

## Christmas 2021 The Cosmic Battle

*<sup>18</sup> Now the birth of Jesus Christ took place in this way. When his mother Mary had been betrothed to Joseph, before they came together she was found to be with child from the Holy Spirit. <sup>19</sup> And her husband Joseph, being a just man and unwilling to put her to shame, resolved to divorce her quietly. <sup>20</sup> But as he considered these things, behold, an angel of the Lord appeared to him in a dream, saying, "Joseph, son of David, do not fear to take Mary as your wife, for that which is conceived in her is from the Holy Spirit. <sup>21</sup> She will bear a son, and you shall call his name Jesus, for he will save his people from their sins."*

*<sup>22</sup> All this took place to fulfill what the Lord had spoken by the prophet: <sup>23</sup> "Behold, the virgin shall conceive and bear a son, and they shall call his name Immanuel" (which means, God with us). <sup>24</sup> When Joseph woke from sleep, he did as the angel of the Lord commanded him: he took his wife, <sup>25</sup> but knew her not until she had given birth to a son. And he called his name Jesus. Matthew 1:18-25 (ESV)*

As this is the Sunday after Christmas, we will leave our study of 1 Corinthians and turn to the birth of Jesus. One thing we notice in Matthew is that Jesus is our example in all things. You might ask how His birth could be an example to us? Certainly, none among us was born of a virgin. None among us has come to redeem the world. None of us comes from eternity with the Father to reveal what had been kept a mystery through the ages (1 Corinthians 2:6,7). These things are unique to Jesus of Nazareth.

Let us first consider the big picture that night that the light shone in the darkness and forever changed this world (John 18:37<sup>i</sup>). In millenniums past, God decided to make man in His image. He set him in a wonderful environment and asked him to care for it. Knowing that love is not love unless it is freely given, God gave man a chance to express his love through worshipful obedience or to turn away in rebellion. There was only one rule: Don't eat of the Tree of the Knowledge of Good and Evil (Genesis 2:16,17<sup>ii</sup>).

Enter Lucifer. Knowing that love is not love unless it is tested, God allowed Lucifer to rebel. He was one of the most magnificent creatures of all God's creation (Ezekiel 28:12-15<sup>iii</sup>). Many theologians believe he led heaven in worshipping Almighty God. A wicked desire sprang in his heart to take the place of God and receive the worship of God's creations for himself. Since God no longer allowed him to continue in his lofty position in heaven, he decided to frustrate the plans of God. He would try to steal the worship of man on earth (Isaiah 14:12-14<sup>iv</sup>). Thus began a cosmic battle that has raged over the souls of men from the first man, Adam, to this very day. Who will we worship? (Joshua 24:15<sup>v</sup>)

He first attacked Eve with suggestions that implied that God was not forthright. He implied that God had an agenda of deception and fear (Genesis 3:1-5<sup>vi</sup>). Satan's treachery was able to seduce Eve into disobedience. She in turn led Adam astray. The image of God was marred. Satan took dominion that was given to Adam along with his rights as vice-regent of the earth (Matthew 4:8-9<sup>vii</sup>). Every man descended from Adam was born with a nature of fallen Adam (Romans 5:12<sup>viii</sup>). Communion with God was limited, and a curse on man, woman, and creation followed. Because we all

sin, we must pay the consequence for treason. That consequence is death (Romans 6:23<sup>ix</sup>).

In the midst of all this treachery and loss of relationship came a glorious promise. *<sup>15</sup> I will put enmity between you and the woman, and between your offspring and her offspring; he shall bruise your head, and you shall bruise his heel.*” Genesis 3:15 (ESV) One day, the offspring of the woman would crush the head of the serpent. He had stolen the dominion of the earth from Adam, but God promised that authority (represented by “head”) would one day be crushed.

