

Contents

| | |
|---|-----|
| Preface | 7 |
| 1. Bible Questions and Answers | 11 |
| 2. The Big Picture: From Adam to Christ | 21 |
| 3. Creation, Fall and Flood | 39 |
| 4. The Patriarchs: Abraham and Isaac | 51 |
| 5. Jacob (Israel) and Joseph | 61 |
| 6. Angels in the Bible | 71 |
| 7. Out of Egypt: Moses and the Exodus | 83 |
| 8. In the Wilderness: Ark and Golden Calf | 95 |
| 9. The Promised Land: Joshua and the Judges | 105 |
| 10. Bible Heroes and Heroines | 115 |
| 11. A Unified Kingdom: Saul and David | 129 |
| 12. A Divided Kingdom: Solomon and Others | 139 |
| 13. Enter the Prophets | 149 |
| 14. Prophets of the Exile: Jeremiah and Ezekiel | 161 |
| 15. Return from Exile and the Maccabees | 171 |
| 16. Villains in the Bible | 181 |
| 17. The Coming of the Messiah | 193 |

| | |
|--|-----|
| 18. The Joyful Mysteries of Christ's Life | 209 |
| 19. The Luminous Mysteries of Christ's Life | 219 |
| 20. The Sorrowful Mysteries of Christ's Life | 231 |
| 21. The Glorious Mysteries of Christ's Life | 243 |
| 22. The Early Church (St. Peter) | 253 |
| 23. The Early Church (St. Paul) | 265 |
| Catholic Prayers | 275 |
| Glossary | 277 |
| Bibliography | 283 |
| Index | 285 |

Chapter 2

The Big Picture: From Adam to Christ

The LORD is our God,/ who rules the whole earth.
He remembers forever his covenant,/
the pact imposed for a thousand/ generations.
— Psalm 105:7-8

Have you ever worked a jigsaw puzzle? Not a small child's version with a dozen large pieces, but rather one with hundreds of tiny pieces? Even when you have a picture of what the puzzle should look like, it is still a huge challenge, requiring much patience and perseverance, to fit all the pieces together correctly.

Salvation history is like a giant jigsaw puzzle, with hundreds of persons, places, and events spread over thousands of years, and it can seem confusing and almost incomprehensible at times. Only God knows what the entire puzzle will look like at the final judgment, but we can get a pretty good idea of how the pieces fit together so far by studying the Bible prayerfully and relying on the magisterium of the Church for authoritative guidance.

It is the purpose of this chapter to paint a simplified version of the big picture before getting into more detail in subsequent chapters. But what this brief survey of salvation history attempts to show is how God out of love has revealed and given himself to us and "has thus provided the definitive, superabundant answer to the questions that man asks himself about the meaning and purpose of his life. God has revealed himself to man by gradually communicating his own mystery in deeds and in words" (*Catechism*, nn. 68-69).

A long time ago, when the world began Adam and Eve disobeyed God's plan.

The story of creation tells us that everything God created was good — the sun and the moon, the earth and the sea, plant life and animals — but the creation of the first man and woman was

A SALVATION TIMELINE

(All dates are approximate)

B.C. (Before Christ)

- 1850 — God calls Abraham
- 1700 — Joseph in Egypt
- 1700-1270 — Israel in Egypt
- 1270 — Passover and Exodus
- 1270-1230 — In the Wilderness
- 1230 — Joshua enters Promised Land
- 1225-1025 — Time of the Judges
- 1030 — Saul chosen as first King
- 1010 — Reign of David begins
- 970 — Reign of Solomon begins
- 931 — The Kingdom is divided
- 721 — Fall of Northern Kingdom (Israel)
- 587 — Fall of Southern Kingdom (Judah)
- 587-538 — Exile in Babylon
- 538 — Return from Exile
- 538-332 — Persian Empire
- 332-63 — Greek Empire
- 63 — Roman Empire
- 4 — Birth of Jesus*

A.D. (Anno Domini — In the Year of Our Lord)

- 30 — Death and Resurrection of Jesus
- 30 — Coming of the Holy Spirit on Pentecost
- 64-67 — Martyrdom of Sts. Peter and Paul

** A calendar error in the sixth century misdated the year in which Jesus was born*

“very good” (Genesis 1:31). The man was called Adam because that is the Hebrew word for man; the woman was called Eve because she was to be the mother of all the living. They were created in a state of holiness, justice, and immortality.

