at Christmas time as we celebrate Christ’s birth. I think it is because we attach so many other things to Christmas. A lot of times we view the amount of love someone has for us by the size of their gift or the expense of it. God doesn’t

show his love to us by giving us a big bank account or a fancy home or a nice car or truck. Because none of those things compare to the gift of his Son. Everything we have on this earth will wear out and eventually go away but the gift of faith in Jesus brings us God's love today and into the future.

John reminded us that as we live in this world, we are surrounded by the wilderness of unbelief but God promises to take care of us by giving us the oasis of his church. That makes all the difference in our lives. The dragon is still out there but God is by our side – taking care of us – as we journey through life.

So, as you view the various nativity scenes this Christmas – the one we have in church, the one you might have at home or the ones you see around town – think of this picture John paints for us in Revelation – how Satan was poised to attack and yet our Savior came into the world for us anyway and he fought Satan from the moment he was born until he defeated him on the cross – that is God's love for you and for me. This isn't a nice, pristine picture we might be looking for but it is reality so is our Savior's love for us. And take time to be refreshed by the oasis of God's Word on a regular basis. Amen.