



“What’s your story, God?”

(A Look at Salvation History)



Opening Prayer

God, I still have so much to learn about you, myself, my world. I know I don't say it enough, but "thank you" for all that you've done in my life so far and for all that I get to have and experience because of you. Even though at times it feels like you are very distant, and I question why you would allow bad things to happen, I'm sure you are working in ways that I do not always see or understand. So, please help me to be more aware of the good things you are doing and how I fit into your eternal "story" here and now. Amen.

Dive In: A Confusing Story

Once upon a time, there was a toad. After being coaxed out of the comfort of his hobbit hole by Gandalf the wizard, Toad went on a long journey with a talking donkey to find his pride (pack of lions) and become their king.

You see, Toad thought he killed his dad, but it was actually Mufasa who did it! When he became king, a princess kissed him, and he became a wooden puppet, but in the end, the fairy godmother made him a real boy ... and he lived happily ever after.

Notice anything strange about that story? There was no real beginning. No end. No meaning. It was just random images and events pieced together. You would wonder if the author was even awake while writing, or if the story just kind of wrote itself ...

That's life without God.

If there is no intelligent mind behind life, then the story of human history and each life in particular is no more than disjointed events thrown together by chance.

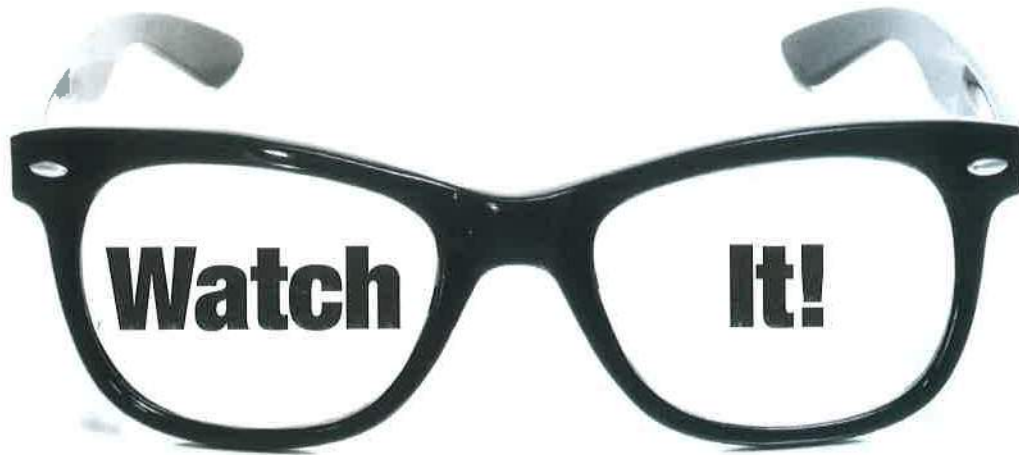
Thankfully, there is more. There is a larger, overarching story that the creation of the universe, the events of human history, and the story of your life fit within. It's written by the hand of God. It has a happy ending. And every character is a key player. That story offers us a deep sense of meaning and purpose.

Today we're going to take a look at that story, "His-story," otherwise known as "salvation history."

*"I arise today
Through a mighty strength, the
invocation of the Trinity,
Through a belief in the Threeness,
Through Confession of the
Oneness
Of the Creator of creation."*

—St. Patrick





Segment 1: Creation and the Fall

1. The Blessed Trinity is one God in three divine Persons: God the Father, God the _____, and God the _____.
2. God created Adam and Eve in his _____ and likeness.

Segment 2: Jesus' Divine Rescue Mission

1. Unlike Eve, who disobeyed God, _____ said "yes" to God's plan. By her obedience, she became the "New Eve."
A) Sarah B) Mary C) Elizabeth D) Esther
2. Jesus revealed to us the awesome truth that God is _____.

Segment 3: A Kingdom on Earth

1. The Church is both human and _____.
A) divine B) angelic C) eternal D) earthly
2. _____ are men and women the Church recognizes for their heroic virtue. They are witnesses, intercessors, and examples of faith.



“And once I got to know Jesus, I realized that I loved him—not just in my head, but in my heart.”