But into the peace and harmony of the Garden of Eden came a fallen angel in the guise of a serpent. He tempted our first parents into disobeying God’s command not to eat the fruit of the tree of knowledge of good and evil lest they die. Adam and Eve believed the lie of the devil that eating the fruit would make them “like gods,” and they succumbed to a temptation that was rooted in pride and disobedience.

When the couple realized what they had done, they hid from God, just as we try to hide from God when we sin. God banished them from paradise and told them to expect a life of hard work and pain and suffering before they died. But he also promised to put enmity between Satan and the woman and between the devil’s offspring and hers.

The Church has always seen this passage from Genesis 3:15 as a promise of a Redeemer, Jesus, who would be the offspring of the woman named Mary and who would “destroy the works of the devil” (1 John 3:8).

***Things got worse after Abel and Cain
so God sent forty days of rain.***

The effects of that Original Sin and fall from grace became obvious in the next generation as Cain murdered his brother Abel out of jealousy because the Lord looked more favorably on Abel’s offering. God had tried to warn Cain not to let the “demon lurking at the door” (Genesis 4:7) stir up resentment in him, but Cain gave in to temptation and killed his brother. How many times since then have men and women allowed jealousy to fester into hatred, and hatred into murder?

Although God sent Cain to wander restlessly over the earth, he did not abandon him, but rather put a mark (perhaps a tattoo) on him and warned that anyone who killed Cain would be avenged sevenfold.

Meanwhile, the wickedness and rebellion against God spawned by Satan became so great and so widespread that God decided to send a flood that would wipe out everything he had created, sparing only a good and blameless man named Noah, along with his wife, his three sons, and their wives.

While following the Lord's directions to build an ark to ride out the flood, Noah was surely laughed at by his neighbors, just as those today who try to follow the Lord's directions (Commandments) are ridiculed. Those who seek to put God first in their lives, to worship him every Sunday, to show respect and reverence for all human life and for the Creator's plan for sexuality can expect the disdain of the culture in which we live. But as St. Peter said when the disciples were told to stop teaching in the name of Jesus, "We must obey God rather than men" (Acts 5:29).

***Throughout the Flood there was still a spark,
our race was saved on Noah's Ark.***

Whether the Flood covered all the earth, or only that part of the world where Noah lived, is open to speculation. What is not open to speculation, however, is that God once again sought to save humanity from its sinfulness, with the water prefiguring Baptism and the ark the Church. He promised Noah, who had offered sacrifices to the Lord immediately upon reaching dry land, that never again would he destroy the earth by the waters of a flood. He didn't say, however, that he would never destroy the world again, and St. Peter suggests that the destruction of the earth the next time will be by fire (2 Peter 3:7).

As a sign of his intentions, God set a rainbow in the sky so as to "recall the everlasting covenant that I have established between God and all living beings — all mortal creatures that are on earth" (Genesis 9:16). By this covenant and the one with Abraham, "God formed his people and revealed his law to them through Moses" (*Catechism*, n. 72). This foreshadowed a future covenant with David and the "new and everlasting covenant" that would be established in Jesus (cf. *Catechism*, n. 73).

To Noah and his sons, God gave the same command he had given Adam and Eve: "Be fertile, then, and multiply; abound on earth and subdue it" (Genesis 9:7). But the consequences of Original Sin continued to plague the human race and, before long, prideful men began constructing a tower in Babel that would reach to the heavens and enable them to play God. The temptation to play God is still a problem for humanity today.

So the Almighty confused their language, making it impossible for them to communicate with each other, and their tower project collapsed. He then scattered people throughout the world, and their disunity has continued until the present day, causing

Jesus, while he was on earth, to pray for that day when there would be one flock and one shepherd (cf. John 10:16).

