

The Woman, the Dragon & the Male Child - Christmas Eve 2017

by Michael Flowers

The sermon explores the symbolism of the woman, the red dragon, and the male child in Revelation 12, revealing the true nature of God's plan for humanity and the ultimate victory of Jesus Christ.

Duration: 24:53

Scripture: Genesis 49:8-10, Matthew 1:1-2, Mark 1:1-3, Luke 3:23-38, John 1:1-3, Revelation 12:1-2, Revelation 12:6

Topics: "Christmas"

Description

In this sermon, the preacher explores the unseen story behind the rebellion against God and the cosmic realities surrounding the birth of Jesus Christ. The book of Revelation is highlighted as a source of both seen and unseen realities, with the author, John, taking readers on a journey through time and space. The sermon emphasizes that the main focus of Revelation is the unveiling of Jesus Christ and the ability to see him with spiritual eyes. The preacher also mentions the significance of Christmas as the unfolding of Jesus Christ and encourages listeners to have a 'cosmic Christmas' by delving into the deeper meaning of the holiday.

Transcript

Thank you, Lord, that you've called us to be close, closer than we can ever imagine. And you have drawn us near. You have drawn us near in the incarnation of Jesus Christ.

And Jesus Christ has gathered up all humanity into himself, the one new human being. And, Lord, we thank you for that new humanity today in Jesus Christ and that we are gathered up into him. We are truly in Christ and through adoption and grace made sons and daughters.

Thank you. Thank you for this, Lord, this fourth Sunday of Advent and also Christmas Eve in the name of the Father and the Son and the Holy Spirit. Amen.

Amen. May be seated. We're going to talk today about have yourself a little cosmic Christmas.

How's that? These are very, very fun pairings for Christmas. Usually we read about the manger scene and some of the more familiar things are descriptions from, we would say, below. But today we're reading out of the context from above John the Eagle.

He's going to take us places where we're not familiar on Christmas. He's going to take us into the scene and the unseen. He's going to show us what's going on behind all of this thing we call Christmas, the mass of Christ.

Yeah, it's beautiful. And it is, as I said, the fourth Sunday of Advent, as well as Christmas Eve. And that's just a rare calendrical pairing, you know.

And so let's consider the scriptures that we heard this morning to begin with. You know, when we think about the story of Jesus and his birth, if you think about Mark's version of that, it's very, very short. He just starts right out, bam, talking about the prophecy of Isaiah and introduces John the Baptist.

He wastes no time getting into the story of Jesus on the ground. OK, and so that's Mark's version and that's the oldest and the shortest gospel. And then Matthew begins with the genealogy of Jesus and that genealogy beginning with Abraham.

But then Luke goes back even farther. He begins with anybody know Adam? He goes way back to Adam in the genealogy of Jesus. OK, now, if that's not good enough, where does John take us in the beginning before all beginnings? And so we're just getting deeper and deeper because John is that's my favorite gospel.

And I love the book of Revelation. It's such a beautiful book about the revelation of Jesus Christ. Jesus Christ, it's the unfolding, the unveiling of Jesus Christ.

It's not about charts and and per se in times that's those are subcategories, the end times that we get in the book of Revelation. But the big story, the big theme, the big topic is the revelation of Jesus Christ, the unveiling so that we might be able to see him with eyes of the spirit. And so John begins in the beginning before creation with God's Greek word is logos.

His word in the beginning was the word John is writing this out of Ephesus, you see, and so he's surrounded by pagan culture. And so he doesn't take us back to those things that would be familiar to the Jewish story about the Messiah's lineage and all of that. So John wants to take and communicate to a pagan culture something that they were very familiar with the term logos.

John borrows this from pagan philosophy, Heraclitus, and Heraclitus was actually based way back before John out of Ephesus. And so John took the Virgin Mary and tradition tells us ended up in Ephesus. And so John's sitting around going like, how am I going to talk about Jesus to this culture? And he pulls out this word called logos.

And he says, that's it. That's it. And so he says, in the beginning was the logos in the beginning was the word and the word was with God and the word was God.

