

St. Therese Catholic Church

Book of Revelation

Chapter 12

January 21, 2025

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Ark of the Covenant

- After the seventh trumpet is blown (11:15), the twenty-four elders offered a hymn praising God (11:17-19).
- Following the hymn, John sees the heavens opened and the ark of the covenant in the temple.
- Ark of the Covenant: A small gold inlaid box in which two stones of the law were kept. The rabbinical tradition added a jar of manna and the rod of Aaron (McIlraith, 111).
- The Ark of the Covenant was eventually brought to Jerusalem and Solomon built the temple and placed the ark in the Holy of Holies (McIlraith, 111).

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Ark of the Covenant

- The ark is the place where Israel meets God. It was lost at the destruction of Jerusalem by the Babylonians in 587 B.C.
- 2 Maccabees mentions that Jeremiah hid it and said that it would not be revealed until the end times (McIlraith, 111-112).



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Ark of the Covenant

- Jewish tradition is clear that Moses saw the real heavenly tabernacle/temple and modelled the earthly one on it. The temple and ark of 11:19 is clearly the heavenly one.
- Since the ark was the place of God's presence and the symbol of the new covenant, this ark must be telling us that the new and eternal covenant is now a reality.
- The sight of the ark is immediately followed by the sign of the New Covenant partner, the woman clothed with the sun (McIlraith, 112).

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Apocalypse Cosmology

First Creation	New Creation
Tripart structure: Heavens, earth, and under the earth (Rev. 5:3)	God creates a new creation: “Behold, I make all things new!” (21:5)
Christians are redeemed from the earth (14:3) and live or tent in heaven (12:12; 13:6)	“And I saw a new heaven and a new earth.” (Rev. 21:1).
“Earth dwellers” means idolaters, those whose names are not written in the book of life (13:8)	Jesus is the instrument by which God makes the new creation (3:14).
First creation is passing away (21:1)	The new creation centers on the New Jerusalem, which comes down out of heaven from God (21:2).

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Revelation 12

- Composed of three parts:
 - Verses 1-6: Battle between a woman with child and a dragon. The woman gives birth to the child (destined to rule) and then flees from the dragon to the desert for a fixed amount of time.
 - Verses 7-13: War between Michael and his angels against the dragon. Michael casts the dragon out of heaven, who then pursues the woman who had given birth to the child.
 - Verses 14-18: Returns to the battle between the dragon (serpent) and the woman. In failing to defeat the woman, the dragon waged war against the woman's offspring.

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Woman Clothed with the Sun
Basilica of the National Shrine of the Immaculate Conception

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Woman Clothed with the Sun

- John begins chapter 12 with two signs: a woman clothed with the sun (12:1) and a huge red dragon (12:3).
- Woman clothed with the sun: She is decorated with the main heavenly bodies, the sun, moon, and the stars (McIlraith, 115).
- This is how the people of God were described in that dream of Joseph's that did not endear him to his brothers (Gn. 37:9). Joseph saw the sun (his father), the moon (his mother), and the eleven stars (his brothers) bowing down before him – the twelfth star (McIlraith, 115).

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Woman Clothed with the Sun

- The woman symbolizes Israel, who in the Bible is often personified as a woman – as daughter of Zion (Is. 62:11), as a mother (Ps. 87; Is. 66:8-11), or as the bride of the Lord (Is. 54:5; 62:4-5) (206).
- “She represents the entire story of God’s people, chosen to carry forward his plans for the nations and indeed for the whole creation. That is why the sun, moon, and stars form her robe, her footstool and her crown.” (206)
- With child: The woman is pregnant and about to give birth. She cried aloud in labor pains, which are the sufferings that God’s people would experience before the Messiah’s coming to rescue them (206).

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Woman Clothed with the Sun

- As far back as Epiphanius in the AD 300s and Oecumenius in the 600s, the woman was identified with Mary, and this debate has continued (McIlraith, 116).

Woman as Mary

Mary as the Ark of the Covenant

John sees the Ark of the Covenant in heaven, then speaks about a woman clothed with the sun. Mary is the fulfillment of the Ark of the Covenant.

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Ark of the Covenant

- **Carried Word of God** written on stone tablets (Ex 25:8-16)
- Manna placed in it (Ez 16:32-35)
- Shepherd's staff of Aaron (high priest) (Heb. 9:4)
- Contained Aaron's rod

Mary

- Carried Incarnate Word of God in her womb (Lk 1:42)
- Carried Jesus, the Bread of Life (Jn 6:58)
- Carried Jesus, the eternal High Priest
- Jesus will "rule the nations with a rod of iron" (Rev 12:5)

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Ark of the Covenant



Mary: Ark of the
New Covenant

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Woman Clothed with the Sun

Woman as Mary	
Singular Figures	The child symbolizes the Christ Child and the red dragon the devil. Given two symbols are singular figures, it is fitting that the woman is a singular figure as well: Mary.
Woman's pregnancy	In heaven, the Church is an espoused wife who becomes God's bride in Rev. 21:2. In Rev. 12, the woman is espoused but not yet God's bride. The woman is Mary, who is espoused to Joseph as virgin and mother.
Multiple levels of meaning	Scripture allows for multiple levels of meaning (layers of a wedding cake). The woman can be Israel, the Church, and Mary, who is the most preeminent member of the Church.

