

Liturgical Year Supplemental Lesson

Advent and Christmas

Correlated Materials

Student Text: Chapters 3–7, pp. 24–51

LESSON FOCUS

Through our participation in the liturgical year, we participate in the life of Christ. During Advent we come to know the meaning of patient and prayerful waiting for God to answer our prayers. During the Christmas season we celebrate that God has kept his promise to send a Savior. As we walk with Christ through all of the Church seasons, we come to know, love, and serve him.

AIMS

- Students will understand that by participating in the liturgical year they will walk with Christ and participate in his joys and sufferings.
- Students will learn that during Advent we are called to wait patiently and prayerfully, make sacrifices, and learn to trust and honor Jesus.
- Students will learn that God keeps his covenant with us through Jesus Christ.

Begin the Lesson

Preparation (5–10 minutes)

Use one or more of the following resources for prayer and student preparation for the lesson.

SCRIPTURE: Student Text, p. 47

“And the Word became flesh and dwelt among us, full of grace and truth; we have beheld his glory, glory as of the only-begotten Son from the Father” (John 1:14).

The Mystery of the Incarnation is that Christ, who is fully divine, came from heaven and entered history as man. Jesus is the Word, and he became flesh, born of the Virgin Mary. He lived on this earth; he was full of grace; he is truth. We give him all glory that is due to him.

SACRED ART: Student Text, p. 46

Adoration of the Magi, Fra Angelico

Jesus, who is fully divine, becomes man and is the Savior of the world. He is adored by the Magi. We too adore Jesus, who has saved us from our sins.

PRAYER WITH CHILDREN: Act of Love, Student Text, p. 176

Proclamation (1 minute)

(Proclaim slowly, then repeat.)

Jesus Christ is the focus of salvation history. Each year the Church celebrates all of salvation history with the life of Christ at its focus. Through our personal participation in the Church year, our story becomes part of the story of salvation history.

Lesson Explanation (35–45 minutes)

Explain focus points in your own words or use the discussion points and questions.

MATERIALS

- Chalkboard/dry erase board
- Bibles
- Copies of timeline on Appendix p. A-46
- Copies of Liturgical Year chart (Appendix pp. B-41–B-42)

WORDS TO KNOW

Incarnation: the truth that God became man. The Incarnation refers to the conception and birth of Jesus, the Son of God become man through Mary.

salvation history: the love story of God's plan to save each of us from the consequences of sin. Salvation history began with Creation and will continue to the end of time. Each of us is a part of this love story in our own lives. As the story unfolds, God's love and mercy become evident through his Son, Jesus Christ, as well as through the Church and grace received in the Sacraments.

Focus 1: God has a plan for each of us so that we may attain eternal life.

- *When you are on a sports team or if you play a musical instrument, or even if you are preparing for an exam or a test, what do you do to prepare? (Answers will vary.)*
 - One of the best ways to prepare for anything is by doing a practice run, participating in a way that helps us to know exactly what we will be doing so that we can know how others "ran the race" before us.
 - *Tell about a situation in your life where you have learned something from someone who has done it before you. In other words, when have you learned from someone by imitating him? (Answers will vary.)*
 - Living a life in Christ is not just about knowing Christ; rather, it is about actually *being* like Christ and experiencing his life.
 - Preparing for heaven and becoming who God intended for us to be is not always easy. In order to become more Christlike, we need to let go of our bad habits.
 - Sometimes experiencing the life of Christ may include suffering or persecution. There are times when it may include receiving the new life of the Resurrection.
 - *Can you name a time you came to know Christ through your own suffering or joy? (Answers will vary.)*
 - During the liturgical year, we all walk with Christ and come to know him. We come to know him through his suffering, as well as through his joys.
- If our final destination in life is heaven, we need to prepare to become who God intended for us to become.
 - *Who can we imitate to become the person God wants us to be? (Jesus Christ, Mary, those who live virtuous lives, the saints, and others.)*
 - *What can Jesus give us to help us be who we are called to be and to get to heaven? (Grace.)*
 - We must cooperate with the grace given to us through the Sacraments in order to become the person Christ intends for us to be, as well as to live a Christian life, to know God, to love God, and to serve him.
- One way to prepare for heaven is to participate in the life of Christ—to walk with him, to know how he prayed, to know what he suffered, and to know how much he loves us.
 - *How do we do this? (Answers will vary. Read the Bible, learn about the life of Jesus and the lives of the saints, talk to Jesus in prayer, etc.)*
 - *What have you learned in the Bible that has helped you prepare for this life or for heaven? (Answers will vary.)*
- The liturgical year is the annual cycle of the Church in which we walk with Christ and the Blessed Mother, and we commemorate the saints. It begins with the first Sunday of Advent and ends on the thirty-fourth week of Ordinary Time.

- Throughout our participation in the liturgical year, we participate in the life of Christ. We walk with him through the story of **salvation history**.
- We listen to Jesus' parables and learn life's lessons in the Gospel stories and in the readings of the Old Testament and New Testament at Mass.
- We walk through Jesus' suffering and receive the joy of his Resurrection.
- We commemorate the saints to learn how to grow in holiness.
- Through our walk with Christ in the liturgical year, we prepare for eternal life in heaven.
- **What is salvation history?** (*The story of God's plan to save each of us from the consequences of sin. Salvation history began with Creation and will continue to the end of time.*)
 - **Who is at the very center of this love story between God and us?** (*Jesus Christ.*)
- This Advent and Christmas, as we prepare for Christ's coming, we can experience peace, love, and joy that only Christ can give us.
- **Review** the liturgical calendar: Hand out copies of the timeline found on Appendix p. A-46 and Appendix pp. B-41–B-42 for the chart below.
 - The Church seasons celebrate the saving events of salvation history with a focus on the life of Christ.
 - (Use the Church seasons chart, columns one and two, to briefly explain the theme for each season.)
 - Throughout our lives and through our participation in the liturgical year, we share in the life of Christ and participate in the story of salvation history.
 - For example, as we read Scripture and see how God's people learned to trust that God keeps his promises, we too learn how to trust in God.
 - God promised to send a Savior, and he kept his promise in Jesus Christ's **Incarnation**. **Name a time that you learned to trust in God.** (*Answers will vary.*)
 - Let's look at an example of someone in the story of salvation history: Moses wandered through the desert for forty years, not getting to the Promised Land. Sometimes in our lives we may feel like we are not making progress, but God is working in our lives anyway. Moses waited and waited.
 - **What liturgical season does this remind you of?** (*Advent.*)
 - **Is there anyone or anything in the timeline with which you can identify?** (*Answers will vary.*)
 - As we unite ourselves to Christ by trusting him, in suffering or in joy, we actually become a part of the love story between God and his people.

- Using the Church seasons chart, **read** the names of the people in the Bible in the third column whose stories are related to Advent and Christmas. (If time allows, have students review the stories in the Student Text or Scripture verses provided below.) **Discuss** the people listed and what they did that goes along with the themes of Advent and Christmas.
 - In the fourth column, **have each student make** a personal commitment that they will follow to enter into Advent and Christmas. (This can also be used as the life application step below.)
- When we unite our life experiences with Christ (or other people in the story of salvation history), we come to know God and his people and ourselves.
 - In Christ, we also come to know who we are.
 - **What do you know about Jesus that helps you to understand yourself?** (Answers will vary. Examples include that Jesus had to suffer—I too must suffer, etc.)
- God has revealed himself to us throughout the Bible stories. He wants us to know him and his love for us.
 - He wants us to know that he is a good and gracious God who has patience with his people, and that he is just and very loving and merciful.
- When we participate in God’s story through the liturgical year or by learning about our own lives by looking at the people in the Bible, God bestows his blessings on us, just as he did with all of the people in salvation history.
- **Note:** Lent and Easter will be discussed during Lent and Easter.

