

Read: Revelation 12

'they have conquered him by the blood of the Lamb and by the word of their testimony, for they did not cling to life even in the face of death.'

Revelation 12:11

"We've been given our parts in the nativity play! And I'm the lobster!" "The Lobster?" "Yeah!" "In the nativity play?" "Yeah! First Lobster!" "There was more than one lobster present at the birth of Jesus?" "Duh!" We all remember this scene from the 2003 film 'Love Actually' – and the later flash of the school nativity play in which, indeed, several crustaceans appear on stage to welcome Mary's baby. While the film fondly mocks the desperate multiplication of characters in the primary school plays, reality is stranger than fiction. Not a lobster, admittedly, but a great red dragon was indeed present at our Lord's birth.

A key question we're faced with in reading this chapter is this: who is the woman, the central character of the stylised story? Is she a symbol of the Church, picking up the imagery of Joseph's dream and alluding to the twelve apostles? Or is she the Blessed Virgin Mary, the Mother of God? To quote an internet meme, 'Both is good.' Surveying the Church Fathers, they're pretty evenly divided on the question – and a few make a case for the woman having double reference to Mother Church and Mother Mary. As Mary brought her Son into the world, the great dragon Satan, operating through Herod, sought to devour Him as soon as He was born; but the Holy Family fled to the wilderness of Egypt. Mary and Jesus thus both re-lived the story of Israel and anticipated the experience of the New Testament Church (cf. v.17): Satan seeks to accuse, destroy, and devour, often through oppressive secular power structures – but God thwarts his diabolical plan, protects and sustains His holy ones, and seals His Son's comprehensive victory.

We live in-between the Advents of Christ (vv.10-12). The devil has been defeated – thrown down from heaven and awaiting final judgement. The messianic kingdom has dawned: salvation has come, the accuser has been silenced, and the saints have conquered by the blood of the Lamb. And yet the devil's final doom has not yet come: he has been cast down to the earth and rages around 'with great wrath' (v.12) in the short time he has left. It would be easy this Christmastime to ruin a toddlers' nativity play by seeking to include a bloodthirsty dragon, a massive fight between some angels and demons, and a song about blood and woe in place of 'Little Donkey'. But while preschoolers needn't act out this drama, adult Christians should rejoice to have this opportunity to see behind the veil of the historical story we know so well to the spiritual significance of our Lord's first coming, even as we wait for His second.

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