As we read the stories of individuals in the Bible, we see the battle rage. Though it seems that man has no hope or power, the placing of trust in God brings man to a place of restored relationship. (Psalms 32:5-7<sup>x</sup>) (Genesis 15:6<sup>xi</sup>) (Hebrews 11:5-6<sup>xii</sup>) The struggle in our lives boils down to a decision to trust in God alone or some other source. **Since Satan has dominion over the earth, all other sources we place our trust in are worship of him in disguise** (Matthew 6:24<sup>xiii</sup>)! He is receiving the worship for which he started the rebellion. Individuals like Abel, Enoch, Noah, Abraham, Joseph, and Moses, seem to have come to a place of trust in God, placing the victory in God’s omnipotent hands. (See Hebrews 11.) They stand out as those who broke free from the oppressive tyranny of the control of sin over their lives and became worshipers of God. They were not perfect, but something about them was radically altered. To some of these people, God reiterated His promise of a coming child that would deliver the world from the tyranny of Satan.

God made a relationship with an entire nation, calling them to be a people that would demonstrate to the world a total trust in God and worship and service to Him alone (Deuteronomy 6:13<sup>xiv</sup>). The promise of that special offspring ran through the line of a great king of Israel, David (Isaiah 11:1,2<sup>xv</sup>). Imperfect as he was, and imperfect as the nation was, God would not break His promises.

The prophets foretold of the downfall of the nation of Israel. They reminded them that they were not fulfilling their side of the agreement they made with God. They were not placing their trust in God and had turned to those other gods thereby worshipping Lucifer. Yet, the prophets began to tell of the details of the life of the coming child that would bring God a mighty victory in this ancient battle. They foretold of that He would be the eternal King with an eternal kingdom.

Details of the coming King’s life began to emerge. The place of His birth was predicted by Micah (Micah 5:2<sup>xvi</sup>), the place of His ministry by Isaiah (Isaiah 9:1,2<sup>xvii</sup>), and even the time and place of His death were foretold by Daniel (Daniel 9:24-26<sup>xviii</sup>). The promises included amazing things like the end of sin, the healing of all afflictions, and bringing in everlasting righteousness.

Meanwhile, the nation was miraculously restored from captivity and awaited the birth of this child. Women prayed to be the one to give birth to the Savior. Even the nations of the world looked toward Israel in expectation of a great King. Magi from the East saw a heavenly sign and began their journey to come and worship Him. Though Israel was under the thumb of Rome, taxed and subjugated by the emperor, the world anticipated the birth of a great king from there.

Lucifer had been at work in the kingdoms of the earth also. Dark and evil religions had prospered. The murder of one’s own children in the name of these false

gods was a thought to be a thing of honor. Immorality spread disease. Cities began to be quite large, making plagues and wholesale slaughter for gain by armies a frequent occurrence.

At the same time, the Greek language spread throughout most of the world as a language of trade. Rome made roads that connected far-flung countries. Trade was on the increase, opening up distant lands. It was God's perfect time to send His salvation into the world.

Lucifer is not omniscient. He does not know what is in the mind of God or man. He can only know what he is told or guesses. He surely saw the expectation in the world and may have sensed his reign of terror was about to be dealt a blow to the head, but from where and when? He must have thought that God would surely be born in a palace. The King of the universe would have an army to guard Him in His vulnerable existence as a baby, wouldn't He?

God pulled a sneak attack on Satan. He came through a peasant woman, Mary. Lucifer wasn't expecting Him to be born in a stable with an entourage of shepherds. But it was also a sneak attack on our hearts. Who could not relate to this little defenseless child born into poverty? Our hearts go out to Him before He does or says a thing.

Here is where we have an example in His birth that can transform the way we see our world. A baby in the hands of His Father God was safe from the Destroyer. This is probably the greatest picture in the world of absolute trust in the Sovereignty of God. In a short time, we will see Satan's attempt to snuff out His life through the soldiers of Herod. But when there was the need to escape, God warned Joseph in a dream to move to Egypt.