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Red Dragon

Red Dragon	Meaning
Fiery Red	Same color as the second horseman that took peace from the earth (Rev. 6:4)
Dragon	The Jewish people were used to calling their enemies dragons. Pharoah is called a dragon in Ezekiel 29:3 and so is Nebuchadnezzar in Jeremiah 51:34.
Seven heads	Indicating his perfect angelic intelligence
Ten horns	Symbol of power. The lamb had seven horns (Rev. 5:6). Dragon appears to have more power. However, it is illusory.
Seven diadems	Indicates his great kingly power.

~McIlraith, 117-118

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The Dragon

- Third of the stars: Rev. 12:9 identifies the dragon as the devil, many interpret this to refer to Satan's leading astray a third of the angels before the beginning of history (207).
- To devour her child: Herod reflects the same mentality (Matt. 2:7-16) in an attempt to kill the Christ-child. He acts under the influence of Satan, as did those who killed Christ (Lk 22:3; John 13:2; 27), as do those who persecute Christians in John's time and our own (207).
- By attempting to devour the child, the dragon tries to take Jesus out of history. However, the dragon's hopes are entirely frustrated as the son is taken directly to his Father's throne at birth (McIlraith, 119).

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The Child

- Having failed to destroy Jesus, the dragon now turns to trying to lead the entire world away from him. Just as Jesus is characterized as the “one loving us” so Satan is characterized in this book as “the one leading us astray” or away from Jesus (12:9, 20:10) (McIlraith, 118).
- Rule all the nations: Psalm 2 is about God’s Messiah who will be given the nations as an inheritance and shepherd them with an iron rod.
- Child was caught up to God: This verse summarizes the earthly life of Jesus, from his birth to his exaltation to God’s throne (Mk 16:19; Eph. 1:20; Heb. 12:2) (208).

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Woman Protected

- Woman herself fled into desert: Recalls Israel's time in the wilderness, a type of the Church's earthly pilgrimage. As God took care of Israel in the desert, so God will take care of (literally "fed" or "nourished") the woman in a place he has prepared for her (209).
- Twelve hundred and sixty days: Three and a half years or symbolic number of the Church's worship and witness, and of the Gentile's trampling the holy city (210).
- Three and a half years is an incomplete or temporary period, referring to the history of the Church and in a particular way to the Church's ultimate trial (189).

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Summary of the Woman

- The woman is seen to be the faithful Israel, personified as daughter Zion, who gives birth to the Messiah.
- At the same time, the woman is the literal mother of the Messiah, Mary of Nazareth.
- Finally, the woman is the Church, whom God cares for during her time in the wilderness of this world and who brings forth other children (210).



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War in Heaven

- War in heaven: War breaks out in a sphere above the world of human beings, where angelic beings operate and influence earthly events (212).
- Michael: First mentioned in the the Book of Daniel where he is presented as the “chief prince” among the angels, the “guardian” of God’s people, who battles for Israel in struggles against pagan nations and their princes (Dan. 10:13, 21; 12:1) and will battle again on behalf of God’s people at the end of history (Dan. 12:1-4) (212).



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Michael's Victory

- No longer any place for them in heaven: The dragon and his angels are defeated and lost their place in heaven. Their defeat, however, does not render them powerless (212).
- Huge dragon: Identified as the ancient serpent of the Garden of Eden (Gen. 3), the Devil (*diabolos*, "slanderer"), Satan (a Hebrew word meaning "accuser" or "adversary"); and he is the one who is deceiving the whole world. Later Jewish tradition identified the the serpent of Genesis 3 with the devil and Satan (Wis. 2:24).

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St. Michael Prayer

- Pope Leo XIII recommended the prayer to St. Michael at the end of every Mass against the work of the devil.
- This pious custom fell out of practice following the Second Vatican Council. In recent years, many Catholic parishes have begun offering the prayer to St. Michael following daily Masses.
- Pope John Paul II recommended that everyone recite the St. Michael Prayer to obtain help in the battle against the forces of darkness and against the spirit of this world (213).

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Victory Hymn

- The victory hymn of 12:10 – 12 celebrates the banishment of Satan from heaven. It picks up the songs of 11:15-18 and attributes this victory to God.
- The victory, as we know, has been won by Christ. We already know from the seven messages that Christ has shared his victory, his conquering, with his faithful Wife.
- Now we learn that the Wife has power to conquer the dragon and we are told how she can do this. Because she is his espoused Wife, she has direct access to Jesus and to the power of his blood. This access to Christ's blood, which we saw in 7:14, enables her to overcome the dragon (McIlraith, 119).

