



Genesis

The Woman

History of the Early World	Patriarchs	Israel in Egypt	Conquest of Canaan	Judges	United Kingdom	Divided Kingdom Exile	Exile	Return	Maccabean Revolt	Jesus the Messiah	Church
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Introduction

Before we proceed with our study of Genesis, in this lesson and the next we will take a departure from the Old Testament into the New. We are eager now to examine how God's promise to defeat His enemy through human beings, made so long ago, was finally kept. Because the details of life in the Garden, presided over by Adam and Eve, are so vivid for us, we are perfectly prepared to recognize Mary and Jesus to be the Woman and her Seed. This is an especially valuable step for Catholic students of Scripture. We have sometimes been misunderstood by our Protestant brethren to have intruded Mary into the plan of redemption in an unbiblical way. But as this lesson will show, Catholics simply continue today what Christians from the earliest centuries did when, having studied Genesis as we have done; they recognized that the Woman of Gen. 3:15 has always been part of God's plan to win the world back to Himself.

Our format in this lesson, because it is a topical study, will be somewhat different from usual. Instead of studying only one text, we will be reading various New Testament passages in order to make the necessary connections from Adam and Eve to Jesus and Mary. You will need to read those texts in your own Bible; they are not reprinted here. The purpose of this lesson is to enable you to hold together in your mind and heart various scenes from Scripture—the Garden of Eden, the Annunciation, the Nativity, the Garden of Gethsemane, and others. This will not be so much a lesson in which you dig out information as it will be a time for you to "see" the marvelous plan of God unfold, in exquisite beauty and power. The Church has always recognized meanings in Scripture beyond the literal. These lessons will enable us to explore the spiritual sense of the story of the Garden that we have so carefully examined (see CCC 115).

First, however, we will need some idea of what happened between the Garden of Eden and the Annunciation. Some of this history will unfold as we proceed in our study of Genesis. Without giving away too much of the story, we need to know that from among all the descendants of Adam and Eve who multiplied and covered the earth, God formed one unique nation, Israel, and entered into a covenant with it for a unique purpose. Throughout the history of this nation, which included a rise to greatness but also a catastrophic fall into misery, a slow but steady expectation grew that someday God would send to them a very special human being—the Messiah. This was not simply wishful thinking on their part. God promised through His prophets (men He sent to Israel throughout her history to remind them to keep His covenant with them) that Someone was coming to restore them to greatness.

As the years went by, Israel expected the Messiah to appear to defeat their enemies, of which there were many. We can't help but be struck by how this Messianic expectation fits exactly the prophecy of Gen. 3:15. It is almost as if an icon of a Woman and her Seed sits above all the troubled picture that was the history of Israel. Indeed, the prophet Isaiah announced to King Ahaz that God wanted to give His people a sign of hope in the midst of their darkness. What would that sign be? As Isa. 7:14 says, "Therefore the Lord Himself will give you a sign: Behold, the virgin shall conceive and bear a son and shall call his name Immanuel."



Catholic Scripture Study



Introduction (cont.)

About five hundred years before the birth of Christ, because of Israel's grace and persistent disobedience to God and unfaithfulness to the covenant He had made with them, the Jews were crushed by the Babylonians and sent into exile. When they were allowed to return to Jerusalem and rebuild some of what was lost, they became a people of deep, anguished longing. Shortly before Jesus was born, they were under the yoke of yet another enemy-the Roman Empire. By the year 4 B.C. (the presumed date of Jesus' birth), the air in Jerusalem was thick with anticipation of the appearance of God's Anointed One (the meaning of the Hebrew word "Messiah"). If only He would come, the darkness of oppression by the enemy would be shattered. When would it happen?



