

ADVENT: WEEK THREE

day 21

Christmas Prayers

Luke 2:36–38; Revelation 12:1–5;

Genesis 3:15



The Gospel writer Luke goes out of his way to help us know what was happening in the world at the time of Jesus' birth. The world Jesus was born into was truly horrific. Rome ruled with unprecedented imperialistic might, exercising brutal force and oppressive power against any who dared resist. And one way to read the Advent story is to see that, in a distant corner of the empire, among a viciously-oppressed ethnic group, a young girl was having a baby that was going to threaten everything that evil empire stood for. We read the earthly details of that story in Matthew and Luke. But we find the COSMIC version of that story in Revelation 12. We discover in that chapter that a dragon (whom John tells us is Satan) is poised to devour Jesus as soon as He enters this world. Think about how fragile Mary, the mother of Jesus, really was...how fragile the baby in her womb was...how fragile the infant Jesus in her arms was...and ponder the amazing fact that THAT young girl had THAT baby, up against THAT brutal regime, and up against THAT dragon (the DEVIL himself). And ponder, too, this fact: that baby ended up not only taking down the Roman Empire, but the kingdom of hell!

Many years ago, I was doing exactly that: pondering those amazing facts. And in the process of doing so, God asked me a question: WHO WAS PRAYING? If you understand anything about the kingdom of darkness, you know someone was praying, or Mary never would have had that baby. The devil was told in Genesis 3:15 that someone was coming Who would crush his head, and the serpent had been on the lookout ever since. And then one day an angel stepped into our dimension and almost gave an old man named Zechariah a heart attack. What Gabriel said sent shockwaves through the dark kingdom. The MESSIAH is about to be born! Can you imagine the fear? All the demonic hosts are on high alert. Then, six months later, Gabriel shows up again to Mary, and we see in that cosmic, spirit-world view from Revelation 12, that hell went into overdrive to kill the baby. Ultimately, Satan used the vast Roman empire as a weapon in his arsenal, yet he still couldn't kill a simple baby. Against all odds, separated from family, tended only by a carpenter, Mary gives birth to the Son of God!

And God said to me that night...there's no way that happens without someone PRAYING! Who was praying?

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Well, I can tell you at least one person who was praying. The night that Mary gave birth to Jesus...the night that the dragon crouched before her, slavering jaws poised to devour the baby the moment He was born...THAT night, Anna was praying. Did you see what God said about her? "She never left the temple but worshiped there with fasting and prayer night and day." Anna had learned the GREATEST lesson of prayer: she just NEVER STOPPED PRAYING! And because of that, the night when all hell broke loose, the devil's worst wasn't enough to defeat God's best. While Mary groaned in physical travail to birth Jesus into that stall, Anna was travailing in the spirit to birth Jesus into this world.

And how did she know which night was going to be that all-important night? SHE DIDN'T! That's why praying faithfully is so important! It's why you never stop praying for the miracle, why you never stop praying for EVERYTHING God has promised! The Christmas story is a story of prayer. For hundreds of years it looked like nothing was happening. There was no indication of God even hearing the prayers, much less moving in response to them. The enemy seemed to have it all sewn up tight. But against all the backdrop of an evil empire, and a satanic kingdom, a baby started stirring in the womb of a teenage girl...and answers to PRAYER started to send tremors throughout the corridors of hell.

prayer:



O God, help me learn to pray like Anna! Holy Spirit, please empower me to pray without ceasing, to never give up no matter how long I wait for answers. Make me someone who is able to partner with God to usher Jesus into the most broken, evil and lost places in this world. In Jesus' name, amen.

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