

Mary, the Woman Clothed with the Sun

LIVING
TRADITION



In the vision of Rev 12, Mary "represents and is the living icon of the whole Church."^a She is the one who brought forth the divine Messiah (12:5); her soul was pierced by a sword (Luke 2:35) when her Son, the Lamb, was sacrificed. She is the mother of Christians both by being the mother of the one in whom we are born anew, and by assenting to the request of her Son on the cross, "Behold, your son" (John 19:26), indicating the beloved disciple. In tradition, this beloved disciple has been seen to represent all followers of Jesus, whom Mary has adopted.

Assumed into heaven, Mary now reigns with Christ, the martyrs, and saints (20:4-6). With all the saints she intercedes for her children on earth, "those who keep God's commandments and bear witness to Jesus" who are being pursued by the dragon (12:17).

The woman in John's vision is radiant, clothed with the light of the sun, moon, and stars, an anticipation of the [†]glory of God that will one day clothe all God's people in the new Jerusalem (21:9-11).

a. Donal A. McIlraith, *Everyone's Apocalypse* (Suva, Fiji: Pacific Regional Seminary, 1995), 62.

I will proclaim the decree of the LORD,
he said to me, "You are my son;
today I have begotten you.

Ask of me,
and I will give you the nations as your inheritance,
and, as your possession, the ends of the earth.
With an iron rod you will shepherd them." (Ps 2:2, 4, 5-9)

The woman's child will **rule all the nations with an iron rod**. He is the one who will one day defeat the devil and his human agents with "the rod of his mouth," his word (Isa 11:4; see Rev 19:13, 15) and rescue the human race.

At this point the relation of the woman in the vision to Mary the mother of Jesus becomes most clear. No one can deny that the Messiah was born of Mary, a particular woman of Israel. Eve, whose offspring was promised to strike the serpent's head, foreshadowed Mary, and Mary embodies faithful daughter Zion, of whose line the Messiah is born.

The woman's child is **caught up to God and his throne**. In a few words this verse telescopes the earthly life of Jesus, from his birth to his exaltation to God's throne (Mark 16:19; Eph 1:20; Heb 12:2).⁵

5. It is possible that here the Messiah's birth after a painful labor refers to his "birth" to eternal life through resurrection (Rev 1:5; Col 1:18).

Attributes of the Second Beast, the False Prophet

BIBLICAL BACKGROUND



Here is a summary of the attributes and activity of the second beast, the false prophet. As with the rest of Revelation, readers should be alert to figurative fulfillments.

- Like the first beast, it is a superhuman entity that advances Satan's goals in human history.
- It gives the appearance of being good, even Christlike, yet its message is from the devil (13:11).
- It collaborates closely with the first beast, which wields political power, exercising a delegated authority and promoting idolatrous submission to it (13:12).
- It deceives people to worship the first beast by performing seemingly miraculous signs and by setting up an image of the first beast that can speak (13:13–15).
- It also compels worship of the beast by putting to death those who refuse to worship and by excluding from economic life all who do not express allegiance to the beast by accepting its "stamped image" (13:16–17).
- It propagandizes, performing signs through its agents, to persuade "the kings of the whole world" to battle against God and his people (16:13–16).

of the seven cities where the churches were located. For instance, it is likely that the requirement of participation in pagan rites excluded Christians from guilds, which were an important part of economic life in Pergamum and Thyatira.

13:18

With the statement that **the number of the beast is six hundred and sixty-six** we have arrived at the verse in Revelation that has probably aroused more speculation than any other. To avoid being led astray, the first words of the verse are important: **Wisdom is needed here**. A clue is offered regarding the identity of the beast-antichrist, but understanding must be brought to bear. That discernment should take into account the other attributes of the beast-antichrist and the characteristics of its work as described in Revelation and elsewhere in the New Testament (see comments on 13:1–10 and sidebar, "The Antichrist in the New Testament," pp. 226–27). Among its traits, the *number* of the beast is probably the least important and may pertain primarily to its manifestation in the first century. What should be sought in discerning the presence of the beast at any time in Christian history is a "family resemblance" between its biblical portrait and a contemporary reality.