Church Season	Theme	Examples: Old Testament and New Testament	My Commitment through Prayer, Sacrifice, and Obedience
Advent	<i>Waiting and preparing for our salvation through prayer and sacrifice</i>	<p>Abraham had great faith. He obeyed God; waited patiently; was willing to sacrifice his son, Isaac; and prayed to God. (See Hebrews 11:8 and Student Text, p. 31.)</p> <p>Isaac prefigured the sacrifice of Jesus; he was obedient. (See Genesis 22:2 and Student Text, p. 32.)</p> <p>Jacob receives the birthright; God’s covenant continues through Jacob. (See Genesis 28:13–15 and Student Text, p. 32.)</p> <p>Moses waited patiently and prayed during the forty years that he led the Israelites to the Promised Land and to serve the one true God. (See Exodus 3:12 and Student Text, pp. 35–38.)</p> <p>The prophets obeyed as they led the Israelite people to trust that God would keep his promise of a Savior. (See Isaiah 9:6–7 and Student Text, pp. 41–44.)</p>	<p><i>I will wait patiently and prayerfully by ...</i></p> <p><i>I will make sacrifices by ...</i></p> <p><i>I will be obedient by ...</i></p>

(continued)

Church Season	Theme	Examples: Old Testament and New Testament	My Commitment through Prayer, Sacrifice, and Obedience
Christmas	<i>God always keeps his promises, our blessings, joy, new life</i>	Birth of Christ: <i>God promised to send a Redeemer who would open the gates of heaven. (See Genesis 3:15; Matthew 1:18–25; or Luke 2:1–20; and Student Text, p. 27.)</i>	<i>Knowing that God always keeps his promises, I will trust God by ...</i> <i>I will honor Jesus Christ as my Savior by ...</i>
Ordinary Time	<i>Miracles, blessings, trials, and joy in our lives</i>	The Life of Christ <i>teaches us how to live humbly, selflessly, and in prayer to the Father. (See Philippians 2:4–8 and Student Text, pp. 52–58.)</i>	<i>I will follow in the footsteps of Jesus by ...</i>
Lent	<i>Sacrifice, self-denial, self-giving love, repentance, forgiveness, mercy</i>	Joseph <i>shows mercy to his brothers who had caused him much suffering. (See Genesis 50:20–21 and Student Text, pp. 32–33.)</i> David <i>repented and asked for healing. (See Psalm 51 and Student Text, p. 39.)</i> Jesus <i>forgives us for our sins, heals us, and calls us to deny ourselves. (See John 8:11; Matthew 16:24; and Student Text, pp. 127–29.)</i>	<i>I will repent and ask for healing in my life.</i> <i>I will forgive others, in particular ...</i> <i>I will show mercy by ...</i> <i>I will change my heart by ...</i> <i>I will give selflessly by ...</i> <i>I will deny myself and take up my cross by ...</i>
Easter	<i>Joy comes through suffering, new life</i>	Resurrection of Jesus Christ: <i>We find new life and joy through our suffering. (See Romans 8:28; James 1:2–3; 2 Corinthians 4:7–14.)</i>	<i>I will be grateful, positive, and joyful in all things by ...</i> <i>I will trust and realize that God blesses us through our obedience in times of trial and persecution by ...</i>

FOCUS | OPTIONAL ACTIVITY

- Have students look up the Scripture verses in the chart above that help them to come to know Christ through Advent and Christmas.

Conclusion: Through the Church seasons, we are able to unite ourselves with Christ and share in his life. During Advent, we prepare, wait, and pray for our Savior. During Christmas, we celebrate the birth of Jesus, who is our Savior.

Through our participation in the life of Christ, we come to know him, love him, and serve him.

Review the Advent and Christmas

Lesson (3 minutes)

- By participating in the liturgical year, we are walking with Christ in the story of salvation history.
- Advent is a season of preparation and prayer. Christmas is a season of celebrating the birth of Jesus Christ, our Lord and Savior!

Application (10–20 minutes)

Choose one or more of the following for discussion.

- Have students complete column four in the Church seasons chart.
- Have students recall special events for which they prepare in their daily lives such as sports events or recitals. Ask them how they prepare for these different events and how

preparation can make a difference, pointing out what happens if we don't prepare. Compare this to preparing ourselves spiritually for Christmas. ***What happens if we do not prepare?*** (*Christmas comes and goes and we focus on all of the wrong things.*) During Advent, God is calling us to prepare for a spiritual celebration of Christmas. If we participate in the life of the Church, we are drawn closer to Christ and we will receive many blessings.

- Discuss how our participation in Advent and Christmas helps us to nurture the virtues of faith, hope, and love.
- Have students write a letter to Jesus explaining their spiritual goal for Christmas and what they will personally do to reach this goal by participating more fully in the season of Advent and Christmas.

Celebration (5–10 minutes)

Choose one or more of the following.

- Pray Acts of Faith, Hope, and Love, Student Text, pp. 175–76.
- Quiet students and listen to refrain of “O Come, O Come Emmanuel”, #301. Go to <http://www.ignatius.com/promotions/adoremus-hymnal/downloadable-mp3s.htm>.
- Remind students that December 8 is the feast of the Immaculate Conception (celebrating that the Blessed Mother was free from Original Sin). It is a Holy Day of Obligation.

Take Home

- Have students read the next chapter you will be covering in class.

CHAPTER 3

Creation

In the beginning God created the heavens and the earth.

Genesis 1:1

God shares with us his beauty, his power, and his glory in the wonderful world which he created. The Holy Bible begins with the book of Genesis, in which we find the story of the world's Creation. In order better to appreciate the almighty power of God we must know that to **create** means to make something out of *nothing*. The entire universe came into existence simply because God wanted it to exist! He did not use any materials to create the world as we must when we make something. Rather he had only to think of the universe and give the command and it was created! This is why the book of Genesis tells us that God had only to say, "Let there be light," and there was light (Gen 1:3).



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The inspired story of Creation was originally part of the oral tradition (religious stories) of the Jewish people. They passed this story on to each generation in order to teach and remind the people that:

1. *There is only one God and he is the Creator of all that exists*—the pagans of ten believed that each of their gods created different things in the world.
2. *God created the world in an orderly way and as a way of sharing his love with man*—many pagans believed that the world was the result of a war between their gods or that it happened by accident.
3. *Everything created by God is good*—the pagans believed many created things to be the work of an evil god who liked to make mankind suffer.

The Creation of Mankind

The book of Genesis also tells us about the creation of the first man and the first woman, the parents of the entire human race:

Then God said, "Let us make man in our image, after our likeness. . . ." So God created man in his own image, in the image of God he created him; male and female he cre-

ated them. And God blessed them, and God said to them, "Be fruitful and multiply, and fill the earth and subdue it; and have dominion over the fish of the sea and over the birds of the air and over every living thing that moves upon the earth." And God said, "Behold, I have given you every plant yielding seed which is upon the face of all the earth, and every tree with seed in its fruit; you shall have them for food" (Gen 1:26–29).

This account tells us that God had a greater plan for man than he had for the rest of the world of nature; he gave man authority over the beasts and plants of the earth, which were created for man's proper use (such as food, clothing, or enjoyment of nature). The second chapter of Genesis gives us another account of Creation.

Then the LORD God said, "It is not good that the man should be alone; I will make him a helper fit for him." . . . So the LORD God caused a deep sleep to fall upon the man, and while he slept took one of his ribs and closed up its place with flesh; and the rib which the LORD God had taken from the man he made into a woman and brought her to the man (Gen 2:18, 21–22).

The parents of the human race were called Adam and Eve, because Adam means "man," and Eve means "mother of the living."