TO THE HEART with

My Uncle Tom lived in Los Angeles my entire life and worked on a number of TV shows and movies. He was a voice-over actor on *Titanic* and *Air Force One* and even wrote a couple of Hallmark movies that are still shown during the Christmas holidays!

I loved Uncle Tom. (After all, he was my uncle!) When he called, we would talk, and then I would tell him I loved him and hang up. Unfortunately, I never really *knew* my Uncle Tom, because I never got to fly hundreds of miles to California to spend time with him. (How cool would *that* have been—to go with him to “Take a Kid to Work Day”?)

If I had been able to get to know him in person, I think our phone conversations would have been different. I would have been able to say, “Uncle Tom, I love you,” and know that what I was saying

wasn't just in my head; it would have been in my heart as well.

For a long time, it was the same way with God. I was raised **CATHOLIC**, so I knew the story—God created the world and promised to set things right after sin wrecked everything. And I knew God loved me, and I guess I loved God back. But even when I came to *believe* in Jesus, I didn't feel close to God. I loved Jesus in my *head*, but it just didn't seem like I loved him in my *heart*.

So, I went on a thirty-day retreat with some Jesuit priests in the foothills of Colorado. They challenged me to spend thirty days in *silent prayer* with Jesus in the Gospels. They told me to just take my time and read a little from the Gospels each day. They taught me how to hear Jesus and get to know him in the Scriptures, like St. Ignatius of Loyola.

Although I did not receive an incredible **REVELATION** in a blinding burst of light from God as St. Paul did, I did get to know Jesus by observing his actions in the Gospels, by talking with him in prayer, and by going to Mass. In simply spending time with Jesus, I got to know him. And once I got to know him, I realized that I loved him—not just in my head, but in my heart.

That experience taught me something important: If you want to get to know someone (instead of just “about” someone), you have to spend time with that person. And the best way to get to know the author of our **SALVATION** story is to spend time with him, talking to him and listening to him as you read that story together.

Father Mike Schmitz

Find It!

The Old Testament is filled with prophecies about what God would do to redeem us. Some of the most striking are about “the suffering servant” in the book of Isaiah, written hundreds of years before Jesus was born. What chapter in particular describes how Jesus would suffer to save us?

Hero of the Week



Born:

August 21, 1567

Died:

December 28, 1622

Memorial:

January 24

Patron Saint of:

- journalists
- educators
- confessors

St. Francis de Sales

It took a long time for Francis to believe that God really loved him. He didn't feel very lovable ...

In fact, at one time, he was pretty sure he was going to **HELL**. He didn't *want* this to happen, of course, but he didn't see any way around it. He lived during the time of the Protestant Reformation and was surrounded by people (called Calvinists) who believed that God creates some people for the sole purpose of sending them to hell.

Over time, with a lot of prayer, Francis came to see that God is love—and, even more amazing, he felt God calling him to become a *priest!*

A *priest? Are you sure, God?* It took God thirteen years to convince Francis that, yes, this was what he was supposed to do with his life—tell others about the God who loves them.

There was only one more problem: Nobody wanted to hear Francis preach. It wasn't that he was bad at public speaking—he had been educated for a brilliant public career. But after several years, he felt abandoned and hadn't converted one soul.

Still, he didn't give up. He once wrote, "I have patience with all things, but chiefly, have patience with yourself." Francis realized that those who most needed to hear about God's love were not flocking to the **CHURCH**. So he began writing notes and slipping them under doors. If people wouldn't hear what he had to say, perhaps they would read it. It was just a matter of getting their attention.

It worked. ... Thousands who had left the Church returned to practice the Catholic faith!

As **BISHOP**, Francis took to heart the need to minister to the people—not just the religious, but the regular, ordinary men and women who also needed spiritual direction. His greatest work, *Introduction to the Devout Life*, recounts what Francis learned about God's love through his own life experiences. This spiritual classic continues to inspire Christians today. Check it out!

St. Francis de Sales, pray for us. Help us understand that we are loved because we are God's.