Questions on the Text

The Anunciation

Read Luke 1:26-38

1. [Some translations of 1:28 render the angel's greeting as "Hail, full of grace." Others have it as, "Hail, O favored one." To find favor in God's sight is to be blessed by Him, to be pleasing in His sight.] Remember the first notable characteristic of "the woman" of Gen. 3:15-that she would be outside of the devil's influence. What evidence does this scene present that suggests that Mary stands in that unique place?
2. In Gen. 3:15, we puzzled over why there was no mention of a husband/father in the promise of "the woman and her seed." What does this passage reveal as the answer to that puzzle?
3. Seeing the details of this gospel scene, did Mary have a specific role in the redemption of the human race? What was it?
4. [Read Rom. 5:12-14; II Cor. 11:1-3; 1 Tim. 2:13-14; I Cor. 15:21-22; 42-49. Although St. Paul says that sin came into the world through Adam, he recognizes that Eve was also culpable. In the way he writes about them, St. Paul shows that the fall of the human race was initiated by both Adam and Eve, although the blame is laid to Adam. He describes Adam as a "type of the one to come" (Rom. 5:14), which was Jesus.] Knowing what you know about Gen. 1-3, does it seem logical to you that Christians in the earliest centuries of the Church began to see in Mary a Second Eve? Why?

The Visitation

Read Luke 1:39-56

5. As mentioned in the introduction to this lesson, we can think of the promise of "the woman" and "her seed" in Gen. 3:15 as a kind of icon of Mother and Child that is printed over all the history of Israel. Their appearance, whenever it happens, will herald the defeat of God's enemy, which would be a source of great joy among the Jews. Look carefully at vss. 39-45 in this passage. How does this scene fulfill our expectation of how the people of Israel should react when the Mother and Son appear?
6. From what we have seen of Mary thus far, she is a meek and humble girl. Look at what she says in vs. 48. What do you think prompted this young girl to look out over all generations to come after her and prophesy that they would call her "blessed."? Read also Luke 11:27-28. What was the source of Mary's blessedness?



Questions on the Text (cont.)

The Presentation in the Temple

Read Luke 2:22-35

7. In this gospel scene, we see Joseph and Mary presenting Jesus to God at the Temple in Jerusalem. Simeon is described as a devout man "waiting for the consolation of Israel," which means he, like many others, was looking for the Messiah. Look at vss. 34-35. What does his statement to Mary suggest about her place in the work that the Messiah was destined to do? Are you surprised by this?

The Wedding at Cana

Read John 2:1-11

[In order to understand the meaning of this gospel scene, you need to understand first its context. If you read the first chapter of John, you should see right away that John intentionally evokes the creation story of Genesis in his famous prologue: "In the beginning was the Word" (1:1). He wants his readers to be thinking about the first creation so that they will understand that the Incarnation, God taking on human flesh, is a re-creation of humanity. Notice that beginning with John the Baptist at the Jordan River, John counts out four days of activity by Jesus, introducing each one by repeating the phrase, "the next day." (1:29, 35, 43). He wants us to be thinking about the "days" of creation. Then, on what would be the seventh day, counting three days from the fourth, John begins chapter 2 with "On the third day." This is meant to remind us of the Resurrection. Why? We can only assume that whatever follows is meant to connect the old creation with the new.]

8. In this gospel scene of the wedding at Cana, John says that Jesus performed the first of His miraculous signs by turning water into wine. Knowing that John wants his readers to be thinking about the first chapters of Genesis, what might be the significance of Jesus calling His own mother "woman"? What part does she play in this first manifestation of Christ's glory?

The Crucifixion

Read John 19:25-27

9. As Jesus hangs on the Cross, with His dying breath He again refers to His mother as "woman." If John, who is standing at the foot of the Cross, is the only apostle left who is willing to associate with Jesus in His humiliation, then he and Mary represent the beginning of the Christian church, meager as it is. What, then, is the significance of Jesus giving His mother to John and John to His mother? How does this scene connect to Gen. 3:20?

A Vision of Heaven

Read Revelation 12:1-7

10. This is a scene from a vision of heaven that the apostle John had while he was on the island of Patmos. Remember the promise God made in Gen. 3:15 to put "enmity" between the woman and the serpent, between her seed and his. What does vss. 1-6 tell us about the battle that God predicted? Who are the Woman and Child?

11. What was it that actually overcame the "Serpent, the accuser of the brethren" (vs. 11)?

12. Once the dragon had been cast out of heaven, against whom did he direct his wrath (vs. 13, 17)?

13. The Bible, in Genesis, begins with a foreshadowing of Jesus and His Mother, Mary. Likewise, in Revelation, the Bible ends with a heavenly vision of Jesus and His Mother. Do you think Mary has been intruded into the picture of Redemption, or has she simply been removed by some?



