

The Baby And The Dragon

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[0 : 0 0] As we begin our time together, I want to ask you what might possibly be missing from your Christmas nativity scene. Can I just see, who's got nativity sets up Christmas time?

A few, a dwindling number it seems. But you see them around. Funny enough, the one that I saw that really caught my eye was at Kenilworth Centre.

They used to have a beautiful nativity set. And you don't see that so much in Blue Root and Cavendish, which I find interesting. But in Ireland, they've got them everywhere.

All over the place. And the problem with that is, the person that often goes missing in the Irish nativity set is Jesus himself. And you'll regularly find these headlines in the newspapers and on news.

This one is from the Irish Times recently. And the headline was, Baby Jesus found in Waterford, well, not alive and well, but well. A statue of baby Jesus was stolen from an outdoor crib in Waterford City, but has been reportedly recovered.

[1 : 0 8] A local parish priest, Father Jerry Langford, said the baby Jesus is missing. There's a big search going on around the city and everyone's talking about it. But Christmas is a time for miracles, so maybe the baby might turn up again.

But you know, when we have our nativity sets, we've got the usual characters. We've got, well, you tell me, what's in our nativity sets?

Shepherds. Wise men. Sheep. A beer tent. I can't. I can't.

Cattle. Angels. Did someone say angels and wise men? Well, if that's the only picture you've got of your nativity set, you're actually missing something. And by not having it, you're going to be missing out on the proper biblical understanding of what Christmas is all about.

And the Bible tells us that our nativity scene needs a dragon. It just so happens that I've got one. Expertly made by a Lego master smith.

[2 : 1 6] And here he is. This is a deadly dangerous dragon. He looks cute. But he's not. What do you think? That's a pretty good dragon, isn't it?

Now, this dragon needs to go with our nativity set, so I'm going to put him with baby Jesus. You see, our passage today, and you might want to open up to Revelation 12, rolls back the curtain of space and time, and shows us the Christmas story from a heavenly perspective, from a cosmic level point of view.

And in our passage, we're introduced to three cosmic figures that sound fantastical, but in fact are very real. And we need to come to grips with these characters if we want to understand what Christmas is really all about.

And we're going to look at three characters. The heavenly queen, the cosmic chaos dragon, and the child with the iron scepter. But first, the heavenly queen. This beautiful figure.

And she shows us how God sees his people as beautiful and glorious, but also vulnerable and in need of protection. So have a look at verse 1 and 2.

[3 : 28] A great sign appeared in heaven, a woman clothed with the sun, with the moon under her feet, and a crown of 12 stars on her head. She was pregnant and cried out in pain as she was about to give birth.

I mean, it's a glorious description of someone with beauty and power and prestige. This is a being of shimmering and glorious beauty. And someone with supreme importance in the cosmos.

But who is she? At first glance, it sounds like it could be Mary. After all, she gives birth to what sounds like baby Jesus. And many people take her to be Mary. But she's also more than just a Mary figure.

She actually represents the people of God as a whole. And specifically here, the Old Testament people of God. Israel. This imagery comes from the Old Testament.

And there's a lot of imagery in the Old Testament describing Israel as this beautiful, unblemished bride before God. Turn with me to Isaiah chapter 62. I know we read from 26.

[4 : 37] But I want to show you this imagery of how God sees His people. So just flip back to Isaiah chapter 62. I'm going to read from verse 3.

God says of His people, You will be a crown of splendor in the Lord's hand. A royal diadem in the hand of your God. No longer will they call you deserted or name your land desolate.

But you will be called Hepzibah, which means my delight is in her. And your land will be called Beulah, which means married. For the Lord will take delight in you.

And your land will be married. As a young man marries a young woman, so will your builder marry you. As a bridegroom rejoices over his bride, so will your God rejoice over you.

What does this tell us about how God views His people? How does He view us if we belong to His people? Well, God delights in them.