Challenge of the Week

- Make a cheerful sacrifice.** Volunteer to do a sibling's chores for a day, help a neighbor with yard work, make a meal for your family, or babysit for free. Write about what you did.
- Create or find symbols of the Holy TRINITY.** Explain the symbolism to someone in your family and write about it in the space below.
- Choose a saint to research,** and jot down three interesting facts in the space below about his or her life to share with your small group at the next class.

✝ Closing Prayer

“For God so loved the world that he gave his only-begotten Son, that whoever believes in him should not perish but have eternal life.”

—John 3:16

Heavenly Father, you are powerful, but you don't force us to love you. Through the gifts of your grace and our **FREE WILL**, we can be heroes like the saints or experience the emptiness of sinful choices.

Help us, Lord, to always choose you. Thank you for giving us your son, Jesus, whom we receive in Holy Communion and who strengthens us to find the very best in ourselves. Amen.

Taking It Home

For next week's "Review Game," be sure to read over the following ...

1. **Watch It!** questions (page 17)
2. **Wrap-Up**
3. **"What's That Word?"**
4. **Memory Verse**

Don't forget to do your **Challenge of the Week** (page 21)

Wrap-Up

"In the beginning God created the heavens and the earth" (Genesis 1:1). From the very first verse of the Bible, all of Scripture recounts an epic story, full of real men and women who encountered the living God.

As we read the Scriptures, we discover that God has revealed himself again and again to the human race, making us his own children through a series of **COVENANT** promises. The final and most perfect covenant was made in the New Testament, through God's only-begotten Son, Jesus Christ, who created the Church.

We call this epic story "salvation history." Salvation history is the *true* story of God's relationship with the human race. This is a story with three parts.

In the Old Testament, God the Father particularly reveals himself in the creation of the world, in the sin of our first parents and the fall of the human race, in the promise of a redeemer, and in the covenants with Adam, Noah, Abraham, and David.

In the New Testament, God the Son is especially revealed. Through the life of Christ, God's promise of a redeemer is fulfilled in the **INCARNATION**, when God took on a human nature in the person of Jesus Christ. By his suffering (or "Passion"), Death, Resurrection, and Ascension into heaven, Christ showed us his love, paid the price for our sins, and restored our created purpose.

Finally, the Holy Spirit is more explicitly active in the life of the Church. By instituting the **SACRAMENTS** and passing his authority on to his apostles, Christ ensured that his presence would continue in the world until the end of time.¹ Today, he makes us co-workers in his mission to bring his kingdom to the world, until at last he will return in glory to bring our eternal reward.

Salvation history reveals the purpose of all natural and human history and of your life in particular. In this lesson, we took a closer look at this story of salvation history to show how God's story is our story, too.

“What’s That Word?”

MYSTERY

When people talk about a **MYSTERY**, they usually mean something that we do not—or cannot—understand. In this sense, it is synonymous with a riddle or an enigma. In Catholic terms, though, a mystery is something we would not have known unless God had revealed it. He revealed the mysteries to us because he wanted us to know him and his plan for us. Therefore, a mystery makes sense, and we *can* understand it, but not fully, because God is infinite, and we are not. One of the reasons that **HEAVEN** will never be boring is that we will have the opportunity to explore the mysteries without ever running out of new things to learn; that exploration can begin now. (Eastern Churches use the word “mystery” for sacrament (see CCC 774).

SIN

Sin is a deliberate thought, word, deed, or omission contrary to God’s plan.² It is an offense against God and a failure in genuine love because it makes us less than we have been created to be. *Sin* is addictive and self-destructive; it weakens the sinner and makes it more difficult to find true happiness, which comes from pleasing God. Ultimately, if we are unrepentant, *sin* can destroy us.

The word for *sin* comes from a Greek archery term that means “missing the mark.” We sometimes *sin* by deliberately planning evil against another and carrying it out, but more often than not, we *sin* out of weakness. Overcome by selfishness, emotion, or laziness, we hurt ourselves and others because we “fall short of the target,” which is to act in a virtuous and loving way with the help of God’s grace. The antidote to *sin* is **RECONCILIATION**.



Memory Verse:

“For God so loved the world that he gave his only-begotten Son, that whoever believes in him should not perish but have eternal life.”

—John 3:16