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Series: *Christmas Through the Eyes...*

Title: *Christmas Through God's Eyes*

Text: Revelation 12:1-9

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As you may remember, a few months before COVID hit, Sue and I traveled to France and England and Scotland with the Michaels and the Faulconers. As in past trips, Hugh planned the everything; the flights, the hotels, the van rentals, and the places we would visit. Hugh did his typical excellent job, although I have to say he never once offered to carry my luggage.

On the first part of the trip, we spent a couple days visiting the beaches in France where the allied armies had landed seventy-five years prior on June 6, 1944. We started our tour at what the Allies referred to as OMAHA BEACH, which is located at the beach-front town of Saint Laurent sur Mer. Here's a picture of me standing by the monument that has been set up there. You can see how far the beach stretches out behind me. Bob Michael's dad was one of the soldiers who was a part of that landing and the horrible battle that took place there. It was moving to think of him bravely running nearly a mile across that beach while the Nazi's lobbed artillery shells and strafed him and his fellow soldiers with machine gun fire. I'm so thankful he survived---because if he hadn't---we wouldn't have Bob!

Today this famous beach-head, well it looks very much like Bethany Beach, Delaware, a small beach resort town. When we got there we saw people sunbathing and swimming and building sand castles. We saw children eating ice cream cones as their parents shopped in the stores that line the streets. I mean, in 2019 it was hard to see Omaha Beach as a place where a great history-changing battle was fought--a battle that the Allies miraculously won.

I share this because when you and I look at Christmas, it's hard for us to see it as an event where a battle was fought---a miraculous battle---that has been won. But that's what Christmas was---a battle---an invasion where Bethlehem was the beachhead.

If you've worshipped with us this Advent then you know we have looked at the birth of Jesus from several different perspectives. We have looked at it from the viewpoint of Mary, Joseph, the Shepherds, and the angels. Sunday, Kevin will help us look at this history-changing event through the eyes of the Wisemen. But on this Christmas Eve, I want us to try and see Jesus' coming into our world from God's perspective. What did Christmas look like from our Heavenly Father's perspective? God gives us a glimpse of His perspective on Jesus's coming and it's not in the Gospels, it's in the last book of the Bible--the book of Revelation.

Before we take a glimpse of that glimpse, let me remind you how the book of Revelation came to be. The author God inspired to write this part of the Bible was the Apostle John. Remember, John was one of Jesus' closest followers. John had seen most of our Lord's miracles. When Jesus died on the cross, John was there and was tasked with caring for Jesus' mother, Mary. After Jesus' resurrection and ascension which John also saw, he emerged as a leader in the early church. He served as the pastor of the church at Ephesus. Then, late in his life, he was sent into exile when persecution broke out against Christians. You see, the Roman emperor, Domitian wanted to be seen as a "god." In fact, he wanted all his subjects to worship him as a "god." Of course, Christians wouldn't do that and so Domitian became determined to stomp out the Christian faith. One tactic he used was to get rid of the Christian leaders. So as one of those leaders, John was sent into exile on the island of Patmos which is about sixty miles off the coast of Turkey. He was totally isolated from other Christians. Imagine how John felt knowing his fellow believers---people he had pastored, worked with in sharing the Gospel, friends who were closer than a brother or sister---imagine how John felt knowing they were suffering and dying for the faith and he was stuck on this island, helpless to do anything to come to their aid.

Of course, one powerful way John could help was by praying for them. And John was good at praying. In fact, tradition says he was called "*Camel Knees*" because of the callouses that had formed there from all his time in prayer. Well, one day while John was on his knees before God, he experienced an incredible vision of Jesus Christ. Our Lord gave His aged

disciple an experience in which John saw Heaven open---such that he could look from time into eternity---look in and see all that was and is going on.

If you've studied the book of Revelation you know the vision John describes sheds light on the future, as it uses symbols, images, and visions to describe the end of human history and the second coming of Jesus Christ.

But there's more to it than that for in chapter 12 of Revelation, John sees the past, a heavenly flashback to the first Christmas which had occurred about 80 years earlier. This flashback lifts the curtain and shows John—and us—what the first Christmas looked like from Heaven's perspective, God's perspective.

Let's read about it. Take your Bibles and turn to Revelation 12. Stand if able in respect for God's Word as it is read and follow along as I read beginning with verse 1.

