

THE
WEIRDEST
NATIVITY

Andrew Sach
& Jonathan Gemmell

10 Publishing
a division of **10**ofthose.com

Unless otherwise stated, Scripture quotations are taken from THE HOLY BIBLE, NEW INTERNATIONAL VERSION (Anglicised Edition). Copyright © 1979, 1984, 2011 by Biblica (formerly International Bible Society). Used by permission of Hodder & Stoughton Publishers. All rights reserved. 'NIV' is a registered trademark of Biblica. UK trademark number 1448790.

Copyright © 2019 by Andrew Sach and Jonathan Gemmell

First published in Great Britain in 2019

The right of Andrew Sach and Jonathan Gemmell to be identified as the Authors of this Work has been asserted by them in accordance with the Copyright, Designs and Patents Act 1988.

All rights reserved. No part of this publication may be reproduced, stored in a retrieval system or transmitted in any form or by any means, electronic, mechanical, photocopying, recording or otherwise, without the prior permission of the publisher or the Copyright Licensing Agency.

British Library Cataloguing in Publication Data
A record for this book is available from the British Library

ISBN: 978-1-912373-88-8

Designed and typeset by Pete Barnsley (CreativeHoot.com)

Cover illustration by Chris Iffl Illustration (chrisiliff.co.uk)

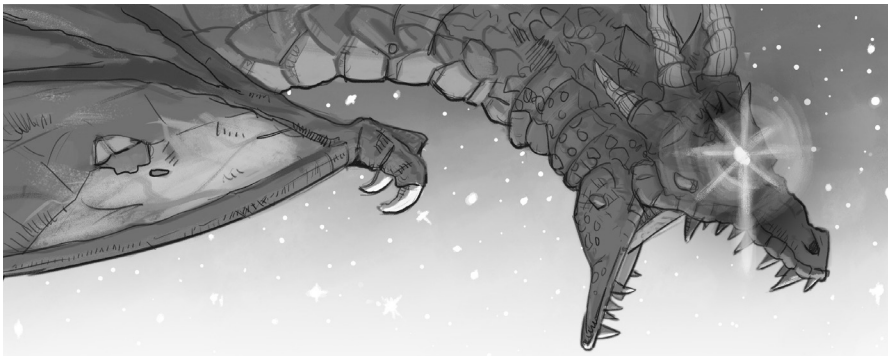
Printed in Denmark by Nørhaven

10Publishing, a division of 10ofthose.com
Unit C, Tomlinson Road, Leyland, PR25 2DY, England

Email: info@10ofthose.com

Website: www.10ofthose.com

1 3 5 7 10 8 6 4 2



THE WEIRDEST NATIVITY

The school nativity was a bit different this year. Of course there were the usual last-minute costumes: the tea-towel-and-dressing-gown shepherds; the Burger-King-crown wise men; the awkward Joseph, trying to keep a safe distance from a Mary who was taking her betrothal far too seriously. Everyone was impressed at the Sinclair twins' donkey costume and it was no surprise that Ella, not one to hide from the limelight, came dressed as a star with a six-foot span.

But why was Harry dressed as a dragon? Why was there a lamb in the manger? Why, in this health-and-safety-conscious age, were there shards of broken pottery all over the floor?

And what was with the grinning baby holding a crowbar?

This really was the weirdest nativity!

Disturbed parents were quick to point the finger at Mr Latimer, the new Religious Studies teacher, but he seemed unfazed by their criticisms. A week later, at his disciplinary tribunal, he calmly picked up a Bible, turned to the back and began to read aloud of a dragon, a crowbar, smashed pottery and a lamb. The school governors were dumbfounded. It was the Christmas story as they'd never heard it before, but it turned out that Mr Latimer's nativity was legit after all.

We are more familiar with the Christmas story as recorded by Matthew and Luke. Matthew tells us that Jesus was born of a virgin in the little town of Bethlehem, in fulfilment of surprisingly specific ancient prophecies. He records the visit of Magi from the east, who followed a star to find the newborn King and presented him with gifts of gold, frankincense and myrrh. But he doesn't mention a dragon.

Luke begins his narrative by setting out his methodology as a historian: he interviewed

the eyewitnesses to find out exactly what happened. He goes on to describe how the angel Gabriel appeared to Mary, announcing her miraculous pregnancy. Later, angels brought an announcement to shepherds who were watching over their flocks at night:

Do not be afraid. I bring you good news that will cause great joy for all the people. Today in the town of David a Saviour has been born to you; he is the Messiah, the Lord.¹

Luke is meticulous with historical detail. But curiously he overlooks the big red dragon.

Although John doesn't record the birth of Jesus, the opening chapter of his gospel is often read at Christmas. It speaks of light coming into the world; the Word becoming flesh; 'the glory of the one and only Son, who came from the Father, full of grace and truth'.²

At the end of his life, John wrote another book, which is now found at the end of the Bible. Persecution had arisen against the first followers of Jesus, and John was exiled to the Greek island of Patmos. There he received a revelation of

Jesus Christ. It's a frightening vision, full of shocking imagery, describing hidden spiritual realities of the present and the future. Here be dragons!

You may have heard of the four horsemen of the apocalypse, and you almost certainly know that 666 is the number of the beast, but in all likelihood you have come across them in horror movies, stripped of their original meaning. Sadly John's book has also been hijacked by crazies who use it to guess the exact timing of the end of the world – not really his intention at all!

The problem is that neither Hollywood nor the doomsday prophets treat the book of Revelation *as a vision*. When they read of a dragon with seven heads, they imagine something physical, an unexpected member of the reptile family, rendered in realistic 3D thanks to a multimillion-dollar special effects budget. But John is writing down what he saw in a dream, even a nightmare. It's metaphorical, figurative, symbolic. It's the difference between you or I taking a photograph of a woman, and Picasso painting the same woman. In our photograph you can see the size of her nose and

the colour of her eyes. Picasso doesn't even care if she *has* a nose! Instead he gives you a powerful impression of her – much more powerful than our photograph in fact. John is doing a Picasso. When he writes of dragons, lambs and crowbars, it's not that he's caught on camera something that Matthew and Luke missed. Rather he's trying to capture the meaning and gravity of it all. He's showing us the same Christmas from a remarkable perspective.