The Human Person

In Genesis we see that after God made the human body, he "breathed into his nostrils the breath of life; and man became a living being" (Gen 2:7). This tells us that we are each composed of both a physical **body** and a spiritual **soul**. The body is made of matter (as are all things that can be touched, seen, etc.) and so



this makes us like the beasts and other physical creatures. But the soul is *spiritual*; that is, like God it is invisible but real. This is why Scripture tells us that we are made in God's image and likeness; for we share with him in the world of the spirit and, unlike the other physical creatures, we will live *forever* since we have souls that are **immortal**.

The soul has two spiritual powers that make us very much like our Creator: the intellect and the will. By the power of the intellect we are able to think, reason, and know right from wrong. The will allows us to choose freely what we shall do or say or think; it gives us the ability to love or to hate, to do good or to sin. We all know that no other earthly creature can do these things.

Both the body and the soul are important to man, otherwise God would not have created them. Even though the soul is immortal and has great powers, without the body we would not be true and complete human beings. God commands that we respect and take care of both of these gifts which he has given us. God made all human beings persons. In that sense, "all men are created equal." That does not mean that everyone is exactly the same or that

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everyone is equally good, intelligent, or strong. It means that human beings all have the same basic dignity and rights from God. It also means that we should respect the rights of others, as we expect others to respect our rights.

God Gave Man Special Gifts

When God created Adam and Eve he gave them more than their natural bodies and souls; he gave them special gifts. These gifts were not part of man's nature, but enabled him to do things beyond his ordinary abilities. They had complete harmony and peace in their lives; they never argued or acted selfishly toward each other. Also, God kept them free from suffering, sickness, and death. But most of all he gave them a share in his own divine life with the gift of **sanctifying grace**. This grace made them more than his creatures: it allowed them to know and love him in a special way and enabled them to live with him forever! These gifts would be theirs and would be passed on to all of their descendants. In this way, human beings were destined to share in God's glory, and, through man, the whole material creation would share God's glory. All that was required of the man and the woman was that they love and serve him all their lives.

The Creation of the Angels

Before we look at the events that led to man's loss of these gifts, we must know that God also created, from nothing, pure spirits whom we call angels. They are intelligent persons like us but they do not have physical bodies as we do, they are spiritual beings without bodies. Angels possess greater intelligence and power than human beings, but they too were created to worship and serve God.

God put the angels to a test to give them a chance to love him freely and obey his com-

mands. Some of them, led by Lucifer, refused to serve the Lord; they rebelled against him and went to **hell**, where those who do not want to be with him go. These angels were good when they were created by God, but they became evil by their own free choice. We call these disobedient spirits **fallen angels** or **demons**. They are still led by Lucifer, who is also known as Satan or the devil. They try to turn all creation away from God, for they do not want God's creatures to serve him.

The spirits who loved God and obeyed his commands are called *faithful* or **good angels**; they were led by Michael the Archangel. These angels assist us in living holy Christian lives so that we will serve God on earth and come to live with him in heaven when we die. God has assigned a good angel to each one of us; this angel is called our *guardian angel* and his mission is to help us on our way to heaven.

The Fall of Man

Like the angels, God tested our first parents to give them the choice to love and serve him freely. He gave Adam and Eve a beautiful garden in which to live, the Garden of Eden (also called paradise), and he told them that they could eat any fruit in that garden except the fruit of the tree of the knowledge of good and evil.

The devil saw this as an opportunity to lead Adam and Eve away from God. He entered the garden and tempted our first parents to sin. He said that if they ate the fruit of the forbidden tree they would become just like their Creator!

Poor Adam and Eve! They believed the lies of Satan and ate the forbidden fruit. At that moment they knew that they had sinned, and they were filled with shame. They tried to hide from God, which is, of course, an impossible thing to do.

The Lord called to them and told Adam and Eve that they must now be banished from the Garden of Eden and be subject to suffering,

sickness, and death. Much worse, they would no longer live in the state of sanctifying grace which had made them close friends of God, heirs to the happiness of **heaven**. Now they could not pass on God's special gifts. In fact, now they passed on to their descendants a human nature that was weakened because of their sin.

We call this sin of Adam **Original Sin** because it was the first sin ever to be committed by man and because it is passed on from Adam, the origin of the human race. The terrible results of this sin (separation from God, sickness, death, slavery to sin and the devil) are called the *effects* of Original Sin. Except for Jesus and Mary, all human beings since the time of Adam and Eve have been conceived with Original Sin and its effects on their souls.

We must not think that God was unfair in taking away these gifts; they were gifts freely given and not deserved. In his love he clearly told Adam and Eve what the result of their disobedience would be when he said:

You may freely eat of every tree of the garden; but of the tree of the knowledge

of good and evil you shall not eat, for in the day that you eat of it you shall die (Gen 2:16–17).

God's Promise of a Redeemer

Even though they had sinned against him, God continued to love Adam and Eve. He wanted them, and all the human race who would descend from them, to live in his friendship. So he promised to send us a **Redeemer**, someone who would be able to reconcile us to God and restore to our souls the life of sanctifying grace. God told the devil that this Redeemer would come from a woman, saying:

I will put enmity between you and the woman, and between your seed and her seed; he shall bruise your head, and you shall bruise his heel (Gen 3:15).

Words to Know:

create body soul immortal
sanctifying grace good angels
fallen angels heaven hell
Original Sin Redeemer

Q. 24 Why is God called "Creator of heaven and earth?"

God is called "Creator of heaven and earth" because he made heaven and earth out of nothing (CCC 279, 296).

Q. 25 Is the world entirely the work of God?

Yes, the world is entirely the work of God (CCC 296, 299).

Q. 26 Did God create only the material things that are in the world?

No, God not only created the material things that are in the world, but he also created the spiritual things, such as the angels and the soul of each human being (CCC 327–28, 355).

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- Q. 27** *What are the pure spirits?*
The pure spirits are intelligent beings who do not have bodies (CCC 328–30, 391–93).
- Q. 28** *What are the angels?*
The angels are pure spirits, invisible servants of God, and some are our guardians (CCC 329, 336).
- Q. 29** *Do we have duties toward the angels?*
We have the duty of reverence and respect toward the angels (CCC 335).
- Q. 30** *What are the demons?*
The demons are fallen angels who rebelled against God in pride and were cast into hell because of their rejection of God. They tempt man to do evil (CCC 391–94, 414).
- Q. 31** *What is man?*
Man is a created reasoning being composed of body and soul (CCC 355).
- Q. 32** *What is the soul?*
The soul is the spiritual part of man, by which he lives, understands, and is free. The soul makes man able to know, love, and serve God (CCC 363).
- Q. 33** *What is the body?*
The body is the material part of man (CCC 364).
- Q. 34** *Does man's soul die with his body?*
No, man's soul does not die with his body; it lives forever because it is a spiritual reality (CCC 1703).
- Q. 35** *Why must we take care of our soul?*
We must take the greatest care of our soul because it is immortal (CCC 366–67).

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- Q. 36** *Does man have free will?*
Yes, man has free will because he can choose to do something or not do something, or to do one thing rather than another (CCC 1731).
- Q. 37** *Who were the first human beings?*
The first human beings and our first parents were Adam and Eve (CCC 375).
- Q. 38** *Was man created weak and sinful as we are now?*
No, man was not created weak and sinful as we are now, but in a state of original holiness and justice (CCC 374).
- Q. 39** *What destiny did God ordain for man?*
The destiny that God ordained for man was happiness in union with God forever. Because this destiny is entirely above and beyond the capacity of human nature, man also received from God a supernatural power called grace (CCC 27, 1998).
- Q. 40** *What gift did God give man in order to help him achieve his destiny?*
God gave man the supernatural gift of grace in order to help him achieve his destiny (CCC 2021).
- Q. 41** *In addition to grace, what else did God give to man?*
In addition to grace, God gave man the gift of freedom from all the weaknesses and sufferings of life, including death, provided that he not sin (CCC 376).
- Q. 42** *Why does man not have these gifts from God today?*
Man does not have these gifts from God today because Adam, who was the father of mankind, sinned (CCC 399, 402).