Catholic Scripture Study



Catholic Scripture Study



Questions for Reflection

One of the best ways to meditate on God's Word is to take it deeply into your life through memorization. Be sure to choose a verse to memorize from the passages you've studied. For further reflection, consider these:

1. As Catholics, we are blessed with a great treasury of Christian art which enables us to frequently "see" some of the scenes we have studied in this lesson. One of the most precious of these scenes is the Annunciation. Do you have access to a picture or painting or some kind of representation of this scene? If so, put it before you and spend some time meditating on why it represents the most glorious moment in human history-and why it has made all the difference in your own personal history. Respond to God appropriately.
2. We have seen that when God acts, He makes use of reversals to accomplish His will. Where in your life now are you in need of reversal? Make every effort to put your trust in God to make darkness into light, to turn mourning into dancing. Be specific in your acts of faith. Be willing to be patient for God to act. He will not fail you.
3. The Catechism says: "What the Catholic faith believes about Mary is based on what it believes about Christ, and what it teaches about Mary illumines in turn its faith in Christ" (487). What have you learned about Mary in this lesson that will strengthen and invigorate your life in Christ? She is the transparent window into life that is "full of grace." Look carefully at her, and ask her to be your advocate as you open your heart wide to all that God has to give you.



Opportunities for Additional Study

Points to Ponder

Now that we have pondered numerous New Testament scenes in which a Mother and Son are prominently featured, we know that the expectation that began to grow in Genesis 3 of two very remarkable human beings to arise in human history somewhere was not misdirected. If we pinned all our hopes on them when we left Paradise with Adam and Eve, we have not been disappointed. In this lesson, our focus has been on Mary as the New Eve. That impulse we felt to rewrite the story of the fall of our first parents has been taken up by God Himself in the unfolding of the gospel. His plan far exceeds anything we could have come up with in its beauty and perfection. We, quite probably, would not have given the humans such important roles in setting things right. We are still subject to the serpent's opinion of man and woman. Can the world be won back to God through mere mortals?

Perhaps the answer is best given by St. Bernard of Clairvaux, as he pondered the Annunciation:

We all have been made in the eternal word of God, and look, we are dying. In your brief reply, kind Virgin, we shall be restored and so brought back to life. Doleful Adam and his unhappy offspring, exiled from Paradise, implore you to give this answer; David asks it, Abraham asks it; all the other patriarchs, you very own fathers beg it of you, as do those now dwelling in the region of the shadow of death. For it the whole world is waiting, bowed down at your feet. And rightly so, because on your answer depends the comfort of the afflicted, the redemption of captives, the deliverance of the damned; the salvation of all the sons of Adam, your whole race. Give your answer quickly, my Virgin. My lady, say this word which earth and hell and heaven itself are waiting for...Are you the one who was promised, or must we look for another? No, it is you and no one else. You, I say, are the one we were promised, you are the one we are expecting.
(Homilies in Praise of the Blessed Virgin, Marie-Bernard Said, Tr., Kalamazoo, MI: Cistercian Publications, 1993)

Catechism Connection

Excerpted from the Catechism of the Catholic Church:

Mary as the New Eve - "The Virgin Mary 'cooperated through free faith and obedience in human salvation'...She uttered her yes 'in the name of all human nature' (St. Thomas Aquinas)...By her obedience she became the new Eve, mother of the living." (511)

"Blessed is she who believed" - "The Virgin Mary most perfectly embodies the obedience of faith. By faith Mary welcomes the tidings and promise brought by the angel Gabriel, believing that 'with God nothing will be impossible' and so giving her assent: 'Behold I am the handmaid of the Lord; let it be done to me according to your word.' Elizabeth greeted her: 'Blessed is she who believed that there would be a fulfillment of what was spoken to her from the Lord.' It is for this faith that all generations have called Mary blessed. Throughout her life and until her last ordeal, when Jesus her son died on the cross, Mary's faith never wavered. She never ceased to believe in the fulfillment of God's word. And so the Church venerates in Mary the purest realization of faith."
(148-149)



Opportunities for Additional Study (cont).