Do we imagine ourselves more vulnerable than that baby? Do we think that Satan has a more intense desire to attack us than the One who was prophesied to crush his head? If Almighty God could protect and keep baby Jesus, do you think He has any trouble watching over you? If Jesus had realized that He was number one on Satan's hit list, would he have slept at night? I think He did realize it, but He also realized that His times were in the Father's hands, just as yours are. "Do not fear" is one of the most repeated expressions of Scripture. It came from the lips of Jesus on more than one occasion. Remember that at His birth the angels sang, "*Peace among those with whom He is pleased.*" Luke 2:14

I recall an experience with a Jewish man that we befriended on a vacation. We went diving with a group. We were both new to diving and inexperienced. Somehow, he got separated from us as we descended and couldn't find the group. He did as instructed: went to the bottom and looked for a minute. But then a barracuda came. Then another joined the first, and finally a whole school. They can be six foot long with huge mouths and protruding teeth. He started thinking the barracuda knew that he was alone and scared and began to panic. Fighting fear, he tried to surface slowly but then panicked and ascended too quickly. There was really no danger from the barracuda, and fortunately he was not hurt, but fear caused him to have a terrible experience and could have killed him. Satan loves to use the tactic of fear. He can only do as he is allowed, but he loves to make you afraid. The fear can kill you.

How can we walk through this world of violence and dark powers without fear? At times we all feel we are out of our element and surrounded by barracuda in suits and ties. Know this, our Shepherd watches over us just as He watched over the baby Jesus. *“I will not fear, for Thou art with me.”* (Psalm 23:4<sup>xix</sup>). Lack of fear and total trust in God do not mean that horrible circumstances and injustices will not take place. It does mean that God will be there with us through it all, and that He will bring good from evil. Just as the cross was the greatest injustice ever, it brought about the greatest good ever. But let us return to our big picture.

The turning point of history had arrived. God had entered the world. The head, the authority, of Satan was soon to be crushed. But first, as the promise predicted, the heel of the offspring of the woman would be bitten. That old serpent tried to bite Jesus all through His life, but not until it was God’s perfect time did Jesus refuse to dodge his strike. As Satan sunk his fangs into Jesus’ heel on the cross, our Lord leaned back with the weight of a righteous life pleasing to God, and He utterly crushed the head of that serpent.

Now, it is just the mopping up exercises. The serpent is still here to give people the choice that Adam and Eve had. He still offers something to worship other than the God who loves us and gave His life to redeem us. It is still a choice to love Him and receive the redemption He purchased for us, and for those who do, the communion of Eden is restored. The image of God in man is being restored in the redeemed. Death is no longer the penalty for our treason, because Jesus took our place.

In that manger in Bethlehem, light had come into the world, and where the light is, the darkness must flee. There, God demonstrated His ability to protect the helpless, to guard against the worst that hell can muster. The baby in the manger shows us we have a reason to trust God with our life. Satan does not threaten God any more than a gnat threatens an elephant.

The great fables and stories of time all relate to this one story that changed the course of mankind. The king that dressed as a pauper to win his peasant wife, the prince that kissed the sleeping beauty under the spell of the wicked witch, every super hero that saves the world from the villain, all touch something in us because they are parables of the real story.

Where would we be if the baby did not come? If the hands that placed the stars in space refused to form the body of a baby with tiny helpless hands, where would we be? We would still be waiting for God to provide a way. We would be like those who have gone before us that placed their hope in God without knowing how He could make us right with Him. This was the only way. This baby was the mystery God had kept hidden through the ages. (Colossians 2:2-3<sup>xx</sup>) As Jesus approached the cross He asked if there was some other way (Matthew 26:39<sup>xxi</sup>). There was none. God had to become one of us to take back dominion over the earth, to restore fellowship with man. He had to pay the price of our treason, which is death, so that we could live (Colossians 2:13-14<sup>xxii</sup>).

Christianity is unique in its understanding of God. Buddhism and Hinduism have a god so immanent that he is in everything. They would say that created things are god, that you are god, and that the mosquito is god. That makes God meaningless and impersonal.

Judaism and Islam would say God is so transcendent, so high and lofty, that we cannot approach Him. They could never see Him becoming man. It is too great a step down, too immanent. They would say He is so far above us that all we can do is bow as servants. There is some truth in that, but there is also something very impersonal and distant in that perspective.

Christianity says that God is both. He is high and holy, and yet, He loves us so much that He is immanently near us. He became one of us to help us see Him. The baby in the manger is both a transcendent and an immanent God, high and holy yet very near, caring, and personally involved in your life.