***Though God still cared, we were in a jam;
he made a pact with Abraham.***

God intervened again in human history around 1,850 years before Christ when he called a man named Abram and his wife Sarai to leave their homeland and travel to a faraway country. "I will make of you a great nation," God told Abram, "and I will bless you; I will make your name great, so that you will be a blessing" (Genesis 12:2). He promised to make his descendants as numerous as the stars in the sky and changed his name to Abraham, which means "father of a host of nations."

As a sign of the covenant with Abraham, God decreed the rite of circumcision for every male child eight days after birth. That covenant remained in effect until the new covenant established by Jesus. After that time, Gentile converts to the Catholic Church were not obligated to be circumcised (cf. Acts 15:28).

The one thing missing from the lives of Abraham and Sarai (later Sarah) was children, so God provided the elderly couple with a son named Isaac. But when Isaac was twelve, God tested Abraham's faith by asking him to sacrifice the child of his old age. However, just as Abraham was about to slay his son, a messenger from heaven told Abraham not to kill the boy, and the patriarch offered in Isaac's stead a ram that had been caught in a nearby thicket.

The heavenly messenger conveyed God's approval of Abraham's willingness to sacrifice even his beloved son (just as the Father would later request the sacrifice of his own beloved Son, Jesus), and reiterated the promise that Abraham's descendants would be "as countless as the stars of the sky and the sands of the seashore" (Genesis 22:17).

***Along came Isaac and Jacob his son,
these patriarchs thought the battle won.***

Abraham deeded everything to Isaac, who married Rebekah and became the father of twin sons, Esau and Jacob. Although Esau emerged first from his mother's womb, which entitled him to a position of honor in the family and double the share of his father's possessions, he later sold his birthright to Jacob for a

bowl of stew. Jacob then pretended to be Esau and deceived his aged and nearly blind father into giving him the special blessing that should have gone to the first-born son.

Esau was furious with Jacob and intended to kill him, but Rebekah warned Jacob to flee the country to escape the wrath of Esau. It would be many years before the brothers would be reconciled. Meanwhile, Jacob journeyed to Haran and sought to marry a woman named Rachel, the daughter of his uncle Laban. Laban promised Rachel to Jacob if he would serve him for seven years, but after seven years, Laban deceived Jacob and married him to Rachel's older sister, Leah. A week later, Jacob also married Rachel and worked another seven years for his uncle.

Jacob eventually had twelve sons and, after a struggle one night with an angel, his name was changed to Israel. He passed on to his sons the blessing he had received from Isaac, and they became the leaders of the twelve tribes of Israel. Of all Jacob's sons, Joseph was his favorite, much to the dismay of his brothers, who were jealous of him and who, when the opportunity arose, sold Joseph into slavery in Egypt for twenty pieces of silver (Jesus would be sold for thirty pieces of silver) and told Jacob that he had been killed by a wild animal.

The story of Joseph is one of the most fascinating stories in the Bible and a good example of how God can bring good out of evil. Joseph's skill as an administrator and his ability to interpret dreams so impressed Pharaoh, the king of Egypt, that he put Joseph in charge of all the land and crops in Egypt. By storing up grain during the abundant years, Joseph was able to provide food for the people during the years of famine.

So it was that some of Joseph's brothers came down to Egypt to obtain food for their starving people back home. They did not recognize Joseph, but he recognized them and, after putting them through some anxious moments, finally revealed his identity to them. Joseph then arranged for Jacob, his brothers, and their extended family to move to Egypt, where they lived in peace and prosperity for many years.

***But then came slavery under Pharaoh's hand
'til Moses led them to the Promised Land.***

It wasn't long after Joseph's death that a new Pharaoh, who had never heard of Joseph, began to persecute and enslave the Israelites. After many years of hardship and oppression, God

heard the cries of his people and raised up a man named Moses to lead them back to the Promised Land. Like Jesus, Moses as a baby had escaped death at the hands of an evil ruler and eventually saved God's people from slavery in Egypt, just as Jesus would come out of Egypt with Mary and Joseph and eventually lead all people away from their slavery to sin.