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- Q. 43** *What was Adam's sin?*
Adam's sin was a grave sin of pride and disobedience (CCC 397–98).
- Q. 44** *What damage did the sin of Adam cause?*
The sin of Adam lost grace and every other supernatural gift for man. Adam and all men were made subject to sin, to the demons, to death, to ignorance, to evil inclinations and every other sort of suffering, and finally to exclusion from heaven (CCC 403, 405).
- Q. 45** *What is the sin called to which Adam subjected the rest of mankind by his fault?*
The sin to which Adam subjected all mankind by his fault is called Original Sin (CCC 404).
- Q. 46** *In what does Original Sin consist?*
Original Sin consists in the loss of original holiness and justice, which would have been passed on to us but was lost by Adam for all mankind (CCC 400).
- Q. 47** *Did God abandon man after his sin?*
No, God did not abandon man after his sin. Because God loved man, he promised to send a Savior who would redeem man, restore the life of grace to his soul, and make it possible for him to go to heaven (CCC 410).

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CHAPTER 4

God's Plan of Salvation

Sing to the LORD, all the earth! Tell of his salvation from day to day.

1 Chronicles 16:23

All of the events in human history by which God prepared the world for the coming of Jesus Christ and the events by which Jesus accomplishes this plan for the redemption, or salvation, of the human race is called **salvation history**. Jesus was to restore the grace that had been lost through Original Sin.

God began to form for himself a people, the chosen people, to whom he would reveal himself and his plan of salvation. From among this sacred community he would choose the woman who would be the Mother of the Redeemer of the whole world.

God Calls Abraham

God chose a man named Abram, who lived in the land of Mesopotamia almost four thousand years ago. He made a **covenant** (agreement or promise) with him, promising to make Abram the father of many descendants, who would become a great nation. God also told him that this nation would live in a wonderful place called the **Promised Land**:

And I will make of you a great nation, and I will bless you, and make your name great, so that you will be a blessing. I will

bless those who bless you, and him who curses you I will curse; and by you all the families of the earth shall bless themselves (Gen 12:2–3).

Abram agreed to the covenant, and to show his new mission in life, God gave him the new name of Abraham, which means “father of many people.” When he agreed to this covenant, Abraham showed great faith in God because he and his wife were very old and yet they believed that the Lord would give them many descendants. They trusted God so much that they were willing to leave family and home in order to set out for the Promised Land. The early Christians recognized the great faith that Abraham had in God; it is mentioned in the letter to the Hebrews:

By faith Abraham obeyed when he was called to go out to a place which he was to receive as an inheritance; and he went out, not knowing where he was to go (Heb 11:8).

Even today in the liturgy of the Catholic Church we honor this holy man as, “Abraham, our father in faith” (Eucharistic Prayer I).

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Isaac Continues the Covenant

After God's promise of descendants, Abraham had a son named Isaac. Needless to say, the boy was loved dearly by his elderly parents. One day God wanted to test Abraham's faith. He commanded this father to sacrifice his beloved only son as an act of worship: "Take your son, your only begotten son Isaac, whom you love, and go to the land of Moriah, and offer him there as a burnt offering upon one of the mountains of which I shall tell you" (Gen 22:2).

Knowing that man must love and serve God more than his family, Abraham took Isaac up a mountain and prepared to sacrifice him as God had commanded. Just as Abraham was about to sacrifice Isaac, an angel stopped Abraham and revealed to him that it was a test. Now Abraham had shown that he truly loved God more than anyone else, and God rewarded this love by promising to continue his covenant through Isaac. After his father's death Isaac became the second **patriarch**, or leader, of God's chosen people.

The sacrifice of his only son that Abraham was willing to make was a **prefiguration** of God's love for mankind. A prefiguration is some person or event that happens before another event to which it is similar in some way. In this case, the prefiguration was of the



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sacrifice that God the Father was to make in allowing Jesus, his only Son, to be sacrificed on the Cross for our sins.

The Covenant Continues with Jacob

Isaac married a woman named Rebekah, and they had twin boys, Esau and Jacob. God chose Jacob as the one with whom he would keep the covenant he had made with Abraham, saying:

"I am the LORD, the God of Abraham your father and the God of Isaac; the land on which you lie I will give to you and to your descendants . . . and by you and your descendants shall all the families of the earth bless themselves. Behold, I am with you and will keep you wherever you go, and will bring you back to this land; for I will not leave you until I have done that of which I have spoken to you." (Gen 28:13–15).

Soon after this event God gave Jacob a new name, **Israel**, which means "the man who strives with God." This new name is very important because God's people used it as the name for their community: the Israelites. Jacob had twelve sons who became the fathers of the twelve tribes, or families, that made up the chosen people. Thus Jacob became the third patriarch of God's people.

The Story of Joseph

Among the many sons of Jacob, there was one who was especially dear to him—Joseph. The other sons were envious at this, and they grew angry with their brother. They began to plan among themselves how they could get rid of Joseph once and for all. One day, when they were out in the fields watching their sheep, they sold poor Joseph to a band of slave

traders who were on their way to Egypt. Then they convinced Jacob that Joseph had been killed by a wild beast. Jacob was heartbroken. If only he knew that they had sold their brother for twenty pieces of silver!

In this, Joseph reminds us of Jesus who was sold by one of his friends for thirty pieces of silver. Joseph also prefigures Jesus because he was to become a kind of savior in Egypt for his brothers. This is how it happened.

When he arrived in Egypt, Joseph was bought by an important ruling family. Soon he became a trusted servant of the Pharaoh (the Egyptian king) because he was handsome and very intelligent and was given important positions in the royal court—he even became second in command in all of Egypt. In the meantime, the land of the chosen people was in a time of famine so the sons of Jacob traveled to Egypt in search of food. Imagine their surprise to find Joseph in command! Instead of having them killed or thrown into prison because of what they had done to him, Joseph embraced each one and gave them all the food they needed. He invited his family to move to Egypt, which they did. Joseph gave them some of the best land in Egypt and loved them with all of his heart.

In this Joseph again prefigures Jesus. Joseph forgave those who had wronged him and gave them everything they needed for a happy life. This reminds us of Christ, who forgives all of our sins and gives us every grace and blessing we need to live good Christian lives while we journey to heaven, our true home.

For four hundred years the Israelites lived in the land of Egypt. While Joseph was alive they were treated with honor and respect. Years later, however, the rulers were no longer happy to have them. One particular Pharaoh made the Israelites the slaves of the Egyptian people. The descendants of Jacob were forced to do heavy manual labor from sunrise to sunset; they were used as "beasts of burden" to build many of the pyramids in Egypt. God's people soon began to think that the Lord had abandoned them; they wondered if he had taken back the wonderful covenant of blessing that he had made with Abraham, Isaac, and Jacob. It was at this difficult point in their history that God sent a very special man to his people.

Words to Know:

salvation history covenant
patriarch prefiguration
Promised Land Israel



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Q. 48 What is salvation history?

Salvation history is the story of God's saving plan, fulfilled in Jesus Christ, to reunite man with him and share in his glory forever (CCC 430–31).

Q. 49 From whom would be born the Redeemer of the world?

The Redeemer of the world would be born from among God's chosen people, of a woman named Mary, who was of the house of David (CCC 488).

Q. 50 Why is Abraham our father in faith?

Abraham is our father in faith because he believed God's promise to make him the father of a holy people from whom our Savior was born (CCC 59–60).

Q. 51 What is a covenant?

A covenant is a promise or an oath that binds two people (or groups of people) together. God's covenant with the Israelites bound them to his laws so that they could know and serve him faithfully (CCC 62).

