

“The Unfolding Story of the Woman and the SOn”

26 December 2021 - Led by Rev. Sam Mawhinney

Welcome

Lighting of the Advent Candles

Hymn of Preparation: The First Noel

Prayers of Adoration & Confession

Old Testament Reading: Genesis 3:14-15

Praise: Good Christians All, Rejoice!

New Testament Reading: Revelation 12:1-17

Sermon:

I. The beginning and the end of the story

Did you get a book for a present and are you looking forward to reading it? If the start really captures your attention and you are enjoying the story, usually we want to know how it all works out, we want to know the ending. I am told some read the end before they start.

Today marks the conclusion of our series on miracle births. We have looked at amazing stories of women who have given birth to a son as part of the wonderful story of God's salvation history: Sarah and Isaac, Rebecca and Joseph, Manoah's wife and Samson, Hannah and Samuel, Elizabeth and John, Mary and Jesus and today we will take a look at the beginning and the end of the salvation story in Genesis Ch 3:14-15 and in Revelation Ch 12 and they both contain stories of a woman and the birth of a son.

II. The beginning and the end in the Bible narrative

Every story had a hopeless beginning, old age, childlessness, homelessness, being refugees, slavery, marital disharmony, pain, political oppression, domination and lack of nationhood, and many attempts to sort things out by their own ingenuity and disobedience of God's word which ended in failure and death.

They all had moments of triumph and success, children born, enemies defeated, land and a home granted, release from slavery, overcoming temptation, riches and success but sadly each story no matter how good ended in death.

Why is everything messed up? Why suffering? Why death? Why Covid? Why natural disasters? Why pain? The bible's answer is what we call the fall of humanity through Adam and Eve and the hostility described by the reality of Satan in the world and specifically on human beings. In the beginning in the days of Eden when Eve and then Adam disobeyed God, they did so because they listened to the serpent (that is the animal snake) which was a conduit of falsehood and lies and who deceived Eve. The Lord pronounces judgement on the serpent both the animal snake and Satan, and on humanity, male and female.

The judgement for humanity is given in the context of dialogue with God pointing out their sin and with the promise, (Gods words are for their benefit not for the snake) of ongoing enmity in subsequent generations and of a battle where a mortal blow is delivered to the head of the snake and pain is delivered to the heel of the woman. *“He will strike your head, and you will strike his heel.”* This highlights, Gods serious antipathy to sin and his judgement of it and it also assures Adam and Eve and us of a victory over Satan the one who caused us such ruin.

What is promised is that an offspring of Eve will be the one to inflict the defeat. Our look at each of the women and their seed or offspring, is the tracing of the story, with the specific promise to Abraham that his seed would be from his own body and be a blessing to every nation. Each time we saw that the offspring was flawed and though they were a part of the story they pointed to another. The one who was that seed and who fulfilled all the requirements was Jesus. Galatians 4:4 *“when the time had fully come. God sent his son, born of a woman, born under law, to redeem those under law, that we might receive the full rights as sons.”* The victory of Jesus on the cross is summarized in Colossians Ch 2:15 *“and having disarmed the powers and authorities, he made a public spectacle of them, triumphing over them by the cross.”*

The story climaxes with the birth of Jesus, his life an atoning death on the cross for our sin and his victory over sin and death through his resurrection from the dead and his ascension to heaven. Yet that is not the conclusion of the story for that we turn to the final book of the bible, revelation, and to Ch 12.

III. The beginning and the end in Revelation

This beginning and the end of the story is shown to us in glorious technicolour, in Revelation Ch 12, in magnificent apocalyptic language. We are also shown a big picture view of the hostility between Satan and the woman and her offspring. Apocalyptic literature describes in pictures, the unseen heavenly reality in the present with an emphasis on the future end times. The key to understanding is that it must have made sense to the readers of the day using biblical OT pictures. So let us look at the picture of the story.

There is something big happening “in heaven”. (11:19-12:1) When you read in heaven you think somewhere up there, beyond us, outside of us, but in Revelation “in heaven” doesn’t only mean the place heaven but the reality of heaven, a spiritual reality that is unseen but exists all around us. This world sits within the context of an unseen spiritual reality and the two interact with each other. Revelation chapter 12 describes a conflict like the conflict in Genesis Ch 3 between a pregnant woman who gives birth to a child and her further offspring, and a fierce dragon identified as Satan in 12:9. This is a picture of the spiritual conflict being played out on the stage of the world from Eve to when Jesus comes back as we will see as we understand the characters introduced to us in the passage.