Moses was an unlikely and unwilling instrument of the Lord at first, but with the constant and unwavering assistance of God, he was able to lead the people of Israel through forty years of trials and temptations in the desert to the borders of Canaan, the Promised Land. An outstanding event on their journey, and one of the most important events in the Book of Exodus, as well as the entire Old Testament, was the Passover, where God struck down the oldest child in each family in Egypt as a final warning to Pharaoh to let his people go.

The oldest child in the Israelite households was spared after the blood of the lamb was smeared over the doors of the houses, and the Lord passed over those homes. This was a great foreshadowing of Jesus, the Lamb of God, whose blood shed on the cross would make it possible for all humanity to escape the everlasting death of sin.

Once the people passed miraculously through the waters of the Red Sea and escaped their Egyptian pursuers, they should have reached the Promised Land in a matter of months. But their continual apostasy, their continual rebellion against God, and their continual refusal to put aside false gods and to love the true God with all their hearts, minds, and souls kept them wandering in the desert for forty years.

God established still another covenant at Mount Sinai by giving Moses the Ten Commandments, but the people turned back to the gods of Egypt and worshiped a golden calf. When Moses came down from Sinai with the tablets on which the Commandments had been inscribed, his face was radiant, just as the body of Jesus became radiant during his Transfiguration on the mountain as he conversed with Moses and Elijah about his coming Death in Jerusalem (cf. Luke 9:28-36).

Despite their apostasy and ingratitude, however, God still watched out for the people of Israel. He guided them with a cloud by day and fire by night. When they complained about hunger and thirst, God gave them water from a rock and a special food called manna from heaven, which was a foreshadowing of the Holy Eucharist, the true bread from heaven that is Jesus.

Though Moses had for years tried to act as God's spokesman to his "stiff-necked people," he would not be privileged to set foot in the Promised Land because he had on one occasion showed a lack of trust in God. The Lord had told him to order a rock to give forth water, but Moses, in a moment of doubt, instead struck the rock twice with Aaron's staff.

***So God sent Joshua and the Judges too
to guide his people as Israel grew.***

The task of leading the people of Israel into the Promised Land of Canaan fell to Moses' successor Joshua, whose name meant "Yahweh saves" and who was a type of Jesus. He conquered the land of Canaan, beginning with the famous overthrow of the city of Jericho, whose walls came tumbling down. The extermination of the Canaanites to make room for Israel may seem unfair and even wrong, but it was tolerated to fulfill the promise made to Abraham and because the holiness of Israel would have been threatened by the sinfulness of the Canaanites.

The Israelites should not have been able to conquer the militarily powerful Canaanites, but God was on their side. When Israel obeyed God, it triumphed; when it disobeyed God, it suffered military disaster.

Following the death of Joshua, God raised up twelve Judges to settle the land and guide his people. They were not judicial authorities as such, but rather military commanders sent to protect the nation from its enemies, and the best known of them were Barak, Gideon, and Samson. Samson, who had taken a Nazarite vow not to cut his hair, drink wine, or touch a corpse, was a type of John the Baptist.

Throughout the books of Joshua and Judges, we find what some have called the cycle of sin, whereby the sinfulness of the people was followed by slavery, suffering, and salvation before the cycle started all over again. Others describe the cycle as one of sin, punishment, repentance, and liberation. But whatever words are used, the pattern is one that continues to plague the human race down to the present time.

***Yet still they sinned and they complained
when Kings David and Solomon reigned.***

The people of Israel were not happy with God as their sovereign, so they asked for a king to rule over them. God told the prophet

Samuel to grant their request, but also to warn them that a king would force their sons into military service, make them do his plowing and harvesting, take the best of their crops for his own officials, and ultimately make both males and females his slaves.

The people refused to listen to Samuel's warning and demanded that they be like other nations in having a king to rule them and lead them into battle. So Samuel anointed Saul the first king of Israel around the year 1030 B.C. But Saul was not the king he could have been; he often failed to trust God completely and frequently turned away from him.