The prayer of the Virgin Mary - "The Gospel reveals to us how Mary prays and intercedes in faith. At Cana, the mother of Jesus asks her son for the needs of a wedding feast; this is the sign of another feast-that of the wedding of the Lamb where he gives his body and blood at the request of the Church, his Bride. It is at the hour of the New Covenant, at the foot of the cross, that Mary is heard as the Woman, the new Eve, and the true 'Mother of all the living.'" (2618)

Mary and the Church - "At the end of this mission of the Spirit, Mary became the Woman, the new Eve ('mother of the living'), the mother of the 'whole Christ.' As such, she was present with the Twelve, who 'with one accord devoted themselves to prayer,' at the dawn of the 'end time' which the Spirit was to inaugurate on the morning of Pentecost with the manifestation of the Church." (726)

The Woman and her Offspring - "Victory over the 'prince of this world' was won once for all at the Hour when Jesus freely gave himself up to death to give us his life. This is the judgment of this world, and the prince of this world is 'cast out.' 'He pursued the woman' but had no hold on her: the new Eve, 'full of grace' of the Holy Spirit, is preserved from sin and the corruption of death (the Immaculate Conception and the Assumption of the Most Holy Mother of God, Mary, ever virgin). 'Then the dragon was angry with the woman, and went off to make war on the rest of her offspring.' Therefore, the Spirit and the Church pray: 'Come, Lord Jesus,' since his coming will deliver us from the Evil One." (2853)



Summary

In this lesson, we observed that:

1. The angel addressed Mary, a young virgin of Nazareth, with a greeting that marked her out as a human being unlike all others since the time of Adam and Eve-"full of grace." She was told that by the power of the Holy Spirit, she would bear a Son. He would be the Son of God and the Son of Mary. This Mother and Son must be "the woman" and her "seed" from Gen. 3:15.
2. Mary's conversation with an angel and her humble obedience to God's Word were the opposite of Eve's disobedience. She submitted entirely to God's plan for His creation. Christians from the earliest history of the Church have seen in Mary a New Eve.
3. When Mary visited her cousin, she and her Son in the womb were greeted with a blessing as well as an act of reverence by Elizabeth, who was filled with the Holy Spirit. Mary's voice also caused John the Baptist to rejoice in Elizabeth's womb. The darkness in which humanity had kept watch ever since the expulsion from the Garden was being penetrated by a great light, just as the darkness of Elizabeth's womb was brightened by the sound of Mary's voice.
4. Mary shared the blessing of God with Jesus; she also shared His suffering. Simeon, filled with the Holy Spirit, spoke directly to her about this as she and Joseph presented Jesus to the Lord in the Temple. In a graphic prophecy, Simeon announced that Mary would suffer with her Son as He became the cause of the rise and fall of many in Israel. As Eve was Adam's helper to do the work God had given him to do, Mary joined her Son in the work God sent Him to accomplish.
5. At Mary's request, Jesus performed the first of His miraculous signs that revealed Him to be Israel's Messiah at a wedding in Cana. Using language reminiscent of creation and the Garden of Eden, the gospel writer helped us to recognize the New Adam and New Eve at work to transform lives of mere existence into lives with the richness of the finest wine.
6. The name Adam gave to Eve, describing her as the "mother of all living," was given a spiritual fulfillment by Jesus while He was on the Cross. He gave Mary to John and John to Mary, establishing her as the Mother of His new family, the Church.
7. In the apocalypse of John, the Woman and the Child she bore were objects of the wrath of the devil. The Child was caught up to heaven. By His blood, He defeated the Dragon, who was thrown down to the earth. In the short time he has left, the dragon makes war against the Woman and her offspring, Mary and the Church.
8. The New Testament references to Mary make it clear that she is "the woman" of Gen. 3:15 and that she was chosen by God to have as decisive a role in redemption as Eve had in the fall. Beginning with Elizabeth and John, Christians forever after would recognize in Mary a woman blessed above all and worthy of special honor. She is not an intrusion into God's plan of redemption but a vital part of it.



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