[5 : 49] They are the crowning splendor and beautiful wonder of His creation. We're just going to pause there for a second. If you belong to this people of God, and God thinks of that like that of you, what does that make you feel about God, if He thinks those things of you?

Do you realize that's how God sees you, if you are indeed part of His people? In Old Testament Israel, in the New Testament His church. God's church. Radiant.

Beautiful. Glorious. And powerful. Now this beauty is not in outward appearance, but in inward things.

Holiness. Purity. But also in outward works of charity and kindness. The things that God always has wanted His people to be. Ladies, what this means for you is you need to live up to your heavenly identity as this beautiful queen of heaven.

You're the beautiful queen of heaven, so don't be like drama queens this Christmas. What about the men? How are we to think of ourselves?

[7 : 07] Well, we're actually to think of ourselves in a similar way here. Not, well, you can think of yourself as beautiful to God, that's not a bad place to start.

Maybe you want to think of yourself as handsome rather than beautiful. But this glorious place in the cosmos, the highest thing that God can create in all of creation was man, in Genesis 1, redeemed man, which is even more glorious than the original man in the New Testament.

But here's where our similarity lies with this woman, men and ladies. We're also vulnerable. We're weak.

And we're helpless in the face of a great evil that lurks in God's creation, waiting to trip us up, to spoil our relationship with Him, and to wreak havoc in our lives.

And that is a problem that the people of God face in every age. The problem of the great red chaos dragon. That's what we're going to look at next, this cosmic chaos dragon.

[8 : 24] And he's the embodiment of all evil in the world. Opposed to God, to His plans, to Jesus and to His people. And attempts to destroy by undoing any good that God achieves.

Have a look at verse 3 and verse 4. Verse 3 and 4 in Revelation 12. Then another sign appeared in heaven, an enormous red dragon, with seven heads and ten horns and seven crowns on its heads.

Its tail swept a third of the stars out of the sky and flung them to earth. And the dragon stood in front of the woman who was about to give birth, so that it might devour her child the moment he was born.

Now, the historical situation that this is referencing is something we celebrate actually at Christmas time. It's called the murder of the innocents. When King Herod wiped out an entire village of newborn babies to try and make sure that Jesus wouldn't grow up and claim His throne, as we've got it recorded in Matthew chapter 2.

Now, what Revelation is showing us is behind-the-scenes look at what motivates actions like that. And it's this beast of a demon, Satan.

[9 : 42] And it shows us what results when people listen to him or follow him. What results is jealousy, rage, death, pain, and tears.

What the Bible is cluing us into here in Revelation is that there's a back story to Christmas that stretches all the way back to the dawn of creation.

Because that's where we meet this snake that we see, this dragon, this serpent, this snake in Revelation 12. The dawn of creation in Genesis 1, everything was working as God intended.

There was order, there was peace, there was goodness, there was life. That is, until a snake appeared and spoiled everything by tricking us humans into thinking that we could live life better on our own terms without God.

And the result of that in our lives is jealousy, anger, pain, tears, and death.

[10 : 53] But God doesn't want to leave it that way. And the promise to destroy this dragon starts all the way back in Genesis. I'm just going to read Genesis 3 verse 15.

As God judges Adam and Eve for what they've done, He calls the serpent up and He says, what have you done? And this is the curse that He lays on them. He says this, I will put enmity between you and the woman and between your offspring and hers.

He will crush your head and you will strike His heel. And so in Genesis 15, at the beginning of time, you've got this, the promise starting that starts this long search for the dragon slayer that Revelation 12 reveals to us.

But ever since Genesis 3, there's been this, down through the ages, this continual battle between Satan and God's plan to bring goodness and order back into the world. The promise of Christmas is that although there is a war raging, ultimately, the end goal is the destruction of the dragon and all his works.

But for now, let's think through some implications for our lives now that we know what this great foe of the world is and what this person, this dragon is doing in our lives.

[12 : 21] I think first we need to realize that there is something like objective evil in the world and that evil is an evil being who is really powerful, really strong and really destructive.

