

Amen. Amen. Well, hey, everybody. Merry Christmas. So glad that you're here.

My name is Shawn. I'm one of the ministers here at Sherwood Oaks. And this is one of my favorite nights of the year when, when we get to gather in here and get to celebrate one of the most important moments in. In history. And I know that there are people here tonight that are very excited to be here.

I know that there are some that are like, just counting down, going, okay, how much longer until we get to go in open presence? Or how much longer until I get to get out of here? Night. We had a service, our first one at 7:00. And right over here, there was a young family that was sitting.

They had a few kids that just were not having it. They were not having it. And right as I was about this point in my message, he stood up and screamed, I just want to leave. And I was like, bro, you're probably not the only one that feels that way. You're probably not the only one.

So if you are here tonight because, because someone wanted you to be here, thank you. It is, I think, very Christlike of you to surrender your want for. Because you love someone else. And so thank you for being here tonight. Hopefully, while you are here as a family, looking all nice and spiffy and you are together, you get a chance to go by, you know, one of like the Christmas tree sets that we have in here or the places that we have out in the lobby, get a family picture.

We put a lot of work and just making this place look nice for that reason. Some of you have told me that you can track the growth of your family in multiple ways. You can track the growth of your family through the Christmas Eve pictures that you have taken here over the years. We love that. So please take advantage of that while you are here.

Also, be sure if you have not ever done this, it is worth the time. Go around. Our worship center on the outside and the window sills, we have nativity sets from all over the world. Brad Pontius, our director of Global Engagement, has collected these from our different mission partners. Places where he has been, he's brought them back and so we have them set up.

Many of them have little tags from where they're from. And so just take a moment to walk around and look at all of those. They all are just a bit of a unique take on the nativity scene. They are culturally significant depictions of one of the most significant moments in history. That word, nativity, it.

It means the occasion of someone's birth. And, and so you have a

nativity story, I have a nativity story. Some of our nativities that occasion of our birth were captured by, by family members who took some pictures and, and kind that moment, you know, with a family and holding you as the newborn. And. But Jesus didn't really have that.

Mary and Joseph didn't have photography necessarily. And as the early church kind of started and they're like, we want to capture this. They created these nativity scenes. And so nativity scenes capture the moment, right, of Jesus birth. It's the occasion of Jesus birth.

And of all of the ones that we have around the church this time of year, this one is one of my favorites. It typically sits right over here by the, by the baptistry. It's been here for as long as really anybody can remember. And this is, this is an establishment, a fixture here at Sherwood Oaks at Christmas time. And in Luke chapter two, we are introduced to some of the characters that we see up here on, on the table.

And so of course there's baby Jesus. Like, it wouldn't be the Nativity of Jesus without baby Jesus. And so we've got him. And then, and then you have Joseph and you have Mary. Luke 2 says that the angels appeared to the shepherds.

And so you have, you have a shepherd or an angel there. And then you have a shepherd who for some reason thought it would be a good idea to bring livestock to a place where a child was just born. I'm sure Mary really appreciated that. But we have the shepherd and we have a cow and a sheep. And so about every nativity that you're going to come across has some combination of these.

Sometimes you just find Mary and Joseph and baby Jesus. Sometimes you find the other ones. These are the ones that, that were there at Jesus nativity. And then some nativity scenes like this one will add characters who weren't necessarily there. And so we have the three magi here that came to, to bring their gifts.

They, they probably weren't there when Jesus was born. It was probably several months, maybe even up to a couple of years afterwards that they arrived on the scene. But this nativity captures that moment. And of all the nativities that we have around the church, including this one, there is one character that is missing from every single one of them. It's not in this one.

It's not in any of the nativities that you'll find around the church. It's probably not even a nativity that you'll find in your own home there. Most nativities if not all that I have seen, are missing one key character. And we're not introduced to this character in any of the four gospels, any of the accounts. In Matthew, Mark, Luke, John of Jesus birth.

We don't find this character. In fact, we don't find this character until we get all the way to the book of Revelation. In the book of Revelation, God peels back the cosmic curtain between what is seen and he gives us a glimpse into what is unseen. And In Revelation, chapter 12, we are introduced to the unseen character of the nativity story, a dragon. So I'm just going to put that right there.

Dragon. Now, this is where Christmas Eve just got weird, at Sherwood Oak Christian Church. Like, my guess is that you did not come here this afternoon expecting to hear a sermon on Revelation about a red dragon. But it's in there. It's in there, and it is the missing character of Christmas.