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Victory Hymn

Objective Dimension	Subjective Dimension
They conquered him by the blood of the Lamb (Rev. 12:11)	And by the word of their testimony (Rev. 12:11)
It is the sacrificial death of Christ on the cross that silences the accuser.	Christians conquer the devil by the word of their testimony.
The saints have washed their robes and made them white in the blood of the Lamb (through faith, repentance, and baptism)	Believers “testify to the truth” (John 18:37). They wield “the sword of the Spirit, which is the word of God” (Eph. 6:17; Heb. 4:12).
Key: Christ died for all so that those who live might not live for themselves but for him whose sake died and was raised (2 Cor. 5:15)	Key: Christ’s life, death, and resurrection must be personally embraced and lived by Christians to experience his power/forgiveness.

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Victory Hymn

- Love for life did not deter them from death: The fundamental attitude that makes the words of Christians effective is their willingness to die for the faith (215).
- The martyrs prioritize following Jesus above everything else, even to the point of willingness to lay down their lives (Matt. 10:28-33).
- Their attitude is opposite to the attitude of those who worship idols or compromise with the evil of the surrounding society (215).
- This verse is almost precisely midway in the book. One scholar calls it “the key theological sentence in the entire book” (215).

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Dragon's Pursuit

- Come down to you: The final phase of history between Christ's resurrection and his return in glory is a time of great conflict (217).
- While the devil's time has been "thrown down" (v. 9), "cast down" (v. 10), and "conquered" (v. 11), he is far from harmless and capable of making things very difficult for disciples of Jesus (217).
- In great fury: The devil's fury directed against the Church is proof of his desperation (217).
- Short time: In light of eternity, the time between Christ's death and resurrection and the final consummation is a brief interlude.

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Serpent's Torrent

- Key: While the Church is spiritually protected from the serpent, he does not stop trying to pursue her (219).
- Serpent spewed a torrent of water: Coming from his mouth suggests that it is a flood of lies, which fits well with texts that speak of Satan as a deceiver (John 8:44) and with the tradition that the final period of history will be characterized by satanic deception (219).
- In our own day it can sometimes seem difficult to defend the truth, not so much because of the plausibility of the lies as because of their overwhelming quantity (219).

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Serpent's Torrent

- Earth helped the woman: In the Old Testament, the earth opened and swallowed those who were attacking or misleading God's people (Exod. 15:12) (219).
- No matter what the devil throws at the Church, God will come to her aid and preserve her: "The gates of the netherworld shall not prevail against it" (Mt 16:18) (219).
- That does not mean, however, that the Church will be spared from severe trials in which her future may seem to be in jeopardy (Lk 18:8) (219).



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Waging Further War

- The conflict ends with the dragon directing his rage at the woman against “the rest of her seed” or offspring. We are somehow back in Genesis 3:15 again (McIlraith, 120).
 - Genesis 3:15: I will put enmity between you and the woman, and between your offspring and hers; They will strike at your head, while you strike at their heel.
- We are amazed to learn that the Wife has other offspring besides the Messiah and that these offspring are every Christian. These are the ones who keep the commandments and witness to Jesus (McIlraith, 120).

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Dragon's Position

- Position on the sand of the sea: The dragon now stands on the sand of the sea, appropriately as he is to witness the arrival from the depths of his chief aide in his war, the sea beast (McIlraith, 120).
- Why does the dragon still have such terrible power when he is defeated? Such are the inscrutable designs of the creator "who created all things and by whose will they existed and were created" (4:11) (McIlraith, 120).
- Key: The Wife is invited to rejoice for although the dragon attacks her children, victory is assured as long as they remain faithful to the Lamb and keep his commandments.

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Mary's Protection

- Although the context indicates that the woman and her offspring pursued by the dragon is the Church, Catholics cannot help but think of Mary, whom of Christians honors the title “Mother of the Church” (220).

Mary as our Mother	Meaning
Mother of Jesus, the Incarnate Word (Mother of the Head)	Mary is the source of human nature of the new Adam in whom every Christian is reborn. In Christ, related to Mary.
Mother of the Church (symbolized by John at the Cross)	In giving Mary to John, “Behold, your mother,” he gives her to all of us.
Mary said “yes;” we imitate our mother when we say “yes.”	We imitate our Mother when we believe and when we keep God’s commandments and bear witness to Jesus” (Rev. 12:17).

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The Sea Beast

- While the dragon will disappear in chapter 13, he has not given up.
- He masterminds the war behind the scenes, and the sea beast appears as his CEO.
- The CEO has an assistant, the land beast, the false prophet (McIlraith, 121).



The Sea Beast

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Next Time

- Tuesday, February 4th



Revelation 13	
The First Beast	13:1-10
The Second Beast	13:11-18