

# Good News Told Four Ways



## *The Stories of Christmas*

### **John: a Story of Christmas**

**Revelation 12:1-17**

I don't have any lights as I preach this morning because unlike Kory, I am not the crazy light guy. When we decided to do the Christmas series and tell the different stories of Christmas using different books of the Bible, I never dreamed that Kory would want to begin with the gospel of Mark because like you, I thought Mark doesn't have a Christmas story. But it was fascinating last Sunday to listen to Kory, from Mark, take us back to the book of Isaiah, and see Isaiah be that crazy light guy that hundreds of years before Christ was trying to get us ready for the birth of God's Son. This morning, I'm not the crazy light person, but if you know me and you've been with me very long, you know that when it comes to Christmas, I'm the biblically correct nativity scene guy. As a matter of fact, we made a funeral visitation to a nice new Baptist church in Tennessee Friday night and when we got there and I came in the foyer, there was a beautiful nativity scene that I didn't get to examine. I went on in to the sanctuary and paid our respects to the family, and as we were coming out, there was no one in the foyer but me and Celisa and a member of the family. The

member of the family was from our church, all of a sudden, I found myself standing in front of that nativity scene in the foyer of a Baptist church, and it was not biblically correct. But it was beautiful! It was expensive; it was gorgeous! But there was baby Jesus in the manger with his mom, dad, and the shepherds, and guess who they had there. They had the wise men. You know what I wanted to do, right. If it was not for my wife, I literally was getting to lay my hands on the wise men when she said, "Don't you touch those!" I looked around and there wasn't anybody from the church in the foyer, so no one would have known...she quickly grabbed me by the arm and led me out of the foyer, and she did not let me change that nativity scene. I mean where Kory is the light guy, I'm the guy that I'm telling you, if you're going to put your nativity set on the mantle of your fireplace, you put the wise men at least in the kitchen. If you've got a small house, you put the wise men in the back bedroom. It's going to take them about a year and a half to get there. As a matter of fact, the Bible is going to tell us that Jesus was not in a cave on the outskirts of Bethlehem lying in a manger; He had already moved into a house. He is a toddler. Herod is going to take out the children, not just who have just been born, but also the children who were two years and younger when he ascertains the time the star first appears. Last year, I was in my brother-in-law, Trace's, house and they had the nativity set in the hallway. Guess who was on the hallway table. The wise men! So while no one was looking, I gathered up the wise men, took them in Amy's master bathroom, and put them on the counter. It was about three days later when I got a call from Amy asking if I had moved her wise men. "Absolutely, I moved your wise men! They're not supposed to be at the manger scene!"

When we decided to do this new Christmas series and Kory was going to kick it off with the gospel of Mark, I got the second pick. I thought wow I'm going to pick my favorite nativity scene. If you've got your bibles and you're ready this morning, let's open our bibles to the Apostle John, because he gives us my favorite nativity scene. If you opened your bibles to the gospel of John, you've missed it. Turn to the book of Revelation. The apostle who wrote the gospel of John also wrote the book of Revelation. In the book of Revelation, he has my favorite nativity scene. Let me remind you that when we turn to the Revelation of Jesus Christ to the apostle of