He's building on it. This is not what the pagans believe. The pagans believed it was some sort of universal reason and the foundation and reason for all existence.

It's true. And John's bringing that in as well, because logos, Jesus, the eternal logos who is begotten of the father in eternity is that ground of being that foundation of all existence. And this is the one who spoke the worlds into existence, this eternal word from the father.

And this is the pre-incarnate state of the logos not made flesh yet, who spoke the worlds into existence. This is the being of Jesus, fully God and fully man. This is the one who created all things and new creation.

He's making all things new. This is the one that John's talking about. And so with God's logos, his word, his eternally begotten son, we would say, and then as the creed riffs from phrases from the gospel of John, God from God light from light.

He is the true light that lightens the heart of every human being. That light is coming into the world. John is telling us light from light, true God divinity from true God divinity, true divinity from true divinity, begotten from a father, a father's begotten mother's birth, begotten of the father, not made with human hands of one being, one being with the father, one divine essence with the father and with the son, the father and the son and the Holy Spirit.

Three persons in one divinity, one God. This is the one that we're contemplating today. Well, that's the gospel of John.

And we believe that John wrote the book of Revelation as well, the revelation of Jesus Christ. And John's final great writing, this revelation of Jesus, it gives us an even deeper prophetic, mythopoetic language to describe the above and the below realities of redemptive history. This is what the book of Revelation is describing.

It's the realities of the scene and the unseen aspects of the history of our redemption. That's what it's all about. And it's in mythopoetic, prophetic, apocalyptic language.

Right. So it takes some getting used to read through the book of Revelation. It's kind of like one of those commercials.

Don't do that at home alone or something like that. Anyway, I do. You'll be blessed.

John is talking about above and below, even in the book of Revelation, the scene and the unseen realities around in this chapter, chapter 12. We heard today, Revelation 12, the scene and the unseen realities around the birth of Jesus Christ. No major story here, but you get this cosmic story of what's happening in the heavens, the scene and the unseen, and he goes back and forth between the heavens, the unseen and the earth, the scene.

And present, past and future are not in chronological order throughout the book of Revelation. So throw out a type of reading that is sequential from chapter one to chapter 22. He's recapitulating throughout the book.

He's going back and then he'll stop and then he'll go back and then he will summarize everything. And then he'll start in the middle of somewhere else. So you can't follow it chronologically.

And so even with this passage that we heard today and a great sign appeared in heaven. A great sign. Here it is.

What is that great sign? He's going to talk about two signs, a woman. A woman clothed with the sun, with the moon under her feet and on her head, a crown of 12 stars. Mytho-poetic language.

John is describing something that's truer than true right here. And so as we read these signs and these symbols and consider the 12 stars and what are the biblical images of the 12 stars other than speaking of the nation of Israel, the 12 tribes of Israel. And so this woman, this daughter of Zion, as it were, this multifaceted woman, it's not just one identity.

It's not just in one time, but it's a woman who reaches past, present and future. On earth and in heaven. Who is this woman? That's what we're going to ask today.

We're going to ask today, who is this woman? Who is this dragon? And who is this male child? The sun, those three things. Follow me if you can follow me with three things. It's going to be a three point sermon.

Can you believe it? I never do that. The woman, the woman is a great and wondrous sign. John is seeing her appear in heaven.

In the heavens. And she's clothed with the sun and the moon under her feet and the 12 stars on her crown. And so this speaks of royalty.

This speaks of ruling. This speaks of a queen ruling in heaven. As it were, she's pregnant.

She's pregnant and she's crying out in pain as she is about to give birth. This glorious heavenly woman described by John is the climactic evolution of the people of God, first of all. First, this woman is the encapsulation of all the history of Israel.

She incorporates all of the prophecies of the people of God, and she's wearing the 12 tribes on her head. This is the daughter of Zion. And if you read through the prophet Isaiah alone, Isaiah seven and so forth, it speaks of the nation of Israel as a woman about to give birth.

Genesis 49 in today's reading spoke of this woman coming from the tribe of Judah. And did you pick up the parallels between what this glorious one coming forth from Judah would look like and do with the scepter and the ruling staff? And then you find that again in Psalm two that we read today. And then in Revelation 12, what we read today, we also see allusions to Psalm two.