God informed Samuel of his displeasure with Saul and told him to go to Bethlehem and anoint one of the sons of Jesse as the successor of Saul. That son, who was just a shepherd boy at the time, was David. He slew the Philistine giant Goliath and joined the staff of Saul, but Saul was extremely jealous of David and even sought to kill him.

However, David repeatedly escaped Saul's wrath, even passing up an opportunity to kill the king, and finally succeeded him after Saul and his sons were killed in battle with the Philistines. Warfare continued between the families of Saul and David, but David finally prevailed and began his 40-year reign (1010-970) over the nation of Israel by bringing the Ark of the Covenant to Jerusalem, making the city both the religious and political capital of Israel.

Though David sinned terribly by committing adultery with Bathsheba and having her husband killed, he later repented of his sins and became the greatest of Israel's kings and a spiritual prototype of Jesus, who also came from Bethlehem and would establish an everlasting kingdom. That is why Jesus would be called Son of David, although he was far superior to David.

David was succeeded as king by his son Solomon, who also ruled for almost forty years (970-931) and erected the magnificent temple in Jerusalem. The reign of Solomon got off to a good start as he used well the wisdom and understanding that God had granted him. But then he turned away from God, multiplying wives and concubines and gold and silver and bringing in foreign religions that led the people away from the true God.

It was Solomon's misrule that set the stage for a series of mostly bad kings, for the division of Israel into two kingdoms, and for the eventual fall of Jerusalem and the exile of the Israelite nation.

***On many kings God did not smile,
first came division and then exile.***

Solomon's oppressive rule was continued by his son Rehoboam, and this led to a revolt by Jereboam and division of the nation into the Northern Kingdom of Israel (with ten tribes) and Southern Kingdom of Judah (with two tribes). There was no link to David in the North since Jereboam was not of the royal family, so the lineage of David would be continued in the South.

Things got very confusing over the next two centuries, with nineteen kings and nine successive family dynasties in the North and twenty kings and one family dynasty in the South. Not surprisingly, the enemies of Israel took advantage of this division. First, the Assyrians conquered the North in 721 B.C. and deported its leading officials. They invaded Judah, but did not capture Jerusalem at that time.

When Assyrian power declined, the Babylonians took their place and, under Nebuchadnezzar, captured Jerusalem in 597 and deported King Jehoiachin and his leading citizens to Babylon. Nebuchadnezzar destroyed Jerusalem in 587 and deported the rest of the populace to Babylon. Israel had gone from the height of power and splendor under David and Solomon to the depths of ruin and destruction and exile.

***So God sent prophets to prepare the way
for the Messiah who would come some day.***

As we have seen, God continually showed his love and concern for his people by raising up spiritual and political leaders to guide them. He also raised up great prophets, men from all walks of life who not only predicted the future, but more importantly called people back to God and to a holy life. We will have more to say about individual prophets in later chapters, but for now let's just mention some of those who preached before and during the exile.

Amos and Hosea (formerly known as Osee) were the prophets of the Northern Kingdom, with Amos prophesying that the destruction of Israel would not be total, that a remnant would survive. His predictions would be cited by St. Stephen just before his martyrdom (cf. Acts 7:42-50). Hosea was the last prophet before the fall of the North, and he compared Israel's infidelity to the Lord to his own failed marriage. He said that God would

use the exile as a period of purification and then take Israel back as his spouse, just as Hosea had taken his wife Gomer back.

Isaiah and Micah were contemporaries in Jerusalem in the eighth century, and Isaiah prophesied in 701 that Yahweh would protect Jerusalem from the Assyrian armies. His prophecy came true as the Assyrians marched up to the walls of Jerusalem and then turned around and left.

Micah predicted that the unfaithful would suffer desolation, but also that God would bring forth a new king, one who would come from Bethlehem (cf. Micah 5:1) and would gather his people together again. It was this prophecy that led the Magi to Bethlehem at the time Jesus was born.