Revelation 12:1-5, 7-9

**1 - A great 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 its heads.**

**4 - Its 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 it might devour her Child the moment He 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.**

To keep the continuity of this vision skip down to verse 7 where it says,

**7 - Then war broke out in Heaven. Michael and his angels fought against the dragon, and the dragon and his angels fought back.**

**8 - But he was not strong enough, and they lost their place in heaven.**

**9 - The great dragon was hurled down—that ancient serpent called the devil, or Satan, who leads the whole world astray. He was hurled to the earth, and his angels with him.**

These verses help us to see that from God's perspective Jesus' birth was indeed part of a cosmic battle. More accurately it was the END of a WAR--Christmas was an invasion into enemy territory like our D-Day but this time Bethlehem was the beachhead. Let's identify the combatants in John's vision, starting with the "good guys."

The pregnant woman with the 12-starred crown in verse 1 represents the faithful members of the twelve tribes of Israel. Remember? Jesus traced his ancestry through the bloodlines of Israel. He was a descendant of King David, He was from the tribe of Judah. In fact, our Lord's lineage goes all the way back to Israel's forefathers—Abraham, Isaac, and Jacob.

And Jesus is our primary combatant, He is the Child being born in verse 5. But of course, He's not just any child. No as we learned Sunday, He is the Messiah, the pre-existent Word. He is Jesus---Who was with God---Who was and IS God---Who was made flesh and dwelt among us.

John's revelation shows us Jesus not as a helpless infant but as a RULER with an iron scepter.

Now let's look at the enemy, the "Axis forces" in this cosmic battle. They are led by a seven-headed dragon, who of course is Satan. John is able to look back such that he describes the beginning of this war between God and Satan. It started before God created the Earth, when Satan rebelled against God and a third of the angels in Heaven fought alongside him.

Remember Satan's battle with Adam and Eve, a successful struggle that led to the fall of mankind? Well, when Jesus is born into the world that first Christmas, Satan was there, waiting to destroy Him. Satan prompted wicked Herod to try

and slaughter the child Jesus by running a sword through every crib and playpen in Bethlehem. But Herod was not successful for Joseph, warned in a dream, took Jesus and Mary and fled to the safety of Egypt. When Jesus grew up and was baptized by John, the devil-dragon attacked again by trying to tempt Jesus in the wilderness to do things Satan's way rather than God's way. As we saw last week, the Devil lost that battle, too.

Then there was the time the devil-dragon attacked by putting words in the mouth of Jesus' right hand man---the disciple Peter---who was prompted to tell Jesus that all the suffering Savior stuff, the cross should never happen. Jesus won that fight as well. In fact, our Lord won every battle in this war with evil and when He rose victoriously from the dead and ascended to Heaven the battle was done. Satan was defeated.

So, from God's perspective, Christmas was indeed a battle. Of course, that's hard for us to see because from our perspective we see the birth of Jesus as a tranquil, quiet, and peaceful event.

- We picture shepherds in wordless wonder gazing at Jesus.
- We picture animals silently milling about in the stable the night of His birth.
- Even our songs tell us that when Jesus awakes, "*no crying He makes.*"
- It's a silent night, in which all of creation holds its breath in silent wonder.

But in the unseen world, on that Christmas day literally all Hell broke out as God fought to wrestle back His most precious creation---you and me---from the power of evil. The birth of Jesus was the launch of God's final victorious assault on the power of evil. It was HIS D-day.

My point is, Christmas wasn't as tranquil as it looks from our perspective--war never is.

I can't help but think of the people who lived in the D.C. area back in July of 1861 who took buggies and picnic lunches to the hills around Manassas to watch the first battle of the War of Southern Rebellion. These civilians expected to be entertained and then as the horror of battle began, they fled for their lives.

War isn't tranquil.

I mean, you don't get from D-Day to V-E Day without the bloodbath on Normandy's beaches and the horrible casualties of the Battle of the Bulge. Jesus didn't get from birth to ascension without battles and bloodshed either. As I said, the devil-dragon waged war on Jesus from the moment Jesus made his beachhead in Bethlehem. But Jesus won every time, not just the battle but the war.

Of course, for you and me, even after Jesus' victory, the battle goes on because even though Satan knows he has lost---even though he knows his time is short---well, like a snake that maintains its bite reflexes even after it's dead, Satan still attacks you and me.