John, God did not, by the Holy Spirit, lead John to write in prose or poetry, so this vision of the Lord that he's going to see doesn't come to us in those two main vehicles that we've been taught to understand, and it's easy for us to understand. No, the vehicle that God gives John is apocalyptic literature. Apocalyptic literature was a special literature that was used between 200BC to 100AD. It was written during a time of persecution. It was written during a time when you tried to keep your message from the enemy, so you coded it; you symbolized it. It was kind of like during our World Wars. You know that our United States government had men who would send our messages to our troops and they were coded so that if the enemy intercepted the messages they wouldn't understand it. You know that for a long period of time we tried to break the codes of the Japanese during that famous war. Why? Because it was important military strategy to try to know what your enemy was doing but try to keep the enemy from knowing what you were doing. It was no different two thousand years ago when the book of Revelation was written. Just so you and I have kind of an understanding of what the book of Revelation is about, it is written with a type of literature that the closest thing I think we have to it today in our society would be a political cartoon. If you've been with me a long time you understand this, you know this. When I was at Bible college at Midcontinent Bible College, I had a professor by the name of Charles Cloyd. I would come into class each day and he would be sitting at his desk. He wouldn't talk to any of us students until he finished reading the paper. The last section he would always read was the political cartoons, and he would be sitting at his desk and he would just chuckle, then he would begin class. A few times, I would come in and walk by his desk because I knew he was going to chuckle at a cartoon, and I would look at that cartoon and it would make no sense to me at all. He would still chuckle. After a few years of him as my teacher, one day I asked him, "Bro. Cloyd, would you help me understand why you chuckle at those things?" He began to share with me the key to unlocking political cartoons. Now, many of them are easy, but some of them at that time were rather difficult. If you remember, that was the time during the Cold War, and sometimes you would open up the newspaper, Time magazine or Newsweek, and there would be a globe of Europe and there would be a big bear with a paw trying to grab the

continent of Europe, and there would be an eagle circling at the top of the cover. If you know about world politics, you understand what that was saying. That bear paw symbolized Russia and Russia's will, Russia's domination of Europe. The only hope for Europe was not a literal bird, but the United States of America. I've always said that if I was a cartoonist during political season and wanted to capture what was going on in America, I would have a picture on the cover a picture of the White House, and trying to squeeze through the door would be a donkey and an elephant. How many of you would know what that means? Of course you would! When it comes to the political scene in the United States, we're basically a two party system, and the Republicans and the Democrats both want the office of the presidency so they can influence the nation to their way of thinking. That's how the book of Revelation is written. It's really written, if you will, in a political cartoon style. Imagine the United States ceases to be a nation in about two hundred years and climate change doesn't wipe us out for the next thousand years, and then two thousand years down the road, archaeologists discover a cover of Time magazine with a white house and a donkey and an elephant trying to squeeze through the door. How many of you think they would get that right off the bat like you and I just did? They wouldn't get it. They would have to study and study and study. See, this book of Revelation that people say was written so we wouldn't understand, that's crazy! It was written to be understood, but it is just a little harder for us to understand because we're two thousand years removed from the people that it was written to.

We are going to choose a passage of Scripture this morning that there's really no controversy over, there's really not much doubt about because even two thousand years later, we can clearly get this picture, and it's my favorite picture of Christmas. As a matter of fact, if we were going to put a nativity scene out on 641 by the entrance of our church, this is the scene that I would want us to put up, I've told you that before. I'm surprised some of you haven't made this so we could put this out at Christmas. Here's the picture. No Joseph, no shepherds, no angels, no baby yet, just this woman. Not a young woman who is a virgin who's never had a child, but an older woman. She's beautiful, but she's old and she's having a baby. She's struggling to have a baby. She's in great pain to have this baby.

There is pain all over her face! Standing where the baby is going to come out of her body is not a midwife, not a doctor, not her husband, but a big red seven headed dragon ready to devour her baby. Yeah...that's my favorite scene of Christmas. John is going to tell us that this doesn't happen on the earth, but it happens in the heavens. I hope you're ready to hear John's story about Christmas. Let's open our bibles to Revelation chapter 12.

### **Scripture**

***"And a great sign appeared in heaven: a woman clothed with the sun, with the moon under her feet, and on her head a crown of twelve stars. She was pregnant and was crying out in birth pains and the agony of giving birth. And another sign appeared in heaven: behold, a great red dragon, with seven heads and ten horns, and on his heads seven diadems. His tail swept down a third of the stars of heaven and cast them to the earth. And the dragon stood before the woman who was about to give birth, so that when she bore her child he might devour it."***

(Prayer)

