

“Pregnant Splendor”  
 Pastor Sam Richards  
 Sermon for 30 April 2023  
 Texts: Revelation 12

A great sign appeared in heaven: **a woman clothed with the sun, with the moon under her feet, and on her head a garland of twelve stars**<sup>1</sup>. Her outer splendor is matched with inner glory! In terms of body imagery, she is in the divine image both womanly and motherly; she is feminine completion and perfect in “pregnant splendor. *The woman* is not only with child, *she is at full term*, crying **out in labor and in pain** signifying her superlative condition. How at odds with modern culture’s womanhood!

- Many modern women struggle with their body image—feeling ugly, or deformed, fat even. Breastfeeding languishes under the pall of being unscientific, and unacceptable if not dirty and unhygienic.
- Pregnancy is sometimes treated as a medical emergency, a health risk, unwanted, or unexpected! A threat to personal prosperity and educational/professional advancement—the classic rationales advanced for having an abortion!
- **Women, however, will be saved through childbearing, if they continue in faith, love, and holiness, with self-control. . . or self-restraint, sobriety, good judgment, modesty, propriety, or discretion** even—all renderings of σωφροσύνης. (Strong’s Greek #4997 (e)), a word of amazing semantic range! (1 Timothy 2:15)

But all of this pales beside the spiritual significance that such a woman, the image of the body of Christ, bride and mother, symbolized in pregnant splendor: she most gloriously represents us!

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<sup>1</sup> All the lights of heaven are brought together here for a description which cannot fail to remind us of the picture of the Shulamite in the Canticles ([Song of Solomon 6:10](#)): “Who is she that looketh forth as the morning, fair as the moon, clear as the sun, and terrible as an army with banners (or, *the heavenly host*)?” It is the picture of the bride, the Church. The beams of the divine glory clothe her; she has caught—like Moses—the radiance of her Lord, whose countenance was as the sun ([Revelation 1:16](#)); the moon is beneath her feet; she rises superior to all change, and lays all lesser lights of knowledge under tribute; she is crowned with a crown of twelve stars: the illustrious members of the Church (twelve being the representative number in Old Testament as well as New Testament times) form her crown of rejoicing in the day of Christ. -Ellicott’s Commentary

. . . in particular, *Salus*, the emblem of security and protection, is represented as a woman standing upon a globe, to represent the safety and security of the world under the emperor’s care. -Benson

. . . and having on her head the crown of twelve stars, the twelve apostles, who, however, are related closely to Israel’s twelve tribes. The Church, in passing over into the Gentile world, is (1) persecuted; (2) then seduced, as heathenism begins to react on her. This is the key to the meaning of the symbolic woman, beast, harlot, and false prophet. Woman and beast form the same contrast as the Son of man and the beasts in Daniel. As the Son of man comes from heaven, so the woman is seen in heaven (Re 12:1). The two beasts arise respectively out of the sea (compare Da 7:3) and the earth (Re 13:1, 11): their origin is not of heaven, but of earth earthy. -Jamieson, Fausset-Brown

. . . this signifies, that the church openly owned the doctrine of the apostles, and was not ashamed of it before men, and publicly preached, and held it forth in her ministers, to all the world; and that this was her crown and glory, so long as she held it in its power, purity, and was both what she gloried in, and was a glory, an ornament to her: and this was also an emblem of her victory over her enemies, and of her future happiness, and pointed at the means of both; that it was by a faithful and steadfast adherence to the doctrine of the apostles that she overcame Satan, and all her spiritual enemies, and came to the possession of the crown of life and glory. -Gill

When she is most vulnerable, most dependent—at her supposedly weakest and most threatened condition— she is this **great sign** of consummation, of glory, the highest fulfillment of divine promise . . .worthy of honor and praise. This esteem is what we need to temper our approach to femininity, womanhood and childbearing!

Fascinating, that her pain would be pictured thus in heaven where, for us **her offspring**, pain is abolished!

And, then, another sign: **A great, fiery red dragon, having seven heads and ten horns** so that not every head is fully horned **and seven diadems on his heads**. Here, if we compared the heavenly woman in the vision with Eve, and the great dragon with the Serpent who enticed the woman in her innocence—we discover that here they are pictured in their full maturity—a long way from the imagery of and setting Eden. Eve fell easily enough to the deceptions of Satan—to the ruin of our entire race!—but the moment depicts the time when the entire conceit between the principles of good and evil, truth and falsehood, the open conflict between God and Satan broke out on earth. And as we recall, God uttered his first promise to the fallen humanity involved: **I will put enmity between you and the woman, between your seed and her seed**. The seeming universal fear and loathing of humanity for serpents comports well with this animosity as part of that conflict. But there is more, on the heels of Satan’s quick triumph, God also declared: **The seed of the woman shall bruise your head, and you shall bruise his heel**. (Gen. 3:16) And here is an indication of our role *as a whole* in the war between good and evil—we are meant to be on the woman’s side, crushing the enemy with and for God while Satan assaults us with pain, torment and sufferings! The truth of this is borne out by the book of Job where God expresses his confidence in Job by allowing Satan to test his faith! *Conflict is our destiny because we are, as spiritual beings, participants in this spiritual cosmic battle along with the angels and other created, intelligent souls*.