Q. 52 Who were the Israelites?

The Israelites were God's chosen people of the Old Testament. They were the first to hear the Word of God. God prepared them for the coming of the Savior, who would redeem the whole world (CCC 64).

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CHAPTER 5

The Holy Prophet Moses

When the LORD saw that he turned aside to see, God called to him out of the bush, "Moses, Moses!" And he said, "Here am I."

Exodus 3:4

Before the coming of Jesus, the Redeemer, the most important person among God's chosen people was Moses, the first of God's prophets. He was their first leader, and he helped to make the Israelites a united people.

Moses was born in Egypt to a poor Israelite woman. At the time of his birth the Pharaoh had made a law that required the death of every newborn Israelite boy. He did this because the Jewish people were becoming a very large group, and if their numbers continued to increase they would not as easily be kept in slavery. Hoping to save the life of her son, Moses' mother hid him in a basket by the Nile River.

One day, the Pharaoh's daughter found little Moses, and she adopted him as her own son. He grew up in the royal palace and was treated as one of the family. Moses knew that he was really an Israelite by birth, and he would visit the Jewish slaves often. During one of these visits he saw an Egyptian hit one of the slaves; this filled him with so much anger that he killed the Egyptian! Realizing that he was in great trouble for having killed the Egyptian, Moses fled Egypt and went to the land of Midian. There he became a herdsman, married a woman named Zipporah, and raised a family.

God Calls Moses

The time soon arrived when God, because of the covenant he had made with Abraham, Isaac, and Jacob, answered the prayers of his enslaved people. He appeared to Moses in a burning bush and told him to return to Egypt in order to deliver the Jews from their slavery. The Lord said to Moses:

"I have seen the affliction of my people who are in Egypt, and have heard their cry because of their taskmasters; I know their sufferings. . . . Come, I will send you to Pharaoh that you may bring forth my people, the sons of Israel, out of Egypt. . . . But I will be with you; and this shall be the sign for you, that I have sent you: when you have brought forth the people out of Egypt, you shall serve God upon this mountain" (Ex 3:7–12).

At this time God also revealed his name to Moses. He called himself **Yahweh** (Ex 3:14) which translated means, "I AM." This tells us that God is the source of all that exists; it is he alone who has the power to do all things. It also reminds us that God is *eternal*; that is, his

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existence had no beginning and will have no end.

Moses Returns to the Land of Egypt

Obedient to the will of God, Moses traveled to Egypt where he was accepted by the Israelites as a prophet sent from the Lord. God chose his brother, Aaron, to be his companion in God's service and they both went to Pharaoh with this message: "Thus says the LORD, the God of Israel, 'Let my people go'" (Ex 5:1).

But the Pharaoh would not think of it! Instead he increased the labor of the Jews and treated them even more harshly. In order to punish his stubbornness God sent ten plagues upon the land: water turned into blood; frogs overran the countryside; gnats were like a thick dust; flies swarmed; animals died; boils and

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sores afflicted men and animals; hailstorms descended upon the land; locusts destroyed their crops; and for three days all of Egypt was plunged into darkness. Even after all of these terrible signs, Pharaoh refused to obey the will of God in letting the Jewish people go!

The Passover of the Lord

Before sending the tenth and final plague (which was to be the death of every firstborn son and animal), God told Moses to have each Israelite family hold a special religious meal which would be a sign that they were members of his sacred people. Every family was to kill a lamb and eat it with unleavened bread and bitter herbs. They were to eat this holy meal standing, ready to leave on a journey. Before finishing this ceremony, they were to sprinkle the lamb's blood on their wooden doorposts, for this would be a signal that the home was to be spared from the tenth plague. When the angel of death went throughout the land carrying out this plague, he would *pass over* the homes sprinkled with blood. Thus the meal became known as the **Passover**. Even today, Jewish families gather together to celebrate the feast of the Passover; it is always celebrated near our Christian feast of Easter.

The Passover meal was a special preparation of God's people for Christ's saving death and for the Mass, which is the sacred sacrifice-meal of the new chosen people, the Church. Let us pause to compare these important events.

The Israelites gathered together for the Passover by the command of God; we Catholics come together every Sunday for Mass as Christ commands us. During their ceremony the Israelites sacrificed an animal known as the Paschal lamb; we offer the Father the Eucharistic sacrifice of Jesus, who is the "Lamb of God" (Jn 1:36). At the Passover meal the Israelites ate the sacrificed lamb; at every Eucharist we

are invited to partake of the Body and Blood of Jesus in Holy Communion. The Israelites sprinkled the blood of the sacrificed lamb upon the wood of their doorposts so that death would not come to them that night; at every Holy Mass the Precious Blood of Jesus is *sacramentally* shed for our sins so that we might be saved from eternal death (hell). Finally, because of the Passover ceremony and the tenth plague, the Israelites were freed from their slavery; because of Christ's sacrifice we are freed from slavery to sin and the devil.

The Jewish Passover ceremony prefigured how Christ would save us from our sins. The Passion, death, and Resurrection of Christ are thus the fulfillment of the Passover and hence called the **Paschal Mystery** (Passover of the Lord Jesus. This Paschal Mystery is perpetuated throughout time in the Holy Sacrifice of the Mass. Saint Paul, in his first letter to the Corinthians, uses this same comparison saying: "For Christ, our Paschal Lamb, has been sacrificed. Let us, therefore, celebrate the festival . . . with the unleavened bread of sincerity and truth" (1 Cor 5:7-8).

The Exodus from Egypt

Afraid of the power of the Israelites' God, Pharaoh let the Jews leave Egypt. We call this journey from Egypt to the Promised Land the **Exodus**. Soon after they had left the Pharaoh's city, the Egyptian ruler changed his mind and sent some of his troops to bring the Israelites back. At first God's people were terrified at seeing the soldiers coming toward them, but Moses told them to trust in the Lord. As the Israelites approached the Red Sea, God intervened to save them: the mighty waters parted and there was a clear path for them to travel through! The soldiers came galloping after the Israelites, but they were too late: as soon as the last of God's people reached the other side of

the sea, the waves came crashing down upon the Egyptians. You can imagine the great joy and confidence in God that filled the hearts of his people!

Even with this great sign of God's protection, the people soon grew weary of traveling in the desert where food and water were scarce. They complained to Moses: "Would that we had died by the hand of the LORD in the land of Egypt . . . for you have brought us out into this wilderness to kill this whole assembly with hunger" (Ex 16:3).

God heard their cries and in reply, God sent nourishment to his people in miraculous ways: he gave them a special bread called manna and water gushed forth from a rock! This bread, wondrously sent from God, prefigures the Holy Eucharist, which is the heavenly Bread of Life.

God Gives Moses the Ten Commandments

After about three months of wandering in the desert the Israelites found themselves at Mount Sinai. Moses climbed up this mountain in order to pray. At this time God appeared to him and gave him the Ten Commandments, also called the **Law**. Moses proclaimed the Ten Commandments to the people and they all answered: "All the words which the LORD has spoken we will do" (Ex 24:3). The Lord then called Moses to go back up the mountain to receive the Law written on the stone tablets. In the meantime the people grew weary again and complained about their situation. Many of them actually turned their backs on God saying to Aaron: "Up, make us gods, who shall go before us" (Ex 32:1).

They melted down all their gold jewelry and formed an **idol**, or image of a false god, in the shape of a calf. They worshipped this image, committing the sin known as *idolatry*. When Moses came down from Sinai he grew furious

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at this sin of the people. How dare they turn their backs on the one true God, the God who had made a covenant with their ancestors and who had so miraculously freed them from slavery! Moses destroyed the idol and those who had worshipped it were punished. The Israelites told God and Moses that they were sorry for having doubted. They promised to do whatever was asked of them in order to remain God's chosen people. Moses returned to Sinai in order to seek God's forgiveness.

