

Joy To The World

Matthew 2:10-11

There are a lot of Christmas traditions expressed right now. Putting up a Christmas tree is a tradition. 77% of people put up a Christmas tree. Of those, about 85% of people will put up an artificial tree. About 15% have a real tree.

Giving gifts is a Christmas tradition. Christmas movies. Putting up Christmas lights.

Setting out the nativity scene is a tradition. It begins with Jesus in a manger. The Son of God as a baby in a feeding trough. Animals are standing around. We set out Mary and Joseph. We don't know much about them. They don't have much to offer to Jesus. We know even less about Joseph.

We know about the journey. We know about the inn and no room. This is Joseph's hometown, and no one invited them to stay with them. Maybe there was a scandal of having them in their home. They were outsiders.

We place the shepherds. They weren't highly thought of. They were the lowest in society. They prove the Gospel is for everyone. No one is excluded. No one is too low or too unimportant. In Luke 2 the angels tell the shepherds, "*We bring you good news of great joy for all the people.*" They would have been the last people to get an invitation to the birth of the Messiah. The shepherds teach us that no matter who you are or where you're from, you're invited!

The wise men are put in place. They come later in the story, but they have a nativity moment, so we include them. They were not part of God's chosen people, and yet the Gospel mattered to them. They are the intellectual, the wealthy. There is a clear message that the Gospel is for everyone!

"When they saw the star, they were overjoyed. On coming to the house, they saw the child with his mother Mary, and they bowed down and worshiped him." Matthew 2:10-11

Some people feel discouraged at Christmas. Some of you are dealing with illness, and you're afraid. Christmas is for everyone. We have all sinned and fallen short. The guilt and shame make you avoid worship. Because of Jesus, we don't have to live in fear after we die.

"We are convinced that one died for everyone." 2 Corinthians 5:11

There is a character in the nativity story that is not presented in Matthew or Luke's accounts. He is in John's Christmas story in Revelation 12. It is a red dragon. Here is how John sees him in Revelation 12.

"Now a great sign appeared in heaven: a woman clothed with the sun, with the moon under her feet, and on her head a garland of twelve stars. Then being with child, she cried out in labor and in pain to give birth."
Revelation 12:1-2

There are many ideas about who is this woman clothed with sun with the moon under her feet. This woman represents the nation of Israel.

This picture of Israel in childbirth reminds us that it was nation of Israel God used to bring His Savior into the world. Jesus Christ is Jewish. In Matthew 1:11 He is called both the "*Son of David*" and the "*Son of Abraham*."

The woman is "*clothed with the sun.*" This speaks of heavenly glory. The "*Moon*" is "*under her feet.*" This speaks of dominion and power. She wears "*a crown.*" This speaks of royalty. The "*twelve stars*" speak of the twelve tribes of Israel.

The clue to the identity of this woman is found in Joseph's dream in Genesis 37:9-11 where this same symbolic imagery was once used, *"Then he dreamed still another dream and told it to his brothers, and said, 'Look, I have dreamed another dream. And this time, the sun, the moon, and the eleven stars bowed down to me,' so he told it to his father and his brothers; and his father rebuked him and said to him, 'What is this dream that you have dreamed? Shall your mother and I and your brothers indeed come to bow down to the earth before you?' and his brothers envied him, but his father kept the matter in mind."* Genesis 37:9-11

The John sees this diabolical character in the Christmas story.

"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 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." Revelation 12:3-5

There are three important images in John's Christmas nativity.

1. The Battle With A Dragon Who Will Wreck Humanity

"Then war broke out in heaven. Michael and his angels fought against the dragon, and the dragon and his angels fought back. But he was not strong enough, and they lost their place in heaven. 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...For the accuser of our brothers and sisters, who accuses them before our God day and night, has been hurled down." Revelation 12:7-9

Throughout the centuries, dragons have played a role in ancient folklore. They are always depicted as a winged, mythical creature that resembles a serpent with four legs. They are associated with fierceness, brutality, violence and destruction. Superstitious people in the dark ages lived in fear of fire-breathing dragons. This image is fitting for Satan. He is a violent character, bent on the total destruction of God and His creation. He is responsible for countless deaths and wars.

The word "devil" comes from the word "*diabolos*." It refers to one who is a "*slanderer, a false accuser or one who stands opposed*." He stands before God accusing the saints of God. This is just what the Bible says he does in Job 1-2. When we fail, he accuses us before the throne of God. He slanders our name, and he slanders our Savior too.