- A. **The woman:** v1 is *“clothed with the sun, with the moon under her feet and a crown of twelve stars on her head”*. This is the picture in Joseph’s dream where he foresaw his father Jacob also called Israel and his eleven sons bowing down to him, so this represents the nation of Israel. She Israel is pregnant (v2) and gives birth to a male child (v5) who will rule all nations with an iron sceptre, a picture of the King of Israel

in Psalm 2:9 who is the Messiah; and the child is snatched and taken up to heaven because the dragon wants to devour the child. (The child being Jesus this probably represents his ascension to the right hand of his father in heaven) Note (v17) that the woman has further children and for a period of 1260 days (42 months / 3 ½ years) she is both taken care of in the desert (v6) though vulnerable to attack by the dragon, Satan (v17) The picture is a sign, a sign that appeared in heaven, it is not referring to one person but is a sign of a woman who is pregnant. The woman is Eve, Sarah, Rachel, Hannah, Elizabeth, Mary, Israel, the church (the bride of Christ).

- B. **The child:** is Jesus Christ and the most vulnerable time for Jesus was when he was born of Mary (v4) think of Herod and the slaughter of the innocents, think of going to Egypt (possibly for 3 ½ years) think of Jesus temptation in the desert, or Gethsemane. His life is noted by its beginning on earth, his birth and end on earth, the ascension.
- C. **The dragon:** (v3) enormous beast (powerful) red possibly means strife! Seven heads, ten horns and seven crowns on his heads. Head means authority, crowns mean ruling and the horns mean strength or power. The OT pictures Egypt as a monster with many heads (Psalm 74:13-14) However we are being told the dragon is Satan (v9) but his influence comes through control of the kingdoms of the world, and this is what Ch 13 is about in the beast of the sea (political power and rulers) and the beast of the earth (false religion) So we see Satan's power being exercised through political ideologies and through powerful rulers. We see this most clearly when the nation and rulers are opposed to God's people, Pharaohs, Kings such as Nebuchadnezzar, Herod, Caesar's, Communist states and rulers, States ruled by other religions, and we see it in every government and rulers who oppose the teaching and rule of Jesus Christ in their lives up to the present day. Jesus confirms this when confronted by Satan in the desert and Satan offers him the kingdoms of the world. (Luke Ch 4:5-8)

The picture reveals something of Satan's history (v4) Other references, Isaiah 14:12-15; 2nd Peter 2:4 and Jude 6 point to Satan and other demonic angels having become proud, rising up in rebellion and being thrown out of heaven. There is evidence in v7-9 that the definitive battle with Satan occurred when Jesus was on earth and that victory was secured through the death of Jesus on the cross and his resurrection. This battle continued from before time, revealed to us in Genesis Ch 3 and ongoing until Jesus' victory of the cross, see v10-12. Having been defeated he is now restricted to influence on the earth, Jesus has ascended, Satan is no longer allowed access to heaven (as he was in the days of Job) but because of that fact; woe to the earth (v12) for he knows his defeat and his time is short. His strategy here on earth is of accusation and slander (v10) and of death (v11) but believers have the victory over both, through the gospel and their testimony. They are not under condemnation and not defeated by death.

This battle in the heavens was real, man did fall, sin entered the world and all its consequences are clearly seen, but God's plan always was to send a saviour, born of a woman, and victory was always assured and has been secured through the son born to

Mary, Jesus Christ crucified for our sins, raised on the third day from the dead and ascended to the right hand of his Father in heaven to reign. This spiritual war was worked out and tied into world history. Today our eternal destiny is secure, we are blessed in the heavenly realms with every spiritual blessing in Christ, yet in this world we contend with the ongoing but ultimately futile struggle by Satan against the Church and her people, pictured here as the women and her offspring (v17).

IV. The purpose of the story

- Makes sense of both the beauty and brokenness of the world and humanity
- Offers hope of salvation from sin and death through belief in the person and work of the Lord Jesus on the cross.
- Explains the current hostility of the world to the church. *“Satan is filled with fury”*
- Encourages Christ’s followers, Christian believers to resist his lies and use the spiritual weapons and disciplines available to us, prayer and the scriptures as means of grace.
- Encourages us to persevere faithfully with hope when the times are very tough because Satan’s time is short.
- Gives us the conclusion, as Jesus said to John in his vision, *“It is done. I am the Alpha and the Omega, the Beginning and the End. To the thirsty I will give to drink without cost from the spring of the water of life. The one who overcomes will inherit all this and I will be his God and he will be my son.”* Rev 21:6-7

Praise: Come Behold the Wondrous Mystery

Announcements

Prayers for Others

Closing Hymn: I Will Glory in My Redeemer

Benediction