

John Sampson
"Falling Stars"
Text: Revelation 12:1 – 5a
Preached at KVCC
December 3, 2017

Will you pray with me?

God, may the words of my mouth and the meditations of all of our hearts be acceptable to you, our rock, and our redeemer. AMEN.

Today, on this first Sunday in Advent, we start to tell our greatest story.

We start to tell the story of nothing less than the redemption of humanity from the darkness that engulfs our lives, and defines so much of our world. We begin to tell a story of hope that will reveal to us what the very meaning of the word "salvation" could be.

And it's a story that is deep and shattering, that calls into question all of our assumptions and beliefs about what is true and right,

about what is good and what is evil, about who we are, and who we see as Other.

This story is the story of the birth and ministry of a man named Jesus, a man overflowing with the presence of God, and of all of the ways the people of his time responded to what he shared with them.

But it's also a story that never fully remains in the past.

It's a story that is told again in the ordinariness of our own lives. It's a story that is being lived right now at the Noonmark Diner, and on the trails up Marcy, and in our car rides home after worship, and even on the floor of the US Senate in this week's budget debate.

And today we open this story that is simultaneously once-upon-a-time and also here-and-now with a strange scene in heaven, in an encounter between a pregnant woman surrounded by the sun and

moon and stars, and a horrifying dragon that seeks to destroy her soon-to-be delivered child.

We may be surprised that our story starts not with facts and history, but with a myth. Which is not to say we start with an untruth, but rather with a truth told poetically.

Heaven – that inaccessible realm that can't be found on any star chart, and eludes all of our telescopes and satellites. It escapes us because we may be looking for it in the wrong place when we search for it literally – out there, up above us. But turn our gaze within, shine the light of perception on our hearts, and there is heaven staring back at us. There is the woman arrayed by the sun and moon and stars. There is the dragon slobbering and hungry for the woman's baby to be born.

Because the story we begin in Advent is fundamentally a story about the human heart, and the sometimes less-than-admirable ways our heart causes us to act towards ourselves, towards each other, and towards the Creation that is all around us.

It is a story about the conflict within our hearts between the forces of life, of selflessness, of creation, of compassion and of openness, which are all symbolized by the radiant woman of our myth, and the dragon-like forces of our anger and selfishness, of our apathy and alienation. The woman and the dragon may not exist in a literal sense, they may only be characters in a myth, but aren't they nonetheless real? Don't we recognize them from our own lives? Don't we see them staring back at us from within our own hearts? And don't we see them manifest in the events of our world?

But hear the good news of Advent!

The story of the conflict between the celestial woman and the great dragon, the story of the conflict within our deepest being, is not the end of our tale. It is just the beginning. It is the setting for something more, for something wondrous.

Because Advent promises us a miracle.

Advent is a season that tells us that our history is not our future. It is a season that announces the beginning of something new, of the possibility that the suffering of our hearts and the tragedy of human life, which may seem as eternal and secure as the very heavens above us, will come to an end like falling stars.

Because we are told that a child will be born to us. Because we are promised that a child will be born *within* us, within the heavenly realm of our own hearts.

And this child will be snatched from the jaws of our hatred. He will be saved from the hunger of our baseness. And he will grow to show us a new way.

This child's name is Jesus.

This child's name is Emanuel – God with Us.

This child's name is Love.

And through the story of his life, and by the words of his teaching, of his Torah, this child will provide us with a blueprint for nothing less than a new world – starting with a transformation of our own hearts. Because everything starts there.

So come. On this cold Sunday morning, here amidst the mountains and forests of the Adirondacks, here amidst these people, here

amidst the threats of nuclear war, here amidst a nation that seems to have lost any sense of common purpose, here amidst a crisis of addiction, come!

Let us begin our story that promises to lead us towards the birth of something new, something that may seem impossible, something that we may think can only be accomplished through a miracle. Let us begin our story that invites us to remake nothing less than our aching hearts, and to transform nothing less than the entirety of our exhausted world.

Let us begin our story of the advent of Jesus.

“O lord what a morning

O lord what a morning

O lord what a morning

When the stars begin to fall”

AMEN.