My nativity scene at home doesn't have this. None of them. Probably yours doesn't either. I have never seen a dragon in any nativity scene. The closest I have ever come to seeing a dragon around Christmas time is this one.

Maggie Mobley took a picture of that a couple of weeks ago and sent it to me. That is definitely a Christmas dragon. But it is not the dragon of the Christmas story. No, the one that we are introduced to. Revelation, chapter 12 is much more menacing.

This is how John describes it. He writes these words, and we're kind of thrust right into the middle of this eternal cosmic battle that is taking place. And I want to read it to you, says a great sign appeared in heaven. A woman clothed with the sun, with the moon under her feet, and a crown of 12 stars on her head. She was pregnant and cried out in pain as she was about to give birth.

Then another sign appeared in heaven, an enormous red dragon. And ours doesn't quite capture it. I actually, actually had a picture that I used last night that was up on this screen. And some people reached out and they're like that, scared kids. And so we took it off, and we're just going to use this guy right here this weekend.

An enormous red dragon with seven heads and ten horns and seven crowns on its head. Its tail swept a third of the stars out of the sky and flung them to the earth. The dragon stood in front of the woman who was about to give birth so that he might devour the child the moment he was born. And she gave birth to a son, a male child who will rule all the nations with an iron scepter and her Child was snatched up to God and to his throne. Now, there's a lot of apocalyptic language here, which means that what we read describes.

Describes kind of what was not actually. Not actually like, really captures exactly what it was. Describes what things are like. And so let's look at the characters. First, we find a woman who is.

Is pregnant. And we think of a pregnant woman in the Christmas story,

and we immediately think of Mary, but it's actually not Mary. It's Israel. Israel was the one who would birth the Messiah. The Messiah would come out of the nation of Israel.

And she is described as being clothed with the sun and the moon, and there are 12 stars on her head. These represent the 12 tribes of Israel. And Israel is the one that would deliver the Messiah into the world. And the text says that it would come with a lot of pain and with a lot of struggle. And we read through Israel's history as a nation, and we see it.

We see it. And when the baby finally does arrive, an ancient foe is waiting for him. That's Our Dragon. Revelation 12, 9. It says that it is this ancient serpent called the devil or Satan, who leads the whole world astray.

The word devil, it means accuser. Satan, it means adversary. This is the bad guy of the Christmas story. He is the Mr. Potter to George Bailey, the Grinch to Cindy Lou, who he is the Hans gruber to John McClane.

And he has been coming for God's throne since the beginning of time. And he did not come for it alone. When we read, his tail swept a third of the stars out of the sky. It was the third of the angels that he took with him in his pursuit of God's throne. And now he is waiting for the moment to be able to devour this baby, the moment that he is born, which leads us to Jesus.

And this Jesus that we read about in Revelation chapter 12. It is not the meek and mild and innocent baby Jesus that we see in most manger and nativity scenes. This baby was born ready for battle. This baby was born not with a rattle in its hand, but with a sword. Says that he comes carrying an iron sword, scepter.

This symbol of power and authority. Revelation 12 steps into this cosmic battle that began all the way back in the opening pages of scripture. Matt talked about this a couple of weeks ago. In Genesis chapter 3, Satan is described as a serpent who tempts God's children, who deceives them, who leads them into the chaos of sin. But right after we are introduced to a serpent, we are quickly introduced to a son the serpent that would come to lead us astray.

We are introduced to a son who would come to rescue us. A son who will deliver us. A son who will bring us back to God. And in Genesis, chapter three, verse 15, God speaks this curse over the serpent. He says, and I will put enmity between you and the woman and between your offspring and hers.

And then listen to this. He will crush your head and you will strike his heel. You see, Satan knew that the birth of Jesus meant the

beginning of the end for him. And Revelation 12 shows us that he did not take this sitting down. He fights and he claws even harder to stop God's plan of forgiveness and redemption.

He tries to devour Jesus every single step of the way. And as he watches this baby grow into a man in his ministry and he sees where all this is heading, he knows that his ultimate demise is right on the horizon. And so imagine. Imagine his delight when it seems like his last ditch effort to stop God's plan had worked. He had everyone turn on Jesus.

Even his closest friends. The people that he came to rescue rejected him. They cried out for him to be crucified. It even seemed like in that very moment that God had turned his back on his son. And imagine Satan's delight as he watched Jesus die on the cross.

As he watched the one who came as the light of the world be overcome by the darkness of death. The cross was supposed to be the knockout blow. It was supposed to be the final punch. Satan thought he had won. But don't miss this.

