

You saw in the children’s sermon, there was the mother and the baby and the dragon. Maybe some of you kids were thinking “Pastor, why did you say there was a dragon at Christmas?” But to be honest, I just said it because God said it in Revelation 12. Why would God put this in the Bible? Today we’re going to see that this sign shows that God loves you. It might not be the first thing you think of. So often we look for other ways to prove that God loves us, but the baby Jesus proves it. We won’t understand how lovely Christmas is unless we first spend some time thinking about how terrifying it was. Hence, the dragon. Today God shows us that through a wondrous sign.

----- A WONDROUS SIGN SHOWS WONDROUS LOVE-----

It’s such a strange sign that we need to take the first few minutes of the sermon to figure out what it all means. It’s gonna get a little Bible nerdy, but then we’ll see how it shows God’s love and what it means for our lives.

We are in the book of Revelation, which was written by Jesus’ disciple John. When John was an old man he was living on an island and one day he looked up in the sky and saw what is described in Revelation 12. He calls it, “**a great and wondrous sign.**” And this sign worked like other signs. It marks something so you know what it is, but the only reason you understand it because you’ve seen it before. Like this [McDonald’s] sign. This is not telling you that if you go over there you’ll find the letter M painted in yellow. Because you’ve seen this before, you know you’ll find tasty hamburgers over there. Or this [men’s room sign]. This does not mark the storage closet for stick figures. No, you’ve seen this before so you know that it’s the men’s room. The signs in Revelation work the exact same way. Let’s take a look at that sign.

First there’s a pregnant woman who is in a lot of pain, but she’s gloriously dressed in the sun, moon, and stars, and then whisked away to a wilderness. A lot of people think, “pregnant Bible woman? Must be the virgin Mary.” But if we are going to interpret this sign according to what we’ve in Bible, it can’t be Mary. The Bible never describes Mary as having the sun, moon and stars at her disposal. But at the beginning of the Bible, it does describe the sun, moon and stars as servants for God’s people. While Mary did have a baby, the Bible says nothing about her crying out in agony. But listen how God addresses his people, in the book of Micah. “**Writhe in agony, O Daughter of Zion, like a woman in labor, for now you must leave the city to camp in the open field.**” This pregnant woman in pain who will go to a field, we’ve seen this before. The woman is God’s people. And at Christmas we see how Jesus was born from God’s people.

Jesus is the next part of the sign. This woman’s baby will rule the nations with an iron rod, which is exactly how Jesus is described in Psalm 2. In another part of Revelation Jesus writes a letter to a church and says that he breaks the nations with an iron rod. We’ve seen this ruler before. The baby is Jesus.

But we aren’t the only ones waiting for baby Jesus. There’s a huge red dragon and he’s waiting to eat Jesus and ruin God’s plan. We’ve seen this before. The ancient serpent from the garden of Eden is now pictured as a dragon. This is the devil, and he wants to destroy us.

God won’t let that happen. God saves the baby, and at the end of the sign, the woman is kept safe for 1,260 days. This takes a little math. 3 is God’s number. We’ve seen that before, Father, Son and Holy Spirit. 4 is earth’s number. We’ve seen that in North, South, East and West. God’s number with earth’s number is 7. So 7 years is the whole story of God and earth. But this sign doesn’t say the woman is kept safe for 7 years. It says 1,260 days. This is the math part. 1,260 divided by 30 gives you 42 months. 42 months divided by 12 is 3.5 years, half of 7. You can find all those numbers in the Old Testament, and they show that half of God’s story is before Jesus; half of his story is after Jesus. In this sign God promises that he will take care of his people after Jesus, just like he did before.

The woman is God’s people. The dragon is the devil. The baby is Jesus. With that in mind, let’s read these verses together. Then we’ll talk about how this proves God loves us.