Jeremiah was in Jerusalem when it fell to the Babylonians in 597. He was allowed to remain there after many citizens were deported, and he finally fled to Egypt with other refugees in 582. He is a type *par excellence* of Jesus in that he remained celibate at God's command and was put to death by those to whom he preached. What happened to Jeremiah, Jerusalem, the Temple, and the Babylonians parallels what happened to Jesus, Jerusalem, the Temple, and the Romans.

Ezekiel preached to the people in exile. His famous "dry bones" vision (cf. 37:1-14) told them that God would breathe new life into Israel and return the exiles to Jerusalem. The vision also foreshadowed the resurrection of the body. The prophet is further noted for his parables of the good shepherd (34:1:31), the replacement of our "stony hearts" with natural hearts (36:26), and the waters of new life flowing from the Temple (47:1-12).

As the prophets had foretold, the people of Israel were allowed to return from exile in 538 by the Persian King Cyrus, and they were able to rebuild the Temple under the guidance of Ezra and Nehemiah and with the benevolence of Cyrus and his successor Darius I. God has a way of using worldly rulers to help carry out his plans.

The centuries leading up to the coming of the Messiah had been foreseen by the prophet Daniel, who in a dream saw four kingdoms arising on earth, those of Babylon, Persia, Greece, and Rome. He saw the last of these kingdoms being overcome by "One like a son of man coming, / on the clouds of heaven" whose "dominion is an everlasting dominion / that shall not be taken away, / his kingship shall not be destroyed" (Daniel 7:13-14).

Jesus would associate this prophecy with himself during his trial before the Sanhedrin (Mark 14:62).

*And then one night, after years of them,
Christ was born in Bethlehem.*

After thousands of years of waiting, and hundreds of prophecies in the pages of the Old Testament, the "fullness of time" had arrived for the Messiah to appear on the scene. However, this long-awaited and anxiously anticipated event did not occur in a palace in one of the major cities in the world, but rather in a cave in the obscure town of Bethlehem in the hills of Judea.

The birth of this new and everlasting King was not witnessed by earthly kings and their courts, but by a teenage mother and her husband, a few animals, and some shepherds. There were no news reporters or television cameras to herald the coming of the Messiah, only some angels giving glory to God.

Yet no greater or more earth-shaking event had ever happened, or would ever happen, in the entire history of the human race than the Incarnation of Jesus, when God the Son took on human flesh and, for some thirty-three years, taught us how to live if we wished to enjoy eternal life in heaven.

His mother Mary was the new Eve because she had said yes to God the Father, unlike Adam's wife. Jesus was the new Adam because what Adam had lost at the tree in the Garden of Eden, Jesus would win back on the tree of the cross. The shadow of the cross was there in Bethlehem as one of the Magi gave the newborn Child a gift of myrrh, a burial ointment indicating that suffering would be a part of this Child's life.

His life was threatened immediately by a king named Herod, who had heard about the birth of this new King and who sought to eliminate all rivals. But an angel warned Joseph to take Mary and Jesus into Egypt to escape the slaughter of all male children under the age of two in the region of Bethlehem. God then brought his Son out of Egypt after Herod had died, just as he had brought the Israelite people out of Egypt thirteen hundred years earlier.

Mary and Joseph settled in the Galilean town of Nazareth upon their return from Egypt, and Jesus grew up there, working as a carpenter with his foster father and advancing in "wisdom and age and favor before God and man" (Luke 2:52). The only event in his young life that has been recorded for us is the time when he was twelve years old and remained behind in the Temple in Jerusalem, listening to the religious leaders, asking them questions, and astounding them with his understanding and answers. He would astound them again twenty years later.

*He was God's Son, he was God's Word,
he spread God's love to all who heard.*

Around the age of thirty, Jesus began his public life by spending forty days praying and fasting in the desert, where he would repel three temptations by Satan to turn away from his mission of saving the world from its sins. His cousin John the Baptist paved the way for Jesus by recalling the prophecy of Isaiah to "prepare the way of the LORD!" (Isaiah 40:3), by calling him "the Lamb of God, who takes away the sin of the world" (John 1:29), and by telling his own disciples: "He must increase; I must decrease" (John 3:30).