Father, thank You for the different stories You give us of Christmas. Mark had a story and John has a story too. Father, from everything we understand, John was an older apostle when he wrote his gospel and his letters and the book of Revelation, the revelation of Jesus that you signified to him by an angel. Father, let us learn an important aspect of John's story this morning. Let us fully come to understand that on earth there may be some scrooges that might try to damper the spirit of Christmas, and there might be a Grinch in many families who try to squelch the spirit of Christmas, but let us come to understand that in Heaven there is a being far, far greater. You picture him as a dragon whose tail takes down a third of the stars, and it was his desire to take out the child. Father, thank You for the truth that he did not take Him out, but when He was born, he did grow up to go to a tree, and on that tree, lay His life down. When He laid His life down, You accepted the life He laid down. You let us know that by raising Him back alive three days later and He

ascended back to Your right hand side, and it changed eternity forever. It changed how we would live our life on this earth. We praise You for that truth this morning. When we leave here, let us truly grab hold of John's purpose of the nativity scene that was set in the heavens. We thank You, in Christ's name, amen.

What a story! Please understand that as we're studying the book of Revelation, the first part is telling us what's happening on earth. What's happening on earth is the church is being persecuted, God's people. Starting in chapter 12 and the end of the book of Revelation, the Bible is going to start telling us why what's happening on the earth to the church is happening. That is because there is a being behind all that's happening, that being is a personal devil, a personal Satan, who is picture here as a dragon. In Revelation chapter 12, the Bible starts again with the beginning and pictures the church age for us. We know what ultimately started the church age, which is the birth of God's Son Jesus Christ, the fulfilment of Old Testament prophecy. Even though Jesus would not build the church until later in His ministry, even though the church would not be empowered by the Holy Spirit to carry out the agenda of God's kingdom until the day of Pentecost, John takes us back to the birth of Christ. Please be careful here. Don't paint the woman or see her as the Virgin Mary. She might be the Virgin Mary here, but I really don't think that is what the angel is trying to show John. What the angel is trying to show John is that the woman who is clothed with the sun has the moon under her feet...wow. This is a glorious lady! She's wearing a crown and there are twelve stars in her crown.

If you and I were the early church, I believe without a doubt, immediately because of the teachings of our pastors and apostles, we would quickly recognize that this is very similar to the Old Testament story of Joseph. Do you remember when Genesis transfers from Joseph being the main character? It starts off with him being the young man and he has a dream because his dad has given him a coat of many colors. He has this dream and one day he sees his brother's sheaves of wheat bow down to his sheaf of wheat. The brothers say hey, are you trying to tell us you believe in this

dream that one day you're going to rule over us and we will bow down to you? The next thing you know, I imagine dad breaks up a fight. The older brothers are on the younger brother, and the next thing you know, he comes back he comes back to the field one day and says last night I dreamed this dream that the sun, moon, and eleven stars bowed down to me. Does anyone remember what dad said? It was one thing yesterday when you thought you would rule over your brothers, but are you saying that me and your mom will bow down to you too? It is the same language to begin the church era. In my mind, the Bible is painting the nativity scene for John. It is built on this truth that God chose a people, and that people is Israel. Israel's ultimate purpose by God as a nation of people was to bring forth the birth of the Messiah who was going to be the serpent crusher.

As we read last week in lighting our advent wreath, after the fall of man in the garden God made a promise that one day there would be enmity between the seed of the serpent and the seed of the woman and one day the offspring of the serpent would bruise the heel of the offspring of the woman, but the offspring of the woman would crush the head of the serpent. Did God put Satan on notice, or did He put him on notice? The next thing we know in Scripture, Cain kills Abel. Have you ever wondered if Abel might have been going to be the seed line? But now, we have Seth. We don't have long in human history until one day the sons of God decide to marry the sons of men, and it makes God so upset that He decides to destroy man because of their wickedness. The godly seed line now intermarrying with the ungodly seed line. Satan must have been rejoicing as God gets ready to wipe out humanity because if God wipes out humanity, there will be no seed to crush his head. But praise God, Noah finds grace in the eyes of God! The next thing we know, the seed of the woman is no longer just the seed of the woman, he is the seed of Abraham. Before we know it, a Pharaoh who knows not Joseph decides to kill all the male babies, but does not happen. That seed of the woman who is now the seed of Abraham, we suddenly find out that it's refined to a family and refined to a man, and this man is going to be the seed of David. The next thing you know we have a queen mother who because her son dies decides to wipe out all the grandchildren. Do you realize that if she

wipes out all the grandchildren there will be no serpent crusher? Praise the Lord, one of the daughters saves Joash. When Israel's history comes to an end in the historical section of the Old Testament, we have a man who's trying to convince a Persian king to wipe out in its entirety the Jewish people! If that plot had have been carried out, there would never have been a serpent crusher.