### Revelation 12:1-6

**A great and wondrous sign appeared in heaven: a woman clothed with the sun, with the moon under her feet and a crown of twelve stars on her head. <sup>2</sup>She was pregnant and cried out in pain as she was about to give birth. <sup>3</sup>Then another sign appeared in heaven: an enormous red dragon with seven heads and ten horns and seven crowns on his heads. <sup>4</sup>His 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 he might devour her child the moment it was born. <sup>5</sup>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. <sup>6</sup>The woman fled into the desert to a place prepared for her by God, where she might be taken care of for 1,260 days.**

We’ve heard in the last few weeks how Jesus comes bearing gifts. We’ve seen his gifts of hope, peace, and joy. And this story is meant to show us God’s gift of love. But I’ve seen it in myself and I’ve seen it in other Christians, how we look to everything else to show us God’s love. If God really loved the world, he wouldn’t allow these tragedies. If he really loved

me I wouldn't be having this financial struggle. If God really loved me, I would be healthy. If God really loved me I would be able to feel it in some exciting religious experience. A lot of us don't say those things, but those false measurements of God's love are the roots of pessimism and doubt. When you wake up on a winter morning with a sigh and a "here we go again," have you misjudged how God loves you? When you think that your sadness means that God is far away from you, have you misjudged how God shows love? When you've heard people tell you that God loves you, but you just don't know if you should take their word for it, have you misjudged how God shows love?

Of course we misjudge God's love. Of course we do. We've got malfunctioning hearts! All humans are broken from the start, and it totally impairs our ability to know God's love. Father forgive us for being so wrong-headed. Forgive us for the silly demands we make of you. And show us how much you love us!

God has shown us his love in a passage I think you might know. **"God loved the world in precisely this way: that he gave his one and only son, that whoever believes in him will not perish but have everlasting life."**

God's Christmas gift was his Son and think of what it cost him! He let his son be born into the realm of the devil. To us the Jesus' delivery room looks like a stable and a manger. To God it looked like the jaws of a dragon. What wondrous love is this! That God knew the danger and still sent his Son! If you'd like to get a sense for what that was like, picture someone you love most dearly. Think of their name. Picture their face. Now imagine agreeing to let demons chase them around the earth for decades. What would I have to give you in exchange for the suffering of your loved one? What's your price? Do you know what God's was? He let the dragon afflict his Son, so that he could have you. That's how you measure God's love for you.

Now it's true that the devil would never consume Jesus. That's why in Revelation, the baby is snatched up to God's throne before the dragon eats him. But don't forget what the chase was like! When Jesus was just two years old Herod tried to kill Jesus as he murdered all the babies in Bethlehem. The devil confronted Jesus personally in the desert and tempted him for 40 days. The devil even worked through Jesus' friends as Peter tried to persuade Jesus to avoid the cross, and Jesus had to say, "Get behind me Satan!" Finally, as Jesus suffocated on the cross, the devil did strike his heel, and Jesus died. Jesus has been facing off with the devil for you since the day he was born.

The baby Jesus in your manger scene may look cute, but I looked through my Bible and I couldn't find any mention that Jesus is cute. The closest thing is maybe when Jesus takes babies on his lap to bless them. That's kinda cute. There's no Bible passage about the little lord Jesus asleep on the hay. Far more often the Bible describes Jesus as daring. Many artists make Jesus look cute and meek. The Bible makes Jesus look manly. Even when the Bible describes the beatings Jesus suffered and his crucifixion and death, it's not written in a way the evokes pity. It's written to make you feel awe. Jesus is remarkable because of his super-human courage. You see it when he stares down Pontius Pilate, more than that, he stares down a murderous mob, more than that he stares down a seven headed fiery dragon, more than that you see Jesus' courage as he holds all the sins of the world, the guiltiest man in history, and still he stares down the barrel of his Father's justice, and he DOES. NOT. FLINCH.

I saw a poem about the Christmas story in Revelation 12.

*Silent night, violent night  
Hell and heaven meet to fight*

In our fight with Satan, in our fear of God's justice, the baby in the manger is our champion, and he has the heart of a lion!

*What wondrous love is this, O my soul!  
What wondrous love is this  
that caused the Lord of bliss  
To bear the dreadful curse for my soul!*

I hope you come back tomorrow for Christmas Eve worship. We'll sing the regular silent night. If you want to know that God loves you look no further than the light of the world lying in manger. But if you want to know *how much* God loves you, do look further and see the darkness. See the dragon. See how much it cost the Father to give his one and only Son. See how much courage it took for the baby to be our Savior. And see that this God who loves you enough to give up his Son, this God who is powerful enough to crush the head of the dragon, this same God has promised to take care of his people until the end.

If you have any doubts about God's love, see this wondrous sign that shows God's wondrous love.

Amen.