God Renews the Covenant with His People

God told Moses to give this message to the people:

"Behold, I make a covenant. Before all your people I will do marvels, such as have not been wrought in all the earth or in any nation. . . . Observe what I command you this day" (Ex 34:10-11).

Obedient to the commandments of the Law became the people's way of showing their loyalty to God. In order to show and preserve their deep respect for the commandments, God told them how to build a special container, called the **Ark of the Covenant**, in which the tablets of the Law were kept. They carried this with them as they journeyed to the Promised Land.

God Commands Sacrifices

As another part of the renewed covenant, God commanded that the priests of Israel offer animal sacrifices to him in worship. A **sacrifice** is the act of offering to God something that is precious to us. These gifts were to be offered on an **altar** that was **consecrated**, set apart solely for this purpose. Each time a sacrifice was offered the people would be reminded of the covenant and of their duty to obey the Law. During each sacrifice the priests

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would beg God to forgive the sins of all the people.

For the next few centuries of salvation history (until the perfect sacrificial death of Jesus on the Cross), these sacrifices were offered to God by the Jewish people. Thus sacrificial worship became an important religious event in the lives of the People of God.

The Israelites Enter the Promised Land

After forty years of traveling through the desert the people finally arrived in the Promised Land. However, Moses was forbidden by the Lord to enter this land because he had once doubted God's power. Even though he was a holy man and a prophet, he had to endure this punishment because he had disobeyed God's command. This shows that even one sin is "one too many" in God's eyes. Moses died just as the people were nearing the land. After burying him the Israelites entered into the land promised them from of old: the land God said he would give to Abraham, Isaac, and Jacob.

Joshua and the Judges of Israel

Joshua was Moses' successor as prophet of God and leader of the people. He was also a great warrior who led the Jews in battle against the foreigners who had taken over their land while they had been enslaved in Egypt. The book of Joshua in the Old Testament tells us about this brave man and the way he served God. Before his death, Joshua gathered the Israelites together and renewed the covenant with the Lord.

After Joshua's death there was a new kind of leadership for Israel: the judges. These were not men who presided over courts of law as our judges do; they were military heroes who won great victories for God's people. The era of the judges lasted only as long as Israel needed military men to reconquer their land. Once

the community was firmly established as a nation, the work of the judges ended, and yet another new form of leadership arose: the kings.

The Rule of the Kings

At this time in salvation history there lived a holy prophet named Samuel. Since the Israelites wanted a king like all the other nations, God told Samuel to **anoint** certain men as the kings of God's people. He chose a man named Saul to be the very first king of Israel. Samuel anointed Saul king by pouring oil over his head as a sign that he had been chosen by God. Saul proved to be an unworthy king and he soon died.

His successor was David, a shepherd boy who won a mighty battle with the Philistine soldier Goliath. David became the greatest king Israel ever had; he was a strong warrior and a good government leader. Even though he committed some terrible sins he was truly sorry for them, and God forgave him. He loved God and wrote some beautiful prayers and hymns to him. We call these **Psalms**, and even today they are used in worship. It was King David who made *Jerusalem* the capital of the Jewish nation and the center of their worship. God loved David and made a special promise to him: one of his descendants would reign as king for-

ever! This was a prophecy about Jesus, who would be a descendant of David and the true King of the Jews.

After David's death, his son Solomon became king. He was a very wise ruler who made the kingdom a good place in which to live. His words of advice were written down and can be found in some of the wisdom books of the Old Testament. Solomon had a magnificent temple built in Jerusalem; it was beautifully decorated inside with gold, fine cloth, and ornate furnishings.

Soon after Solomon's death, however, the kingdom experienced many difficulties. The Jews who lived in the northern part fought with those of the south; they eventually divided the cherished Promised Land into two separate nations. The northern kingdom was called Israel, while the southern kingdom was named Judah. It was the kingdom of Judah that remained faithful to God and to King David's policies. And it was from the people of this nation that Jesus Christ would come to us.

Words to Know:

Yahweh Passover Paschal Mystery
Exodus Law idol
Ark of the Covenant sacrifice altar
consecrated anoint Psalms

The Ten Commandments of God

1. I, the Lord, am your God. You shall not have other gods besides me.
2. You shall not take the name of the Lord, your God, in vain.
3. Remember to keep holy the Sabbath day.
4. Honor your father and mother.
5. You shall not kill.
6. You shall not commit adultery.
7. You shall not steal.
8. You shall not bear false witness against your neighbor.
9. You shall not covet your neighbor's wife.
10. You shall not covet anything that belongs to your neighbor.

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Q. 53 Who was Moses?

Moses was a great prophet in the Old Testament, through whom God established his covenant with the Israelites and gave them the Ten Commandments (CCC 62).

Q. 54 What was the Passover?

The Passover was the great event of the liberation of Israel from slavery in Egypt (CCC 1334).

Q. 55 What are the Ten Commandments?

The Ten Commandments are the moral laws that God gave to Moses on Mount Sinai and which Jesus Christ fulfilled in the New Testament (CCC 2056).



God's Special Spokesmen— The Prophets

For this is he who was spoken of by the prophet Isaiah when he said, "The voice of one crying in the wilderness: Prepare the way of the Lord, make his paths straight."

Matthew 3:3

In our study of salvation history we have seen that men called **prophets** have played an important role in the dealings which God had with the Jews. Many people misunderstand what a prophet is. Most think that it means a person who foretells future events in strange and mysterious ways. While it is true that part of a prophet's mission may be to tell us about future events, this is not the main purpose of these holy men. A prophet is someone chosen by God to speak a message from God to the people. Usually this message is about their present concerns, something that they need to hear for their spiritual well-being. The prophet speaks these words with the authority, or permission and power, of the Lord.

Jews for the coming of the **Messiah**, a name which means "the Anointed One." In Greek the word for "Anointed One" is *Christos*, from which we get "Christ." As we learned in the previous chapter, "anointed" means someone chosen by God for a special role; in this case, the Anointed One is the Redeemer whom God promised to send to the human race, Jesus Christ.

The prophets encouraged the people to trust in God, not in the powerful nations of the earth, for peace and protection. They warned them that God would punish them if they did not live as his holy people, observing the commandments of the Law.

The Mission of the Prophets in Israel

God sent many such men to his people. They were sent to remind the Jews about the covenant by which they were bound to God. The prophets told the people to be faithful to the Law and to refuse to worship false gods as their pagan neighbors did. By doing these things the prophets were really preparing the

The Prophets Proclaimed God's Message in Many Ways

The prophets delivered the Lord's messages in many ways. They spoke the words, put them into poetry, and sometimes even acted them out in little skits! They were so devoted to God and to their mission that they used any method they could to get the people to hear God's Word and obey it.



The Different Kinds of Prophets

The spokesmen of God whom we know most about are those whose **prophecies** (messages from God) and lives are recorded in the Old Testament. They are divided into two groups: the major and the minor prophets.

The major prophets are those who wrote a lot; their names are Isaiah, Jeremiah, Ezekiel, and Daniel. The minor prophets, whose writings are not as abundant, are Hosea, Joel, Amos, Obadiah, Jonah, Micah, Nahum, Habakkuk, Zephaniah, Haggai, Zechariah, and Malachi.

The Prophets Elijah and Elisha

There are two very great prophets who are not included in the above lists because they did not leave us any of their writings. But their lives are recorded in the Bible and they are very important in salvation history. Their

names are Elijah and Elisha. Elijah, who is one of the greatest prophets, was very devoted to God. He is most famous for a contest he held with some pagan priests on Mount Carmel. He wanted to prove to the people that the God of the Israelites was the one true God, so he told the pagan priests to set up altars of sacrifice and ask their gods to set these altars on fire. Of course no matter how long they prayed nothing happened. However, when Elijah set up his altar, he flooded it with water and asked God to set it on fire. Behold! A blaze came down from heaven and consumed the animal that was on the altar! Elijah's holiness drew many men to him; they wanted to serve God too.