**12 Beloved, do not be surprised at the fiery ordeal among you, which comes upon you for your testing, as though some strange thing were happening to you; 13 but to the degree that you share the sufferings of Christ, keep on rejoicing, so that also at the revelation of His glory you may rejoice with exultation.** (1 Peter 4:12-13)

**And the dragon stood before the woman who was ready to give birth to devour the Child as soon as it was born**. (v.4) This shocking revelation of the malevolent attitude of the dragon towards newborn human life is illuminating—whether hatred of the divine image is depicted as infanticide, or as late term abortion, Satan’s murderous cannibalism is the dragon’s diabolical, evil intentions. Part of the steal, kill and destroy agenda! It is full-blown, or mature antagonism. **A great, fiery red dragon, having seven heads and ten horns** . . . with crowns representing *usurped authority/dominion* and a *grasping after* the glory, honor and worship due to God alone displays a development of wickedness. On the other hand, the woman is “no longer a simple, childlike personage, but a *wonder*.” (CHS) .In her the great cause of “truth and righteousness” are summed up, embodied—for the woman in Revelation 12, **clothed with the sun, the moon under her feet and a coronet of twelve stars** may best be taken to represent “the church of God in all ages.” “The glorious cause of holiness and God, incarnated in the church, is clothed with the splendor of light, and truth, and majesty. . . she is covered with the underived splendor of indwelling Deity.” (CHS) The man child birthed to her **is the one who was to rule all nations with a rod of iron**. (v.5)—none other than Jesus Christ the Lord who is preserved from the dragon by being **caught up to God and His throne** (the ascension?).

Now one curious thing about this heavenly scenario is that the chronology is not linear—things do not happen in a historical order. Therefore we have nativity narrative in v.2 and the accession narrative in v.5 and immediately flowing we have **Then the woman fled into the wilderness, which is a decidedly earth-bound matter—where she has a place prepared for her by God, that they should feed her there one thousand two hundred and sixty days** (which suggests half of a literal/historical tribulation period—See Daniel 9:27). (v.6) **And war broke out in heaven: Michael and his angels fought with the dragon; and the dragon and his angels fought, but they did not prevail, nor was a place found for them in heaven any longer. So the great dragon was cast out** (of heaven!), **that serpent of old, called the Devil and Satan, who deceives the whole world, he was cast to the earth, and his angles were cast out with him.** (v.9) This event, we may recall, was declared by Jesus upon the joyous return of the seventy disciples in Luke 10:17, saying: **“even the demons are subject to us in Your Name.”** **And He said to them, “I saw Satan fall like lightning from heaven. Behold, I give you the authority to trample on serpents and scorpions and over all the power of the enemy, and nothing shall by any means hurt you** (this I take to refer to the serpents and scorpions that they might encounter while preaching the gospel, or evangelism). **Nevertheless do not rejoice in this, that the spirits are subject to you, but rather rejoice because your names are written in heaven. In that hour Jesus rejoiced in the spirit . . .** (Luke 10:18-21) This occurred midstream in Jesus’ earthly ministry—prior to His atoning sacrifice. Returning to Revelation 12:10: **Then I heard** (back now in the visionary moment!) **a loud voice saying, in heaven, Now salvation, and strength, and the kingdom of our God, and the power of His Christ have come, for the accuser of our brethren, who accused them before our God** (as Satan had done with Job centuries prior to the advent of Christ!) **day and night, has been cast down. And they overcame him** (the accuser) **by the blood of the Lamb** (an allusion to the atonement, Christ’s death upon the cross, crucifixion!) **and by the word of their testimony** (their preaching of the gospel of forgiveness **for all who believe in the Name of Jesus,** His death and resurrection—which is truth), **and they did not love their lives to the death.**

They did not so love their lives that they were unwilling to die as martyrs. They did not shrink back when threatened with death, but remained firm in their attachment to their Saviour, and left their dying testimony to the truth and power of religion. It was by these means that Christianity was established in the world, and John, in the scene before us, saw it thus triumphant, and saw the angels and the redeemed in heaven celebrating the triumph. -Barnes Notes

**Therefore rejoice, O heavens, and you who dwell in them.**

**Woe to the inhabitants of the earth and the sea! For the devil has come down to you, having great wrath, because he knows his time is short.** (v. 12) **Now when the dragon saw that he had been cast to the earth, he persecuted the woman who gave birth to the male *Child*. But the woman was given two wings of a great eagle that she might fly into the wilderness to her place (as prepared by God) **where she is nourished for a time and times and half a time** (3 1/2 years/42 months—the length of the two witnesses testimony and the period of the beast’s authority to make war with the saints and **to overcome them** (see 13:7 and Daniel 7:25;12:7)—and mid-way through the tribulation) **from the presence of the serpent. So the serpent spewed water out of his mouth like a flood after the woman, that he might cause her to be carried away by the flood. But the earth helped the woman and the earth opened its mouth and swallowed up the flood which the dragon had spewed out of his mouth. And the dragon was enraged with the woman and he went to make war****

**with the rest of her offspring, who keep the commandments of Gods and have the testimony of Jesus Christ.** (vv. 13-17)

“The glorious cause of holiness and God, incarnated in the church, is clothed with the splendor of light, and truth, and majesty. . . . she is covered with the underived splendor of indwelling Deity, and her walk is bright with the reflected glory of holiness—while her crown of joy is found in her complete ministry as represented by the apostolic twelve. She is fair as the moon, clear as the sun, and terrible as an army with banners. Behold, then, the typical woman, and see how glorious is the cause of truth and holiness.”

