

Title: "The Cosmic Christmas Story!"

Text: Revelation 12:1-17

A few minutes ago we read that part of the Christmas Story
-which tells of King Herod's reaction to the birth of the
Messiah.

When he discovers that the 3 Magi have outwitted him,
-and have not come back to report to him on having found
the Christ-child,
-Herod gets furious and orders that every boy baby two
years old and under in the whole vicinity of Bethlehem
be killed.

He is the King of Israel, and he will have no rival to his throne.

Well, what I want to read for you now is the nativity story
according to the Book of Revelation.

-As I read it, I want you to keep the earthly story of Mary and
Joseph and Jesus in mind,
-along with the Magi, and King Herod, and the flight to
Egypt.

But listen now to the images that Book of Revelation uses to
describe what was happening in the heavenly realms at
Jesus' birth.

-It's what you might call the Cosmic Christmas Story!

So how do you like that text to ring out the old year and bring
in the new?

-I thought it might just wake you right up after all your
Christmas celebrations this past week!

And what in the world was all of that, that I just read?

-The Apostle John, who wrote the Revelation, calls it in v. 1,
"A great and wondrous sign."

And in fact, there are two "signs" he describes here:

1. The first is a woman, clothed with the sun,
and with the moon under her feet and a crown of twelve
stars on her head.

Now, tell me, from that description, is this first sign the sign of something good, or something evil?

-It's something good, right?

-It's a woman, radiant with light, and full of life: pregnant in fact.

-She is ready to give birth at any minute.

2. But then the second sign appears in heaven:

-And this is an enormous red dragon with 7 heads and ten horns,

-and its tail sweeps 1/3rd of the stars out of heaven.

Now is that a good sign or an evil sign? An evil sign, right?

-Just the color "red" warns you to watch out for this sign, and then the fact that it's a seven headed dragon makes it pretty obvious, right?

And then in v. 4 we are told what the dragon has come to do!

-He is standing right in front of the radiant woman, waiting for her to give birth,

"so that he might devour her child the moment it was born!"

Aha! So this child to be born is pretty important!

-The powers of hell are standing at the ready to wipe this child out as soon as it sees the light of day.

But what happens?

-The child is born, and we are told it is a male child, who will rule the nations with an iron scepter.

-Wo! That is language taken from Psalm 2, and is used for the Messiah.

-So that's who this male child is: it's the Messiah!

And does the dragon get him, and eat him up as soon as he is born?

-No! The child is "snatched up to God and to His throne, and the woman flees into the desert to a place of safety prepared for her by God.

And then there is war in heaven!

-And Michael, the archangel, and all the host of heaven fight against the dragon and his demons.

And the demons are losing the fight, and the dragon spews forth a torrent of water to try and drown the woman as she flees into the desert.

-But the earth itself comes to her rescue and opens up a fissure to swallow all of the water.

So the woman and baby escape, and the dragon is cast down from heaven.

It's quite a drama, isn't it?

-Maybe you never heard the nativity story told quite like that!

It's not a nice story about a mother and child in a cozy stable -with cattle lowing, and shepherds kneeling, and angels singing "Gloria in excelsis deo."

No. This telling of the story is about war in heaven.

-The birth of this little baby is considered to be an invasion.

-It's like "D-Day."

-It is God storming the gates of hell, invading planet earth.

-It is light bursting into darkness and establishing a beachhead in the valley of the shadow of death.

All of the enemy forces of evil know exactly who this baby is

-and though they cannot seem to prevent the birth, they will do everything in their power to kill the child.

Now with the Book of Revelation, we are not meant to try and fit all of the images into some neat, earthly historical chronology.

-What the Book of Revelation gives us is a glimpse of the timeless, spiritual warfare that is going on in heaven.

-It's a constant battle in which the forces of Satan try and devour the Christ and his followers.

But there are many parallels between the battle going on in heaven, and the battles we fight here on earth.

-And so there are parallels between the red dragon in heaven, and King Herod on earth.

When Herod sends soldiers to kill every newborn under the age of 2 in Bethlehem,

- he is in a sense, acting out the will of the dragon.
- He has his own reasons for wanting that baby dead, but he is right in tune with the powers of evil, -who have even more reasons for wanting that baby dead.

