Christmas is in two days, and if you are like most people, you are probably starting to feel that combination of excitement and stress that goes along with it. Maybe you’re still trying to figure out what to get people for presents and scrambling to get your shopping done.

Go to a mall at this time of year, or even just Walmart, and you’ll be surrounded by crowds of people doing their last-minute shopping. They are gearing up for the meals they’ll make during the holiday, for Christmas parties, and for family gatherings. For many people, this may be the happiest time of the year, but it’s also the busiest time of the year.

We’re reminded often that Jesus is the reason for the season. But it’s often easy to forget that in all the busyness of Christmas in America.

Today I want us to take our focus off all the presents, and meals, and travel, and stress of Christmas, and turn our attention to the real reason that we celebrate this day. I want to take us back to the day that Jesus was born. But today we’re going to look at an aspect of the Christmas story that we don’t normally talk about at Christmas time. Today we are going to take a look behind the scenes of the nativity that we so that we can get the whole story of the birth of Jesus.

Most of the time when we think of the story of the birth of Jesus we think of a nativity scene, or the story from Luke 2. Especially if you have ever seen this:

Play Charlie Brown Christmas Video Here

**Luke 2:1–14 NKJV — 1** And it came to pass in those days that a decree went out from Caesar Augustus that all the world should be registered… **4** Joseph also went up from Galilee… to the city of David, which is called Bethlehem… **5** to be registered with Mary, his betrothed wife, who was with child. **6** So it was, that while they were there, the days were completed for her to be delivered. **7** And she brought forth her firstborn Son, and wrapped Him in swaddling cloths, and laid Him in a manger, because there was no room for them in the inn. **8** Now there were in the same country shepherds living out in the fields, keeping watch over their flock by night. **9** And behold, an angel of the Lord stood before them, and the glory of the Lord shone around them, and they were greatly afraid. **10** Then the angel said to them, “Do not be afraid, for behold, I bring you good tidings of great joy which will be to all people. **11** For there is born to you this day in the city of David a Savior, who is Christ the Lord. **12** And this will be the sign to you: You will find a Babe wrapped in swaddling cloths, lying in a manger.” **13** And suddenly there was with the angel a multitude of the heavenly host praising God and saying: **14** “Glory to God in the highest, And on earth peace, goodwill toward men!”

That’s the story we’re used to hearing, the story you’ve probably already heard in one way or another this year. It’s a tranquil and calm scene. One that we put on Christmas cards and set up in our front yards. We set up nativity scenes in our houses and hang them on our Christmas trees. We see it everywhere.

That’s the picture that we get of Christmas in our heads, that tranquil scene in a stable, with all the animals sitting calmly around. That’s the image we get in our heads when we sing Silent Night*.*

Sometimes you even hear people claim that Jesus never cried as a baby. If you have ever been around a baby for any length of time, or if you have ever been in a delivery room, you know that what went on that night was probably anything but a silent night or a tranquil, calm, scene. Delivering a baby isn’t fun in a hospital with doctors and epidurals, or so I’m told. Now imagine that happening in a barn, laying on the straw that the animals bed down on. Not exactly the tranquil scene we picture in our heads.

Even so, when we’re told to remember the reason for the season, that’s the image we probably all think of. But there was a whole lot more going on that night than just a baby being born in a stable.

There’s another passage in the Bible that talks about this same event, Jesus being born as a human being. But it has a little different perspective on it than Luke 2. It takes us behind the scenes to look at the whole picture of what was going on that night.

**Revelation 12:1–6 (ESV) — 1** And a great sign appeared in heaven: a woman clothed with the sun, with the moon under her feet, and on her head a crown of twelve stars. **2** She was pregnant and was crying out in birth pains and the agony of giving birth. **3** And another sign appeared in heaven: behold, a great red dragon, with seven heads and ten horns, and on his heads seven crowns. **4** His tail swept down a third of the stars of heaven and cast them to the earth. And the dragon stood before the woman who was about to give birth, so that when she bore her child he might devour it. **5** She gave birth to a male child, one who is to rule all the nations with a rod of iron, but her child was caught up to God and to his throne, **6** and the woman fled into the wilderness, where she has a place prepared by God…

Doesn’t sound like the typical Christmas story, right? Do you think A Charlie Brown Christmas would have been as popular if Linus had read that story instead of Luke 2? I’m gonna go out on a limb and say probably not.

But in Revelation 12, John tells that same story, the story of the birth of Jesus. But John shows us what’s behind the scenes of that story. John tells the story of a woman who was crying out in birth pains and the agony of giving birth. John doesn’t beat around the bush, he doesn’t whitewash things or try to make them more comfortable. He lets us see the real deal, the raw picture of what happened there that night.

