

Christmas with an Attitude

(Revelation 12:1-17)

I. Introduction

- A. I ran across a list of 25 best Christmas movies of all time (are *there* 25 best?)
1. Some were the classics (“*It’s a Wonderful Life*” and “*Miracle on 34th Street*”)
 - a. I hadn’t heard of some (“*Christmas in Connecticut*” or “*The Bishops Wife*”) *These were in black-and-white, and I’m much too young to remember black-and-white*
 - b. There were 3 versions of “*Christmas Carol*” (*Muppets* and *Bill Murray*) *(Actually, the greatest production ever done of “A Christmas Carol” was the one starring Mr. McGoo)*
 - c. Most successful movie comedy ever was on the list at #8 (“*Home Alone*”)
 - d. They did get #1 Christmas movie of all time right— “*A Christmas Story*”
 2. One of the all-time great Christmas classic movies was— “*Die Hard*.”
 - a. It’s heartwarming story terrorists trying to blow up a skyscraper
 - 1) Except they’re not terrorists but bank robbers out to steal billions
 - 2) But they run into Bruce Willis, and hilarious holiday hijinks ensue
 - b. OK, the story takes place during Christmas, so it’s a Christmas movie
 - c. If *Die Hard* is a Christmas story, it’s a Christmas story with an attitude!
- B. That’s what I want us to look at— not *Die Hard*, but Christmas with an attitude
1. Last week, Lynn and I re-watched the 2006 movie *The Nativity Story*
 - a. OK, the movie wasn’t completely accurate— the magi came to the stable
 - 1) It had flight to Egypt and slaughter of babies on the night of the birth
 - 2) Those took place after the wise men visited about a year later
 - b. The movie did have an attitude—Mary has this sullen, brooding look
 - 1) I thought she captured the scrutiny and censure of the pregnancy
 - 2) Ancients could count to 9! Mary & Joseph paid a price for obedience
 - c. Christmas story isn’t as pastoral and peaceful as Christmas cards suggest
 2. This is particularly true of John’s telling of the story of Christ’s birth
 - a. John begins with prologue and then (like Mark) skips the birth narrative
 - 1) John saves the story of the birth of Christ for Revelation (**12:1-17**)
 - 2) His version has no shepherds, wise men or drummer boy— **dragon!**
 - b. So John’s version of the Christmas story has something of an attitude!

II. Christmas with an Attitude: Revelation 12:1-17

A. There are two main characters in John's version of the Christmas story

1. **First**, there is a woman clothed with the sun and has the moon at her feet.
 - a. She is very pregnant; in fact, she cries out in pain as she is in labor
 - 1) This woman doesn't look much like Mary— because she isn't Mary
 - 2) She represents Israel; later she will morph to represent the church.
 - b. But we immediately recognize child; this is the birth of Christ (**12:5**)
She gave birth to a son, a male child, who will rule all the nations with an iron scepter. And her child was snatched up to God and to his throne.
2. **Second**, an enormous red dragon (Satan) hotly pursues the woman in labor
 - a. He has 7 heads (*power*), 7 crowns (*authority*), 10 horns (*more power*).
 - b. The dragon pursues the woman so he can devour the child she will bear.
 - 1) But when the child is born, he is taken to heaven to God's throne.
 - 2) Woman is also taken to a safe place in the desert prepared by God.

B. This child is not born to carols, but amid a cosmic conflict. Eugene Peterson—
This is not the nativity story we grew up with, but it is the nativity story all the same. Jesus' birth excites more than wonder, it excites evil: Herod, Judas. Pilate. Ferocious wickedness is goaded to violence by this life. (Eugene Peterson, A Distant Thunder, p. 121)

1. Angels aren't singing; they are in a pitched spiritual nettle with a dragon.
 - a. The dragon is defeated by the angelic hosts and is thrown out of heaven.
 - 1) Unlike most of Revelation, this is flashback, not flash forward (**12:9**)
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.
 - 2) Jesus said, “I saw Satan fall like lightning from heaven” (**Lk 10:18**)
 - b. At any rate, the good news is Satan's attack on God's throne is thwarted.
 - c. **Bad News:** Satan is thrown down on the earth with us! (**Rev 12:12**, NLT)
But it will be terrible for the earth and the sea, because the devil has come down to you! He is filled with anger, because he knows he does not have much time.
2. Bad thing with nativity plays—very few roles (*someone's always is a sheep*)
 - a. Not true with John's version—we all have a part in his nativity play!
 - b. Dragon can't get the child; God protects the mother (*symbol of church*)
 - c. Now dragon is **looking for us** (**Rev 12:17**, NCV) *God bless us every one!*
Then the dragon was very angry at the woman, and he went off to make war against all her other children—those who obey God's commands and who have the message Jesus taught.