Satan opposes everything of God. He opposes everything God is trying to do. He opposes the people of God, the House of God, the Word of God, and the plan of God. He stands in open opposition to everything that is decent, holy, and right. He is an adversary!

When the prophesied child was finally born, Satan instilled fear and hatred into King Herod. He had all the babies in Bethlehem murdered, but the sovereign hand of God intervened and directed Joseph to go to Egypt with his family, sparing Jesus' life.

On a Friday afternoon, Satan thought he saw the completion of his long campaign when the Son of God succumbed to a bloody death on a Roman cross. When Christ's mangled body was wrapped in linen, embalmed in spices, and sealed in a sepulcher, Satan thought he had won. But God had purposed for this promised Child to rescue and rule the world, and God never changes His purposes. And on the third day, He raised Jesus from the dead.

In the middle of our traditions and sweet moments, there a battle happening behind the scenes. We have an enemy who is bent on our destruction. The red dragon has come that we will have death and destruction.

“The thief comes only to steal and kill and destroy. I came that they may have life and have it abundantly.” John 10:10

Satan has a downward path. He comes from heaven to the earth, from the earth to the bottomless pit, and from the bottomless pit to the lake of fire. He never travels up, he is always moving down. He takes everybody who follows with him that direction. The pull of gravity is the pull of Satan: down, down, down. Never up, always down.

He is called a dragon because he is **strong**. A dragon is a picture of some fire-breathing, man-eating beast that kills everything in its path.

He is called a serpent because he is **subtle**. The word serpent literally means “the shining one.” Don't get the idea that Satan is some hideous, ugly, evil-looking creature that wears a red suit, horns on his head, goatee and a mustache and carries a pitchfork. The Bible says he can transform himself into an angel of light. When he was that serpent of old who deceived Eve in the Garden of Eden, he was one of the most beautiful creatures known to man.

He is called the devil because he is **sinister**. The word devil means “slanderer or accuser.” That is his specialty. He loves to slander the Savior and accuse the saints. He will lie to you. He will lie about you. Then he will lie to you about you. He will tell you that you are lost when you are saved. He will tell you that you are guilty when you have been forgiven. He will tell you that you are weak when indeed you are strong.

Then he is called Satan because he is **shameful**, the name Satan means “adversary.” He is the adversary “who deceives the whole world.” He is one who opposes, who deceives. Jesus said, “He is a liar, and the father of lies.” John 8:44

“Whose minds the God of this age has blinded lest the light of the gospel of the glory of Christ, who is the image of God, should shine on them.” 2 Corinthians 4:4

The Bible says that Satan's determination is to blind us so we can't see the truth of the Gospel.

2. The Birth Of A Son That Will Reign In Heaven And Earth

The reason the dragon wants to stop the baby from being born is because He's a dragon slayer. The Son Isaiah wrote about will become a sovereign ruler.

“She gave birth to a son, a male child, who will rule all the nations with an iron scepter. And her child was caught up to God and to his throne.” Revelation 12:5

This remarkable statement captures the life of Jesus Christ in a very concise way. It captures His incarnation. Jesus was born into humanity. He became part of us. The verse also teaches us about His ascension. Her child was caught up to God and His throne. Jesus went up to heaven after His resurrection. But it also speaks that He's coming back again. He was to rule all nations with a rod of iron. That hasn't happened yet. That will take place in the Millennium.

This phrase is only spoken of the Lord Jesus Christ. It was prophesied of Jesus in Psalm 2:7-9 *“I will declare the decree: the Lord has said to me, ‘You are my son, today I have begotten you. Ask of me, and I will give you the nations for your inheritance, and the ends of the earth for your possession. You shall break them with a rod of iron; you shall dash them in pieces like a potter's vessel.’”*

That prophecy will be fulfilled in Jesus Christ as we read in Revelation 19:15 *“Now out of his mouth goes a sharp sword, that with it he should strike the nations, and he himself will rule them with a rod of iron. He himself treads the winepress of the fierceness and wrath of almighty God.”*

The woman’s child will be Satan's ultimate nemesis, Christ Himself, the grand hero of the end times drama. The person that Satan hates more than anyone else in the world is Jesus. The people that Satan hates more than anyone else in the world are the Jews. Now he does not hate Jesus because of the Jews. He hates the Jews because of Jesus. The most persecuted people in history have been the nation of Israel, but don't take their persecution as a sign that they are not special to God. It is because they are indeed God's chosen people.

