

## Revelation 12

<sup>7</sup> Then war broke out in heaven. Michael and his angels fought against the dragon, and the dragon and his angels fought back. <sup>8</sup> But he was not strong enough, and they lost their place in heaven. <sup>9</sup> The great dragon was hurled down—that ancient serpent called the devil, or Satan, who leads the whole world astray. He was hurled to the earth, and his angels with him.

<sup>10</sup> Then I heard a loud voice in heaven say:

“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 brothers and sisters,  
who accuses them before our God day and night,  
has been hurled down.

<sup>11</sup> They triumphed over him  
by the blood of the Lamb  
and by the word of their testimony;  
they did not love their lives so much  
as to shrink from death.

<sup>12</sup> Therefore rejoice, you heavens  
and you who dwell in them!  
But woe to the earth and the sea,  
because the devil has gone down to you!  
He is filled with fury,  
because he knows that his time is short.”

<sup>13</sup> When the dragon saw that he had been hurled to the earth, he pursued the woman who had given birth to the male child. <sup>14</sup> The woman was given the two wings of a great eagle, so that she might fly to the place prepared for her in the wilderness, where she would be taken care of for a time, times and half a time, out of the serpent’s reach. <sup>15</sup> Then from his mouth the serpent spewed water like a river, to overtake the woman and sweep her away with the torrent. <sup>16</sup> But the earth helped the woman by opening its mouth and swallowing the river that the dragon had spewed out of his mouth. <sup>17</sup> Then the dragon was enraged at the woman and went off to wage war against the rest of her offspring—those who keep God’s commands and hold fast their testimony about Jesus.

### Footnotes:

- a. [Revelation 12:5](#) Psalm 2:9

## John 1

<sup>47</sup> When Jesus saw Nathanael approaching, he said of him, “Here truly is an Israelite in whom there is no deceit.”

<sup>48</sup> “How do you know me?” Nathanael asked.

Jesus answered, “I saw you while you were still under the fig tree before Philip called you.”

<sup>49</sup> Then Nathanael declared, “Rabbi, you are the Son of God; you are the king of Israel.”

<sup>50</sup> Jesus said, “You believe<sup>[h]</sup> because I told you I saw you under the fig tree. You will see greater things than that.” <sup>51</sup> He then added, “Very truly I tell you,<sup>[i]</sup> you<sup>[i]</sup> will see ‘heaven open, and the angels of God ascending and descending on’<sup>[k]</sup> the Son of Man.”

Joan and I return from the holiday of a lifetime with three things:

One – precious memories that will stay with us forever

Two – a sermon (or maybe more) and

Three – a stinking cold!

If you're ever offered the option to travel with your vehicle through the channel tunnel, I strongly advise you to avoid it at all costs

Our coach's air-conditioning had broken down and so had the train's. So Joan and I chose to step out of the coach into the train carriage, where it was hot and noisy – whilst others remained on the coach – which when we re-boarded in Folkestone was like a sauna and a perfect incubation box for germs to breed. It was little better than a cattle truck, which makes me think we've got something wrong somewhere, we have the technology to drill 30-odd miles under the channel, accurate to the millimetre, and yet we can't make a simple thing like air-conditioning incorporating some kind of bio-filter to kill germs.

My guess is that such a system is well within our grasp – and that the only stumbling block is the cost – and the powers that be would rather their customers die of suffocation or disease than let down their share holders (what an old cynic I've become!)

And whilst Victor Meldrew's on his soap-box, why is it that the locals can use motorway toilets for nothing whilst as soon as they see a British coach pull up, the attendants are there at the entrance demanding one euro from us all?

And another thing - why does a 5 star hotel herd all the Brits into a separate dining room for bacon butties & soggy cornflakes whilst the rest of their guests feast on the delights of a full continental breakfast?

But seriously - there are some things they do on the other side of the water, which put us to shame –their churches and churchyards are a shining example.

There's an average of about 40 chapels per Greek island, which ain't bad considering there are 3000 Greek Islands and more than half of them are uninhabited. Almost every family builds a chapel or shrine in their gardens as a memorial, to give thanks for something God has done for them, lives of loved ones, saved from shipwrecks, one we saw even had a plane hanging from the silver candelabra to praise God for saving them from an air-crash. God and religion clearly plays a major part in the everyday lives of Greek people.

