

Session 8: The Woman, the Child, and the Dragon

What We Found

The guesses came unsealed, and the text voted for nearly all of them at once. The ark of the covenant, hidden from view for nearly seven centuries, appears in heaven's opened temple (11:19), and in the same breath a great portent: a woman clothed with the sun. Her regalia is Israel's (Joseph's dream: sun, moon, and stars, completed to twelve), her travail is Zion's (Isaiah 66), so she is the people of God laboring to bring forth the Messiah. Her child rules with the rod of iron of Psalm 2 and is caught up to God's throne: Jesus, birth to Ascension in one verse, which makes the woman, at the personal level, Mary. And her other offspring are those who keep God's commandments and bear testimony to Jesus: us. The Catholic answer is a built-in both-and: the Catechism names the Mother of God the Woman (CCC 1138), and the corporate reading rises from the text's own imagery and the tradition (Mary, type of the Church, CCC 967). The dragon is decoded by the text: that ancient serpent, the Devil, which turns the whole chapter into Genesis 3:15 staged: the first gospel, the enmity, the woman, her seed, and the serpent's defeat. Michael casts him down, and the real weapons are named: they have conquered him by the blood of the Lamb and by the word of their testimony. The accuser has been disbarred. The woman is carried on eagles' wings (Exodus 19:4) into the wilderness, often understood as including the Church's present pilgrimage: pursued, provided for, en route.

VOICES OF THE CHURCH

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St. Irenaeus of Lyons · *Against Heresies, Book 3*

The knot of Eve's disobedience was untied by Mary's obedience: what the virgin Eve bound through unbelief, the Virgin Mary loosed through faith. The Fathers called Mary the new Eve within a century of the apostles.

VOICE OF THE CHURCH

St. Ambrose · *Lumen Gentium 63, drawing on St. Ambrose*

Mary is the type of the Church in the order of faith, charity, and perfect union with Christ. The Catholic reading refuses to choose between Mary and the Church: type and exemplar, person and people, distinct yet inseparable.

VOICE OF THE CHURCH

St. Pius X · *Ad Diem Illum (summary)*

St. Pius X teaches, in substance, that John saw in the woman the Virgin Mother, who, her blessed childbearing accomplished, labors mystically still in birth pangs for us, the members of Christ: Mary, mother of Christians: exactly Revelation 12:17's rest of her offspring.

Live It This Week

- Once this week, when the accusing voice starts, answer it out loud with Revelation 12:11: conquered by the blood of the Lamb. Then go about your day.

- Pray one Memorare or one decade of the Rosary this week for the persecuted members of her family; if Marian prayer is new or uneasy for you, simply read Revelation 12 and John 19:25–27 side by side.
- Memorize the memory verse.

Memory Verse

And they have conquered him by the blood of the Lamb and by the word of their testimony, for they loved not their lives even unto death. (Revelation 12:11, RSV2CE)

Before Next Session

Read Revelation 13 and 14:1–5.

Catechism references from this session: CCC 391–395; 410–411; 963–964, 968–970; 1138.