All he had done was strike his heel. Instead, by laying down his life, Jesus crushed the head of the dragon in the most unexpected way. By the power of his life, death, and resurrection, Jesus claimed victory and destroyed the power that our accuser, our enemy and our adversary has over us. Here's the thing, though. You know this and I know this, that just because the war has been won does not mean that the battle is over.

The cross and the resurrection, it delivered the mortal wound to our enemy. The truth is, he's not dead yet. And knowing that he can't defeat God, Satan now settles for the next best thing. If he can't get to God, he's going to go after the ones that he loves. We read this in verse 17 of Revelation 12.

It says, Then the dragon was enraged with the woman and went off to wage war against the rest of her offspring. Who are the rest of her offspring? It's those who keep God's commands and hold fast to their testimony about Jesus. And Satan is now after us. And his purpose is the same purpose that he had for Jesus.

He seeks to devour us whether. Whether we believe it or not. Listen, I know, I know this is the weirdest Christmas Eve service you have ever been to. And some of you are sitting there going, this is ridiculous. Talking about dragons, this unseen.

Matt's weird meter is like blowing up right now, right? But it doesn't matter what you believe about this. You may think this is all make believe, that's fine. It doesn't change the truth. It doesn't change the truth that we have a very real enemy who wants nothing more than

to destroy all the good that God wants for you.

We have an accuser who is this relentless prosecutor constantly pointing out our flaws and our failures. He's trying to convince us and God that we are unworthy of grace and forgiveness, love. And we feel it in the guilt and shame and self condemnation in our lives that we sometimes feel like we cannot shake as our adversary. Satan is constantly opposing the work of God in your life. He's trying to undermine your faith by sowing seeds of doubt.

He's working against us by isolating us, by discouraging us, by making us feel like we are the only ones who struggle with that sin, that we are unloved and unlovable because of where we've been or what we've done or what has been done to us. And as the Prince of darkness, Satan, fills our world with war and hunger and selfishness and school shootings. And then he gives us things like cable news and social media to keep just enough of the evil and darkness in front of us to make us think that there's no more light that shines in our world Today. The good news of Christmas, the good news that the angels said, behold, I bring you good news that brings peace to all mankind. It actually starts with really bad news that we have a very real enemy who is out to devour any good that God wants to do.

But listen, we also have a very real savior who is victorious. First. John 3, 8 says this, that the reason why the Son of God appeared, the reason why Jesus was born, was to destroy the devil's work. And so Jesus, hear me. Jesus was not born to be your life coach.

Jesus was not born and come into this world to just give you a good example to follow and to make you a good person. Jesus came to win the war. Say that with me. Jesus came to win the war. Jesus came to shut the mouth of your accuser, to cast out your adversary, and to overcome darkness with the light of his love, Jesus came to win the war.

Which means that Christmas is not about a helpless baby laying in the middle manger. It is about a king who came to rescue us. It is about a king who came to lay down his life for us, to defeat our greatest enemy and to bring light into the darkness of our lives. And I don't know where you are right now. I don't know what's going on in your life.

But I imagine that in a room like this on a day like today, it's probably not all merry and bright. There are some of us who feel like giving up. There are some of us in here right now that may be tired. Life feels tough. It feels dark.

You don't know what next year is gonna hold, let alone the next few days as you get together with family. But here's what I do know. Jesus is victorious. And because of that, you can be, too. Your adversary wants to paralyze you in fear.

He wants to remind you of your sin and your shame and your guilt. But hear me today, he does not have the final word in your life. God does. God's grace and his mercy and his love, they speak a new word over you. And it's all because Jesus took on flesh and entered as a baby into our world to defeat our greatest enemy in the most unlikely way imaginable, by giving himself.

And now that hidden figure in the nativity scene has been defeated. And when you turn to Jesus, you will find that he still is the light that shines in the darkness of this world and in your life. So we come tonight to remind ourselves of this truth. And we come to adore this baby who was born, who would grow up to die in our place. Place so that we could be rescued and redeemed.

Won't you stand with me and I'll close this in prayer? Jesus, thank you. Thank you for entering into our world, taking on flesh. Thank you for. For coming knowing that you are entering right into a battle from the very moment of your birth.

But you are ready and you are faithful. And you fought all the way to the end and through your life, death and resurrection. Satan has now been defeated. And so we. We can stand as those who have been forgiven, as those who have been redeemed.

We no longer have to listen to the voice of our accuser. When we put our faith in Jesus and you, we have been forgiven and set free from it. And so thank you for that message and that hope that began on Christmas morning. We adore you, Jesus, for who you are. And for what you have done for us, amen.