The most important of Elijah's followers was Elisha. He lived with the holy prophet Elijah and saw him taken up into heaven in a fiery chariot (2 Kings 2:11). Elisha continued serving God with the same love and devotion that

had filled the heart of his master, Elijah. He worked many miracles, one of which was multiplying bread for the hungry, just as our Lord did centuries later.

Elijah and Elisha are especially important to the Catholic Church because one of its greatest religious orders, the Carmelites, owes its existence to the disciples of these prophets. The priests, brothers, nuns, and lay people who belong to the Carmelite Order dedicate their lives to offering prayers and sacrifices to God for the needs of his people, just as the holy prophets had done centuries ago.

The Prophet Isaiah

A most important prophet for Christians is Isaiah, who lived eight hundred years before the birth of Christ. More than the others, Isaiah spoke about the coming Messiah. Here are some of his prophecies about the Redeemer:

The Messiah's virgin Mother: "Behold, a virgin shall conceive and bear a son, and shall call his name Immanuel!" (Is 7:14).

The Messiah will be a great light: "The people who walked in darkness have seen a great light; those who dwelt in a land of deep darkness, on them has light shined" (Is 9:2).

The Messiah will be a great ruler: "For to us a child is born, to us a son is given; and the government will be upon his shoulder, and his name will be called 'Wonderful Counselor, Mighty God, Everlasting Father, Prince of Peace.' Of the increase of his government and of peace there will be no end" (Is 9:6-7).

The Messiah will suffer: "Surely he has borne our griefs and carried our sorrows; yet we esteemed him stricken, struck down by God, and afflicted. But he was wounded for our transgressions, he

was bruised for our iniquities; upon him was the chastisement that made us whole, and with his stripes we are healed" (Is 53:4-5).

The Messiah shines in glory upon the people: "Arise, shine; for your light has come, and the glory of the LORD has risen upon you. . . . And nations shall walk by your light, and kings in the brightness of your rising" (Is 60:1, 3).

We use these and other prophecies about the Messiah from Isaiah in our Advent and Christmas liturgies in the Catholic Church.

Saint John the Baptist, Herald of the Messiah

The last of the Old Testament prophets and the only one who is present in the New Testament is Saint John the Baptist. He was a "bridge" between these two parts of salvation history, and it was his privileged mission to prepare the Jews for the public ministry of our Lord.

John was born only six months before Jesus, and he was our Lord's cousin (his mother was Mary's relative). His parents, Zechariah and Elizabeth, were elderly and had no children. They wanted a baby so badly! One day, when Zechariah was in the temple worshipping God, an angel appeared to him with this happy message:

"Do not be afraid, Zechariah, for your prayer is heard, and your wife Elizabeth will bear you a son, and you shall call his name John. And you will have joy and gladness, and many will rejoice at his birth; for he will be great before the Lord (Lk 1:13-15).

At John's birth the Holy Spirit inspired his father with wonderful words about the little

boy. He revealed to Zechariah that John was to be the **forerunner** and **herald** of the Messiah. A forerunner is someone who goes before another person to prepare the people for his coming; a herald is someone who announces the coming of a royal person. The Holy Spirit gave Zechariah these words about John:

And you, child, will be called the prophet of the Most High; for you will go before the Lord to prepare his ways, to give knowledge of salvation to his people in the forgiveness of their sins (Lk 1:76–77).

When John grew up he began his mission in the area around the Jordan River, not far from the city of Jerusalem. He would tell the people to **repent** (to give up their sinful desires and actions). John is called the “Baptist” (or the Baptizer) because he would pour water upon those people who wanted to give up sin, as a sign of their desire to repent. He would often say to the crowds that came to him: “I baptize

you with water; but he who is mightier than I is coming . . . he will baptize you with the Holy Spirit and with fire” (Lk 3:16).

John was speaking of Jesus, who was soon to make his appearance among the people. Like all of the other prophets sent by God, John was a victim of persecution. King Herod, who was living a sinful and impure life, did not like to hear John say that his actions were wrong. He had the Baptist thrown into prison and later sentenced him to be beheaded.

John was not afraid to die, for he had finished the work that was his to do. He had faithfully prepared the people for Jesus’ preaching, and he was ready to meet death with a loyal heart. Saint John the Baptist is one of the most important saints of the Church, and, after our Lord and our Lady, he receives the most honor in the Church’s prayers and liturgy.

Words to Know:

prophets Messiah prophecies
forerunner herald repent

Q. 56 *Who were the prophets?*

The prophets were God’s servants who prepared his people for the coming of the Messiah by calling for repentance from sin and faithfulness to God (CCC 64).

Q. 57 *What does “Messiah” mean?*

The word “Messiah” is the Hebrew word for “Anointed One” and refers to the one who is anointed by the Holy Spirit as the Savior of God’s people (CCC 436).

Q. 58 *Who was the last and greatest of all the prophets?*

Saint John the Baptist was the last and greatest of the prophets because he prepared the way of the Lord Jesus (CCC 523).

PART TWO

God
Becomes Man



CHAPTER 7

Our Lord and Savior
Jesus Christ

And the Word became flesh and dwelt among us, full of grace and truth; we have beheld his glory, glory as of the only-begotten Son from the Father.

John 1:14

You will remember that God promised Adam and Eve that he would send a Redeemer, someone who would make up for Original Sin and the separation it caused between man and the Creator. We have seen how God began his plan for our salvation by choosing a community of people, the Jews or Israelites, to whom he gradually revealed his plan. He sent prophets to these people to prepare them for the coming of the Messiah, the “Anointed One” of God.

The various prophets had told the Jewish people that the Messiah would indeed come to them, but they never said exactly *who* he would be. Most of the people expected a great and powerful military leader who would free them from political oppression. That this Savior would be God himself, come down to liberate them from their spiritual slavery to sin and the devil, was not what they expected.

But the prophets did give the people some clues about the Messiah, ways to recognize him once he came. They said that he would be a member of the tribe of Judah (Gen 49:8–10); he would be born of a virgin (Is 7:14) in the

town of Bethlehem (Micah 5:2–4). A great star would shine in the sky to announce the Messiah’s birth (Num 24:17), and he would live for a time in Egypt (Hos 11:1). This Redeemer would preach God’s Good News to the poor and the lowly (Is 61:1–3), but he would be rejected by the people who would cause him much suffering (Is 53:1–12).

You probably recognize the life of the Lord Jesus in the above prophecies; many of the Jews did, and they accepted him as the Messiah sent from God. But many others did not.

The Incarnation of Our Lord

From among all the women of the chosen people, God selected one through whom he would fulfill his promise of salvation: the Virgin Mary of Nazareth. God had prepared her to cooperate with his plan of salvation. Mary was free from Original Sin from the moment of her conception. This is called the Immaculate Conception. One day, he sent the angel Gabriel to her, saying:

Hail, full of grace, the Lord is with you! . . . Do not be afraid, Mary, for you have found favor with God. And behold, you will conceive in your womb and bear a son, and you shall call his name Jesus. He will be great, and will be called the Son of the Most High; and the Lord God will give to him the throne of his father [ancestor] David, and he will reign over the house of Jacob for ever; and of his Kingdom there will be no end (Lk 1:28, 30–33).

Now Mary, as the Church has always taught, was a virgin, as her response to this angelic messenger reveals: "How can this be, since I have no husband?" (Lk 1:34).

The angel told her that God, in his almighty power, would work this great wonder within her. By the power of the Holy Spirit the child would be conceived in her womb. Joseph, to whom she was betrothed, would *seem* to be the baby's father but he was actually the Lord's foster father and protector. Mary, ready to do whatever God asked of her, replied to the angel: "Behold, I am the handmaid of the Lord; let it be to me according to your word" (Lk 1:38).