C. Christmas is the most wonder time of the year. Andy Williams sings that to us
*It's the most wonderful time of the year; there'll be much mistltoeing and hearts will be glowing
When love ones are near; It's the most wonderful time of the year*

1. But the very things we love about Christmas become dangers for us.
 - a. Yes, Christmas is time for family... and of loneliness for one w/o family
 - b. It is a time for tradition... and if expectation exceeds reality (*depression*)
 - c. It is a time for giving... and the time we allow materialism to run amok!
2. Christmas is a time we remember the birth that would change all history.
 - a. We see Christmas card images of Mary-n-child, shepherds, Magi, Joseph
 - b. We sing the carols and try imagine the angels singing to the shepherds.
 - c. We remind ourselves of true meaning of Christmas in **Luke 2:14** (KJV)
Glory to God in the highest, and on earth peace, good will toward men.

D. This is danger we hinted at last week—see Christmas as peace & good cheer.
(Ironically, for many, "Christmas Cheer" is defined in terms of what gets slipped into the egg nog!)

1. It is precisely the peace and good cheer we sing about in our carols today.
*O little town of Bethlehem, How still we see thee lie! Above thy deep and dreamless sleep the silent stars go by.
Silent night, holy night; All is calm, all is bright round yon virgin mother and child, Holy infant so tender and mild...
Hark! the herald angels sing, "Glory to the newborn King! Peace on earth and mercy mild, God and sinners reconciled!"*
 - a. There's nothing wrong with the songs (*need to sing them more, not less*)
 - b. But they present a **one-sided view** of the story—shepherds, magi, earth!
 - c. This story is not just about the birth of a child but what that birth meant!
2. In Revelation, John shifts the point of view; he tells the story *spiritually*.
 - a. So the pastoral serenity of *Silent Night* dissipates into sound of battle.
 - b. There is no Christmas Truce of 1914— season is the reason for warfare!
 - c. God came into Satan's domain to face down the dragon on his own turf!
3. And the old dragon was not about to let that happen without a fight!
 - a. He used Herod in an attempt to kill the baby Jesus—will rise up others
 - b. All hell's fury would be released against that child born that silent night
 - 1) As Jesus lay in that manger, somewhere in Palestine there grew a tree
 - 2) One day tree would be cut down and fashioned into old rugged cross
 - 3) It would be the ultimate Christmas tree; He was the ultimate gift!
 - c. **Point:** John here wants us to see the manger through the lens of the cross!

III. Conclusion

- A. Sometimes we talk about people getting into the “*spirit of Christmas*”
1. This may be shopping, decorating or digging out the Bing Crosby album.
 - a. At its best, Christmas spirit is generosity, courtesy and just being nice
 - b. My grandmother had a poem she would recite when we’d visit at Xmas—
“It’s Christmas time you know, I don’t think folks out to mind it so”
 2. John reminds us that however we see Bethlehem, niceness isn’t the point!
 - a. The birth of Jesus means that God came face to face with the evil one.
 - b. Maybe that’s a message we need to contemplate with our fruitcake!
 3. Petersen sums up this section in his book on Revelation like this (p. 122)
Our response to the Nativity cannot be reduced to shutting the door against a wintry world, drinking hot chocolate, and singing carols. Rather, we are ready to walk out the door with, as one psalmist put it, high praises of God in our throats and two-edged swords in our hands
- B. John’s version of Christmas story reminds us we’re in a struggle with a dragon.
1. It’s a struggle we **can’t win**... and Jesus **already won** (**12:11**, NRSV)
But they have conquered him by the blood of the Lamb and by the word of their testimony
 - a. Those who put their faith in the **testimony of Jesus** overcome the dragon.
 - b. **Irony**: It looked like the dragon was winning for 1st readers of Apocalypse
 2. Perpetua was a young wife imprisoned during persecution of Severus (354)
 - a. While in prison, she dreamed of her husband climbing stairs to heaven.
 - 1) To get there, he had to climb over a huge red dragon blocking way.
 - 2) He shouted to her from heaven to have courage as she faced dragon.
 - b. The next day, she faced her death with such courage it silenced the mob
 3. Christians today continue to die in places like Sudan, Somalia and China
 - a. Dragon still comes after children of the church, and sometimes gets them.
 - b. You and I might face the dragon in different ways, but we still face him
 - c. For John, that was an important part of the “*true meaning of Christmas*”
- C. The message of the coming of Christ into the world is not peace and joy for all
1. Remember what the angels promised the shepherds (**Luke 2:14** (NCV)
Give glory to God in heaven, and on earth let there be peace among the people who please God
 2. Last Week: Peace is for those who please God, those who follow the Lamb
 3. Dragon will attack, but battle belongs to the Lord. *Do you belong to him?*