As we look at the baby in the manger, let us remember that God is able to watch over us. That He is God come near to demonstrate His love for us. Let us also remember that He completed what He came to do. He gave Himself for us. That should cause us to know that when we give our lives to Him in service to Him and others, God will keep us until our ministry is done. We need not fear. We serve a great God, One who is great enough to draw near to us and do for us what we could not do for ourselves.

When you open your gifts this year, I hope you remembered the greatest gift. The transcendent God became descended into His creation to win the battle for your soul that you might worship what is good and not what is destructive and evil. He showed us that we can place our lives in the hands of our heavenly Father and have no fear. He came to be our ultimate example. He came to restore what sin marred. He came to free us from our death sentence. No greater gift has been, or ever will be, given. I hope you have claimed this gift. This is not a fable. It is the reality behind all the stories. The One who occupied the manger would love to be the King of your heart. Will you allow Him to be to you the personal immanent God He came to be?

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<sup>i</sup> **John 18:37 (ESV)**

<sup>37</sup> Then Pilate said to him, "So you are a king?" Jesus answered, "You say that I am a king. For this purpose I was born and for this purpose I have come into the world—to bear witness to the truth. Everyone who is of the truth listens to my voice."

<sup>ii</sup> **Genesis 2:16-17 (ESV)**

<sup>16</sup> And the LORD God commanded the man, saying, "You may surely eat of every tree of the garden,

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<sup>17</sup> but of the tree of the knowledge of good and evil you shall not eat, for in the day that you eat of it you shall surely die.”

<sup>iii</sup> **Ezekiel 28:12-15 (ESV)**

<sup>12</sup> “Son of man, raise a lamentation over the king of Tyre, and say to him, Thus says the Lord GOD: “You were the signet of perfection, full of wisdom and perfect in beauty. <sup>13</sup> You were in Eden, the garden of God; every precious stone was your covering, sardius, topaz, and diamond, beryl, onyx, and jasper, sapphire, emerald, and carbuncle; and crafted in gold were your settings and your engravings. On the day that you were created they were prepared. <sup>14</sup> You were an anointed guardian cherub. I placed you; you were on the holy mountain of God; in the midst of the stones of fire you walked. <sup>15</sup> You were blameless in your ways from the day you were created, till unrighteousness was found in you.

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<sup>v</sup> **Joshua 24:15 (ESV)**

<sup>15</sup> And if it is evil in your eyes to serve the LORD, choose this day whom you will serve, whether the gods your fathers served in the region beyond the River, or the gods of the Amorites in whose land you dwell. But as for me and my house, we will serve the LORD.”

<sup>vi</sup> **Genesis 3:1-5 (ESV)**

<sup>1</sup> Now the serpent was more crafty than any other beast of the field that the LORD God had made. He said to the woman, “Did God actually say, ‘You shall not eat of any tree in the garden’?” <sup>2</sup> And the woman said to the serpent, “We may eat of the fruit of the trees in the garden, <sup>3</sup> but God said, ‘You shall not eat of the fruit of the tree that is in the midst of the garden, neither shall you touch it, lest you die.’” <sup>4</sup> But the serpent said to the woman, “You will not surely die. <sup>5</sup> For God knows that when you eat of it your eyes will be opened, and you will be like God, knowing good and evil.”

<sup>vii</sup> **Matthew 4:8-9 (ESV)**

<sup>8</sup> Again, the devil took him to a very high mountain and showed him all the kingdoms of the world and their glory. <sup>9</sup> And he said to him, “All these I will give you, if you will fall down and worship me.”

<sup>viii</sup> **Romans 5:12 (ESV)**

<sup>12</sup> Therefore, just as sin came into the world through one man, and death through sin, and so death spread to all men because all sinned—

<sup>ix</sup> **Romans 6:23 (ESV)**

<sup>23</sup> For the wages of sin is death, but the free gift of God is eternal life in Christ Jesus our Lord.

<sup>x</sup> **Psalms 32:5-7 (ESV)**

<sup>5</sup> I acknowledged my sin to you, and I did not cover my iniquity; I said, “I will confess my transgressions to the LORD,” and you forgave the iniquity of my sin. Selah

<sup>6</sup> Therefore let everyone who is godly offer prayer to you at a time when you may be found; surely in the rush of great waters, they shall not reach him.