There were those at the time of our Lord, just as there are many today, who thought of Jesus as just a good man, and they refused to recognize him as God. The problem with that attitude is that Jesus said he was God on many occasions, and proved it by fulfilling scores of prophecies about the Messiah from the Old Testament and performing dozens of recorded miracles.

If Jesus were not the God he claimed to be, then he was either a liar or a lunatic, which means he could not have been a good man. But everything we know about him shows him to have been an extraordinarily good man. He was a skilled debater who defeated every attempt to trip him up or to make him look foolish and a spellbinding storyteller who got his message across with parables about good shepherds and good Samaritans and runaway sons, about fishermen, farmers, laborers, tax collectors, and hypocritical religious leaders.

The Son of God preached a strong moral code, one that called for keeping the Ten Commandments, demonstrating love first of all for God and then for others and even for enemies, treating others the way we would want to be treated ourselves, and reaching out to the least of our brothers and sisters, those who are hungry or naked or thirsty, sick or in prison or homeless.

Jesus' perfect humanity was illustrated by his desire to do the will of his Father. "In Christ, and through his human will," says the *Catechism* (n. 2824), "the will of the Father has been perfectly fulfilled once for all. Jesus said on entering into this world: 'Lo, I have come to do your will, O God'" [Heb 10:7; Ps 40:7]. So, too, in his Agony in the Garden, Jesus prayed, "not my will but yours be done" (Luke 22:42).

Doing the will of his Father encompassed Jesus' compassion and tenderness for the sick and suffering, his mercy and forgive-

ness toward sinners, but also his courage and fearlessness when facing down those who would turn the Temple into a den of thieves or who would impose heavy burdens on the people while they themselves lived an easy life. No man with all of these virtues and admirable qualities could possibly be a liar or a lunatic. Jesus' flawless personality, which stems from his relationship with the Father and the Holy Spirit, is one of the strongest arguments for his claim to be a divine messenger and the Messiah.

But Jesus was more than just an extraordinary man; he was also God. Unlike any other man in history, he demonstrated this by fulfilling prophecies that pertained to the Messiah. He was born in Bethlehem (Micah 5:1) of a virgin mother (Isaiah 7:14). Kings came to adore him (Psalm 72:10), he was betrayed for thirty pieces of silver (Zechariah 11:12-13), his hands and feet were pierced with nails (Isaiah 53:5), and he was led like a sheep to the slaughter (Isaiah 53:7).

But Jesus showed his divinity even more with spectacular miracles that could only be performed by a messenger from God or by God himself. How else could Jesus have changed water into wine, walked on water, calmed the wind and the sea, fed thousands with a handful of loaves and fishes, cured people of all kinds of ailments, and even raised three persons from the dead if he were just another preacher or prophet? He was indeed the Christ, the anointed one sent by God to save the world.

***He died for women, he died for men.
On Easter morn, he rose again.***

The Passion and Death of Jesus on Good Friday is one of the best-known events in human history, and the cruelty of his Crucifixion was dramatically portrayed in the Mel Gibson movie, *The Passion of the Christ*. Viewers of that movie realized perhaps for the first time the depths of Jesus' love for humanity and the unbelievable horror of sin.

Fortunately for the world, the story of Jesus did not end on Good Friday. If it had, he would have been just another victim of the Roman Empire and would not have earned even a footnote in history. The reason why we know of Jesus today, and the pillar on which our whole religion rests, is the Resurrection of Jesus on Easter Sunday morning. By walking out of his grave and overcoming the power of death, the Lord foreshadowed the resurrection of our bodies at the end of the world.

There are many who believe that Jesus died on the cross, but do not think he rose from the dead. However, there are good reasons to believe, such as the fact that the tomb was empty on Sunday morning and no corpse was ever found, that Jesus was seen over the next forty days by more than 500 people, and that the Apostles who had abandoned Jesus on Good Friday now were willing to go out and die in order to spread his teachings and to persuade the world that he had risen from the dead.

