

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. ²She was pregnant and cried out in pain as she was about to give birth. ³Then another sign appeared in heaven: an enormous red dragon with seven heads and ten horns and seven crowns on his heads. ⁴His 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. ⁵She 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. ⁶The woman fled into the desert to a place prepared for her by God, where she might be taken care of for 1,260 days. (NIV 84)

Theme: A Look Behind the Scenes at Jesus' Birth.

1. The Characters
2. The Plot
3. The Review

Well, did you see it—the new Star Wars movie? I must admit that I'm not a fan at all, and I have no interest whatsoever in seeing it; but for some reason it is supposed to be one of the highest grossing movies of all time. Maybe one of the hundreds of Christmas movies playing on T.V. right now is more your thing. Or maybe a movie like Creed, a sequel to the Rocky movies is what interests you. People love movies. And they don't just love the movies, but they want to know more about the actors who play the characters; the writers, directors, and producers can even become famous. Fans long to get a behind the scenes look at their favorite movies—they want pictures, stories, deleted scenes and so on. The movie life may seem so glamorous to them that they want to know the stories behind the story.

Today, that is what we get. We get to see behind the scenes look at Jesus' birth and beyond. You could say that it's from the viewpoint of heaven. First we'll take a look at the characters, then the plot, and finally we'll give a review of this vision.

To begin our section of Scripture we see a woman, a pregnant woman who was about to give birth to a son. When you first read this portion

of Scripture, I'm guessing that almost everyone, if not everyone here thought of Mary—especially during this time of year just a handful of days before Christmas.

But this woman doesn't really depict Mary. It is clear that throughout the book of Revelation this woman represents the Church, of which Mary is a part. The Church is regularly referred to in the feminine form throughout the Bible. We think of the picture of Christ the groom and the bride being the Church. This woman will spend 1260 days in the wilderness—that is three and a half years. In chapter 11 this three and a half years depicts the entire New Testament era, from the birth of Christ to his return. We also see this that this woman wears a victor's crown, like a laurel wreath worn by those who would win an Olympic event; it was made of 12 stars. In Revelation the number 12 is associated with the 12 apostles and represents the Church on earth.

This woman, the Church gives birth to Christ a son because Christ came from believers and it was believers in the Promised Messiah who longed for him to come. Later in this chapter the offspring of this woman are described as **those who obey God's commandments and hold to the testimony of Jesus**. It is believers who obey God and hold to Jesus' teaching while in this world. This woman is described as shining like the sun—a reminder that you and I, God's people, share the glory of Christ. The moon under the Church's feet may represent the truth that we rein with Christ.

The next character is the Red Dragon. This is a great and powerful beast who very obviously is the devil. In verse nine John describes the downfall of this dragon, **the great dragon was hurled down—that ancient serpent called the devil, or Satan, who leads the whole world astray**.

The dragon had seven heads with seven crowns. Seven is typically the number of God. The crowns he wears are different than the victor's crown of the woman. He wears a diadem, a crown worn by earthly rulers who claimed to be gods themselves—fitting for Satan who tried to rebel against God and take his place! This is in-line with how Satan is described in the rest of Scripture—that he **masquerades as an angel of light** and that he is **a wolf in sheep's clothing**.

The final character is the child of the woman. This child is clearly Jesus Christ. This child is described as a male who rules the world

with an iron scepter. In Psalm two, the Psalmist is talking about Christ when he says, **You will rule them with an iron scepter.**

He is born of a woman and is called a child indicating his human nature, but he is called a child three times—the number of the Triune God, indicating his divine nature. And as we know and focus on this time of year, Jesus was conceived by the Holy Spirit and was born of the Virgin Mary—and so he is both God and man.

So those are the characters—what about the plot?

Well, it reminds us a lot of Christmas. The woman, the Church, is pregnant and in labor, and gives birth a son. This is what the Church had been waiting for. Just imagine the anticipation of those in heaven—the saints and angel as they waited for the birth of the Messiah!