The picture and revelation of horns and crowns and heads and seven of them and this huge monster dragon makes him seem invincible.

and he is big and powerful but he's not invincible. But next to God he's the next most powerful force in the universe and his job role is to visit destruction and pain in any way that he can.

What this does is helps us understand our life experience. You see, we like to make Christmas time a time of tinsels and yummy food which thankfully we enjoy.

but it's like a hallmark movie we put on rose tinted glasses and we think everything is going to be okay. But life in a world with a deadly dragon on the loose is going to be filled with a certain portion of pain and failure and frustration and real evil.

[13 : 35] But because we know it's caused by a being who himself is being hunted by the champion of heaven it calls us to not give in to the chaos to not give in to despair but to rely on the one that God has sent to kill the dragon.

And secondly we need to realize that this dragon actually only has pretend power. You know, it's got seven heads and ten horns and seven crowns but you know that's a little bit much.

it's like those pretend dictators that put on all their little epaulets and medals and try to be more than they are. So have a look at these two characters. We don't take them seriously.

We know that they're trying to put on a big show to make themselves look bigger and more powerful and more authoritative than they are and it's a joke. They're not. What this means is while the dragon pretends to be the final authority in the world and while it looks and feels like evil is going to overtake and drown you it won't.

It can't because that dragon is living in God's world and God is stronger than the dragon and he sends someone to deal with that dragon. There is one who is higher than him to whom this dragon has to report who is stronger and mightier who can out plan out thought and out fight this pretend source of knowledge and authority and that is the God of the universe who has managed to outwit Satan at every turn.

[15 : 07] His defeat is guaranteed and the proof of that is the third person in our story the baby with an iron scepter. By the way that's the other thing missing from our nativity sets.

It's a baby with an iron scepter. Right next year we're going to get a sword people. But let's look at this baby with an iron scepter for a bit. Revelation verse 5 This is the one whom God is sent to rule as a wise and good king and who will defeat chaos and disorder and death.

Verse 5 She gave birth to a son a male child who will rule all the nations with an iron scepter. And a child was snatched up to God and to his throne.

An iron scepter by the way is just a rod that kings have that rule. They sometimes have a sword that stands for justice and an iron scepter is just a big wallop iron rod to be used to keep people in line.

Now that little child of course is Jesus the baby whose birth we celebrate at Christmas and now you know why it's such a huge celebration because he's come to defeat a huge foe that without him is undefeatable.

[16 : 24] And that's the secret of Christmas is that this dragon is not defeatable by you it's only defeatable by Christ. And Jesus is the culmination of all of God's plans to bring forth his champion dragon slayer.

Jesus' birth story is itself a part of a larger series of birth stories recorded in the Bible. You remember how Satan working through Pharaoh tried to kill Moses as his champion before he was even born.

And that of course didn't work out well for Pharaoh. Pharaoh there standing as one controlled by the dragon. God then decides on the line of David as the king through whom his champion dragon slayer will come.

But through the course of time David is about 1000 BC is 1000 years before Jesus through the course of time David's line goes underground.

We lose track of it until the time was right for God to take action and for his champion of champions to be born. Now to understand this imagery of the iron scepter we need to go back to Psalm 2 which is all about God's king bringing order to the unruly and chaotic people of the world.

[17 : 38] so turn back to Psalm 2. It's a glorious description essentially a job description of God's king this little baby with an iron scepter.

And there you'll find this person this king with a rod of iron. So have a look at verse 9. God's king Psalm 2 verse 9 says you will rule them the nations with an iron scepter you will dash them to pieces like pottery.

Maybe that's the other thing we need to include in our nativity sets. A whole bunch of pottery that you can smash with an iron scepter. Turning to a Greek wedding.

I was a baby with an iron scepter dashing things like pottery.