He shall rule them with a rod of iron. We're speaking of the son, the male child now. This is the son.

This is the male child that this woman gives birth to. Genesis 49, the lion of the tribe of Judah. But also the heavenly woman is a picture of the Virgin Mary, the one who sums up all of the prophecies again of the Messiah coming into the world, this faithful Israelite, this faithful one who said, let it be, let it be.

That is the phrase that needs to resound through our lives as we emulate Mary, who said yes to God, the new Eve. Mary is the new Eve who reverses the no of the first Eve. Had Mary not said yes, let it be, we would still be here in our sins because we would be waiting on our Savior to be born.

But because she said yes, and in such humiliating circumstances, as young as I'm married, just betrothed, an angel appears and says, you will conceive a son by the Holy Spirit. And in this, Mary is the first we could say born again believer because she's conceived the son in her womb and all of us. We are born, John says in John one, not of blood, not of flesh, but of God.

We're born from above. The best translation of being born again is born from above. Thank you, Mary, for saying yes.

But the picture of the woman also shifts to earth, right? Because it says that the male child is lifted up in the ascension and he's taken off and he's lifted up off of the earth. You see, it's like scrambled eggs. He's not going like chronologically here.

He's just fast forwarding ahead to the ascension of Christ. The male child is lifted up and then the woman is led by God into the wilderness. This is why I can't just be the Virgin Mary.

And I've got tons of Catholic and Protestant commentaries that I refer to all the time, Orthodox commentaries, and they all see this in a multifaceted dimension. It is, yes, daughter Zion. She is the woman with the twelve crowns.

But daughter Zion has birthed Mary and Mary must birth the male child. None of that can be left out. And so beautiful mythopoetic language here just captures the imagination.

And John is saying, let reason and imagination be brought back together throughout the book of Revelation. And so who is this woman who is being driven into the wilderness? Sounds like the first exodus coming out of Egypt, being driven into the wilderness where that people, that woman is nourished. It says for twelve hundred and sixty days.

Twelve hundred and sixty days computes to three and a half years and three and a half years or twelve hundred and sixty days is always talking about the season of persecution, the season of turmoil and travail. And that's where we're living right now, because the woman driven into the wilderness is the church, the final people of God, Jew and Gentile. We have been made one, one people of God, Jew and Gentile through Jesus Christ, the faithful Israelite.

And so John is talking about this, this life in the wilderness where it's life on the margins. That's what that's referring to. The church lives a life on the margins in the midst of the great city Babylon in the book of Revelation.

There is the city of God coming down out of heaven and there is the whore, the great whore, another woman called Babylon, and she is the woman of the earth. And so she represents the world and that which is antithetical to the kingdom of God. Revelation 17 and 18 describe her qualities.

Sounds very much like America, but I'll move on. It sounds like the West. It sounds like the earth.

It sounds like people. Yeah, living apart and in defiance towards God. So check that out.

So who is this woman? She is the daughter of Zion. She is the Virgin Mary. She is the bride of Christ, the church.

And so this heavenly woman is both earthly and heavenly. You see, and there is one church in heaven and on earth and the bride of Christ is being formed. The bride is making herself ready on earth, right? John says, rejoice for the bride has made herself ready and that is life in the wilderness.

That is the church in the wilderness living close to the bridegroom. And hearing the voice of the bridegroom and being gathered into the bridegroom until that final call. Rejoice, rejoice for the bride has made herself ready.

You see, the Bible begins with a wedding and it ends with a wedding. And that's where we're going to that great wedding feast of the lamb as the bride of Christ. We are that woman in the wilderness being

sustained and nurtured through the sacraments and by the power of the Holy Spirit.

Amen. Who is the red dragon? We've talked about the woman now. Who is the red dragon point to? Yeah, it tells us a lot more about who the dragon is.

Another sign appeared in heaven. Behold, a great red, which speaks of death, red dragon with seven heads and ten horns and on his heads, seven diadems. He's acting like a king.