But he wasn't the only one who waited for Christ to be born. The dragon, the devil himself was there waiting. God had come down to earth; he became flesh and lived as a human. The devil saw this as his chance to destroy God. So he waited for Christ to come so that he could completely devour him. You're probably thinking of how Herod, after the visit of the Magi, had all the boys in Bethlehem two years and younger killed. But we also remember the temptation in the wilderness after the 40 days and nights of fasting, and when the people in his hometown of Nazareth tried to push him off of a cliff, or when the Jews at the temple in Jerusalem tried to stone Jesus, or when Peter tried to talk Jesus out of suffering and dying (that is when Jesus replied to him, **Get behind me, Satan**). Satan was behind all of these—trying to get Jesus to sin or to get Jesus killed before his time had come.

And eventually Jesus did die and Satan thought he had finally struck the final blow. But Jesus suffered and died willingly so that he could pay the price for our sins and give us his perfect life. And he only died because he knew that three days after his death he would rise from the dead—defeating death and crushing Satan's head. And then 40 days later he was taken up into heaven where he sits on his heavenly throne ruling over his entire creation. In the vision given to John, he sees this happening all at once, but it really expands Jesus' entire life—the devil tried to destroy Christ but Christ was taken up into heaven where Satan cannot do any damage.

Unable to defeat Christ the dragon turns his attention to the Woman—in other words Satan now seeks to attack the Church. Since he failed

to defeat Jesus, now his goal is to lead us to sin and doubt his Word so that we may reject God's grace in unbelief and join him in hell. As he did with Adam and Eve the devil tries to cast doubt into our hearts. We've already seen how the devil masquerades as an angel of light. He disguises himself so that we don't recognize him or his motives. The fact that he has seven heads with seven crowns indicates the many ways, tools, or disguises Satan has at his disposal—using everything in his arsenal to lead us into sin. Later John refers to this attack as the devil waging war against believers. And this dragon is great and powerful, one is far too powerful for us to defeat on our own. And we see how this plays out in our lives—again and again we fall to the devil's temptations, just like Adam and Eve. We constantly fail to obey God's commands. We start to listen to our friends, being swayed by human reason, being convinced by science or what society says is right and then we question or doubt God's Word.

So we read in verse six, **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.** Of course, we think of Joseph, Mary, and Jesus' flight to Egypt when Herod went on his killing spree, but there is more to it than this, especially since this woman is not Mary, but the Church. And as we said before the 1,260 days represents the whole NT era. While we live on this earth we are part of the Church militant—always under attack from the devil. We are away from our heavenly home—away from Paradise, like we are in a wilderness. But it is a place prepared for us by the Lord. And place where he keeps us safe and out of the devil's reach. He promises to guard and defend us until he takes us to our heavenly home.

We have seen a behind the scenes look at Christ's birth and beyond. We have met the characters, we know the plot. How are the reviews? Unlike a movie, this isn't scripted—it is a behind-the-scenes look at a true story. It pictures the spiritual battle waged by the devil against Christ and his Church. It is fascinating and amazing—if not somewhat alarming. The devil—a big, powerful, and angry dragon is looking to devour you by dragging you down to hell with him. Revelation may be a confusing book to read. This portion of Scripture before us today may be hard to follow; but the main point is clear: Jesus wins. And we see that today. As powerful as the devil may be, he has no power over Christ.

By coming down from heaven to earth, by taking on human flesh and living a perfect life for us; by his suffering, death, and resurrection Jesus defeated the devil. Because Jesus wins so do we! He can do us no real harm, for the Lord keeps us safe and will continue to do so until he comes again.

This Christmas I doubt if you will see a Red Dragon in any manger scenes. He is there trying his hardest to devour Christ. But in the end it doesn't matter. The devil always loses and Christ always wins. And so do we. And so this Christmas we rejoice in the coming of our Savior and say along with a voice from heaven—just a few verses after our text, **Now have come the salvation and the power and the kingdom of our God, and the authority of his Christ. For the accuser of our brothers, who accuses them before our God day and night, has been hurled down. 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. Therefore rejoice, you heavens and you who dwell in them! Amen.**