I mean everyone who's had a kid will know that's a very dangerous image. But the Psalm doesn't end there. It doesn't say well just watch out for this kid. It actually says that everyone who takes refuge in him is blessed by him.

[18 : 54] So have a look at the end of that Psalm. It says this verse 12 kiss the son in other words worship him lest he be angry and you be destroyed in your way for his wrath can flare up in a moment but blessed are all who take refuge in him.

What does that mean? Refuge. Well it means he's going to keep alive those who run to him for protection. Protection from what?

Well you'd think in our story from Revelation 12 it's the dragon. and Jesus does protect us from the dragon but here in Psalm 2 it's refuge from being judged by this baby by Jesus himself because he's the appointed heir of all things.

You saw in verse 9 what he's going to do with this iron septa he's going to dash the nations to pieces like pottery and you think to yourself well that's a little bit unfair that doesn't sound like a normal Christmas story to me but look what the nations are trying to do in verse 1 and 2 it asks this question why do the nations conspire and the peoples plot in vain?

The kings of the earth take their stand and the rulers gather together against the Lord and against his anointed one let us break their chains and throw off their fetters.

[20 : 23] conspiring plotting stand against overthrowing God and his son that sounds a lot like the job description of the serpent that we met in Genesis chapter 1 so what's happening here is that the nations without Christ as their ruler have turned into this satanic force that's trying to overthrow God and we see this all around us in our world today that's why you've got the chaos of the world around us these people are enraged with hate and opposition what has happened is they're infected and infused with evil they're so deep under the influence of Satan that nothing can save them except of course unless they kiss the son and take refuge in him it's a little bit like the zombie apocalypse movies that we some of us enjoy watching the zombies are so badly infected that they've got to be killed and if you want to survive the zombie apocalypse you have to find a place that provides shelter and a cure from the thing that's infecting them again this is a behind the scenes look at what's actually happening what the actual problem in our world is and what the cure is people have been so deeply infected with sin and Satan they can't be recovered unless they come to Christ to get the cure but if they don't they've joined forces with Satan and are busy causing as much damage and pain as he does where does that leave us?

well friends we've got to come to Christ to get the cure so that we can stop being filled with hate and jealousy and being unruly and being chaotic in our lives being like zombies infecting everyone else with pain and taking things taking life sucking life out of things and making people's lives a misery you can only not do that you can only get your humanity back and not be like a little mini dragon running around spreading death and pain you can only do that if you come to this baby put yourself under his rule and take refuge in him and then you'll get blessed and then you'll be a blessing and spread peace instead of chaos around you some last points for us to think about it may be time to rearrange our nativity sets if you don't have one you need a dragon and a baby with an iron scepter what I mean is conceptually when you think of Christmas don't get caught up in just the baby and the tinsels and the lights many people do

I've seen lots of videos on YouTube where they go around asking people about Christmas what does it really mean you don't hear about Jesus and you certainly don't hear about this we need to see Jesus as who he is the dragon slayer heaven's champion who once for all takes out evil and sin and then secondly you need to have this baby this champion dragon slayer as your champion whether it's to tame the chaos in your own life or to help you get rid of evil or sin in your life whatever it is that's holding you down making life hard robbing you of joy and peace and happiness you need to bow to Christ as your king and champion and ask to join his side against the fight against evil or he will fight against you you don't want that but our story has not ended that's all in the future our story ends with the baby in Revelation 12 being taken up to heaven and the dragon still very much alive and on the hunt for this woman who's gone into hiding our story ends on a cliffhanger yes Jesus is the answer to the problems that the devil causes but just how he's going to do that and what will happen to God's people you're going to have to come back tomorrow for our sermon on Christmas day let me pray

Lord what a wonderful picture of Christ our Lord a mighty warrior who's come to slay the dragon this evil being that wants to hurt us and Lord we're vulnerable we're helpless we're beautiful but we need your help please Lord be merciful help us to take refuge under your wings this Christmas give us your peace and help us to find true life and meaning in your son Jesus Christ Amen