He's acting like a ruler. He is the god of this world, the ruler of this world, Jesus says, who has been cast down contending for Messiah ship. He's contending against the male child.

He's wearing a crown. His tale here, it is mythopoetic language swept down a third of the stars, a third of the angels of heaven and cast them to the earth. And the dragon stood before the woman who is about to give birth so that when she bore her child, he might devour her.

She gave birth to a male child. This is who the male child is, one who is to rule all the nations with a rod of iron. Bad news for the dragon.

But her child was caught up to God and to his throne, the ascension of Jesus Christ. And the woman fled into the wilderness. OK, now here's another scene scene to about gives you the back story of the red dragon.

Now, war rose in heaven. He's going back now. Michael and his angels fighting against the dragon and dragon and his angels fought back.

But he was defeated and there was no longer any place for them in heaven above. And the great dragon was thrown down. You see, this is a great defeat story and a great triumph of our God.

That ancient serpent taking us back to Genesis mythopoetic language, who is called the devil and Satan, the deceiver of the whole world. And we wonder why there is evil in the world. This is the unseen story of what's behind the rebellion against God.

And it's still taking place because we live in an already not yet kingdom awaiting the return, the final advent of Jesus Christ. He will come again in glory to judge the living and the dead and his kingdom will have no end. But now we overcome the enemy by the blood of the lamb, the cross and the word of our testimony.

And we love not our lives unto death. Revelation 12, 12. So that's the present victory in the midst of the war, in the midst of the unseen battle that we're up against.

Merry Christmas. This is the Christmas story, you guys. This is what you don't get in a secular Christmas story.

You've heard enough of that because Jesus came to destroy the works of the devil. I'm just quoting scripture, right? He didn't come to, you know, just to sort of float around in a cloud. And he had a vocation to destroy the works of the devil before he ascended.

Right. And he's sitting on a throne and he's ruling and reigning as the only Lord God right now. He was thrown down to the earth, this serpent, this Satan, and his angels were thrown down with him.

And I heard a loud voice in heaven saying, finally, we got him out of here. Right. I heard a loud voice in heaven saying, now the salvation and the power and the kingdom of our God and the authority of his Christ have come.

Here he is for the accuser of the brethren, the brothers and sisters who wants to accuse all of us before the throne of God day and night. The accuser of the brothers and sisters, the brethren has been cast down who accuses them day and night before our God. And they have conquered him by the blood of the lamb, the cross and by the word of their testimony.

For they love not their lives unto death, and in fact, death is where they went. And he's speaking of the martyrs of the church who love not their lives unto death. But because of the victory of the cross and the vision of the cross and living the cross, they were able to see death as a doorway into life eternal because Jesus Christ has trampled down death by death.

And so death is now the servant, just the doorway, how we enter into that life. Now, in Jesus Christ, death has been completely destroyed in the one new man. But everything is infused with death until he comes.

Everything dies that's alive. Therefore, rejoice, O heavens, for you dwell in them. But woe to you, O earth and sea, for the devil has come down to you in great wrath because he knows that his time is short.

He knows his time is short. And so here it is again, he takes another scene. And when the dragon saw that he had been thrown down to earth, he pursued the woman who had given birth to the male child.

But the woman was given the two wings of the great eagle so that she might fly from the serpent into the wilderness, to the place where she is to be nourished for a time and times and half time. And so who is this woman? But the church, the people of God now living and worshiping the Lord. Number three, who is this male child? We all know this is the king of kings and the lord of lords.

And we see the heavenly contention. Even in heaven, there was contention about who would have this authority, who would reign, who would be the lord of the cosmos. Today, we worship the male child, the birth of the male child who rules the nations.

How on earth does he rule the nations except through weakness instead of great strength, through humility, through love, through nonviolence? This is the way that he rules the nations. And he says, come unto me, for I am gentle and humble and I will give you rest. He can even give us rest because he knows he's going to sum it up at that final advent in his return.

He wants us in this great wilderness of life to be nourished and to rest and to take his yoke upon us, the lord of lords, the king of kings, Jesus Christ. In the name of the Father and the Son and the Holy Spirit.

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