

## Advent Devotional December 18, 2023

### Scripture

#### Revelation 12:1-10

*1 A great portent 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 birthpangs, in the agony of giving birth. 3 Then another portent appeared in heaven: a great red dragon, with seven heads and ten horns, and seven diadems on his heads. 4 His tail swept down a third of the stars of heaven and threw them to the earth. Then the dragon stood before the woman who was about to bear a child, so that he might devour her child as soon as it was born. 5 And she gave birth to a son, a male child, who is to rule all the nations with a rod of iron. But her child was snatched away and taken to God and to his throne; 6 and the woman fled into the wilderness, where she has a place prepared by God, so that there she can be nourished for one thousand two hundred sixty days.*

*7 And war broke out in heaven; Michael and his angels fought against the dragon. The dragon and his angels fought back, 8 but they were defeated, and there was no longer any place for them in heaven. 9 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 Then I heard a loud voice in heaven, proclaiming, "Now have come the salvation and the power and the kingdom of our God and the authority of his Messiah, for the accuser of our comrades has been thrown down, who accuses them day and night before our God."*

### Devotion

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My Christmas Eve memories are infused with a reminder of waiting. As a young girl, I longed for the day when I would be mature enough to be chosen as Mary in our annual Christmas Eve pageant. In my memory, Mary was always beautiful, demure, and wearing powder blue taffeta, and I felt desperate to one day be her representative. My imagination for the mother of God never included anything about birthpangs, being clothed with the sun, or being confronted by dragons. I never did get the opportunity to play the part, but perhaps the fulfillment of my childhood Christmas wish came not in the donning of the regal blue gown, but in the moment I gave birth to my third child. All birth is difficult, and this one un-medicated; "crying out in birthpangs" somehow seems too gentle an expression to describe the guttural sounds emitting from my throat unbeknownst to me. Despite my fragile body and broken spirit, my son was born into the world and I was left with an adrenaline of triumph coursing through my veins.

We may not all give birth to children, but every one of us is called to participate in the restoration of God's kingdom. Mary pronounced the vision of that kingdom as a place where the mighty will be brought low and all the hungry filled with good things. And yet the fruition of this vision feels so far away. May these words of Scripture act as a midwife offering sustenance to continue in your difficult labor: the dragon of injustice will be thrown down. If that feels like an impossible task, I can assure you that the birth of a child through our fragile broken bodies does as well, and yet God's power sustains us as we co-labor to bring it to bear.

## **Prayer**

To the God who is with us in the waiting, may you provide us glimmers of hope in the hours we are most weary. May we remember the power we yield because it is you who fills us. Help us to use that power to contribute to the kingdom where the lowly will be lifted up and the hungry filled with good things.