Do you see what John is trying to tell us in apocalyptic literature? Israel, God's Old Testament covenant people, has labored and labored to bring forth the birth of the Messiah, and finally He is getting ready to be born and guess who is there...not on the earth, but in the heavenlies where spiritual warfare takes place. We have this red great dragon, seven heads, seven crowns, ten horns, and he's ready. A baby is going to be no match for a dragon. His mother is totally vulnerable now. She's getting ready to deliver; guy's, it's over! A baby is no match for a dragon. But then the Bible says that she delivers a male child who is to rule all nations with a rod of iron, and then quickly, John sees the baby, not grow up, not go to a cross, not be buried, not rise again, but immediately be caught up to Heaven to the Father and His throne. In that one picture of the baby ascending to the throne of the Father, we have the whole story of the gospels, His victorious life, His vicarious death, His burial, His glorious resurrection, and His ascension back to the Father's right hand where He sat down on the throne of David and He begins to reign and rule over His kingdom. All of a sudden, John sees war break out in Heaven. Can we stop, because that's really not the nativity scene? Why would a dragon want to kill a baby? When this war breaks out, John tells us that the dragon is actually that ancient serpent. Why do you think he calls him the ancient serpent? Who is the devil, which basically means slanderer, and Satan, which basically means our adversary who deceives the nations? So now we see it, the dragon is Satan. The real villain of Christmas is not the scrooge; the real villain is not the Grinch. They make great movies and every family may have one, but the real enemy of Christmas is the devil, Satan, the serpent.

We have to ask ourselves this question. Why would Satan want to devour this baby? Does anybody remember how John starts his gospel? "In the beginning was the Word, and the Word was with God, and the Word was

God." In the beginning, the Word was with God. To paraphrase, John goes on to say there wasn't anything made that was not made without Him. He was the true light that was coming into the world to give light to everyone. John wasn't that light; he just bore witness to the light. When the light came to his own, his own received Him not. They rejected Him, but their rejection of Him did not put out the light because in Him was life and His life was the light of men. John says to those who did receive Him, He gave them the right and the power to become children of God, those who were born not of the flesh, nor of the will of man, but of God. Then John says, "...and the Word became flesh and dwelt among us and we behold His glory, the glory as of the only begotten of the Father, full of grace and truth." John says, "No man has seen God at any time, but the only God who was at His side, He has made Him known." You get it, don't you? This baby who is going to be born is the pre-incarnate eternal Word of God, the second person of the triune God, the very Son of God. Do you know what He did? He became who He had never been while remaining who He always is and was. He became like us. Do you know why? It was so He could pitch His tent among us, so He could camp out with us. Eugene Peterson says so He could move into the neighborhood. We're from Dexter; that's the hood. I hope you know this; if Jesus were here today, He would not have hung out at Murray and Benton. He would have hung out in the hood. That's Hardin and Dexter. He moved into our neighborhood, flesh and blood just like us so that we could behold the only begotten of God, the uniquely born one of God! What John is trying to tell us is that Joseph was not His father, God is. Luke will tell us, conceived by the Holy Spirit of God. Please don't get this picture of the eternal Son of God stepping into humanity as a baby; He stepped into the womb of Mary as an embryo. Whoa! We're not looking at a 4-D image; we're seeing the very image of God, and for the first time, He is going to make God known.

