

A Not So Silent Night

1. It can be hard to sweep away the accumulated legends, songs, traditions and assumptions of the last 2000yrs and return to the unvarnished, unadorned truth of the Christmas story. There is a lot of work to be done there...
2. We sometimes act as if there was some mean and uncaring innkeeper in Bethlehem who just refused to let a young couple spend the night in his place but the fact is that the stable was very much a part of the place. Until the 1800s, even in America, animals were kept close by and, in countries that did not have a lot of land, they were inside, under the same roof as the family.
3. Joseph and Mary would have been traveling with a very large family group for it was not just the two of them who were being taxed. Mary didn't give birth alone in a stable, surrounded by shepherds, three kings, some wise men, and talking animals. It was a lot more real than that...better and worse, no doubt.
4. In that sense, it was anything but a silent night. Cries, sweat, blood, pain, voices, candles being lit and moved about... but there is another very important way in which this night was a very crowded night and not silent at all...
5. If you are following my Revelation class posted each Wednesday, you will have much of what I'm about to say here. There are many scholars and many friends of mine that spiritualize Revelation 12 in a way to make it mean spiritual Israel or the Jews and the world that was sliding into disruption around them...but I think it is best to take this as written...but not yet.
6. We know that we are not alone in the universe and that some of the things out there don't like us. We know that some of the angels did not like the plan of God. Some allied themselves with one of God's highest creatures, a guardian cherub. There are passages in Ezekiel and Isaiah that may give us a peek behind the curtains at what went on in heaven...

7. But there are two things we need to keep in mind. First, most of what we think we know about the events in heaven when Satan rebelled against God and the plan comes from John Milton, not scripture. Satan had a real issue with God's plan and had no interest in seeing it succeed. And, second, there is a snake missing.
8. In Genesis, we see a snake show up. It's not a good thing. We know the story of how they were tempted, led into a relationship of trust with the snake, and then tried to put themselves in God's place. The world fell because of that. And then...we lose track of the snake.
9. But the snake didn't lose track of us. Move/countermove. And it all leads up to a night in a crowded stable in Bethlehem. If our Nativity scenes were more accurate, they wouldn't have the wise men there, the shepherds would be come and go...and there'd be a dragon.
10. **Revelation 12:1-4**. The devil has decided to end this plan, to stop God from loving us, and he goes after God's Son. Before this time, Satan had free reign to go in and out of heaven (see Job) but, this time, he went too far.
11. **Revelation 12:5-9**. Michael was also in the room. Jesus refers to this incident when he tells his followers "I saw Satan cast from heaven like lightning." Luke 10:18
12. The battle in heaven is over. The battle on earth has begun in earnest. The devil is mortally wounded, as God said he would be (Genesis 3:15), but he fights on through slander, accusation. Don't join his team. Refuse to slander others. We are team Jesus. We don't do that.
13. Salvation is now ours so we no longer love our lives so much as to shrink from death. **Revelation 12:10-12**.
14. Because God's plan to love us is worth fighting for, He fought for us and He continues to fight for us. No wonder, when the prophet saw him, this happened. **Luke 2:25-31**.