Peter gives us another word picture that shows this. Remember? He says Satan still prowls around like a roaring lion seeking whom he can devour---doing his worst to tempt us to sin---doing all he can to keep us from sharing God's love. For us, life is indeed a battlefield and doesn't it feel that way at times?! It should because in a very real sense we are like P.O.W.'s held behind enemy lines waiting to be rescued, freed.

That brings to mind one of my favorite books: *Ghost Soldiers*. It's written by Hampton Sides and in its pages, he tells the story of a dramatic mission during World War II. On January 28, 1945, 121 specially-trained Army Rangers slipped behind enemy lines in the Philippines in an attempt to rescue 513 American and British P.O.W.'s who had spent three years in a hellish prison camp near the city of Cabanatuan. You see, as they retreated, the Japanese army was executing U.S. POW's and these rangers were sent to prevent that from happening to these prisoners. And these Rangers were successful---they defeated the Japanese soldiers around the camp---but getting the prisoners to leave that camp was not as easy as they thought it would be. You see, these poor men were too mentally fragile to understand what was taking place. They couldn't imagine being freed. Some even scurried away from their liberators.

One particular prisoner, a soldier named Bert Bank, refused to budge, even when a Ranger walked right up to him and tugged his arm. The ranger said, *"C'mon, we're here to save you. Run for the gate."* Bank would not move. The Ranger looked into his eyes and saw they were vacant, registering nothing. So, he gently said to Bank, *"What's wrong with you? Don't you want to be free?"* And then a smile formed on Bank's lips, as the meaning of those words became clear. He reached up to the outstretched hand of the Ranger and ran to freedom.

After Bank and his fellow prisoners left, the Rangers searched all the barracks to make sure they had not left anyone behind and then they shouted, *"The Americans are leaving. Is there anybody here?"* Hearing no answer, they left.

But there was one more POW, a man named Edwin Rose. Edwin had been in the latrine and since he was deaf, he didn't hear all the shooting and explosions. When he wandered back to his barracks, he failed to notice the room was empty and lay down on his straw mat and fell asleep while the other prisoners were beginning their 25-mile march to freedom.

But, eventually he did escape. When Edwin woke up the next day and found the camp empty, he realized that the camp had been liberated and he left and made his way across the American lines.

Do you see the parallel between us and this story? We are like those Rangers, in that our job as "soldiers in God's army" is to share the news that Jesus has won the victory. We are to go and tell it on the mountain and over the hills and everywhere, that mankind's liberation has been made possible---that victory has been won---that Jesus has landed on the "beach," that He has come to rescue us from the bondage of sin. He has paid the price for our freedom on the Cross, all we have to do is accept it.

I would ask, have You responded to Jesus? Have you reached up and taken His hand, like that prisoner did the Ranger's? Or are you like Edwin and don't know liberation has come? Well, it has! Jesus has been born! He lived a sinless life, died an atoning death, and rose victoriously from the tomb. The battle---the war---has been won!

Each Christmas Eve we observe communion as a way of celebrating Jesus' victory over sin and death. These elements that represent His broken body and shed blood--they remind us that as Jesus said, ***"If the SON sets you free---you are free indeed."*** (John 8:36)

As we share this meal, let me invite all Christians present to partake with us because even if you are not a member of this church---if you are a Christian---if you are His, this is Yours.

#### THE LORD'S SUPPER

Romans 8:1-2, ***"There is now no condemnation for those who are in Christ Jesus, because through Christ Jesus the law of the Spirit Who gives life has set you free from the law of sin and death. For what the law was powerless to do because it was weakened by the flesh, God did by sending His own Son in the likeness of sinful flesh to be a sin offering"***

Isaiah, ***"The Spirit of the Lord is on Me, because He has anointed Me to proclaim good news to the poor. He has sent Me to proclaim freedom for the prisoners---to set the oppressed free."***

#### BENEDICTION

Now may the Light of Christmas that illumines our souls,  
Shine and make plain your way until the light of your life,  
Is joined with that Light that is beyond all light,  
And we see even as we are seen,  
And we know even as we are known,  
And we are made perfect,  
even as the Son of God is perfect

And Heaven and Earth are one.

MERRY CHRISTMAS!