With these words Mary showed how dedicated she was to God's plan for her life and for our salvation. She called herself the "handmaid" of the Lord, which is another way of saying that she was God's servant or slave, ever ready to do whatever he asked of her.

As soon as Mary expressed her consent to God's will, Jesus was conceived in her womb; this is the Virginal Conception. Nine months later he was born in the little town of Bethlehem, and his **nativity** (birth) was announced by the appearance of the miraculous star, just as had been foretold. We call the event by which the Son of God took on our human nature the **Incarnation**.

The Divinity of Jesus

The Second Person of the Blessed Trinity came down from heaven in order to share our human life. Even more, he freely chose to be born in poverty and to live a poor life, so that we could learn that wealth and worldly pleasures do not give us true happiness. He became man so that we, by being freed from sin and reunited with God by Baptism, could become like him, the children of the Father. Saint Irenaeus, a holy bishop of the second century, once said: "The Word of God, Jesus Christ, on account of his great love for mankind, became what we are in order to make us what he is himself."

For thirty years Jesus lived a normal human life with Mary and Joseph, working as a carpenter in the village of Nazareth. He did this in order to teach us that even such ordinary things as work and family life are very important to God. This first part of Christ's life is called his "hidden life," because during this time the people did not know *who* he really was and because we do not know very much about it.

When our Lord was about thirty years old he began what is known as his "public life," that is, the three years he spent preaching, teaching, and working miracles. These **miracles** were signs and proofs of his divinity; they showed that he was truly the Son of God. A miracle is some event or happening that is beyond the powers of man or of nature. It can only be worked by God, who is the Lord and Master of all creation.

The public life of Jesus began with his baptism in the Jordan River by Saint John the Baptist. At this time, the **evangelists** (writers of the Gospels) tell us that the Holy Spirit came down upon Jesus and the Father's voice was heard to say: "This is my beloved Son, with whom I am well pleased" (Mt 3:17).

This was the first time that Jesus of Nazareth was publicly revealed as the Son of God.

(Of course, Mary and Joseph already knew who he was.) It was also the first time that the mystery of the Blessed Trinity was revealed. During his ministry our Lord spoke of himself as the Son of God, saying: "Truly, truly, I say to you, before Abraham was, I am" (Jn 8:58). (Remember that "I AM" is the name God revealed to Moses in the burning bush.)

So we see from all of these events recorded for us in the Gospels that Jesus Christ is *both* God and man at the same time! This is a great mystery of faith that we believe because God has revealed it. We call this mystery the **hypostatic union**. This phrase comes from a Greek word which tells us that our Lord is the Son of God and the son of Mary, fully God with all of the divine powers, and fully man like us in everything except sin.

The Humanity of Jesus

Jesus had everything that makes someone a human being: a physical body with all of its various functions, and an immortal soul with its powers of intellect and will. As a man he had to grow daily in acquiring human knowledge, and he experienced the joys and sorrows of life just as we do. The Gospels remind us that he felt hunger and thirst (Lk 4:2); he loved children (Mk 10:13–16); he knew sorrow and cried over the death of a friend (Jn 11:32–36); he experienced loneliness (Mt 26:37–46); he enjoyed friendship (Lk 19:1–10); felt joy and gladness (Lk 10:21); he went through suffering and death (the accounts of the Passion in all four Gospels).

We noted that Jesus was like us in all things except sin (Heb 4:15). This is because, as the Second Person of the Blessed Trinity, he is all-holy. But this does not mean that Jesus was free from temptations to sin; the Gospels make it very clear that he was tempted (Mt 4:1; Mk 1:13; Lk 4:2–13). Since he was a human

being like us, this means that we too can live free from sin, with the help of his grace which is always available to us through the Sacraments. Jesus has made it possible for us to live a sinless life by being united to him.

Errors about the Incarnation

Throughout the history of Christianity **heresies**, or errors, about the mystery of the Incarnation have been taught by various mistaken followers of the Lord. Heresies are very dangerous to the faith because they corrupt or destroy man's understanding of the truth which leads to salvation.

The first heresy to attack the truths taught by the Church happened in the days of the Apostles of the Lord; it was called **Docetism**. It corrupted the truth that Jesus is human. This heresy said that Christ only *seemed* to be a man. Some people believed this because they believed that salvation consists in freedom from matter; so according to their way of thinking, God would not take on a real human body! The Magisterium of the Church condemned these teachings of the Docetists as heresy, and Saint John wrote his Gospel partly to show that the Docetists were wrong. But this heresy lives on in our own day among those who think that the human body is sinful and not something which God created as good. It also affects those Christians who see Christ only as the Son of God, and not as a true, full human being.

Another terrible heresy sprang up among Christians in the beginning of the fourth century. It was started by a priest who denied the truth about Christ's divinity. The priest's name was Arius, and so his false teaching was called **Arianism**. Arians believed that our Lord was the Messiah sent from God, that he was the greatest of teachers and holiest of men, but they did not believe that he was of the same substance as the Father. They believed he was

created. An unfortunate thing about this heresy is that it attracted thousands of Christians, including many bishops! We can learn from this that even priests and bishops can be led astray from the Gospel if they do not remain united to the Pope, for at that time the Holy Father and a few faithful bishops were the only ones teaching the truth about Jesus' divinity. As you can well imagine, things got so out of hand that the first **ecumenical council** (meeting of all the bishops of the Church in union with the Pope) was held in order to condemn this false teaching officially. It is called the Council of Nicaea (A.D. 325), and from this and another later meeting (A.D. 381) we received the **Nicene Creed**, which we recite every Sunday at Holy Mass.

Unfortunately, Arianism can still be found today among those who call Christ a "great man" and "moral leader" but who refuse to acknowledge his full divinity. These people place Jesus on the same level as the founders of other religions (such as Buddha or Muhammad), and consider Christianity to be simply one religion among all the others. They fail to see that God has become man for them, for all of us, so that we can truly live with him on this earth and forever in heaven.

Words to Know:

nativity Incarnation miracles evangelists hypostatic union heresies Docetism Arianism ecumenical council Nicene Creed

Q. 59 What was the Annunciation?

The Annunciation was the holy event of the angel Gabriel announcing to Mary that she was to be the Mother of the Messiah, Jesus, the Son of God (CCC 494).

Q. 60 Who is Jesus Christ?

Jesus Christ, the Second Person of the Blessed Trinity, is the Son of God made man in the Incarnation (CCC 461).

Q. 61 How was the Son of God made man?

The Son of God was made man by the power of the Holy Spirit in the pure womb of the Virgin Mary (CCC 497).

Q. 62 From whom was Jesus Christ born?

Jesus Christ was born of Mary, ever virgin, who is therefore the Mother of God (CCC 495).

Q. 63 Who is the father of Jesus Christ?

God the Father is the father of Jesus Christ (CCC 496, 502).

Q. 64 Who was Saint Joseph?

Saint Joseph was the foster father and guardian of Jesus, and the spouse of Mary (CCC 497).

Q. 65 Did the Son of God cease to be God when he was made man?

When the Son of God was made man he did not cease to be God, but while remaining true God, he became true man (CCC 469, 479).

Q. 66 Are there two natures in Jesus Christ?

Yes, in Jesus Christ there are two natures: divine and human (CCC 470, 481).

Q. 67 With the two natures in Jesus Christ are there also two persons?

With the two natures in Jesus Christ there are not two persons, but only one, the Divine Person of the Son of God, the Second Person of the Blessed Trinity (CCC 468, 481).

Q. 68 Did Jesus Christ always exist?

Jesus Christ has always existed as God; he began to exist as man from the moment of the Incarnation (CCC 479).

Q. 69 Where was Jesus Christ born?

Jesus Christ was born in a stable at Bethlehem (CCC 525).