People are not willing to sacrifice their lives for a lie, but they might be willing to die for the truth, for their belief in the words of Jesus that those who die in his friendship will enjoy eternal communion with God in heaven.

***He started a Church with Peter and Paul
and promised his Church would never fall.***

When Jesus changed Simon's name to Peter and gave him the keys to the kingdom of heaven, he said that the gates of hell would never prevail against his Church, and he promised to back up in heaven whatever decisions Peter and his successors made on earth (cf. Matthew 16:13-19). On another occasion, Jesus asked Peter to "feed my sheep" (John 21:17), recalling again the image of the good shepherd who feeds his flock the solid food of truth and not the poison of error.

But it wasn't until Christ sent the Holy Spirit down on the Apostles on Pentecost that Peter and the others were given the Spirit's gifts of wisdom, understanding, knowledge, and fortitude to help them spread the Kingdom of God throughout the hostile Mediterranean world. This Holy Spirit, "whom Christ the head pours out on his members," says the *Catechism*, "builds, animates, and sanctifies the Church. She is the sacrament of the Holy Trinity's communion with men" (n. 747).

The Church of Christ has survived for 2,000 years and has prevailed over all kinds of hostility from without and sinfulness from within. She will continue to do so, not because she is lucky or wealthy or powerful, but because she was founded by the Son of God himself and promised his protection until the end of the world (cf. Matthew 28:20), and because she is guided by the Holy Spirit. "From the beginning to the end of time, whenever God sends his Son," says the *Catechism*, "he always sends his Spirit: their mission is conjoined and inseparable" (n. 743).

SALVATION HISTORY

A long time ago, when the world began
Adam and Eve disobeyed God's plan.

Things got worse after Abel and Cain,
so God sent forty days of rain.

Throughout the Flood there was still a spark,
our race was saved on Noah's Ark.

Though God still cared, we were in a jam.
He made a pact with Abraham.

Along came Isaac and Jacob his son,
these patriarchs thought the battle won.

But then came slavery under Pharaoh's hand
'til Moses led them to the Promised Land.

So God sent Joshua and the Judges too
to guide his people as Israel grew.

Yet still they sinned, and they complained
when Kings David and Solomon reigned.

On many kings God did not smile,
first came division and then exile.

So God sent prophets to prepare the way
for the Messiah who would come some day.

And then one night, after years of them,
Christ was born in Bethlehem.

He was God's Son, he was God's Word,
He spread God's love to all who heard.

He died for women, he died for men,
on Easter morn, he rose again.

He started a Church with Peter and Paul
and promised his Church would never fall.

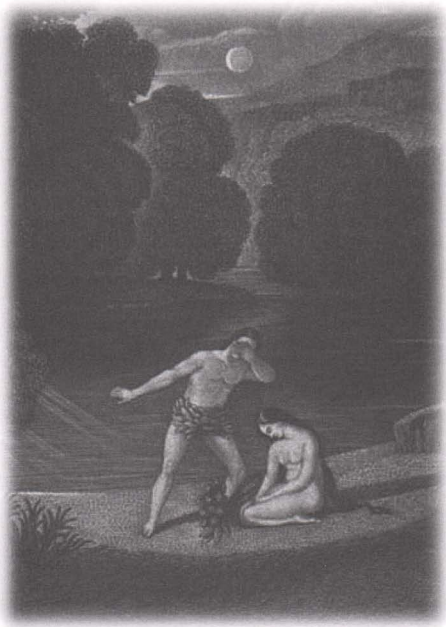
If Jesus were here, this is what he'd say,
love God and others every single day.

Confess your sins and grace will flood,
be sure you eat my Body and Blood.

And go to church, make sure you pray,
you'll get to heaven with little delay.

Now some folks sing, and some folks can't,
and this sure isn't Gregorian chant.

But my good friends, please take it from me,
it is salvation history!



The temptation in the Garden of Eden.