<sup>7</sup> You are a hiding place for me; you preserve me from trouble; you surround me with shouts of deliverance.

Selah

<sup>xi</sup> **Genesis 15:6 (ESV)**

<sup>6</sup> And he believed the LORD, and he counted it to him as righteousness.

<sup>xii</sup> **Hebrews 11:5-6 (ESV)**

<sup>5</sup> By faith Enoch was taken up so that he should not see death, and he was not found, because God had taken him. Now before he was taken he was commended as having pleased God.

<sup>6</sup> And without faith it is impossible to please him, for whoever would draw near to God must believe that he exists and that he rewards those who seek him.

<sup>xiii</sup> **Matthew 6:24 (ESV)**

<sup>24</sup> “No one can serve two masters, for either he will hate the one and love the other, or he will be devoted to the one and despise the other. You cannot serve God and money.

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<sup>xiv</sup> **Deuteronomy 6:13 (ESV)**

<sup>13</sup> It is the LORD your God you shall fear. Him you shall serve and by his name you shall swear.

<sup>xv</sup> **Isaiah 11:1-2 (ESV)**

<sup>1</sup> There shall come forth a shoot from the stump of Jesse, and a branch from his roots shall bear fruit.

<sup>2</sup> And the Spirit of the LORD shall rest upon him, the Spirit of wisdom and understanding, the Spirit of counsel and might, the Spirit of knowledge and the fear of the LORD.

<sup>xvi</sup> **Micah 5:2 (ESV)**

<sup>2</sup> But you, O Bethlehem Ephrathah, who are too little to be among the clans of Judah, from you shall come forth for me one who is to be ruler in Israel, whose coming forth is from of old, from ancient days.

<sup>xvii</sup> **Isaiah 9:1-2 (ESV)**

<sup>1</sup> But there will be no gloom for her who was in anguish. In the former time he brought into contempt the land of Zebulun and the land of Naphtali, but in the latter time he has made glorious the way of the sea, the land beyond the Jordan, Galilee of the nations.

<sup>2</sup> The people who walked in darkness have seen a great light; those who dwelt in a land of deep darkness, on them has light shone.

<sup>xviii</sup> **Daniel 9:24-26 (ESV)**

<sup>24</sup> "Seventy weeks are decreed about your people and your holy city, to finish the transgression, to put an end to sin, and to atone for iniquity, to bring in everlasting righteousness, to seal both vision and prophet, and to anoint a most holy place.

<sup>25</sup> Know therefore and understand that from the going out of the word to restore and build Jerusalem to the coming of an anointed one, a prince, there shall be seven weeks. Then for sixty-two weeks it shall be built again with squares and moat, but in a troubled time.

<sup>26</sup> And after the sixty-two weeks, an anointed one shall be cut off and shall have nothing. And the people of the prince who is to come shall destroy the city and the sanctuary. Its end shall come with a flood, and to the end there shall be war. Desolations are decreed.

<sup>xix</sup> **Psalms 23:4 (ESV)**

<sup>4</sup> Even though I walk through the valley of the shadow of death, I will fear no evil, for you are with me; your rod and your staff, they comfort me.

<sup>xx</sup> **Colossians 2:2 (ESV)**

<sup>2</sup> that their hearts may be encouraged, being knit together in love, to reach all the riches of full assurance of understanding and the knowledge of God's mystery, which is Christ,

<sup>xxi</sup> **Matthew 26:39 (ESV)**

<sup>39</sup> And going a little farther he fell on his face and prayed, saying, "My Father, if it be possible, let this cup pass from me; nevertheless, not as I will, but as you will."

<sup>xxii</sup> **Colossians 2:13-14 (ESV)**

<sup>13</sup> And you, who were dead in your trespasses and the uncircumcision of your flesh, God made alive together with him, having forgiven us all our trespasses,

<sup>14</sup> by canceling the record of debt that stood against us with its legal demands. This he set aside, nailing it to the cross.