“In the vision the queenly woman is about to bring forth the promised seed. She cries in her anguish, “travailing in birth, and pained to be delivered.” This, of course, may represent the church crying day and night unto God in times gone by for the coming of the promised deliverer—a cry which increased in intensity and agony of desire as the time drew on. But it may also depict the constant condition of a true church—always travailing in birth till Christ is formed in the hearts of men. Till the man-child, namely, Christ mystical, is born here below; till the Christ is so brought forth among the sons of men that He and all those who by grace, are enabled to overcome the wicked one, shall rule the nations with a rod of iron. (Rev 2:26, 27).” (CHS)

Whatever else might be by the war in heaven, to which the above passage alludes, we may know that the powers of evil have done their utmost to overcome Christ and they have failed. Good is more powerful than evil and light more powerful than darkness and our hope is that He has achieved this for the whole universe—that it has cosmic reach and application. That He has done this for us is the core of the gospel: the powers that are for us are far superior to those arrayed against us. **If God be for us, who can stand against?** (Romans 8:31) The Spirit which communes with our spirit, awakens our conscience and keeps us on alert with regard to our enemies, which assists us in our weakness and fills us with remorse when we yield and succumb to sin or temptation, that Spirit, along with all good influences, are for us and helps from our earliest years until our last breath—parental counsel, little, young prayers, the words and example of dear friends and family, corrective sorrows, the forced pauses and leisure of sickness, the calm and peaceful face of a just elder (quite distinct from the furtive and festive glances of the wicked; yes, and good books (especially the best book, the Bible), the blessings of thought, meditation and labor, of completed duty, prayer and intimate communion with God, the powerful words of truth, of love and the pleasure we draw from beauty in theater, dance, sports, poetry, painting, sculpture and music—all these good and common things are like so many ministering angels, who also abound around us, they are all fighting under the banner of Christ in the good fight we waged faith. Where there is no battle, there is no victory and where conflict is missing, there’s no one, or anything to overcome! But, we and these allies, are arrayed on one side against all that is false, evil, mischievous and dark! And Scripture informs us that a victory won elsewhere for good (in heaven, say) must eventually reach this further shore.

Good angels have conquered the bad ones—and their leader has suffered defeat and expulsion. And the source of their victory lies in their obedience; they won because they were God’s champions—and the devil has only himself. In this realm obedience is strength and disobedience insures defeat! Yes, obedience, humility and trust in God—these are qualities that grant us advance, virtue and perfected holiness. And without them our characters are poor and weak and all our ways unstable. Where our thoughts and desires are mainly selfish, there defeat awaits its moment. For in this warfare, all are warriors. Of course, we shall be assaulted! And wherever we are attacked, we, like good soldiers, mount a counter-attack, we offer up resistance.

We even take the battle to the foe not content to be passive, or timid. The way to victory is through advance—all retreats must be strategic! There are many battles, and many campaigns in the execution of spiritual warfare. Our purpose is not merely to repulse the enemy, but to overcome him. Where the battles are most severe, the victories are sweetest. The angels stood firm in their conflict—temptation could not obtain a foothold; we must imitate their glorious example.

Our foremost weaponry is the blood of the Lamb. It must become our own, or it will not assist us. It must be applied to the door jams or the angel of death passes not over. Obedience, again. And our testimony is the efficacy of the blood—Satan is conquered by the atoning blood.

We also have unity of spirit: dauntless courage! Spiritual boldness and daring—unafraid to bleed, unafraid to die. Our loyalty is to be ferocious, solid and firm; we refuse to capitulate, retreat, or deny Christ. We must be perfect in consecration—body, mind and soul—both heartfelt and passionate, with all we are *even to the point of self-sacrifice*.

If we know that Satan's strategy is to drive true religion from the world through oppression and persecution, we should curiously be emboldened when such things come against us. Wherever these things are seen, we know there the battle is and we rush to the fire, to the fight, to the point of danger.

Every dishonest act we refuse to perform, every falsehood we choose not to utter, every piece of gossip we do not let pass our lips—all things uncharitable best left unsaid, every crushed sensual motivation—speaks to the tyranny rooted in our lusts from which oppression and injustice springs! All constitute strokes for the good, and a victory for God and all move us towards that moment of consummation when Christ appears and all enmity ends. Then, and only then, all will be peace.

**Amen.**