There is a spiritual war on earth.

“And war broke out in heaven: Michael and his angels fought with the dragon; and the dragon and his angels fought, but they did not prevail, nor was a place found for them in heaven any longer.” Revelation 12:7-8

These verses do not refer to just one battle, but a long war with many battles on many fronts. These include the battle between Michael and Satan, the battle between the Satan-led angels and the God-led angels, and the battle between Satan-led people and God-led people. The Book of Revelation tells us that a final battle between these fierce enemies is to occur in the end times.

3. The Breakthrough to Victory that Causes Believers To Rejoice.

“Then I heard a loud voice in heaven say: ‘Now have come the salvation and the power and the kingdom of our God, and the authority of his Messiah. For the accuser of our brothers and sisters, who accuses them before our God day and night, has been hurled down. They triumphed over 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! But woe to the earth and the sea, because the devil has gone down to you! He is filled with fury, because he knows that his time is short.’” Revelation 12:10-12

- **Victory In Heaven**

“I heard a loud voice in heaven say: “Now have come the salvation and the power and the kingdom of our God, and the authority of his Messiah. For the accuser of our brothers and sisters, who accuses them before our God day and night, has been hurled down.” Revelation 12:10

- **Victory On Earth**

“And they overcame him by the blood of the lamb and by the word of their testimony, and they did not love their lives to the death.” Revelation 12:11

1 John 1:7 tells us *“The blood of Jesus Christ his son cleanses us from all sin.”*

“If anyone sins, we have an advocate with the father, Jesus Christ the righteous.” 1 John 2:2

When Satan stands before God and accuses us of wrong doing and sin, God the Judge looks at our defending attorney, the Jesus, and says “Do You have anything to say?” Our Lord and Savior simply points to the nail-scarred hands and says, “I plead the blood.” God's gavel comes down with the verdict “Not guilty!”

The devil may try to call you dirty, but if you are under the blood, you are clean. What God has called clean, let no man call unclean. The only sin that Satan can hold over your head is the sin that you have never put under the blood.

- He Was Defeated On The Cross.

“Inasmuch then as the children have partaken of flesh and blood, He Himself likewise shared in the same, that through death He might destroy him who had the power of death, that is, the devil.” Hebrews 2:14

The ultimate victory has been won at Calvary, but in the meantime, Satan is desperate to do as much damage as he can.

Satan is not the ultimate force. The Bible says, *“...greater is He that is in you, than he that is in the world.”* 1 John 4:4

Satan does not have the power over your life. Satan is a doomed, judged enemy. His judgment was at the cross. It will ultimately be carried out when he is thrown into the lake of fire forever and ever, but between now and then, his presence is still here without any ultimate power, but with all kinds of ability to disturb and discourage and distress us.

When we pray against the enemy, we enforce the judgment that was passed on him at the cross. We can pray that into operation even today before it is finally completed. When I pray and say, “Lord, I’m praying against the enemy today. Defeat him in every attempt to destroy this marriage or to hurt this family or to ruin this organization or to sow discontent in this church.”

When we pray against him, we help to enforce the victory that was won at the cross until it’s ultimately carried out in its completion.

“The weapons of our warfare are not carnal, but our weapons are mighty in God for pulling down strongholds, for casting down arguments and every high thing that exalts itself against the knowledge of God, bringing every thought into captivity to the obedience of Christ.” 2 Corinthians 10:4-6

We are not powerless, even in this intermission between the judgment and its completion. We have been given everything we need. The Bible says, *“Put on the whole armor of God, that you may be able to stand against the evil one and having done all, to stand.”* Ephesians 6:11

“Resist the devil and he will flee from you.” James 4:7

“Then the dragon was enraged at the woman and went off to wage war against the rest of her offspring—those who keep God’s commands and hold fast their testimony about Jesus.” Revelation 12:17

Satan hates the Jewish nation. Satan wants to take out the Christians who are in Israel, the people who are obeying the Word of God and giving the testimony of Jesus Christ. One of these days, the heavens are going to open, and the trumpets are going to sound, and we’re going to hear the voice, and the Lord Jesus is going to descend. He’s going to take those who have put their trust in Him to heaven forever and ever. In the meantime, while the enemy is thrashing, we need to be doing our job preaching the gospel.

We are victorious! We are victors!