And when the Magi are warned in a dream not to return to King Herod, but to return to their country by a different route,
-they are listening to the voice of the archangel, and obeying the will of God.

In fact, you may have never thought about it much,
-but the archangel speaks to Joseph multiple times in the birth narratives in Matthew.
-The first time he tells Joseph in a dream to go ahead and take Mary home as his wife,
-because what is conceived in her is from the Holy Spirit.
-But then the angel speaks to him two more times,
-warning him about King Herod,
-telling him to flee with Mary to the desert in Egypt.
-and then later telling him it is ok to bring Mary and Jesus back to Judea,
-but warning them again to beware of Herod's son, Archelaus.

You see the parallels?

- The angels are protecting this child.
- Mary is taken to the desert to a safe place so that no harm will come to her child.

And this birth really is the invasion of planet earth by God himself.

- As a loud voice in heaven proclaims in v. 10, "Now have come the salvation and power and the Kingdom of God, and the authority of his Christ!"

And this child would grow up to establish that Kingdom of God on earth,
-and to overcome the devil and his minions,
-and to establish his church.

Christmas isn't just a nice little story about a baby being born.
-It really is a cosmic story of the incarnation of God on earth,
-and the first battle in a war that would ultimately be won on
the cross at Calvary,
-when the little Christmas baby would die for our sins
-and then be raised in victory over sin and hell and death
itself.

Well, that's the story, but how does it apply to you and me
today?

- Well, I've been feeling all Fall that our church, and many of
us individually,
-have been sort of "under attack" by the evil one.
- So many of our leaders have been sick, Susan with
migraines that just won't quit.
-Others suffering discouragement or depression.
- Barbara Coyman dying, and others overwhelmed by all
that life is throwing at them.

-I wanted to preach this today, because there is a line in this
cosmic version of the Nativity story in the Book of
Revelation that I don't want you to miss for your own life.

It comes in v. 11, right in the middle of the proclamation that
comes from a "loud voice in heaven,"
-when the dragon is hurled to the earth.

The loud voice proclaims, "They overcame 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."

Here's the application, my friends.

- That Red Dragon, the devil, has been hurled down from
heaven to earth,
-and at the end of this passage in Revelation 12, he is
left standing on the shore of the sea.

And he is not done with yet.

- He is ready to call upon more of his demonic hordes to come
and join him in making war on God's people.

We know from the Gospels, that he was not yet done with Jesus.

- The devil would meet him in the wilderness and try to derail him from his mission and ministry.
- He would come against him again and again all through Jesus' ministry, and even to the cross.

The devil will do the same with us in our lives, and does!

But, like Jesus, we do not need to be afraid of him.

- We overcome the devil by the blood of the lamb, and by the word of our testimony.

When Jesus faced the devil in the wilderness temptation,
-he used the simplest Scripture verses to ward off the enemies taunts.

And each little verse he used gave testimony to the fact that Jesus was trusting in God,
-and his hope was in God, and his love was for God.

We overcome the devil exactly like that.

- We trust in the blood of the lamb which has taken away our sin,
-and in faith, we now simply give testimony that our hope, our love, and our trust are in God.

It's not complicated, my friends.

- We overcome the devil every day by the blood of the lamb, and by the word of our testimony.

And our testimony is: my faith is in God alone, my hope is in God alone, my love is for God alone.

Or as the great Heidelberg Catechism puts it, our testimony is "that I belong – body and soul, in life and in death – not to myself but to my faithful Savior, Jesus Christ, who at the cost of his own blood has fully paid for all my sins and has completely freed me from the dominion of the devil."

My friends, the devil no longer has dominion over us.

-We may allow him to have little footholds in our lives because we are not actually living under the blood of the lamb,
-or exercising the word of our testimony over him as we ought.

But when the Holy Spirit points out areas in our lives where we have allowed the enemy to have a foothold,
-we do not need to panic and fear.
-We simply need to claim the blood of the lamb over that area,
-and by the word of our testimony enter again in to the freedom which Christ has given us.

So the cosmic battle between good and evil may be continuing,
-and your life and mine may be affected by that battle in a variety of ways.

But we do not need to panic or flee, and we do not need to love our lives so much as to even shrink from death.

Instead, we can live in faith, and hope, and love for God,
-knowing that in Jesus Christ, the battle is already won,
and in him, we are already more than conquerors.

Let us pray.