Our precept ladies will love this word, known. It is where we get English word, exegesis, from. You do know the different between exegesis and eisegesis when you study the Bible. If you are studying the Bible to prove you're right and you've already got a thought about something and you're looking up Scriptures to prove that's right, that's called eisegesis. You read into Scripture what you want it to say. Shame on us for doing that.

Exegesis is where we take the Bible and let the Bible say what it says. We don't read anything into it; we read out of the Bible what God intends us to know. The Bible teaches no one had ever exegeted God. Oh, the world had opinions about God. They made up a figment of their own imagination of what God would be like, but when Jesus came, He didn't eisegete God, He exegeted God; He made God fully known. What is one of the first things John is going to teach us about Jesus? During his baptismal days, John says, "Behold, the lamb of God who takes away the sin of the whole world." Then, John will picture Jesus as the bread of life, as the light of the world, as the door of the sheep, as the good shepherd, as the resurrection and the life, as the way, the truth, and the life. Then he will picture Him as the vine. Someone will ask, show us the Father, and Jesus will say hey, if you've seen Me, you've seen My Father! I have to believe in my mind as I study scripture that ultimately Satan wanted to take out Jesus, he wanted to prevent the coming of the Messiah because he knew once he had been crushed, sin's penalty would be paid, sin's power would be broken, and for the first time, you and I could live the life God intended for His creation to live! What we lost in the garden we gained back at the cross. Wow!

You see, war broke out in the heavenlies. Please, this isn't a literal war. This is trying to picture what happened in the birth, life, death, burial, resurrection, and ascension of Jesus back to the throne of David. When Jesus sat down on that throne after paying our sin debt, the accuser of the brothers, the one who had access to Heaven to accuse the brethren before God, now that their sin debt has been completely paid, sin is forgiven and remembered no more by God, he was cast out of Heaven. You can't accuse me of something to God that God has already forgiven me of. I just have this picture. Wouldn't Heaven be miserable if every day when I blew it, Satan appeared before God and said man, did you see what Ricky did? God goes I don't remember. Don't remember, not because there's anything wrong with the mind of God, but because of the heart of God, God accepted a payment for me sin from the blood of His Son that forever settled my sin debt with Him! Heaven breaks out in a song saying now the salvation of God has come, the kingdom has come; the same thing the New Testament teaches, the kingdom is here. Rejoice, oh Heaven, for the

accusers of the brothers have been cast down, but woe to you on the earth.

See, for the church triumphant in Heaven, it's a glorious day. Satan is not there. But for the church militant on the earth, it's a sad day because he no longer accuses us to God; he now accuses us to us. Why? I think there are three things Satan as the accuser of the brethren wants to prevent.

1. He wants to prevent us from living out the gospel
2. He wants to prevent us from sharing the gospel
3. He wants to prevent us from investing in the gospel

Please tell me you see this. He wants you to fail at home before your family. He wants you to fail in front of your friends. He wants to accuse you. How dare you try to live this thing out? You can't do it. You know how he needles you. If he can prevent you from living out the gospel, you will not share the gospel. That's why many of us have never told our best friend about the Lord. That's why many of us have never talked to that worker at work, and we've been working with them for twenty-five years and we have no clue. We really know they're probably not going to Heaven, yet we've never personally given them the gospel presentation. We've been so accused by him of what we're doing wrong, how dare we share. Ultimately, he wants to prevent us from investing in the gospel. God wants the gospel to be taken to the ends of the earth, but he wants to convince us to so invest in us that we build up our own little empire and we forget about the kingdom of God. What John is going to show in the book of Revelation is the deceiver of the whole world is bound during the church age so that he cannot prevent unbelievers from receiving the gospel, so he goes after the church. He goes after the offspring of the woman. The offspring of the woman is the church. He gives his authority to a beast who has permission to make war against the saints. The saints are the church. Get your mind off the Grinch and get your mind of the scrooge. The Grinch and the scrooge in your family might ruin your personal Christmas, but if you don't get your mind on the real enemy, somebody may not ever really hear the good news of Jesus Christ because we won't live it out, we won't share it, and we won't invest. God has called

us to take this story of Christmas, not just to our families, but to the rest of the world.