You see, we tend to sanitize the Christmas story and make it nice and comfortable, just like all the children’s books about the birth of Jesus. It would be kind of hard to sell nativity scenes that showed a woman in labor, a look of pain on her face, a worried looking Joseph standing nearby, animals agitated and making lots of noise because of this disturbance in their stable. I don’t know anybody who would put that up in their house. We want to clean the story up, to make it more comfortable, more comforting. We want a story we can curl up on the couch and read with our kids.

We do the very same thing with the cross of Jesus. The cross wasn’t some pretty, clean, ornamental thing. It was an instrument of torture and death. But the crosses we decorate our church with and wear on our jewelry look pretty nice. We don’t like to remind ourselves of the pain that went into it, of just how much Jesus went through on the cross. We want it to be an ornament, a decoration. If it looked like the real thing we would never use it as a decoration.

That’s okay at times. Those things help us remember Jesus when maybe we wouldn’t otherwise. They help us tell our children about stories that they don’t necessarily need to know all the gory details of just yet. I’m not ready for my kids to watch *The Passion of the Christ* just yet. But sometimes we have to look beyond the nice calm nativity scenes and the nice shiny crosses and take a look at the reality of what happened.

That’s what John is doing here in Revelation. He pulls back the curtain, so we can see what happened, not just in the stable, but the bigger picture.

It’s also pretty significant how what John says about Jesus birth here in Revelation also ties in with what happened in Genesis 3. When mankind sinned for the very first time, God told the woman she would have pain in childbirth. Luke doesn’t tell us about that part, but John says she was crying out in the agony of giving birth. She was suffering from that curse because of humanity’s sin. God also says to the serpent:

**Genesis 3:15 (NIV) — 15** …I will put hostility between you and the woman, and between your offspring and hers; he will crush your head, and you will strike his heel.”

That prophecy comes into play very clearly here in what John says. The first sign that appeared in heaven was this woman giving birth. The second was a great red dragon. That dragon is, in no uncertain terms, Satan. The same one who was there in the Garden to deceive Eve, the same one that was cursed to be an enemy of the offspring of the woman. Now we see that hostility come to fruition.

John says the dragon had **Revelation 12:3–4 (ESV) — 3** … seven heads and ten horns, and on his heads seven crowns. **4** His tail swept down a third of the stars of heaven and cast them to the earth.

Now we could go into what scholars think all of those things mean: the seven heads and seven crowns, the ten horns, the stars he sweeps out of heaven, but the gist of this picture is that this dragon is powerful. He is a force to be reckoned with, one that no earthly power could prevail against.

And then John says **Revelation 12:4 (ESV) — 4** …And the dragon stood before the woman who was about to give birth, so that when she bore her child he might devour it.

Here is that hostility between the serpent, and the offspring of the woman. This dragon didn’t want this child to be born. He doesn’t want him to survive. As this woman is crying out in agony as she gives birth, this dragon is standing by ready to kill the child as quickly as he can.

There was a professor at Lincoln named Bob Lowery, and one of his classes was on Revelation

Whenever he taught this passage, he would always have a nativity scene set up, just like this one – and then he would bring out this enormous red dragon figurine and put it right behind the stable, looming over the entire scene (get dragon out).

He thought that nativity scenes ought to have a red dragon with them as well, so that we could get the full picture of what was going on that night.

There’s a story behind this dragon. I looked all over for a dragon in anticipation of one day preaching this sermon. I found this one in a toy store in Pigeon Forge, TN about three years ago. since then he has found his way into my kids’ toys, and they affectionately refer to him as ‘Draggy’ the dragon.

That’s a cute story, but what this dragon represents in the nativity is anything but cute. This dragon, Satan, was out to kill this newborn child. We find out why in the next verse.

**Revelation 12:5 (ESV) — 5** She gave birth to a male child, one who is to rule all the nations with a rod of iron, but her child was caught up to God and to his throne,

Realize that all of Jesus’ life and ministry on earth is wrapped up in that one verse. He was born to be the ruler of the nations, then he was caught up to God and to his throne. This child, this little baby who came into the world in such humble circumstances, was not just any baby. He wasn’t some random child who was destined to be a hero. This was the one who was destined by God to rule over all the nations, and over all the earth. This was the one who was sent to be the ruler, the leader, of the earth. That threatened the dragon’s plans.

This dragon was in a fight against God and his plan for the world. He was fighting against God’s plan of redemption that we see on display throughout the Bible. This dragon, Satan, is the enemy of God and all his ways.

The Bible calls Satan the Prince of this world and the god of this age. As long as humanity continued in their sin and didn’t receive redemption from God, then this dragon would continue to reign over his kingdom. He would continue to enslave humanity with the sin that they were so accustomed to. But this child threatened all of that. He was here to bring about the redemption of humanity and put an end to the reign of the dragon. This dragon knew the threat this child posed, and he did whatever he could to stop it from happening.