And it was more of the same in Austria, where we were reminded of just how immaculately they keep their churches and churchyards. With wrought iron crosses, often bearing the photos of the deceased - and what impressed me the most - the fact that family members go in daily to light a candle at their loved ones' final resting

place. As I looked around I felt a sense of love and respect, whilst as I thought of our overgrown and neglected counterparts, with their broken headstones, sunken graves and overgrown with weeds, I felt deep shame. And the thought crossed my mind, do our graveyards reflect the state of our churches?

This week I was listening to Archbishop Justin, speaking at New Wine this summer. He was quoting a YouGov opinion poll. Where 58% of people under 25 didn't say they opposed the church, or faith; they said it was completely irrelevant. "Opposition is one thing" said the Archbishop, "indifference is far more dangerous. That kept me awake at night "

What can we do to be more relevant? How can we make a stand against the ever-decreasing standards of the world today - where workers are forced to labour long and hard, in appalling conditions, whilst unscrupulous bosses make huge profits? Where pay-day loan companies make money hand-over-fist at the expense of the people who can least afford it? Where mighty supermarkets think it's OK to sell our kids Halloween outfits with Mental Patient strewn all over them. Where – quite legally – lottery companies make obscene profits by selling the false hope, that a little windfall will change people's lives forever. It doesn't you know – I read recently that only about 15% of our Lotto winners would describe themselves as really happy.

Some of you are beginning to look a little puzzled. What has this to do with the harvest or either of today's readings? Let me read the opening of Revelation 12 again...

<sup>7</sup> Then war broke out in heaven. Michael and his angels fought against the dragon, and the dragon and his angels fought back. <sup>8</sup> But he was not strong enough, and they lost their place in heaven. <sup>9</sup> The great dragon was hurled down—that ancient serpent called the devil, or Satan, who leads the whole world astray. He was hurled to the earth, and his angels with him.

We can make a difference! If we weren't celebrating the Harvest this weekend, we'd be thanking God for St Michael and all his fellow angels. Who finally get the pleasure of putting Satan in his place.

Another sermon picked up on our cruise – was when they gathered us in the ship's theatre each morning to go ashore and join our excursion buses. It was amazing how people would try to pre-empt the guide's directions so they could get to the exit first! It's a bit like that in airport lounges, where people hang around a certain boarding gate to try and beat the rest. I often ask Joan why? They're not going to sell more tickets than they have seats, so why does everyone clamber to get to the front? I put it down to an inherent human fear of being left behind. Here, in his book of Revelation, John assures us that when the good ship finally leaves for Paradise, there's only one guy who will definitely get thrown off and left behind – the one who

holds us all to ransom now, the one who thinks he has the upper hand. But let me remind you folks, YOU HAVE THE VICTORY.

Death is defeated. Satan will get his comeuppance. God's angels – like their creator – are mighty powerful, and they too are on our side. There is no need for any believer to fear being left behind. If we were Greeks right now we'd be out there starting another shrine or chapel. But we're not, we're British, and there's something very conservative about us, something that makes us step back and say "after you", something that makes us hand over our Euros to get into continental loos!

Yesterday, I was scouring the OT for the origins and meaning of the Harvest Festival, and I came upon this verse from [Deuteronomy 26...](#)

*<sup>3</sup> say to the priest, "I declare today to the LORD your God that I have come to the land the LORD swore to our ancestors to give us." <sup>4</sup> The priest shall take the basket from your hands and set it down in front of the altar of the LORD your God. <sup>5</sup> Then you shall declare before the LORD your God: "My father was a wandering Aramean, and he went down into Egypt with a few people and lived there and became a great nation, powerful and numerous. <sup>6</sup> But the Egyptians mistreated us and made us suffer, subjecting us to harsh labour. <sup>7</sup> Then we cried out to the LORD, the God of our ancestors, and the LORD heard our voice and saw our misery, toil and oppression. <sup>8</sup> So the LORD brought us out of Egypt with a mighty hand and an outstretched arm, with great terror and with signs and wonders. <sup>9</sup> He brought us to this place and gave us this land, a land flowing with milk and honey; <sup>10</sup> and now I bring the firstfruits of the soil that you, LORD, have given me." Place the basket before the LORD your God and bow down before him.*

You see, the point of the harvest wasn't just about thanking God for the fruits of the earth, it was about the children of Israel being freed from slavery and persecution, it was about justice and liberation and God's mercy and compassion. And it doesn't take a huge leap of the imagination to figure that this is what inspired the shema, the ancient Jewish mantra which Jesus made a commandment - to love the Lord your God with all you heart, with all your soul, with all your body, mind and strength.

The Greeks and the Austrians have got it right – but have we? Would anyone passing by see our church and churchyard and think, "wow! They really love the Lord with all their heart and soul".