

In the name of Jesus. Amen.

The text tonight seems to describe Christ in His first coming to earth. The selection of Matthew 1:18-25 would back up such an assumption. There in St. Matthew's Gospel is his short telling of the birth of the Messiah. Mary, with child, gave birth to a Son, whom Joseph, her betrothed, named Jesus. A little later in St. Matthew's Gospel, after the visit of the Magi, the holy family flees into Egypt.

In the Second Reading for tonight, a woman is pregnant and giving birth. In the text, John described the woman almost like a princess: she is adorned with the sun, the moon under her feet, and a crown on her head. This woman gave birth to a male child who would rule all nations with a rod of iron. This rod of iron hearkens to a Messianic prophecy in the Psalms:

"As for me, I have set my King on Zion, my holy hill." I will tell of the decree: The LORD said to me, "You are my Son; today I have begotten you. Ask of me, and I will make the nations your heritage, and the ends of the earth your possession. You shall break them with a rod of iron and dash them in pieces like a potter's vessel." (Psalm 2:6-9)

This prophecy is confirmed to have been fulfilled in Jesus the Christ as Gabriel spoke to Mary, And behold, you will conceive in your womb and bear a son, and you shall call his name Jesus. He will be great and will be called the Son of the Most High. And the Lord God will give to him the throne of his father David, and he will reign over the house of Jacob forever, and of his kingdom there will be no end. (Luke 1:31-33)

St. John continued with the sign of the red dragon. This dragon makes himself out to look almost like the Lamb of God as described in Revelation 5. There, the Lamb had seven horns and seven eyes to signify that Christ is all-seeing and all-knowing. The dragon would use his seven heads, ten horns, and seven crowns to make the deceptive claim that he and not the Christ is the all-knowing master and ruler of the earth. This dragon awaits the birth of the woman's male child in order to devour it and prevent the salvation of the world. However, he didn't succeed, as the child was caught up to God and His throne; more on that in a bit.

This very much sounds like Mary and Jesus, and much of Jesus' life, death, and victory over the devil all wrapped up in a mere 6 verses. John seems to be giving—seems to have been given—a recap of events he knew of and even witnessed in many cases, being one of Jesus' disciples, but in a metaphorical sense common to visions, where there is an air of reality, but also much symbolism. That is the case here, the woman is Mary, the male child Jesus, and the red dragon the devil.

Even the child being caught up to God and His throne fits into interpretation. That sounds very much like Jesus' ascension. Dr. Louis Brighton, the now-sainted seminary professor and Revelation scholar, asserts however that,

[T]he incarnation and the entire ministry, passion, death, resurrection, and ascension of Christ are compressed into the words "snatched up to God." "The Seer shortens the Gospel history." John's purpose is to emphasize the *final outcome* of Christ's incarnation and passion and resurrection, that is, the dragon's failure to destroy the Child and the victory of the Christ over the enemies of God's people.

So, it is the ascension of Christ, and so much more. And this "snatched up to God" phrase, as Dr. Brighton translated it, back-fills the rest of the pericope and makes it so much more than Mary and Jesus; more on that in a bit.

From there, the 12th chapter moves on to the War in Heaven, whereby Michael and his angels cast out the dragon and his angels from the counsel of God; he now prowls on earth defeated and with great fury, because he knows his time is short. (cf. Revelation 12:7-12) Yet again, John relates how being "snatched up to God" is the victory of the Christ over the dragon, "that ancient serpent, who is called the devil and Satan." The devil knows his time is short because he is defeated by the blood of the Lamb, the real Lamb of God.

The woman fled into the wilderness for 1260 days. 1260 days is 42 months, which is 3 and a half years. This number signifies a time of tribulation. It is likely based on the time that Antiochus IV Epiphanes terrorized Jerusalem from 167 to 164BC—roughly 3 and a half years. Elsewhere, this period is noted as “a time, times, and half a time;” though not a specific length of time, but 1260 days isn’t supposed to be specific, either. It is a time of tribulation. Here, the male Child is “snatched up to God,” and Mary endures a tribulation...

But, as I said, the “snatching up to God” back-fills this text to make it mean something more than this. You see, Jesus didn’t just come from Mary; He came from the whole people of Israel. That is to say, that Jesus is Israel reduced to one and that He came from from the Jews. The genealogies in the Gospels would indicate as much, for one thing. Jesus is a Jew of Jews, a Hebrew of Hebrews, come from a long line of Hebrews and Jews, and even a member of the royal line!

Therefore, the woman adorned like a princess, with the crown and stars would indicate that she is God’s crown jewel, His pride and prized possession. You might know it better as the Chosen Nation. They were the least among the nations, a nation of slaves who had to be rescued from that slavery by divine intervention, but that divine intervention is also their chosen-ness. God chose Israel out of all of the other nations precisely because they were the least of the nations—God has a way of working His will to His glory through the least and weakest among mankind, and even in the weakest of mankind’s moments. Remember, victory over death, hell, and the devil was won by the death of God on the cross, a most ignominious death!

The woman, then, is the Chosen Nation of Israel. The twelve stars are the twelve tribes. From this nation came salvation, as God was incarnate of one of her members, a member of the tribe of Judah. God comes to earth—to man—as a child, the least of all people, a member of the Chosen Nation, the least of all nations, and saves by dying on the cross, the least of all deaths.

And the child was caught up to God and His throne. And the woman fled into the wilderness for 1260 days.

But, let me back up again. The “snatching up to God” continues to back-fill this text and make it mean something more. Yes, the male child is Jesus. Yes, the woman is Mary. Yes, the woman is Israel. The woman is also the Church. The Church is the crown jewel of God, His prized possession, or so writes St. Paul: “Christ loved the church and gave himself up for her, that he might sanctify her, having cleansed her by the washing of water with the word, so that he might present the church to himself in splendor, without spot or wrinkle or any such thing, that she might be holy and without blemish.” (Ephesians 5:25-27) Jesus may have come from the Jews, but He came for all of mankind!

Christ has come, died, rose, and ascended and His Word is spread throughout all the world. The death of Christ is proclaimed to a world in need for the forgiveness of sins, because the world is very evil, and you have a part in that! Word of Him spread by the Apostles, now making those twelve stars in the woman’s crown the 12 Apostles. The Church, Old Testament and New Testament, is bound up in the woman from whom and for whom the male Child came.

So, Christ has been “snatched up to God” and His throne. Jesus sits on the throne in heaven. The woman—the Church—is fled into the wilderness for 1260 days. Remember, that number is indicative of a time of tribulation. Jesus’ visible presence is removed from the Church, but His physical and manifest presence is not. The Church is in a time of tribulation, the 1260 days between Christ’s ascension and return. Notice, though, that while the church is in the wilderness—in this realm of sin—that God continues to nourish Her there because He has prepared a place for Her there.

Dear hearers, this is that place—well, this is one of many such places. Here, you find refuge as you live in this wilderness of sin, a place of solace, comfort, and peace, because the male Child, Jesus the Christ, was “snatched up to God.” Christ has come, Christ has died, Christ has risen, Christ will come again—and all of this for you. And because Christ is for you, you are forgiven for all of your sins.

In the name of Jesus. Amen.