The dragon’s first attempt to destroy the child came through King Herod. When the wise men, who are usually a part of all those nativity scenes, came to Bethlehem to seek out the Messiah who has been born, they first went to king Herod to ask about the child. Herod learned just enough from the wise men to figure out how old Jesus must have been at the time, and then he had all the male children two years old and younger in Bethlehem and the surrounding areas put to death so that this baby born to be the ‘king of the Jews’ would not be a threat to Herod’s own throne.

Satan tried again to deter Jesus from his mission to redeem humanity when he tempted him for forty days in the wilderness. Now we only have three of Jesus’ temptations recorded in the Gospels, but Hebrews tells us.

**Hebrews 4:14–15 (ESV) — 14** Since then we have a great high priest who has passed through the heavens, Jesus, the Son of God, let us hold fast our confession. **15** For we do not have a high priest who is unable to sympathize with our weaknesses, but one who in every respect has been tempted as we are, yet without sin.

It’s pretty clear that Jesus faced more than just three temptations in his time here on earth. Satan, the dragon, tempted Jesus in every way that you can imagine and yet he was still without sin.

Of all the ways the dragon tried to end the mission Jesus was on, the most powerful assault he made against the baby that was born that night was on the cross. When Jesus died, Satan thought he had won. He had finally killed the offspring of the woman, he had finally won the battle. But the resurrection of Jesus turned the dragon’s plan on its head. The very thing that was meant to defeat God’s plan of redemption, Jesus used to defeat the dragon instead. CS Lewis talks about that as death as a weapon on both sides.

Several years ago I was introduced to the term zugzwang. It’s a German term that describes when a player in a game has no choice but to make a move that he knows will cause him to lose. In the game of chess it’s often used to talk about the moment when a player realizes that he is going to be checkmated and has no way of stopping it.

That’s what the birth of Jesus was to this dragon. This was one of the final moves of a supernatural battle that was going on. The dragon knew that if he allowed this baby to be born, if he allowed Jesus to accomplish his mission, he was finished, he would be defeated. The birth of Jesus was one of the final moves before the checkmate of the resurrection.

In Revelation 12 John goes on to describe the dragon fighting against the armies of God.

**Revelation 12:7–11 (ESV) — 7** Now war arose in heaven, Michael and his angels fighting against the dragon. And the dragon and his angels fought back, **8** but he was defeated, and there was no longer any place for them in heaven. **9** And the great dragon was thrown down, that ancient serpent, who is called the devil and Satan, the deceiver of the whole world—he was thrown down to the earth, and his angels were thrown down with him. **10** And I heard a loud voice in heaven, saying, “Now the salvation and the power and the kingdom of our God and the authority of his Christ have come, for the accuser of our brothers has been thrown down, who accuses them day and night before our God. **11** And they have conquered him by the blood of the Lamb and by the word of their testimony…

That one event, the birth of Jesus, totally changed the face of the battle between good and evil, between the offspring of the woman, and the dragon. Because of Jesus’ birth and his death and resurrection, there was no longer any place for the dragon and his followers in heaven. They had been defeated by the blood of the Lamb.

We tend to think of Christmas as a time when a baby was born who would one day be our Savior, and that’s true. But if we limit what happened that night to just that, we are missing a big part of the picture.

It wasn’t just any baby that was born that night, it wasn’t just another kid who was destined for something great. There was a war going on. There was a battle raging. The baby that was born that night was God himself stepping into that battle in a way that he never had before. He was stepping onto the frontlines. God taking on flesh to be right in the midst of humanity. All so he could redeem us from our sin and defeat the dragon once and for all.

Paul says it pretty well in **Philippians 2:5–11 (ESV) — 5** Have this mind among yourselves, which is yours in Christ Jesus, **6** who, though he was in the form of God, did not count equality with God a thing to be grasped, **7** but emptied himself, by taking the form of a servant, being born in the likeness of men. **8** And being found in human form, he humbled himself by becoming obedient to the point of death, even death on a cross. **9** Therefore God has highly exalted him and bestowed on him the name that is above every name, **10** so that at the name of Jesus every knee should bow, in heaven and on earth and under the earth, **11** and every tongue confess that Jesus Christ is Lord, to the glory of God the Father.

We have a God and a Savior who loved us so much that he chose to step into the battle himself. He came here to live among us as a human. He humbled himself. He became a servant. And he died for us on that cross. And he did all that so that he could win the battle for us. So he could defeat that dragon and his armies once and for all. So he could bring redemption into the lives of all humanity.

Because of the little baby that was born that night in the midst of this supernatural battle, we no longer have to fear the dragon. We no longer have to be slaves to our sin. We no longer have to face the penalty for our sins. We get to enjoy eternity with our Savior.

You don’t have to go out and buy a red dragon to add to your nativity sets. But as you celebrate this Christmas, remember this little baby whose birth we celebrate was God Almighty stepping into our world to bring redemption to humanity.

That is truly a reason for rejoicing, and we can join with the angels as they said: **Luke 2:14 (NKJV) — 14** “Glory to God in the highest, And on earth peace, goodwill toward men!”